



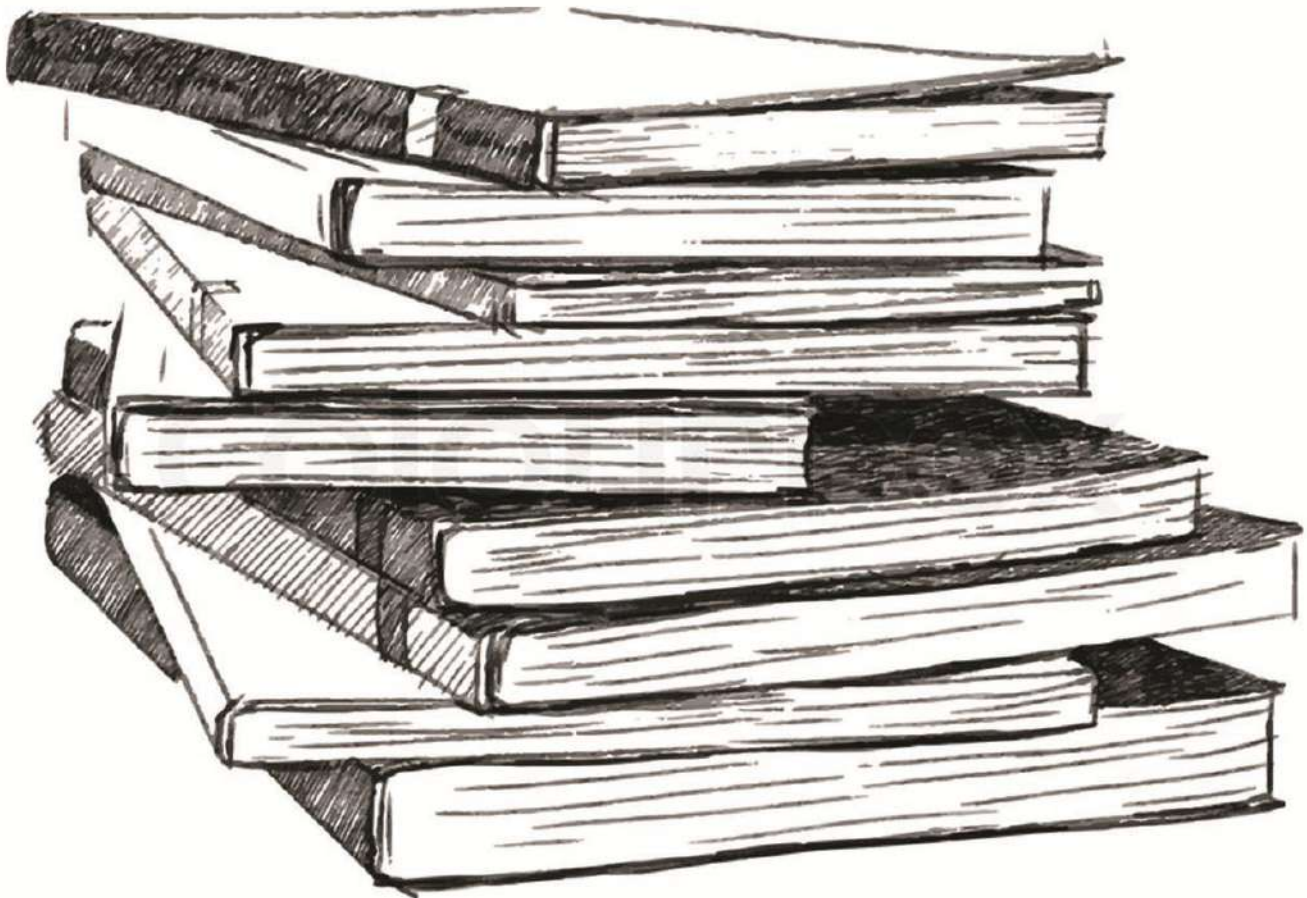
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FOREWORD

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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The Rise and Fall of Banda Singh Bahadur: An Analysis of His Support Base and Political Mobilization

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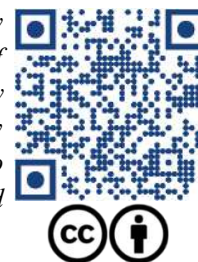
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Abstract— During his prolonged struggle against the oppressive Mughals, Hindu and Muslim nobility abandoned Banda Singh Bahadur. Banda Bahadur was one of the most notable people in the history of mediaeval India. From the very beginning, he campaigned against the Mughal empire and the intermediary zamindars. Banda Singh Bahadur and his base of support belonged to several social groupings. His army consisted of Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim fighters. Particularly sympathetic to his cause were peasants, who joined the Khalsa. The analysis of news reports of that time confirms that zamindars outside of Punjab did not collaborate with Banda, despite their own conflicts with the Mughal authorities in their own provinces. Banda Bahadur primarily led the uprising of the Bari doob Jat zamindars. In the sixth decade of the seventeenth century, the Jats displaced the Khatri as leaders of the Sikh religion. As a consequence of economic distress and harsh policies by local officials, the Jats allied with Banda to overthrow the Mughal authority. Jahandar Shah and Farrukh Siyar appointed a number of Khatri, including Suba Chand, Rattan Chand, Mohakam Singh, Bakht Mal, and others, to significant positions in the imperial services. Several other groups also help Banda in his cause like Banjaras (a class of grain merchants), even though they were besieged in a fort, the Banjaras sought to keep Banda Bahadur's troops supplied with food. Several Hindu Faquirs, Yogis, Sanyasis, and Bairagis supported Banda's cause vigorously.



Keywords— Jat, Zamindar, Sikh, Khatri, Banjara, Yogi, Bairagi, Muslim, Hindu, Mughal.

The narrative of Banda Singh Bahadur's ascent to power coincided with India's political turmoil after Aurangzeb's demise. During the reigns of Bahadur Shah, Jahandar Shah, and Farrukh Siyar, Banda fought against the imperialist Mughals. During his protracted fight, he was abandoned not just by upper-caste Hindus and the Muslim nobles of the area, but also by Sikhs headed by Bawa Binod Singh and Ajit Singh, Guru Gobind Singh's adopted son.

In 1679, Banda Singh Bahadur was born into an ordinary Rajauri peasant family. He spent his youth amidst poverty and misery. He worked diligently on his ancestry. As a consequence of the slaughter of a pregnant doe, he not only gave up hunting forever but also became an ascetic at a young age. He travelled from Kashmir to Maharashtra and settled in Nanded. Bairagi became well-known among the

populace for his tantric and siddhis arts. He was of average height and weight, with brownish hair. He had a sturdy build and bright eyes. He was clever, courageous, and physically active from a young age. Even his harshest rivals, such as Imaduddaulla Muhammad Amir Khan, complimented him for the sharpness of his features and the nobleness of his behaviour. He excelled in matchlock, sword, archery, and horseback riding. According to McGregor, "Banda Bahadur is acknowledged by everybody to have been a man of undeniable valour and courage."

At the age of fifteen, he renounced the world and lived as a bairagi for around fourteen years. At the age of 38, he met Guru Gobind Singh. Guru Gobind Singh baptised him and designated him commander of Khalsa. The Sikhs, under the capable leadership of Banda Singh Bahadur, fought

prolonged warfare against the tyrant from 1708 to 1715. As a result, he founded the first state of the Khalsa commonwealth by uniting the warring Punjabi people, providing land to farmers, and ensuring the safety of the people. He made Lohgarh his capital and issued an official seal. Guru Gobind Singh was depicted on one side, and Guru Nanak on the other, of the Akal Shahe coins. He controlled a large army and appointed administrators to manage the government. Beginning with his triumph at Sirhind, he introduced his own year (Sammāt). He constantly proclaimed himself to be a Banda or Guru's slave. In the words of Ganda Singh, he introduced Fateh Darshan: "It is true that a new greeting, Fateh Darshan, can be seen on a few of his letters, but Khalsa continued to use the old, Wahe Guru ji ka Khalsa, Wahe Guru ji ki Fateh. Banda Bahadur was massively effective in all of his endeavours. As bairagi, he was adept in mesmerism, understood the medicinal uses of numerous plants, was dreaded by the people as a magician (jadoogar), and was a skilled fighter. Upon adopting Sikhism, he became a devoted, baptised disciple of the tenth Guru and followed the gurus' teachings in theory and practice.

Banda Singh Bahadur's personality reveals that he was one of the most memorable figures in mediaeval Indian history. Taking advantage of the preoccupied situation of the empire's centre, Banda Bahadur affected the formation immensely formidable in Punjab. In order to combat the Mughals, he formed troops out of nothing and unified the scattered Sikhs under his command. He acquired significant support from the underprivileged masses. His warriors were members of the Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim faiths. But Banda Bahadur instilled in them a sense of equality, fraternity, and patriotism. Commenting on this facet of Banda's impact, Ghulam Mohyyuddin (a contemporary of Banda Bahadur) says, "poor caste Hindus, filled the ranks of Banda, and each member of his army addressed the other as the adopted son of the persecuted Guru and referred to themselves as Shahibzada."

Banda Bahadur had arrived in Punjab to advance the cause of the oppressed, the weak, and the underprivileged. Banda Bahadur began his war against the Mughal empire and the intermediate zamindars from the very outset. Peasants, in particular, were sympathetic to his cause, and a sizable proportion of them joined the Khalsa. In this context, Fauja Singh states, "Banda Bahadur's general promise at the outset of his campaign to distribute the conquered land among those who would fight for him, and his land reforms after the conquest of Sirhind, conferring proprietorship on petty cultivators, popularised his cause and made him the rallying point of the poor agricultural classes, thus broadening the base of his struggle. As a consequence, he

was able to mobilise a vast number of individuals to carry out his ambitious goals.

Banda Bahadur's calm planning, bold tactics, and offensive strategy against the soft and complacent leadership of the Mughal army were fundamental to his military achievement. In addition to the aggressive guerilla strategy of combat, Banda's war tactics contained elements like a storm, and their sheer speed was the most significant aspect of surprise. Banda Bahadur manoeuvred his onslaught using a well-planned, speed- and mobility-based strategy. Despite being a competent thinker and clever tactician, Banda Bahadur's rebellion against imperial authority was futile. His failure was not attributable to any flaws in his generalship, but rather to other factors such as lack of resources, numerical disadvantage, organisational flaws of the Sikhs, the superiority of the Mughals in terms of manpower and war material, poor army organisation under Banda Bahadur, and the gradual alienation of the upper class from his cause.

Banda Bahadur was recognised as a leader by Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims due to his policy of generosity in all his interactions. The news of the Royal Mughal Court (Akhabar-i-Darbar-i-Mulla) provides a number of records that serve in determining the attitude of various social divisions regarding the cause advocated by him. The analysis of news stories reveals that zamindars outside of Punjab did not cooperate with Banda, despite their own issues with the Mughal authorities in their own regions. The zamindars of Saharanpur aided the imperial armies' attempts to expel the Sikhs from Yamuna-Ganga doab. The Rajputs, Gujjar, and, with potential exceptions, the Afghan zamindars of Sikh strongholds backed the Mughal operations against Banda on a constant basis. Afghans not only fought against Banda but also acted as Mughal propagandists attempting to engage Muslim Zamindars and people in the holy war against non-Muslims. According to Khushwant Singh, "During the Banda's war against the Mughals, there was wanton destruction of life and property of Mughal officials and landowners, which alienated the sympathies of many Muslims, who came to see the Khalsa as the enemies of Islam. Prior to that time, only the wealthier strata of Muslims were captivated with ideas of Islamic renewal propagated by persons such as Shaikh Ahmed Sirhind. Banda's brutality hardened the Muslim peasants' hearts and made them just as anti-Sikh as their government.

Muzaffar Alam, commenting on Banda Bahadur's support from the people of the then-Punjab province, states, "The Jat zamindars of the Rohtak-Sonapat area gave him their entire support when he arrived near Kharkhauda. In addition, a considerable number of zamindars of the Parganas located on either side of the Beas, Ravi, and Shah

Nahar (Roys Canal) sympathised with and collaborated with the Sikhs. Throughout the whole of Banda Bahadur's conflict with the Mughals, the zamindars of Bari doab provided him with weaponry and horses. Chakla Sirhind was the second biggest and most significant area in which Banda had a significant following, and this allowed him to use it as a base for his efforts beyond the Yamuna and Beas.

It is evident from Khafi Khan's statements that, with few exceptions, Banda mostly led the rebellion of the Jat zamindars. It is not without importance that the Jats were the major zamindar castes in several of the Parganas where Banda had support, and that they were nearly always referred to as Malikis, or petty landlords, and malgujars, or Mughal village assessors (mauza and dehat). As for why Jats supported Banda and to what religion they belong, Muzaffar said, "Our sources do not assist us in determining the religion of these zamindars. They may not have been Guru Gobind Singh's disciples. In the sixth decade of the seventeenth century, the Jats began displacing the Khatri from the leadership of the Sikh faith. Eventually, with the expansion of agricultural operations and the foundation of Khalsa, they redoubled their efforts. The author of Dabistan-i-Mazahib remarked that while the gurus had been Khatri, they had rendered the Khatri subject to the Jats, the lowest of the Vaishya. Thus, the majority of Guru's large mass are Jats. The Sikh revolt headed by Banda provided Jats with the opportunity to not only take over the leadership of the region but also to utilise their weaponry to replace the oppressive Mughal local authority. Jats joined forces with Banda Bahadur to overthrow the Mughal government in northwest India as a result of economic strain and repressive practices by local authorities.

Jats benefited during the Sikh revolt in that they were liberated from oppressive middlemen and gained control over their land holdings. When the Banda-led peasant movement started to inflict significant losses to the commercial and merchant classes and moneylenders, they began to offer their support to the Mughals. The urban Khatri dwelling in major trade centres like as Lahore, Sialkot, Bajwara, Haibatpur, Patti, Batala, Ropar, and Samana, among others, sponsored the efforts of pro-imperial forces to battle against Banda Bahadur and his allies. Some Khatri, including Suba Chand, Rattan Chand, Mohakam Singh, Bakht Mal, and others, were assigned to key posts in the imperial services by Jahandar Shah and Farrukh Siyar in recognition of their contributions.

In addition to the rulers' open and unwavering support for Banda's cause, the Banjaras (a class of grain merchants) attempted to keep Banda Bahadur's army supplied with food even while they were besieged in a fort. Also in the highlands, they provided him with the necessary food and worked as his scouts. Some Hindu Faquirs, Yogis, Sanyasis,

and Bairagis actively supported Banda's cause by acting as spies in the imperial camp and then informing Banda Bahadur of impending imperialist movements. Unknown individuals also offered assistance to Banda Bahadur's cause. Reportedly, some individuals bought horses and munitions for delivery to the Sikh insurgents, which they transported via Kohistan. The emperor ordered quick action to be made to monitor the activities of these spies and the supply of food grains and ammunition to the rebels and to punish them if they were caught.

In the struggle against the Mughals, Banda received great broad support. Banda Bahadur was undeniably a source of energy and zeal. In his youth, he gained widespread renown as a Yogi and occultist, having been a skilled hunter in his youth. In his adulthood and campaign against the tyrant, he attracted the attention and support of several social groups. Banda Singh Bahadur emancipated farmers and granted them land ownership. In exchange for abolishing zamindari in northwest India, he received substantial support from the lower class. It is truly said that the effort was unsuccessful, but the ideal survived.

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Drōpadī: From Sanskrit Epic to Modern Oḍiā Fiction

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Abstract— In the chronicles of Indian culture and literature, Drōpadī transcends her status as a mere mythical figure; she stands as a formidable emblem of women's empowerment and unyielding social defiance. This research treatise delivers a penetrating comparative dissection of the psychological metamorphosis in Drōpadī's character, commencing from Sage Byāsa's primordial Mahābhārata, traversing Śūdrāmuni Sāraḷā Dās's 'Sāraḷā Mahābhārata', and culminating in Pratibhā Rāy's 'Yājñasenī'. Where Byāsa's Drōpadī emerges as an indomitable 'Agnismhabā' (fire-born) warrior who brazenly confronts patriarchal dominion, Sāraḷā Dās weaves her essence into the earthy fabric of Odisha's soil, rustic existence, and profound human sensitivities, bestowing a starkly realistic incarnation. In contemporary times, Dr. Pratibhā Rāy, through her novel 'Yājñasenī', elevates Drōpadī to an autonomous sovereign self, wielding a feminist lens to haul society's entrenched patriarchal ethos into the merciless tribunal of critique. Across epochs, Oḍiā literature has masterfully channelled Drōpadī's archetype to etch the intricate tapestry of women's existential warfare, their awakened claim to sovereignty, and the raw contours of societal realities with exquisite subtlety.



Keywords— Byāsa Mahābhārata, Sāraḷā Mahābhārata, Pratibhā Rāy Yājñasenī, Drōpadī, Female Characters, Oḍiā Culture, Patriarchal, Evolution

Introduction

In the venerable lineage of Indian epic traditions, female archetypes transcend mere foundations of captivating narratives; they serve as unerring mirrors reflecting the contemporaneous society's ethical doctrines, moral imperatives, philosophical underpinnings, and intricate social architectures. Sītā from the *Rāmāyaṇa* and Drōpadī from the *Mahābhārata* embody two diametrically opposed pinnacles of Indian feminine ethos, as posited by scholars [6]. Where Sītā epitomises boundless forbearance, selfless devotion, and the paragon of societal virtues, Drōpadī ignites as an unparalleled, incendiary paragon of defiance, unquenchable entitlement, indomitable self-esteem, and radical social insurrection [7]. Particularly within the realm of Oḍiā literature, the maturation and metamorphosis of Drōpadī's persona have charted an extraordinarily distinctive and enthralling trajectory. Ascending beyond her archaic divine incarnation, she progressively emerges as a profoundly human, relatable

figure ravaged by visceral psychological turmoil, thereby immeasurably enriching the tapestry of Oḍiā literary heritage. This transmutation is far from a superficial literary shift; rather, it furnishes irrefutable testimony to the seismic revolutions in women's stature, dignity, and prerogatives within Odisha's socio-cultural paradigm [3,7].

Draupadi: Indian Culture and the Mahabharata Background:

In the tapestry of Indian culture and the *Mahābhārata*'s epic backdrop, Drōpadī emerges not as a peripheral figure but as the pivotal incendiary force igniting the saga's cataclysmic events. The *Mahābhārata* transcends a mere chronicle of dynastic skirmishes; it unfolds as an unparalleled philosophical compendium delving into the profound abysses of human *dharma*, *karma*, ethics, iniquity, and psyche. Amid this colossal canvas, Drōpadī stands as the paramount catalyst and nexus of the narrative's tumultuous upheavals. Born from the sacrificial altar of Pāñcālā's King Dr̥pada, erupting like a blazing inferno,

Yājñasenī's extraordinary genesis harbours a deliberate destiny: to embody the clarion call of vengeance and radical upheaval [8,9]. Thus, in a rigidly conservative patriarchal realm, her advent manifests as a divine, autonomous, and insurgent power, as opined by erudite scholars [7, 9, 21].

In Byāsa's *Mahābhārata*, Drōpadī's multifaceted nomenclature unveils the kaleidoscopic depths of her persona. As the progeny of King Drupada, she is christened 'Drōpadī'; emerging from the hallowed sacrificial pyre, she earns the epithet '*Yājñasenī*'; her mesmerising dusky allure evokes the affectionate moniker 'Kṛṣṇa'; as Pāñcālī's princess, she is hailed as 'Pāñcālī'; and during exile, she cloaks herself as Queen Bīrāta's handmaiden 'Sairandhrī' [8, 9, 18]. Her bond with Lord Kṛṣṇa resonates with profound sanctity and intimacy; she revered him as her sole devotee and cherished confidante, '*Sakhī*' [21].

Within the *Mahābhārata*'s grand opus, Drōpadī's stature is labyrinthine and contentious. Wedded to the five Pandavas, she embraced with unwavering fidelity a practice deemed intricate and socially anathema by contemporaneous norms [8, 10]. During the infamous dice game in the *Kuru* court, when wagered as mere chattel or spoils, she refused passive silence unlike ordinary women; instead, she interrogated the King assembly's (Rāja Darabāra) venerable elders and sages with piercing legal and moral quandaries [1,7]. Could Yudhishtira stake her after forfeiting himself? This query endures as a cornerstone in feminist jurisprudential discourse even today [1]. Far from a mere victim or frail damsel, she can be hailed as the inaugural feminine vanguard in Indian culture who thundered against patriarchal tyranny [8,9].

Byāsa portrays her not as a fragile ingenue but as a living emblem of audacity, *dharma*, and justice. His Drōpadī is unyielding, retribution-driven, and a stern mentor who relentlessly spurs her husbands toward righteous duty [7,21]. In anonymity at Bīrāta's court, when the mighty kicaka cast his predatory gaze upon her, she neither wept nor begged for succour. Boldly confronting King *Bīrāta* and *Dharmarāja* Yudhishtira, she demanded royal jurisprudence, legal entitlements, and ethical rectitude [19, 20]. This intrepidity attests that in no circumstance did she compromise her self-respect; rather, she wielded a resolute voice against injustice.

Indian culture and mythological lore enshrine her among the '*Pañcakanyā*' (Ahalyā, Drōpadī, Kuntī, Tārā, Mandodari), whose mere invocation purportedly absolves humanity's sins in devout belief [7, 8]. Beyond this, as *Indraprastha*'s empress, she was no ornamental consort adorning the throne; she was profoundly erudite, masterfully stewarding the royal exchequer and economy with triumphant acumen [1, 19]. This underscores her exalted administrative

prowess, political sagacity, and societal eminence [9]. Byāsa's Drōpadī radiates as a luminous paragon of self-dignity and valour, unflinching in confronting any adversary for justice, with every stride governed by *dharma* and obligation [7, 10].

Oḍiā Soil's Drōpadī: Humanity and Social Revolt

In the fifteenth century, the primordial bard *Śūdrāmuni* Sāraḷā Dās forged a colossal *Mahābhārata* in the Oḍiā tongue, not as a slavish facsimile of Byāsa's Sanskrit opus, but as an audacious, inventive reimagining that mirrored the pulsating essence of Odisha's folk existence [3]. Infusing his poetic vision with the vibrant alchemy of local lore, he conjured narratives that resonated profoundly with Oḍiā hearts [22, 38]. The chasms between Byāsa's *Mahābhārata* and *Sāraḷā*'s rendition transcend mere plot alterations; they herald a seismic philosophical upheaval. To dissect Drōpadī's archetype, Sāraḷā Dās birthed innovative, unprecedented sub-narratives absent from the primal Sanskrit epic [3,6,37]. He liberated her from Byāsa's ethereal divine veneer, anchoring her to Odisha's soil, waters, and winds, sculpting her as a corporeal, fallible paragon of the quintessential Oḍiā woman [22, 26].

Foremost among these is the pivotal and contentious "*Satya Āmba*" *Upākhyāna* (Saga/episode) [3]. This saga, amid societal obsessions with feminine corporeal and psychic purity—or the so-called "*satī*"—unveils Drōpadī's brazen confession of allure toward another man (Karnṇa or Arjjuna's favouritism) despite her five exalted spouses, etching a stark, audacious portrait of a woman's repressed psyche [3, 36]. In *Sāraḷā*'s ethos, no mortal—however exalted—escapes imperfection. Drōpadī's unflinching public avowal of her human frailties, while adhering to societal edicts, attests to her boundless fidelity to truth and indomitable mental fortitude. Thus, Sāraḷā Dās exposes the subterranean conflicts of the feminine subconscious, obliquely unmasking the era's hypocritical sanctity and bestowing upon Drōpadī an authentic human dignity [3,37]. Through this, he proclaims that deliverance from peril stems not from divine grace or godly intervention but from humanity's own righteous karma [25, 35].

The personas Sāraḷā Dās evokes in his epic cease to be aloof denizens of distant *Indraprastha* or *Hastināpura*'s royal enclaves; instead, they manifest as familiar folk from fifteenth-century Odisha's rustic milieu. He delineates Drōpadī as an adept homemaker and virtuoso in culinary arts, embodying the unadorned Oḍiā bride [23, 37]. Across the epic's cantos, her gastronomic feats brim with Odisha's ancestral delicacies—diverse greens, fermented rice, *pithā* (rice cake) confections, and ambrosial sweets—in lavish enumeration [3,36]. Her attire and adornments echo the sartorial splendour of contemporaneous Oḍiā elite women

[22, 38]. Beyond this, familial discord, mother-in-law-daughter-in-law dynamics, and brother-in-law-sister-in-law intricacies are rendered with vivid, unflinching realism. The Kuntī-Drōpadī bond deviates from Byāsa's sanctified ideal; it seethes with domestic jealousies, suspicions, and power skirmishes emblematic of quotidian household strife [27, 36]. By endowing Drōpadī with an ordinary Oḍiā woman's psyche through her quarrels with co-wives Hiḍimbikā and Subhadrā, Sāraḷā Dās dethrones her from remote goddesshood, rendering her intimately accessible to the common reader.

Sāraḷā Dās's Drōpadī transcends victimhood; she embodies stark realism and unbridled valour. Within her simmer human vulnerabilities alongside inexhaustible potency and defiant resonance. Post-disrobing, she spurns helpless lamentation; her fury erupts so cataclysmically that her gaze ignites a conflagration in *Hastināpura's* inner sanctums. Duryodhana's consort Bhānumatī and other *Kauraba* women, terror-stricken, flee, imploring her mercy and forgiveness, only then quenching her wrath and extinguishing the devouring flames [25, 35, 37]. This spectacle magnificently unveils Drōpadī's intrinsic '*narī śakti*' (feminine puissance), catapulting her beyond patriarchal frailty into a formidable, radiant sovereign capable of exacting personal vengeance against indignity [2, 13, 34].

Drōpadī: Medieval and Modern Perspectives

In the mediaeval tapestry of Oḍiā literature, particularly during the *Pañcasakhā* epoch, Drōpadī's archetype was imbued with fervent devotion and profound philosophical ethos. In Jagannath Das's *Bhāgabata* and the *Mahābhārata* ascribed to his legacy, Drōpadī emerges as an unparalleled devotee of Lord Kṛṣṇa. This era exalted the '*bastra haraṇa*' saga above all, where Drōpadī's abject surrender and Kṛṣṇa's miraculous preservation of her dignity were exalted by *bhakti* poets as the supreme paradigm of mortal-divine communion [43,44]. In the eighteenth century, Kṛṣṇa Singh's *Mahābhārata* endeavoured to transpose Byāsa's Sanskrit archetype into Oḍiā, jettisoning facets of *Sāraḷā's* innovations to some extent. Nonetheless, Sāraḷā Dās's Drōpadī had burrowed so indelibly into the Oḍiā collective consciousness that virtually all subsequent bards were inexorably swayed by his vivid portrayal [36].

Post-Sāraḷā Dās, luminaries penned epochal works: Chintāmaṇi Mahānti's '*Saptasatī*' (1928), Banśīdhar kar's '*Drōpadī Bastraharaṇa*' (1924), and Paṭhāni Sāmantarāy's '*Drōpadī Swayamvara*' as poetic epics; Prasānta Miśra's '*Nispeṣitā Drōpadī*' (1990) and Jyotsnā Rautṛāy's '*Drōpadī*' (1993) as searing short stories; and Pratibhā Rāy's '*Yājñāsenī*' (1985) alongside Surendranāth

Śatpathi's '*Kṛṣṇā*' (2004) as revolutionary novels. While the poetic successors cleaved to Byāsa and *Sāraḷā's* precedents, the dual narratives harnessed Drōpadī as an allegorical archetype mirroring the contemporaneous plight of women. Beyond this, the twin novels etch visceral portraits of feminine psyche, unyielding advocacy for women's sovereignty, and thunderous indictments against patriarchal hegemony [15,16,40,41,42].

Yājñāsenī's Drōpadī in Oḍiā Fiction:

In the vanguard of modern Oḍiā literature, the audacious recasting of mythological archetypes has surged as a dominant literary torrent, particularly interrogating women's societal stature, human entitlements, and psychological sovereignty through a radical feminist prism on *Mahābhārata's* sagas. Within this crucible, *Jñānpīṭha* laureate Dr. Pratibhā Rāy's monumental opus '*Yājñāsenī*' (first unleashed in 1984) stands as a cataclysmic novel [4, 7, 17]. The archaic Drōpadī, hitherto a mere fragment in the patriarchal epic's mosaic, is here exalted into a wholly autonomous, profoundly introspective paragon of modernity—fiercely vigilant over her corporeal and psychic dominions. This narrative unleashes a thoroughly "gynocentric" *Mahābhārata*, transmogrifying history from 'His-story' into an indomitable 'Her-story' [4, 5, 14].

'*Yājñāsenī*' thunders as a feminist foundational epic, as decreed by legions of eminent critics [4, 5]. Herein, Drōpadī's psychic insurrection, volcanic rage, and searing inner torment erupt with crystalline ferocity. Kuntī's inadvertent edict—"Whatever you've brought, divide among the five brothers"—may stem from unwitting folly, yet its brutal toll is borne solely by Drōpadī. The excruciating physical and mental torment of embracing five husbands against her sovereign will, coupled with her treatment as mere chattel or estate (movable or immovable property), ignites a blistering revolt permeating every sinew of the novel [4, 6].

Pratibhā Rāy's Drōpadī shatters the primordial patriarchal mythos that "*the husband is the wife's supreme deity*" into utter oblivion [4, 5]. Those spouses who faltered in shielding her honour amid peril, abandoning her to public desecration, forfeit any claim to divine veneration—a verdict she proclaims with unassailable conviction [4,6,31]. The novel enshrines women's unalienable sovereignty over their bodies and societal parity as its cardinal creed, echoing the bedrock of contemporary feminism. In the harrowing denouement, as the *Paṇḍabas* forsake her in a glacial shroud on the snow-veiled peaks, marching toward celestial ascension in solitary abandon, she awakens to the inexorable truth: no quantum of feminine sacrifice or immolation can compel a male-centric cosmos to bestow

genuine esteem or worth; ultimately, woman is condemned to perish in isolation [4, 5, 30].

The Metamorphosis of Traditional Drōpadī into Modernity:

In the orthodox epic, Drōpadī languishes as a commodified artefact or utilitarian object, but in '*Yājñasenī*', she ascends as an emancipated "entity" or autonomous agent (subject) [31, 32]. Dr. Pratibhā Rāy refrains from confining her to a relic queen of antiquity; instead, she anoints Drōpadī as the eternal emblem of womankind's dignity and torment [5]. Where the conventional Drōpadī seethes as a bloodthirsty avenger, clamouring for carnage, '*Yājñasenī*'s incarnation radiates as a pacifist herald of humanistic ethos [5, 6, 9]. The novel laments the *Mahābhārata*'s sanguinary deluge, genocidal fury, and apocalyptic ruin with profound anguish, culminating in her terminal invocation—"Om Śānti: Śānti: Śānti"—a fervent plea for the soul's serenity and universal peace [5, 32]. The authoress frames this vista within an expansive humanistic expanse, asserting that while women

and men may diverge in nature and physique, they stand in absolute equity regarding social and human prerogatives [4,6].

Through '*Yājñasenī*', Drōpadī erupts from the rigid carapace of ancient scriptural lore, resplendent in an immortal feminist luminescence. Her odyssey resonates with the ceaseless battles of every exploited and suppressed woman in our epoch, igniting an inferno of self-assurance to empower her kin.

Social, Psychological, and Literary Comparison:

In the triad of monumental texts—Byāsa's *Mahābhārata* (archaic Sanskrit), *Sāraḷā Mahābhārata* (mediaeval Oḍiā), and Pratibhā Rāy's '*Yājñasenī*' (contemporary Oḍiā)—a colossal and epoch-shattering metamorphosis is discernible in Drōpadī's societal and psychological stature [6, 7, 19, 25, 36]. The ensuing tableau delineates a comparative panorama of Drōpadī across these immortal creations, furnishing a crystalline denouement to the inquiry:

Comparative Attributes	Drōpadī in Byāsa's <i>Mahābhārata</i>	Drōpadī in <i>Sāraḷā Mahābhārata</i>	Drōpadī in ' <i>Yājñasenī</i> ' (Pratibhā Rāy)
Core Essence and Purpose	Divine, fire-born annihilator of <i>Kṣatrīyas</i> , and indomitable sentinel of dharma.	Quintessential Oḍiā rustic bride, grounded in realism, entwined with human endeavors.	Profoundly contemplative modern woman, emblem of feminist awakening and unyielding equity.
True Savior in the Disrobing Ordeal	Dharma or Lord Kṛṣṇa (intervention of supernatural, celestial potency).	Lord Surya (rooted in past virtuous deeds or karmic fruition doctrine).	Her own psychic resilience and internalized defiance against societal tyranny.
Depiction of Psyche	Idealistic, duty-bound, and relentlessly vengeful.	Laden with human frailties and veiled carnal desires (" <i>Satya Āmba</i> " episode).	Ravaged by profound inner turmoil, anguish, and scathing indictments of patriarchal dominion.
Stance on Polyandry	Embraced as the inexorable decree of predestined fate from prior incarnations.	Accepted as societal exigency, yet unquelled allure toward another man remains unsuppressed.	Widely condemned as a patriarchal burden and a manifestation of ultimate injustice against womanhood.
Narrative Style and Authorship	Third-person chronicle, male-centric epic fragment (Byāsa).	Third-person saga (<i>Sāraḷā Dās</i>), fused with Oḍiā folklore synergies.	First-person memoir (epistolary or autobiographical vein), wholly gynocentric exposition.

Byāsa *Mahābhārata* vs. *Sāraḷā Mahābhārata*:

Byāsa's Drōpadī embodies the archetype of an 'ideal queen' and a dynamic conduit for divine orchestration. Every deed she undertakes is underpinned by the imperatives of *dharma* and ethical mandates. Yet, in *Sāraḷā Dās*'s opus, we diverge from this superhuman sanctity of *dharma*, venturing into the raw terrain of commonplace societal dynamics and authentic human instincts [24, 25, 37]. For instance, in *Sāraḷā Mahābhārata*'s '*Darpadaḷana*' *Upākhyāna* (Saga,

episode) or the '*Satya Āmba*' saga, a profound psychoanalytic verity is laid bare: that a woman's psychic inclinations and carnal allurements cannot perpetually be shackled or subdued [3,36].

In the disrobing debacle, where Byāsa's *Mahābhārata* exalts divine benevolence as paramount, *Sāraḷā Mahābhārata* cogently champions the supremacy of one's karmic repercussions [25]. The bestowal of garments by Lord Surya was no capricious miracle or sorcery; rather, it

constituted the inexorable repayment of a karmic debt from antecedent lifetimes [25]. Through this, Sāraḷā Dās illuminates how Odisha's rustic ethos of karmic determinism can eclipse even the omnipotent divine prowess. In this essence, Sāraḷā's rendition surges as more democratic and intimately attuned to the proletariat than Byāsa's magisterial narrative [37, 38].

Sāraḷā Mahābhārata vs. Pratibhā Rāy's 'Yājñasenī':

Sāraḷā Dās's Drōpadī is forged in the crucible of fifteenth-century Odisha's mediaeval societal panorama, while Pratibhā Rāy's incarnation radiates with the full blaze of late twentieth and twenty-first-century modernist feminist ethos [4, 38]. Where Sāraḷā's Drōpadī ostensibly conforms to societal edicts, carving out her niche of dignity and esteem within their confines, Pratibhā Rāy's *Yājñasenī* unleashes a frontal assault on those very mandates and archetypes. Sāraḷā's woman embodies stark realism sans outright insurgency, but Pratibhā Rāy's paragon fuses unyielding realism with ferocious rebellion [28, 38].

In '*Yājñasenī*', Drōpadī traverses abyssal psychological tempests (such as perceiving polyandry as corporeal and psychic torment, harbouring profound distrust toward her spouses, and grappling with labyrinthine emotions for her confidant)—a depth of introspective dissection utterly unattainable within Sāraḷā's literary ambit. '*Yājñasenī*'s' Drōpadī seizes the quill herself (emerging as the sovereign narrator), demolishing the patriarchal monopoly of godlike male chroniclers like Byāsa or Sāraḷā, scripting her saga in her own indomitable voice [5, 12, 28]. In male-authored epics, she languished as a mere persona; through a female scribe's lens, she ascends as the architect of an entire tome—a thunderous testament to women's empowerment in contemporary literature [4,6].

The Metamorphosis of Drōpadī's Essence Across Oḍiā Literary Epochs:

Across the annals of Oḍiā literature's epochs, Drōpadī's archetype undergoes a relentless, revolutionary evolution. In the fifteenth-century *Sāraḷā Mahābhārata*, she descends from a divine pedestal to embody an unpretentious Oḍiā homemaker, immersed in culinary rites and familial skirmishes [3,12,33]—a folklorisation that democratises mythic grandeur. In subsequent eras, the eighteenth-century *Ritī* period's literary vogue—reducing women to mere voluptuous artefacts or corporeal icons (though Drōpadī wasn't central)—was shattered by nineteenth- and twentieth-century luminaries who invoked her defiant spirit anew [33, 37].

In modernity, from Sāraḷā Debī and Kuntalā Kumāri to Pratibhā Rāy, Yaśodharā Miśra, and Sarojini Sāhu, feminist scribes wielded Drōpadī as a formidable bulwark against patriarchal tyranny [6, 11]. Pratibhā Rāy's *Yājñasenī* crowns

this lineage, infusing Drōpadī with philosophical profundity and humanistic fervour. Thus, from mute goddess to visceral human, and from human to feminist colossus, Drōpadī's odyssey immeasurably enriches Oḍiā literary heritage [28, 29].

CONCLUSION

In holistic scrutiny, it crystallises that Drōpadī's persona has served as a paramount catalyst in Oḍiā literature's metamorphosis. Whenever societal scourges like female oppression, commodification, and human rights erosion ignite controversy, scribes have harnessed her titanic archetype. Byāsa's primal Sanskrit *Mahābhārata* laid the bedrock for a religio-political saga; Sāraḷā Dās fused it with Oḍiā's vernacular pulse, birthing a vibrant cultural renaissance. Through Drōpadī's humanised visage, Sāraḷā Dās and Pratibhā Rāy attest that literature transcends arid ideals—it unflinchingly mirrors unvarnished human frailties and grim societal verities, compelling readers to visceral self-reckoning.

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Nature, Memory, and Identity in the Fiction of Ruskin Bond: A Critical Synthesis of Contemporary Scholarship

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Abstract— This paper studies the works of Ruskin Bond. Many critics say he is only a children's writer. But his stories show deeper psychological and cultural meaning. They talk about identity, belonging, and social life. They also express the reader's emotion and memory. This article uses different research approaches. It combines thematic, linguistic, reader response, gender, and postcolonial views. The purpose is to create a unified critical understanding. Bond creates a literary world of nature and memory. Everyday relationship helps characters find emotional security. His stories reflect postcolonial experience in a quiet way. His plots are simple and not dramatic. He depends on feeling and familiarity. Meaning develops through reader participation and spatial experience. Nature, memory, and human connection together form identity and emotional belonging in his fiction.

Keywords— Identity, Belonging, Relations, Emotion, Society



I. INTRODUCTION

Ruskin Bond is an important figure in Indian English literature. He is known for his simple and emotional writing style. His stories capture the life of the hills in North India. Many of his works **contain strong autobiographical elements and personal memories**. He was born in Dehradun to British parents. Later, he became one of the most loved Indian writers. He received the Padma Shri in 1999 and the Padma Bhushan in 2014. These honors show his literary contribution.

Bond had a deep love for nature. Nature **appears as a living presence in his stories**. He describes hills, forests, and streams with emotional care. His writing **makes readers feel close to the natural world**. In *Tenacity of Mountain Water* (1988), he shows how a small stream grows into a powerful cascade. This image **symbolizes the connection between life and the environment**. His description helps readers understand ecological value. Bond uses a simple narrative but strong emotional meaning. His landscapes and characters emphasize the importance of protecting nature and maintaining the human connection with the environment.

Modern critics recognize the fiction of Ruskin Bond as a cultural and psychological story. His writing is rooted in ordinary life and daily moments. Scholars study childhood and readers' responses. They also study style and postcolonial identity. Most critics agree that his stories use emotional realism. They do not depend on complex structure or a heavy plot. Bond writes about small towns and railway platforms. He also describes hill stations and simple homes. The characters live ordinary lives but feel deep emotions. These places become symbolic spaces in the reader's mind. People search for belonging inside them. Sometimes they meet strangers and remember their past. The memories help them understand themselves. This study combines many research views together. It shows three elements that dominate his vision clearly. Nature gives emotional refuge to characters. Memory forms the identity of people and guides actions. Relationships work as a social negotiation in society. Friends and strangers create human connections. Together, they make a continuous world of experience. This world is not based on conflict or heroism. It depends on continuity and feeling. The reader participates in creating meaning through emotion.

Critics explain that his writing is deeply connected with his personal life and memory. Mittapalli (2013) states that Bond's works include novels, short stories, and essays that reflect his experiences. He argues that Bond's autobiographical elements make his stories more real and emotionally powerful. His personal observation of hills, people, and childhood become central source of his literary imagination. This connection between life and writing creates strong emotional authenticity.

Gulnaz (2013), in *Ruskin Bond's World*, explains that Bond's stories grow from his life in colonial India and his early years in Britain. His experiences in hill stations shape his literary vision. Nature, animals, and childhood appear repeatedly as emotional and thematic centers. His writing combines biography and imagination. This mixture gives his fiction unique emotional depth and realism.

Pandey and Dixit (2017) observe that Bond explores themes like nature, love, and human vulnerability. Even when he writes for children, his themes reflect deeper philosophical and emotional concerns. His purpose is to give emotional comfort. His stories help readers find hope and peace in a difficult world. This emotional sincerity makes his work timeless and meaningful.

II. READER PARTICIPATION AND EMOTIONAL MEANING

Reader response critics say the stories of Ruskin Bond need the reader's feelings. Meaning does not complete without reader's emotion. His narration looks very simple but hides depth. He leaves gaps so readers imagine more. In *The Room on the Roof*, the boy find friendship and belonging. He says, "I wanted to be part of their world, and forget my own." This line shows inner emotional need. It expresses his desire to escape isolation and find human connection. The event is ordinary, but the feeling is strong. Readers understand his loneliness through their own experience. Nothing very dramatic happened. The readers feel the change inside character by their own memory. Critics say the story depends on recognition, not action (Fatma et al., 2024). In *The Woman on Platform 8* a boy meets a strange woman. Their meeting is short but emotional. The narrator says, "She smiled, and I felt comforted and happy." This moment is simple but powerful. The story never fully explains who she is. The narrator only remembers, "She put her hand on my shoulder, and I felt protected." This gesture creates emotional meaning. It allows readers to imagine her identity and emotional role. The silence and absence of explanation make the story became participatory and emotionally open. The writer gives emotional signals. So Bond fiction becomes participatory realism, not only descriptive realism. The text does not explain who she really

is. So the readers imagine her past and intentions. The silence made the story became meaningful (Fatma et al., 2024).

III. SPACE, LANDSCAPE AND MEMORY

Critics say the places in the writing of Ruskin Bond act like psychology. The landscape is not only a background, but it keeps memory and emotions. Hills and towns hold personal history, too. Old houses reminisce about past lives. One critic says they are "repositories of cultural memory and emotional continuity" (Chatterjee).

Hill stations give safety and belonging. In *The Room on the Roof*, the boy feels comfort after city alienation, and the place gives identity more than society does. He observes, "The lights of the town spread below like a warm, living thing." This image shows an emotional connection with a place. The hills give him a sense of belonging that society did not give. Critics say the landscape "provides emotional anchorage to the displaced self" (Parmar & Mishra, 2024). Railway platforms show transience and passing relation. In *The Woman on Platform- 8th*, the narrator remembers, "The platform was almost deserted, and the night felt cold and lonely." This setting reflects inner loneliness. Their meeting is short, but the memory remains strong. The place becomes a symbol of passing connection and emotional trace. The platform becomes a symbol of temporary life.

Old buildings show continuity of the past. Bond writes, "The trees stood silently, as if watching over us." Nature here feels alive and protective. Forests provide refuge and healing. Nature protects the characters from modern changes. Scholars say the environment "stabilizes identity through familiarity and recollection" (Vaishnav & Devi, 2024). Characters lose identity in the city but find it again in nature. Setting, therefore, shapes selfhood more than action does.

IV. IDENTITY AND POSTCOLONIAL BELONGING

Postcolonial critics study the stories of Ruskin Bond and talk about mixed cultural identity. The conflict is not political but everyday adjustment. Characters learn life through daily living. In *The Room on the Roof* the boy search belonging in friendship. He confesses, "I felt I did not belong anywhere." This line shows deep identity confusion. It reflects psychological displacement and cultural uncertainty. Later he finds comfort with his Indian friends. He shares food, laughter, and daily life. He realizes emotional belonging through a relationship. He says, "For the first time, I felt accepted." This moment shows belonging created through human connection, not birth or

ancestry. Critics say he finds a place through companionship, not lineage (Parmar & Mishra, 2024). Friends and shared meals create acceptance. Neighborhood familiarity makes emotional security. The character becomes part of society through participation. Home becomes an emotional idea. It is not a fixed location. It develops slowly through experience. Bond also writes, "The hills were my only home." This statement shows identity connected with place and feeling. It suggests that belonging is formed through memory and environment. Scholars say belonging is a life experience not an inherited status (Vaishnav & Devi, 2024). Home becomes a social idea. It does not depend on ancestry or history. The person adapts through interaction with people. Everyday kindness replaces ideology. Identity becomes personal and experiential, not national (Parmar & Mishra, 2024). Characters do not claim a homeland. They learn it slowly through living.

V. GENDER AND SOCIAL STRUCTURES

Gender critics say the stories of Ruskin Bond show social hierarchy. The inequality is subtle but it is not obvious. Female characters live in the restrictions of society. They follow social rules. The narration looks neutral and does not argue. Bond neither challenges nor supports patriarchy directly. He only records life. Critics note that "Bond's female characters often face quiet limitation, but the story simply shows it without judgment" (Jawed, 2024). Readers understand unfairness by observation. Emotional sympathy replaces ideological argument. In *Time Stops at Shamli* the girl obeys rules at home but the story does not comment on it (Jawed, 2024). The narrator notices, "She spoke softly, and there was sadness in her smile." This detail shows emotional suppression. It suggests her freedom is limited by the social environment. The story does not explain or criticize directly. The silence itself creates meaning. Readers understand her condition through feeling. The limitation feels natural in daily life. Through small actions and conversation, readers see social expectations. Bond also describes domestic and social control through small gestures. He writes, "She lowered her eyes and said nothing." This action shows obedience and restraint. It reflects how social expectations control female expression. Patriarchy is present but not explained. The power dynamics are understood by observation. Bond's tone remains soft and careful. Stories show behavior and do not give a lesson. Criticism argue that this method makes the reader imagine unfairness themselves (Jawed, 2024). Emotional understanding is stronger than direct criticism.

VI. LANGUAGE AND NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

The language of Ruskin Bond is very simple, but it has strong emotion. He uses short sentences and everyday words. He does not use many metaphors in his writing. The writing has a gentle rhythm in description. One scholar says, "Bond's simplicity creates intimacy with the reader" (Prasad & Garg, 2024).

In *The Room on the Roof*, the sentences are short and clear. The reader can feel the character's emotion without thinking too much. The narration looks effortless but it works very deeply. Critics say, "His style is not limitation but artistic choice" (Prasad & Garg, 2024).

Bond also writes dialogue like real speech. It makes the story closer to the reader's life. He does not explain everything. The reader fills the gaps with their own feeling. This technique creates participatory reading. Readers live the story with characters.

Thus the simplicity of language gives emotional power more than complex words. The plain style makes the story human and touching. Narrative technique works with the reader's imagination. The emotion becomes stronger than the description itself.

VII. SYNTHESIS: A UNIFIED FRAMEWORK

Across many studies, the fiction of Ruskin Bond shows a similar pattern. Critics agree his meaning comes from three main elements. These elements work together inside the story.

First is nature. Nature gives emotional grounding. Hills and forests create safety for characters. The environment helps them feel stable. Second is memory. Memory builds personal continuity. Characters remember the past, and it guides their present life. Third are relationships. Relationships give social belonging. Friends and strangers become part of identity formation.

These three elements replace strong plot conflicts. There is no big dramatic action. The drama lies in simple recognition of feeling. Characters rarely change society. They do not try to control world. Instead, they learn how to live inside it. They accept change and grow slowly.

Thus Bond's fiction is not based on external struggle but internal understanding. Meaning develops through connection with place and people. The world of his stories remains quiet but emotionally deep.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Recent criticism of Ruskin Bond shows one clear philosophy. His stories do not focus on political struggle but focus on daily life. Identity grows through familiarity and empathy. Critics say his fiction presents “belonging through experience and environment” (Parmar & Mishra, 2024). Nature stabilizes emotion of characters. Memory shapes the selfhood of a person. Small meetings and encounters define belonging. The language is simple and makes reader participate (Prasad & Garg, 2024). Because of this, the reading becomes a shared experience.

Ruskin Bond does not make a direct political argument in his stories. Instead, he gives a gentle moral message about nature. His writing encourages readers to respect the natural world and understand its rhythm. Nature is not only a background. It is a living presence that gives emotional and spiritual comfort. His eco-critical vision is subtle and poetic rather than theoretical or argumentative. He shows environmental meaning through personal experience and observation.

In many short stories, hills, forests, and rivers become symbols of peace and balance. Bond describes nature with care and emotional closeness. This method helps readers feel a connection rather than receive direct instruction. His stories ask readers to slow down and observe natural beauty. Critics note that his fiction reflects deep ecological awareness through everyday life and memory. His work aligns with pastoral environmentalism. It presents quiet resistance to environmental destruction. Through storytelling, Bond reminds readers that human life depends on harmony with nature and emotional respect for the environment.

Bond writing represents quiet humanism. It does not depend on ideology but depends on living experience. Scholars observe that his world shows “human connection over historical conflict” (Vaishnav & Devi, 2024). The characters learn to go home slowly. Belonging is created by relation to people and places. Memory and moments creates emotional homeland. The fiction finally suggests identity is made, not inherited.

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Exploring Themes of Trauma and Female Suffering in *The Palace of Illusions* by Chitra Banerjee

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Abstract— This paper explores the themes of trauma and female suffering in *The Palace of Illusions* by Chitra Banerjee which re tells the story of *The Mahabharata* from Draupadi's point. Unlike the traditional narrative that celebrates the male heroes of the epic, Banerjee's novel highlight the emotional and psychological struggles of a woman who is caught between the battle of selfhood and patriarchal norms. This research examines Draupadi's life long quest for identity, agency and dignity. There is a repetition of trauma in her life, the pattern can be seen in the various incidents of her life like, her birth from fire, her pre decided destiny, her forced marriage with the 5 brothers, her humiliation in the court, her 13-year exile and the death of her loved ones on the battlefield. The incident that took place in the court, where she was disrobed and humiliated in ways no women should be can be seen as a strong symbol of gendered violence and treatment of women as property within the patriarchal structures. At the end, Draupadi emerges not only as a mere victim who suffered in the hands of the patriarchy, rather she emerges as a questioning and resilient figure. She challenges authority along with calling out the injustice that was done to her. Draupadi channels her pain and converts it into her moral strength. The feminist reading of the paper, projects Draupadi as a complex woman who is shaped by desire, anger, love, guilt, and endurance.



Keywords— Female suffering, Feminist reading, Identity, patriarchy and trauma.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Great War is often thought as the war between the rival cousins- The Pandavas and the Kauravas. The Great War is mentioned in the book – *The Mahabharat* by Ved Vyasa. Originally, the story was narrated from the perspectives of the great heroes of that time. The females supporting the heroes are kept aside and are only highlighted when the actions or the emotions of the women has an impact on the lives of the male warriors. The male perspective of the story does not give the readers a chance to have a deeper look at the women's psychology that is also at work during times like war. Through the male voices is it difficult to comprehend the joys and the sorrows, the achievements and the failures, the love and the heartbreaks that were faced by women.

In her book – *The Palace of Illusions* Chitra Banerjee, narrates the story of Mahabharat through the eyes of

Panchaali (Draupadi). In *The Palace of Illusion*, Draupadi is shown as narrating the story of the Great War while highlighting her pain, sorrows, joys, and achievements throughout her life. The story traces Draupadi's roles as a daughter, as a sister, as a wife, as a daughter-in-law, as a mother and as a friend. Chitra Banerjee has beautifully crafted her Draupadi, who is strong and determined to break through the societal norms that restrict women from living a free life. Through Draupadi, Chitra Banerjee has tactfully showcased many problems that are faced by women like quest for identity, male domination, their position in the patriarchal society and discrimination.

The Palace of Illusion By Chitra Banerjee is a revolutionary text, as it empowers the readers especially females. The story enlightens its readers in many ways. This tale is the perfect example to understand love, friendship, the need for a companion and most importantly how women play an

important role in bringing a major change. In the book, Chitra Banerjee has also addressed various social issues like women being the property of her husband, how the society holds an 'ideal image' for every woman and when the woman fails to put herself according to the ideal image she is considered as a bad omen for the family.

Every female should this tale once in their entire lifetime. As Draupadi is the biggest source of inspiration for her readers, she also acts as a guide to life. Her charismatic character reaches its reader's heart to the fullest.

II. CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Through Draupadi, Chitra Banerjee has highlighted the quest for identity. At the time of her birth she was given the name 'Draupadi' simply meaning daughter of King Draupad. But she was disappointed as there were prophecies that she would change the course of history, so she always wanted an unique name that made her stand out.

In the novel Chitra Banerjee has beautifully talked about the importance of friendship. Lord Krishna has been shown as a mentor, guide and a friend of Draupadi. Because of Lord Krishna's friendship, Draupadi was able to fight with the hardships she faced throughout her life.

Chitra Banerjee has also talked about phase of self-doubt that a woman undergoes. Since Draupadi was a dark skinned female, she often had doubts about her future. She always thought that her skin colour will become an obstacle between her and her ultimate goal that was pre-decided on her behalf.

In the novel, Chitra Banerjee has also raised the issues regarding females seeking education. For instance when her brother Dhiri was being taught the concepts and notions of warship and morals a Kshatriya should never forget in his life, Draupadi who also wanted to learn sat there behind a curtain, this was not appreciated by the tutor, who never missed a chance to remind her that the highest purpose in her life was to support the warriors in her life.

Importance of the name has been showcased in the novel. Draupadi's dissatisfaction was prominent to the wise. When she went to see the sage in the forest, the sage prophesied her future that brought her stress. According to the prophesy, she would marry five greatest warriors, she will be queen of queens, she will be the cause of the greatest war which will result in the loss of her loved ones, and because of everything she would die all alone. This brought her more stress than before. So as a gift the sage granted her the Name 'Panchaali' meaning the spirit of the land. Finally she got her unique name that meant something to her.

Since her childhood, Draupadi longed for a companion. Even though she was surrounded by many people but the

longing for a friend never dried. With the arrival of Sikhandi, Draupadi thought now she would have a true companion by her side. Sikhandi was a transgender warrior, who had suffered because in the past life she loved a man but due to unfortunate circumstances she was left alone and rejected. Her rejection from every court, led to her suicide. Now in this birth she prayed to god and begged him to make her man so that she can take her own revenge from the society that rejected her. During Sikhandi's stay at Draupadi's father palace, she was embraced with a friendship. Sikhandi as Amba in her past life sets an example for women how and why it is necessary to express their love openly even if it brings distress.

Draupadi is often considered as a rebellious woman. Since her childhood, she thought out of the box. She rejected the feminine interests, and was keen to learn complicated laws of household and property. Since the very beginning she had the urge to prove herself, so she always wanted to learn something new. Her father gave her the freedom to choose the man she wishes to marry, but soon this freedom turned out to be one of the biggest disappointments. As in her swayamvar, the suitors were expected to compete against each other and the winner will be the man to whom she will be married off. The competition was that the suitors had to pierce a fish made of metal, revolving high on the ceiling of the hall, they can't look directly at the target nor can they use their own weapons, they must use the Kindhara bow.

Soon before her swayamvar, a sorceress visited Draupadi who acted like a teacher to her. The sorceress taught her the real life lessons that would help her in future. Draupadi was being taught how she should not desire a man's love, even though that was the one thing she wanted to experience the most. She was also taught that she should know how to control her emotions, in situations where she feels like breaking down. The sorceress also made Draupadi familiar with the stereotypes for women that had their place in the society – the women all round the world where the cause of major problems.

When the royal artist brought the portraits of the suitors who wished to marry Draupadi, she openly voiced her opinions about their looks. When she saw Duryodhan's portrait, Karna's, picture in the same frame captivated her. At that very moment, she wanted to embrace Karna as she felt sympathetic towards those affectionate eyes of Karna. Then finally, when she saw Arjun's portrait, at that very moment she found herself wanting to build a relationship with him. She made her mind that she wanted Arjun win the competition but her choice was opposed by Dhishma.

On the day of her swayamvar, she felt nervous as wedding day and a new married life is a new battle for a woman. The turn of events shocked her the most, as she took a stand for

herself and her brother in front of all the guests. Karna who had come to take part in the competition was a friend of Duryodhan but he did not belong to any ruling lineage. So when her brother Dhri, objected Karna's participation it was Draupadi who came in-between the men to stop them from almost killing each other. She proved her loyalty to her brother by insulting the man she admired the most and wanted to marry.

After the stress full course of events, Draupadi was married to a Brahmin who was able to meet the criteria of the competition but everything happened in a haste that it was difficult to comprehend the situation. While traveling with the Brahmin, to his place of residence Draupadi meet with an accident in which her feet had cuts that produced huge amounts of bloods. At that point when the ignorant Brahmin finally acknowledged her pain, he came to her aid and that's when Draupadi recognized Arjun in his disguise. Finally when she realized that had been married to Arjun she was relived and accepted him as her husband. She hoped that they both could build the relationship she desired.

When she reached, Arjun's place she came to a different world altogether. She had to struggle with her new life as this was not what she was expecting. From a Palace to a hut in the end of the town, her life had taken a reverse turn. Kunti, Arjun's mother had full control of the household. Since the childhood, Kunti has taught the Pandavas to equally share what they have, similarly not knowing what Arjun had brought with him, she asked all five of them share it equally. When she realized it was Draupadi, the wife of her third son, she asked all the other brothers to marry her. Kunti's words sounded like thunderclaps to Draupadi, she hoped that Arjun who was her husband would take a stand for her and oppose his mothers words. But she wrongly judged the situation. As Arjun did take a stand saying that this martial set up was against the notions of Dhrama but he was silenced by his mother. Though Arjun took a stand but for Draupadi it was a disappointment. Kunti not only broke Draupadi's spirits of a marriage with Arjun, she also broke Draupadi's wish to be a good daughter in law with her discouraging taunts. Despite all of this Draupadi managed the situation very tactfully.

Since the Pandavs vaunted their mother's orders so much that all of them married Draupadi. The other marriages were against her will as she only wanted to remain married to Arjun but neither her husband took a stand for her nor her father understood the situation. All the men had their own benefits in their mind while negotiating this strange marital arrangement. Vyasa came up with an arrangement in order to maintain harmony in the Pandava household. The arrangement was that she would be wife to each brother for a year at a time, from oldest to youngest, consecutively.

During that, the other brothers were to keep their eyes lowered when speaking to her, better if they did not speak at all. They were not to touch her, not even the tips of her fingers. If they intruded upon their privacy when she and her husband were together, they were to be banished for a year from the household. Vyasa also gave her boon that each time she went to a new brother she would be a virgin again. Draupadi did not like the boon at all as it was awkward. When the other brothers married Draupadi, Arjun projected his anger as he did not like the idea of sharing his wife but he could not go against his brothers and mother.

Draupadi was welcomed by Bheeshma who was Pandava's grandfather. The warm welcome was something that she had truly desired in her life, as no one had really wanted to welcome her. When she and her husbands were taken to Hastinapur, she still found herself lonely. Her expectations also disappointed her, as she hoped a beautiful palace would be given to her and Yudhisthir but what they were offered could not make a place in her heart.

After Bheeshma was able to give the Pandavas what they truly deserved he was quite happy, moreover Draupadi trusted him with her husband's safety. The region they were given was Khandav, a barren land. The brothers decided to establish their kingdom over there. During the journey from Hastinapur to Khandav, Draupadi realized that Bheem was the generous among all the brothers as he helped her the household courses, even though it was not his year but he believed that Vyasa's arrangement made sense behind the walls of the palace and now that they were wandering so they had to help each other.

The Pandavas and Draupadi finally build their Palace of Illusion, with the help of Maya. Their home was truly beyond imagination. It was beautiful yet magical and gave a sense of home and belonging. All of them were delighted to experience this sense of belongingness. While the Palace was being build, the Pandavas took and respected Draupadi's opinions. It was in this palace only where Draupadi experienced motherhood by giving birth to five sons, one from each. She attached herself to the Palace of Illusion as it was the palace she dreamed of since was a young girl. Her gratitude also grew with time and she was also able to take control of the household.

Even though her husbands took other wives, but their respect and gratitude towards her never changed. It was difficult for her accept the other wives at first, but then she also maturely accepted them. The only time she could not accept was when Arjun married Krishna's sister Subhadra. At first when she met Subhadra she thought that she would never like her as she saw love in Arjun's eyes for Subhadra that she yearned to witness for herself. But over the time she became friends with Subhadra.

When Sage Narad paid his visit to the Pandavas in Indraprastha, he informed them that their father's spirit were in Yama's court instead of Indra's court. Yudhisthir's curiosity rose that why their father was in Yama's court and not Indra's court and what could they do to make sure that the ancestors of the pandavas go to Indra's court. Sage Narad replied to Yudhisthir's curiosity by suggesting them to perform Rajasuya sacrifice. In order to perform the Rajasuya sacrifice, the Pandavas had to receive tribute from all the great kings of Bharat, and if the king refused then they had battle against them and defeat them and then the Pandavas should arrange a huge fire ceremony which should be attended by all of them. The Pandavas asked Krishna for his guidance about how they should proceed with the Rajasuya sacrifice. All because of Krishna's help and guidance the Pandavas received tribute. They even invited their cousins the Kauravas. The preparations begin in the Palace of Illusion.

Draupadi wanted to put the past behind and redeem herself for Karna but unfortunately Karna didn't want any such things. Yudhisthir asked Bheeshma to choose a guest of honor as a part of the sacrifice. Bheeshma called Krishna's name as the guest of honor. After Krishna was announced as the guest of honor, Sisupala the king of Chedis objected this and made statements like, "Krishna became a king after killing his own uncle" and "Krishna instigated Bheem to kill Jarasandha." Sisupala's insulting words enraged Bheeshma. Krishna stepped in and said to Sisupala that he had promise him to forgive a hundred insults and Sisupala should apologize to his hosts so that they could complete the sacrifice. Sisupala rebuked Krishna by insulting him further and then Krishna chopped off his head with his chakra. During this entire commotion Draupadi was sacred for Krishna's safety. When Draupadi understood what had happened she was terrified as she thought she had lost her beloved companion but there stood Krishna in front of her with a wounded index finger. Without even thinking Draupadi tore a strip of her sari and bandaged the wound. Soon a chaos broke out as the other kings were protesting and started fighting the Pandavas. Amid the chaos, the Pandavas did not forget their duty towards Draupadi, they made sure that she was safe.

After Sisupala's death, most of the kings had already left. Only Duryodhan and his friends had stayed. Duryodhan was fascinated by the Palace of Illusion. Because of his fascination, Draupadi would find him in unexpected places. The nights in the palace were not appreciated by Draupadi, as the set of cousins would indulge in levels of game of dice, drinking sura, and watching the dancers. During this time Draupadi was not allowed to stay in the sabha. While wandering in the palace, Duryodhan and his men reached the garden that Draupadi had designed herself. In this

garden, there was lake in which Duryodhan fell, he did not receive any help from his men. Watching this from the balcony Draupadi and her maids had a good laughter. But encouraged by Draupadi's smile one of her maids passed a comment, "it seems that the blind king's son is also blind." By this comment the damage was done as Duryodhan and others had seen the ladies. After this incident Draupadi was summoned by Kunti, as she got to know what had been done. Kunti asked Draupadi to inform the incident to Yudhisthir, because Kunti's tone didn't appeal to Draupadi she simply choose not to tell it to anybody. Soon Duryodhan and his men left for Hastinapur. After the departure of the Kauravas, a gloom hanged over the palace and it's residents as Yudhisthir conducted affairs half heartedly, Bheem didn't like the most of the dishes that were made, Arjun watched the mountains listlessly, Nakul neglected his beloved animals, Sahadev left unread his books and Draupadi often stopped mid way of giving instructions. Soon the Pandavas received an invitation from Duryodhan. He wanted his cousins to come and give their blessings to him for his new palace. He even requested that Draupadi should also come as his new wife Bhanumati is keen to meet the queen of queens. The Pandavas were suspicious about the invitation but they decided to go and have a good time with their cousins.

When the Pandavas reached Duryodhan's palace, Draupadi was the first one to notice that the palace was just a replica of their Palace of Illusion only the magic was absent. Bhanumati's visit to Draupadi made her realize that Bhanumati also admired Karna. Duryodhan had organized a family dinner, inviting all his family and closest friends. Bhanumati sought Draupadi's help in order to get ready for the dinner. Bhanumati was eager to make Karna admire her. After helping Draupadi realized that she also had been acting childlike and she had to act like the lady of a fivehold house and the queen of queens. At the dinner, Draupadi had a conversation with Karna that was not at all like the one she had imagined.

Because of the stay in Duryodhan's palace Draupadi was growing irritant and wanted to go back to her beloved palace. Yudhisthir had been enjoying the games and stay but for her sake, he informed that he will ask for leave. Upon hearing that his dearest cousins wishes to go back, Duryodhan challenged Yudhisthir for one last game of dice. The game began and Sakuni took Duryodhan's place as Yudhisthir opponent. The game had turned as Yudhisthir started losing, he lost his jewels, his weapons and all his personal wealth. Soon he started wager things that were not under his control. Draupadi was resting in her room as she was menstruating and did not feel like doing anything. One of the Duryodhan's attendants was standing at her door, upon witnessing this she was furious as a male servant was

not allowed in the women's quarters. Dhairya entered her room panting, begin saying things like, "terrible things had happened" Draupadi could not understand what was going on. She asked the attendant to leave them alone, but he informed her that Duryodhan had invited Draupadi to the sabha. She was shocked as women were not allowed there and why did not her husbands called her. Then Dhairya informed her that Yudhishthira had lost everything in gambling from the palace to his brothers and even himself, and then he had wagered Draupadi, and unfortunately lost her as well. It took time for Draupadi to understand what had happened, but she remembered a law that 'the wife is the property of the husband but if the husband was not free himself then he had no jurisdiction over his wife.' She sent the servant back and asked him to ask the elders that, 'if Yudhishthira was Duryodhan's property so he had no right to wager Draupadi?' Annoyed by this Dussasana came storming into her room and grabbed Draupadi by her hair saying, 'that Duryodhan was her master now and she must obey his orders.' He dragged her to the sabha by pulling her by her hair. Draupadi found herself in the middle of the sabha filled with men and their glances towards her, she was helpless and begged for help from her husbands who could not do anything, all the elder members sat there but did not do anything to help her. Duryodhan insulted her by asking her to come and sit on his lap. Duryodhan asked Dussasana to remove all the jewels from the Pandavas, they removed everything themselves even before Dussasana could touch them. Karna pointed to Draupadi and said, "why should she be treated differently, take her cloths off too." Dussasana started pulling her sari, even though Draupadi stood there naked but he could not completely strip her off from her cloths, as the more he pulled the more fabric appeared. While this was going on, she closed her eyes and imagined as if she was in garden with Krishna. The nature around her was calming and soothing, taking her away from the sabha where she was being humiliated. Krishna had said to her that, "no one can shame her, if she didn't allow it." These words by Krishna came to her as a wave of amazement and she was not scared anymore. She opened eyes, she found herself still clothed and Dussasana on the floor. She stepped over him and cursed the kauravas that no kaurava will be alive to sit on the throne and to offer prayers to the dead. And she took an oath of not combing her hair until she would bathe them in kaurava blood.

The Pandavas lost the last the game of dice and as a result, they were sent to exile for 13 years. In the first 12 years they had to live in the forest and in the last year they had to hide themselves in disguise if caught by Duryodhan, then they would have to live in the forest for another 12 years. Draupadi choose to company her husbands to the forest, leaving behind her 5 boys. After the Pandavas left,

Duryodhan and his men rode towards the Palace of Illusion. Draupadi's beloved palace lost its existence even before Duryodhan could touch it. After the loss of the palace Draupadi's desire to belong somewhere was back again. Even during their exile Duryodhan did not stop his tactics to bring troubles for the Pandavas, one such incident when he sent sage Durvasa to the Pandavas. Durvasa and his hundred disciples visited the Pandavas and asked them to offer food. Unfortunately, the Pandavas were out of food, this brought Draupadi great distress but Krishna was there to her rescue. It was Krishna who helped her in this situation, using his magic. Another time Duryodhan had brought distress for the Pandavas as he incited Jayadratha to abduct Draupadi from the forest.

During their exile the Pandavas had many visitors. Draupadi's brother Dhriti had tried his best to lessen their difficulties. When Draupadi meet her 5 sons again, she realized that there was a disconnection between her and her sons. Dhriti wanted her to go back with him but Draupadi refused, as she wanted to stay by her husbands.

Arjun was growing restless to fight the war. He wanted to restore Draupadi's and his honor. So he announced that he would go to the mountains of Himavan and would try to please lord Shiva through great penance, so he gets the Pushpata the divine astra. Indra Arjun's father invited him to court. There the court dancer Urvashi fell in love with Arjun and wanted him to marry her. But Arjun had denied her proposal, so she cursed Arjun that he would have to live a life of eunuch for a year.

After their exile ended the Pandavas were supposed to live their life hidden and if discovered then they would have to live in the forest for another 12 years. So they decided that they would do odd jobs in the palace of King Virat which was situated in Matsya. Draupadi would be Queen Sudeshna's attendant, Bhishma would help in the royal kitchen, Yudhishthira was in the court as Brahmin who had excelled in philosophic conversations and game of dice, Nakul and Sahadev would work in barns and Arjun would be Princess Uttara's dance tutor. In Virat's palace, Draupadi caught the attention of Keechak, Sudeshna's brother, who wanted her at any cost to fulfill his sexual desires. A month before the disguise ended Keechak cornered and threatened Draupadi that she should come to him on her own otherwise he will take her by force. She ran to the court hoping that king Virat would give her justice but she was wrong. In court she found herself helpless as Keechak kicked her. Yudhishthira witnessed this but the fear of exposure stopped him from helping her or protesting against the injustice. And because of this Draupadi was disheartened. Forgetting that if discovered they would have to return back to the forest, Draupadi went to see Bhishma after the palace fell quiet and

asked him to kill Keechak. The next day Bheem killed Keechak and this news travelled quickly. When it reached Duryodhan, he was sure that it was Bheem who had killed Keechak, to find it out whether it was true or not. He attacked Virat's kingdom from both sides. The Pandavas fought the Kauravas for king Virat. Soon it was out that the disguised men were indeed the Pandavas, and their year of disguise had also ended. King Virat offered his daughter Uttara to Arjun, but Arjun suggested that Uttara should be married to his son Abhimanyu.

Soon the preparations for the Great War begin. Duryodhan and Arjun both went to see Krishna and ask for his help. In Dwarka Arjun and Duryodhan stood face to face in Krishna's room where he was taking a nap. Arjun asked Krishna to be there in the war as his friend where as Duryodhan asked for Krishna's soldiers. Draupadi dreamt about the conversation that took place between Karna and Kunti.

When Draupadi had arrived at Kurukshetra, even though she was tired from the journey but she was equally excited to see the battlefield. Upon seeing Arjun take care of Subhadra, Draupadi longed for his tenderness towards her. Even the women were made familiar with the rules of the war. When it was dark, and all of them decided to go back to their tents, Vyasa appeared in front of Draupadi and gave her a gift, the power to witness what going on the battle field.

With the ongoing war between the cousins internal conflict played its game on the minds of the warriors, like when Bheem killed Duryodhan's brothers he was conflicted by the thought of fratricide as he shared the same blood, Yudhishthir's confused heart did not want the war to take place, Arjun the greatest of all was also conflicted by the thought of killing his beloved grandfather and his teacher who had made him the greatest of all. Vyasa had gifted Draupadi a sight that would allow her to witness the major events of the war, as she would be the only one left to narrate the tale of the Great War. She preferred to call this gift as 'trance', as when the sight was at work she was dragged to a different world. Because of the sight she was able to see the events that occurred and she could even read the minds of the people. Draupadi was surprised to see such a miserable Arjun. He had a shaken mental state, as he was not ready for what was about to happen, he was the one who wanted the war at any cost for his and Draupadi's honour. During such times, it was Krishna's advice that motivated the Pandavas. Krishna's advice to the Pandavas, left Draupadi in great conflict as he advised them, "the pleasures that from sense-objects are bound to end, and thus they are only sources of pain. Don't get attached to them. And: when a man reaches a state where honor and dishonor are alike to

him, then he is considered supreme." Draupadi was conflicted as she did not know a way to live without attachment.

Bheeshma as a great warrior, and was becoming a great problem for the Pandavas and their army. The Pandava army saw Bheeshma as Yama the death-bringer because even at this age he fought the army single handedly. On the ninth day the duel between Arjun and Bheeshma broke out, due to his love for the grandfather Arjun's heart was not in the duel. All the arrows Arjun shot towards Bheeshma were a waste as Arjun aimlessly targeted. Whereas all the arrows shot by Bheeshma towards Arjun, hit him. To stop this Krishna had to interfere by stopping Bheeshma because of Krishna's interference Arjun changed his mind that next day he would face Bheeshma as a true Kshatriya keeping aside everything that had been stopping him. At night on Krishna's advice, the Pandavas went to visit their grandfather without any weapon. And he out of love for the Pandavas told them how he could be defeated. Next day as Arjun had said, he faced Bheeshma. He had dropped his weapons as he saw that Sikhandi was with Arjun and never picked them up again. Arjun shot arrows after arrows towards Bheeshma and all of them hit him. After Bheeshma fell on the ground, Arjun shot three more arrows so that the grandfather could rest his head. Bheeshma did not die but he no longer was a participant in the war. Because he was a charismatic warrior, participants from both the sides came to him for advice and to share their secrets that could not have been shared openly. Draupadi knew that he had visitors at night as well, because she was one of them. She had gone to him to ask that one question that had troubled her for so long, "why didn't he say anything when she was being humiliated in his court?" When she went to him it was quite late in the night, she had thought that at this hour, no one would be there with Bheeshma, but she was wrong as she found Karna there. Because of the admiration, she held for Karna she stayed there in order to listen what he had to say to grandfather. Since Draupadi was eavesdropping on their conversation she learned the truth about Karna. She got to know that Karna was a brother to her husbands, he is Kunti's son whom she had abandoned after birth because when she had him she was very young. Bheeshma knew the truth about his birth, in order to stop the war he asked Karna to join the Pandavas. He had firmly refused the proposal because he was honour bound. He said to grandfather that he had eaten Duryodhan's salt so he could not betray his dearest friend, and he had to repay the eaten salt in the form of blood. Surprises did not end for Draupadi, as she also learned that since the day of her swayamvar Karna had admired her. He had even regretted instigating Dussasan to humiliate her by pulling her sari. Further she also learned that, Kunti had told

him that he would be the king if he joined her sons which did not give him any kind of temptation but Kunti had also offered Draupadi to him. The thought of having Draupadi in his life, Karna wanted to give up his honour, reputation and join his brothers but it took him great effort to not submit himself to the temptation. This admiration was all that Draupadi had ever wished for, she thought it was of no use now because her husbands would take their revenge for her honour's sake. But the truth about Karna's admiration came with more anger towards Kunti. She was infuriated because Kunti had offered her to Karna as if she was some kind of a slave girl. After Arjun had shot Bheeshma, at the night Pandavas only spoke about Karna, now who was allowed to participate in the war. It was a difficult time for Kunti as now she had to witness her own sons killing each other. Before finishing the dinner she left saying that her joints were stiff causing her great difficulties. Seeing Kunti like this something in Draupadi changed, she went to her room and willingly asked for the permission to apply a paste that would lessen the joint pains. And for the first time she had acted as a daughter-in-law.

After Bheeshma, Drona took control of the Kaurava army as their commander. While commanding the army and preparing himself for the role he was about to play, Drona was conflicted. The sight took Draupadi inside Drona's mind. His mind was conflicted by the thoughts that he should have left the Kaurava court long ago and returned to a life of austerities. What stopped him was his love for his son Aswattama, as he developed a fondness for lavish living. It was because of his son he had stayed, promising himself that one day he would leave the court, but now it was too late to have such kind of thoughts. As his teacher, Drona had promised to Arjun that he would be the greatest of all. This promise had taken a backseat when the Pandavas encountered Ekalavya in the forest. During a hunt, the Pandavas crossed paths with Ekalavya, who had shut Arjun's hunting dog in such a manner that it had truly surprised them. The way Arjun's dog was shot, he himself could never have shot like that. After witnessing this, Drona had enquired about Ekalavya's guru. Ekalavya had taken Drona's name. Then Drona, remembered that a boy from the hill tribe had come to him, as wanted to learn archery, but Drona had refused because he did not want to teach a lowborn. Since then Ekalavya has been practicing in the forest considering Drona as his teacher. Upon seeing this Arjun, was in disbelief that a self-taught man was finer than him, Drona sensed Arjun's thoughts and asked Ekalavya for guru dakshina. As guru dakshina, Drona asked Ekalavya his right thumb. Without hesitation Ekalavya offered Drona what he had asked for, Drona's promise to Arjun remained unhindered. Ghatotkacha, Bheem's son with Hidimba had proved to be a great warrior like his father and his uncles.

Since he was a rakshasa, a being of the night his powers increased by the end of the day. The Kaurava army found it difficult to fight with him, witnessing this Duryodhan was horrified. He ordered Karna to do whatever he could in order to stop Ghatotkacha. Karna knew that only the Shakti astra would be able to destroy Ghatotkacha, but he was saving the astra to use it against Arjun. However, since Duryodhan had ordered him, he had to kill Ghatotkacha using the astra. On the battlefield, when the Ghatotkacha saw the speeding missile making its way towards him, he grew to an immense size, when the astra touched him and exploded his chest, he fell in such a manner where he would have killed many enemies. The news of Ghatotkacha's death brought distress to the Pandavas as he was their first child to die in the war. Bheem was shaken and devastated, as now he had to arrange the funeral rites for his own son. Since the very beginning Drona was aware that he could not defeat the Pandavas in an open battle, he had to use different strategies. Drona thought of capturing Yudhishthira in order to put an end to the war but this was not possible with Arjun beside his brother. So in order to capture Yudhishthira, Drona would pursue different kings to challenge Arjun, so in order to fight his challenger Arjun would leave his brother and that moment could be used to capture Yudhishthira. But every time Arjun returned just in time, and would protect his brother. Seeing his plan fail, on the thirteenth day Drona came up with a different strategy, he formed his army into the most devastating and invincible formation known as the Padma Vyuh- it shaped like a thousand-petalled lotus that can only be destroyed from the inside. From the Pandavas it was Arjun, who knew how to destroy the formation from the inside but he was taken away, after him, it was his son Abhimanyu, but he did not know how to come out of the formation. Upon seeing such a formation, the Pandavas had to request Abhimanyu to enter the formation first, promising to follow him from behind. When Abhimanyu got ready he saluted his uncles and went straight towards the Kaurava army. As soon as Abhimanyu entered the formation, it locked up leaving the Pandavas outside. Jayadrath stood with the lock guarding it and preventing the Pandavas to enter in order to help their nephew. Inside the formation, Abhimanyu realized that he had been doomed. He was a great warrior like his father, even when his death was near he wanted to fight his enemies with honour. The rules of the war broken, as the Kaurava men attacked him from back, they cut the string of his bow and the hilt from his sword, his charioteer and his horses were smashed. As they approached him, Abhimanyu requested them to fight him one by one, but the Kaurava men would not honour his last request. As he fell on the ground disbelief took over him that such so-called great heroes have turned into murderers. The death of their second child had brought

great distress on the Pandavas. Abhimanyu's wife, Uttara called death to come her, his uncles felt guilty for pushing him so much and all of them wished it were they who should have died instead of him. When Arjun learned about the death of his son, he fell down, scaring everyone around him that he would perish of sorrow. Krishna consoled Arjun, and reminded him that his son died nobly and Arjun should be a worthy father to him. For the sake of his son's honour Arjun took an oath to kill Jayadrath, who prevented his brothers from entering the formation, and if he fails to do so he would commit suicide. Sitting on the hill alone, Draupadi was contemplating the entire situation, while doing so she started weeping for Abhimanyu. She was tensed because of the fear that what would happen if Arjun failed to fulfil his promise. She had realized that she had pushed the Pandavas too much. And, finally she wept for Karna, who lost his honour today by killing a defenceless boy. The war rules being broken, the unarmed were attacked, later these actions were justified also. Great warriors like the Pandavas and even Krishna broke the rules of the war. Krishna created a fake sunset, so Jayadrath would feel that he is safe in those moments only Arjun beheaded him and fulfilled his promise. Even Drona broke all the rules of the war as he commanded his army to attack the Pandava army in night when they were resting, he even got Draupadi's father and Dhriti's son killed in order to break Dhriti's spirits. Drona as a warrior was being a great cause of distress to the Pandavas, in order to stop him Bhishm killed an elephant named Aswatthama. The Pandavas told him the news, but at first he didn't believe it. He wanted to hear the same from Yudhishthir, as he was a man who never lied in his life. In order to fight and save the men who had come to fight for him, Yudhishthir lied and told Drona that Bhishm had killed his son. The war had forced a man like Yudhishthir to give up on his virtues. Upon hearing the news of his son's death, Drona dropped his weapons and sat in prayer, Dhriti took advantage of the situation and beheaded his own teacher. By killing Drona, Dhriti fulfilled his faith, but lost himself.

After Drona, Karna took the post of the commander for the Kaurava army, as a commander he urged both sides to return to righteousness as he reapplied all the rules of the war that were broken. He regretted his part in Abhimanyu's death, and could not kill the Pandavas as he was fighting his own brothers. He spared Sahadev, Nakul, Bhishm and Yudhishthir, when he had them at his mercy, for once he was disloyal to his friend and his king Duryodhan. Before letting go, he taunted the Pandavas in order to prevent any kind of suspicion. While facing his brothers in the battlefield Karna faced many internal conflicts because the Pandavas were facing an enemy while he was facing his own brothers. Karna as a leader was really admired by the common soldiers. As he had reapplied the rules of the war, now the

common soldiers were a little relaxed as no major astra would be used against them. Karna even walked with the soldiers, after the sun set at night, he offered solace to the wounded and made sure they were given what comfort was available. He would motivate the soldiers who would go to fight in the morning and he would also promise them that whoever won Yudhishthir or Duryodhan would take care of their family. On the seventeenth day Arjun and Karna stood facing each other, their duel was the most waited one. Everything around them had stopped, everyone wanted to experience the most enigmatic duel. Draupadi had been scared of this duel as the two men whom she adored faced each other. Whoever won this duel whether Arjun or Karna, she will have to experience the pain of losing her beloved. Because of the sight, gifted to her by Vyasa she could see the duel very clearly, and wanted the sight to go away, as she did not have the heart to watch the two men she loved fight each other. This duel had caused more pain to her than the entire war. Pandavas's uncle Salya, drove Karna's Chariot towards Arjun, while driving the chariot he was parsing Arjun in order to break Karna's confidence. While facing Arjun, Karna had a calm face because in his heart he knew that he could not defeat Arjun without Shakti and he was facing his younger brother in the battlefield. As a true warrior and a friend, he gave the war what he had. The two warriors, neutralized each other arrows and astras. Krishna had to intervene and bring both the warriors to ground. The sun was about set, this gave a lot of relief to Draupadi because once the sun was set, and the duel had to stop there. And if the duel stopped, Draupadi would get a chance to tell the truth about Karna to her husbands. As everyone waited for the commanders to give the signal to withdraw, Karna's chariot tilted sideways as one of the wheels was embed in earth. Karna realized what was happening; the Brahmin's curse was taking its place. He was helpless and death waited for him in the corner. He asked Arjun to give him a chance to ready himself for the sake of code of honour. It was Krishna, who played with Arjun's mind at that moment. Krishna urged Arjun not to think about the code of honour; he reminded Arjun that it was Karna who had instigated Dussasan to humiliate Draupadi in the royal court. With the flashbacks of that terrible incident, rage flashed in Arjun's eyes but he hesitated, because he didn't want people to remember him as a warrior who killed an unarmed opponent. Krishna very well knew what will put Arjun into action, then he used the memory of Abhimanyu's death as a weapon to put Arjun into action. Arjun was reminded that Karna butchered his son while he was fighting five other men. The memory of his dead son was enough for Arjun to take action that was required at that moment. While facing his hated enemy, he raised his bow. Karna began to chant mantra that would bring him any weapon but it failed.

Parasuram's curse was taking its effect, Karna's knowledge failed. Arjun released his arrow, and shot Karna. Before arrow touched Karna he smiled. Arjun kept his promise to Draupadi and had killed Karna. Karna's death brought great internal conflict for Draupadi. As she sat there on the hill, her heart and mind was muddled with conflicting thoughts. Part of her was glad that the unbearable tension was over, part of her was relieved that her husband had won, part of her realized that the Pandavas were close to achieving the vengeance she had carved though now it gave her no satisfaction. Sorrow and regret had took their control over Draupadi, she was full of sorrow as a noble soul had died on the battle field. She was taken back to the day of her swayamvar, where she had thrown daggers at Karna by asking about his birth, and prohibiting him from competing. She thought to herself, what would have happened if Karna had won the competition that day. Draupadi was heartbroken as her beloved died believing that, she did not love him, she wished to change things.

After Karna's death it seemed as if Draupadi had lost interest in the war, she did not had the will to climb the hill, but to avoid any kind of suspicion she climbed the hill and lied there. The Pandavas hoped that after Karna's death the war would end but Duryodhan refused to give up. Through the sight Draupadi saw the destruction of the Kauravas, she saw how Yudhisthir killed their uncle Salya with the help of his javelin. After killing his uncle, Yudhisthir was burdened with further guilt because while dying their uncle had send them his blessings. At the Kaurava end, now only four warriors were alive: Duryodhan, Kripa, Kritavarma and Aswatthama. At Samantapanchaka lake, the Pandavas found Druyodhan resting underwater. Since Yudhisthir was a man who respect the code of honour, he asked Duryodhan to choose an opponent and the weapon he would like to have a duel with. From the Pandavas it was only Bheem who was capable of fighting Duryodhan. This act of Yudhisthir, made Krishna furious and he began to remind Yudhisthir how foolish his act was. Krishna reminded him that millions of men had died in order to save the Pandavas especially Yudhisthir, his brothers had faced greatest dangers in order to save his life, Draupadi had wept and prayed for this moment for through thirteen years of hardship and humiliation, and how he himself had manipulated dharma for the Pandavas. Krishna also informed Yudhisthir that Duryodhan learned gada – yuddha from his brother Balaram. Duryodhan picked Bheem in order to have a duel, as he believed that no other Pandava could fight him. When the duel began, the Pandavas realized that Duryodhan was extremely good in gada-yuddha. The spies, who had worked for the Pandavas, had informed them that Duryodhan had ordered his armorers to make him an iron statue of Bheem so that he could practice

on it. The duel stretched over one to two hours, Bheem was tired and exhausted and could not fight Duryodhan with his entire strength. Seeing Bheem lose the Pandavas remembered that Gandhari had asked Druyodhan to come and visit her while he was completely naked but out of modesty he wore a loincloth. When Gandhari saw her son, she undid her blindfold and sent the powers of her penances into his body. The duel was going out of the Pandavas' hands, when Krishna guided Bheem through Arjun. During the fight when Bheem caught Arjun's eyes, he slapped his thigh indicating him to hit Duryodhan near his thigh. The gesture was very familiar to all the Pandavas, as it was the same gesture that Duryodhan did when Draupadi was humiliated in his court and the Pandavas were his captive. As Bheem had taken an oath to take revenge for Draupadi's humiliation, he hitted Duryodhan on his thighs and fulfilled his oath. The duel was over, the Pandavas had won the battle of Kurukshetra and the Kaurava prince was placed on his deathbed. But Bheem's actions had enraged Krishna's brother Balaram, because he had broken one of the most important rules of the gada – yuddha. That was hitting Duryodhan below his navel. Upon hearing the news of Duryodhan's death, Balaram came to the battlefield and wanted to kill Bheem, it was Krishna who stopped Balaram from killing Bheem. But before Balaram left, he told Bheem that Duryodhan will be glorified and remembered as the best of fighters. Bheem stood there and said that, he stand by his action and he did it for Yudhisthir whom Druyodhan had cheated of his heritage and for Draupadi whom he insulted the way no women should ever be. The Pandavas had to follow the ancient laws at night, the male members of the family had to stay in a different place and away from the female members of the family. Draupadi longed to join them all, her husbands, Krishna, her brothers and her sons. She wanted to hold her boys close to her heart and believe that all her boys had survived the terrors of the war. She promised to herself that from now she would be a better mother, giving the attention they desired for so many years. While preparing the feast, Draupadi thanked the god for saving all the men she had loved except one. She considered herself more fortunate than Subhadra, Uttara, Kunti, Hidimba, Gandhari but then reality took its place in her mind that she was one of the major causes behind this destruction and she should not be so lucky.

After going to the bed, Draupadi saw a dream where she saw herself transformed into a male warrior. As the night slept, the warrior walked across a barren plain to a broken body. It was the, Kaurava prince on his deathbed, the warrior promised him revenge. The warrior was alone, without any army, chariot or a mentor to guide him. The three men, the warrior and his two companions wanted to rest, but the looming agony did not allow the warrior to rest.

While being restless, the warrior silently watched the owl the death harbinger kill the sleeping crows in their nest. Upon witnessing this, the warrior knew what he had to do. The warrior woke up his companions, shared his plan with them. They thought he had gone mad and tried to calm Aswatthama but he was satisfied after seeing the horror in their eyes. He reminded his companions about the oath that had made to their prince. Upon seeing this dream, Draupadi woke up restlessly, and started screaming and thrashing. Seeing her like this, her attendants called the other queens. Kunti and Subhadra thought that Draupadi was possessed by evil spirit, Kunti burned red chillies and Subhadra splashed water on Draupadi and chanted prayers, but everything failed. Draupadi could not calm herself, and ran to the guards and ordered for a chariot. When Draupadi reached the Pandava camp, where all the men had gone to rest after their victory. She saw the camp was ablaze, as servants were dragging out bodies. Dhri's charioteer was brought to Draupadi and he informed her that, Aswatthama had crept into the camp and overpowered her sleeping brother and when Dhri had asked him to give a chance die fighting. Aswatthama had laughed a maniac's laugh and had strangled Dhri. As Dhri begged him to kill him with a weapon and give him a chance to die as a warrior. Aswatthama had mocked Dhri by saying that no death is more fitting than this for a man who killed his own guru, when he had dropped his weapons. By the time the men in the tent realized that Aswatthama was in the tent, he had already killed Sikhandi and all five sons of Draupadi. She refused to understand what she heard from the servant. Silently she walked around the bodies and then sat beside Dhri's body placing his head on her lap, she asked for her children and Sikhandi to be placed near her. Seeing her beloveds lying there motionless, she thought how unfortunate she was even after her husband has won the war yet she had lost her brothers and all five of her sons. Her body and mind refused to believe what she saw and touched, her mind took her back to the past where she was a young girl in Kampilya. Listening to what Dhri's tutor taught him, discussing the war rules with him in their father's palace. Remembering the day when Sikhandi walked down that corridor to meet her. How Sikhandi had told Draupadi about their life as Amba. Draupadi did not want to come out of her trance but a flute was calling her out of her trance, when she opened her eyes she saw Krishna gently rubbing his hands over her face. Krishna advised Draupadi, to be strong and also told her about the nature of war that even as a winner there are a lot of responsibilities waiting for the Pandavas. He also informed that he and Arjun should go to protect Bheem, who went after Aswatthama. The Pandavas found Aswatthama by the Ganga, where he fought with Arjun. When it was clear that

he could not defeat Arjun, Aswatthama called upon the terrible astra – Brahmasheershastra and cursed it, "may the earth be rid of the seed of the Pandavas." Arjun countered it by sending an astra, at this point Vyasa had to interfere and remind the two warriors about their responsibilities towards the earth-goddess. As instructed by Vyasa Arjun called back astra but Aswatthama failed to take back his weapon. The damage had been done, as the weapon made its way towards the women's tent where Uttara was resting. The women were in frenzy seeing the sky that was burning and made the air too hot to breathe. Without thinking for once, Subhadra threw herself in front of Uttara, who was carrying the only hope of Pandavas, Subhadra called Krishna for help. The magic of life, saved all of them, and Parikshit, Abhimanyu's son was born. After fighting Aswatthama, Bheem returned with a precious and fabled jewel that was the highest possession of Aswatthama. He had this jewel set in his forehead during the golden days of life, it had the power to protect its wearer from weapons disease and hunger. Bheem had brought this jewel, and presented it to Draupadi thinking it would make her happy. But because of the tragedy she had recently faced, this jewel did not appeal to her. She wanted to get rid of the jewel but Bheem had fought for it, so in order to make him happy she gave it to Yudhishthir, so he could place it on his crown and wear it as the king of Hastinapur. Yudhishthir accepted the gift from Draupadi, only to make her happy. The war had brought gloom over the Pandavas, this made Draupadi realize that the future that was waiting for the Pandavas was not something that they had hoped for. Draupadi thought that this is how the Pandavas would live the rest of their lives, trying to make each other happy by doing small gestures. As her mind wandered, she thought of what Duryodhan said to Yudhishthir while dying that, Yudhishthir had to rule a kingdom full of widows and orphans whereas he would enjoy the pleasures of the heaven.

After the war ended, the Pandavas moved in the battlefield, to pay respect to the dead. The sight of the battlefield was terrible, as the corpses of the soldiers who had died produced a rotten smell. The Chandaals who were responsible for cremating set up the funeral pyres on the battlefield and did their job effortlessly. While witnessing all this Draupadi, saw white emotionless creatures approaching them from the far end of the battlefield. Soon she realized that these emotionless creatures were the widows who had travelled from Hastinapur, Indra Prastha and many other corners of Bharat. The condition of these women shocked the Pandavas. The bodies of the common soldiers, were completely destroyed and unrecognizable. The weeping widows realized that they will not be able to view their beloved for one last time, they grew frenzied. The women called curses on Draupadi's husband, others tried

to kill themselves, some threw themselves onto the pyres. Upon seeing this, Draupadi realized that Duryodhan's last words were taking their place. Yudhishthir ordered his guards to stop them from harming themselves and bring them to him. As they didn't trust Yudhishthir because it was he who was responsible for their husbands' death, they tried to run away, call their dead husband's spirit to save them. The guards had to take force in their hands in order to control the women. When the women were brought in front of Yudhishthir, he assured them that there was nothing to fear and they would not suffer the evils of a defeated city. His words acted as triggers and failed to calm the distressed women; upon hearing his words they called death upon them. As his words sounded a little like charity, they refused to believe him and asked Yudhishthir to kill them as well and save them from the bleakness of widowhood. Moreover, if he could not kill them himself then he should allow them an honourable death on their husband's pyres. The women ran away from the dais towards the pyres, the Pandavas feared if nothing was done soon, then the lifeless battlefield will witness a mass suicide. Seeing the women like this, brought more gloom on the Pandavas, because none of them knew what to do had it been a war that they had to fight, all of them would have done their best. Draupadi's pity grew for Yudhishthir, as this mass suicide at the beginning of his reign will be a stain on his kingship, to her he looked so alone, that's why she climbed the dais just to stand beside her husband. But the Pandavas were surprised when they saw that the women stopped running and stood still in front of Draupadi and Yudhishthir. When the women stopped, Draupadi's mind was muddled with thoughts and various kinds of questions like did these women know her story, did they think that she deserved everything that had happened to her? Draupadi stood there without saying any word, she did not even weep because after her sons had died her eyes refused to allow tears. She hesitated, as she had never addressed an audience, but then she started addressing the women. She mentioned the bereavement that all of them shared as she too had lost a father and brothers to the war, she confessed her guilt for bringing the war and asked for forgiveness. Then she started to speak about the children who were there and needed care more than earlier, while talking about the children something in her broke and she found it difficult to continue. Draupadi reminded the women that they still had children waiting for them to return, and they had to live for the sake of the future. She promised them to take care of their children as her own because the war had left her childless. Draupadi addressed her audience as a mother who lost all her hopes for the future and not as a queen would have addressed her subjects. It was Draupadi's responsibility to help her husbands, find the bodies of their people. She wanted to

forget, everything she had witnessed during the 18 days of the war. With the help of Draupadi, the Pandavas were able to find Ghatotkacha, Uttara, Virata and Abhimanyu's body, while pointing towards the bodies Draupadi silently thanked everyone for their contribution to the war. As the Pandavas proceeded, dilemma played its game on Draupadi, as she was confused as to which of the dead should they leave. She remembered how Salva uncle to the Pandavas helped them even though he was fighting the war for Duryodhan, Drona it was him who had taught the Pandavas how to hold their bows, made Arjuna the greatest of all, Lakshmana Kumar Duryodhan's son who reminded Draupadi of her own sons. As they approached Karna's body, Draupadi's heart could not bear it, but for the sake of her husbands, she showed no emotion. While looking at Karna's body, Draupadi's mind wandered everywhere as she thought that there was no one to mourn this great warrior, Kunti could not claim her kinship with him and she herself could not show any grief for him. Her husbands mocked Karna, Nakul questioned that why his corpses didn't give a stench? Arjuna glorified Karna as a warrior realizing that it is easy to praise someone when you have already killed them and then Yudhishthir thought about the parents to whom such a great warrior belonged to and were they aware that their son is no more there. Upon hearing her husbands, her heart did not obey her and she started to show emotions, then sternly she reminded her husbands that they should cremate every warrior who died in Kurukshetra with due honour. To which Yudhishthir agreed and called for arrangements to be made. Dhritrashtra stopped Yudhishthir saying that the Pandavas should not touch his sons whom they have killed. When Draupadi saw Gandhari, she was scared as she thought of Gandhari causing harm to her husbands. Yudhishthir being the man of virtue, rushed to the old couple standing in front of them and apologised, promising them that he had been a son to them. The old king pretended to accept his apologies. When he called out for Bhishma, who had killed all of his sons, Krishna stopped Bhishma and asked his servants to bring out the iron statue, which Duryodhan had ordered for himself in order to vent his hatred. It was Krishna who pointed out that the Pandavas were forced into this war and were cheated by Duryodhan, then he asked the old king to truly forgive the Pandavas. The old king obeyed what Krishna asked him to do, but while giving blessings to the Pandavas something in him broke as he realized that now he had to live a life that was granted by the sons of his brother, from that day onwards he spoke less, ate only one meal and never entered the sabha again. Gandhari was wiser and knew that her sons had brought their own downfall, but at the end of the day she was a mother and her pain was enough to enrage her. When Yudhishthir touched her feet, her rage manifested as fire, which burned his fingernails.

Krishna pulled him away from her, and then she showered her rage upon him. Out of rage, she cursed that Krishna's clan would also destroy in the span of a single day and the women of Dwarka would also weep the way the women of Hastinapur were weeping. To which Krishna replied, that all things must end one day and his own clan is also included in this. But then he questioned Gandhari about how she indulged Duryodhan in the wrong things, how she let her own brother influence her son? and then he made her realize that Duryodhan broke his word again and again. Upon hearing Krishna, she realized what she had done, and asked for forgiveness, and wanted to call back her curse. Krishna smiled and consoled her. As Pandavas were ready to cremate their children, Kunti approached them, her eyes were bleak and her voice was quite. She asked the Pandavas to begin the ceremony by paying respect to their eldest brother, and then finally she had the courage to accept her kinship with Karna, this revelation startled Draupadi's husbands.

After the war, cremations, offerings to the Ganga gloom and depression took complete control of Yudhishthir. He didn't leave the river bank for weeks, as he sat by the Ganga he thought about the land which was so devastated that nothing will grow on it, about the millions who died on this lifeless land. Amid of these thought, the death of his brother- Karna troubled him the most. Draupadi stay with him during those weeks, as she did not wanted him be alone in such a phase. The thought that he asked Arjun to kill his own brother, broke something in Yudhishthir and guilt played its game on his mind. He remembered the day when Arjun killed Karna, how happy it had made him and how Karna had spared his life along with his brothers. Seeing Yudhishthir mourn his brother's death, Draupadi regretted that she had kept the truth hidden if she could have informed the Pandavas, then Yudhishthir would have been saved by the sins of fratricide. Yudhishthir was heartbroken, because Kunti had broken his trust and now he found it difficult to trust his own mother. Draupadi felt bad for Yudhishthir as well as Kunti, then she reminded Yudhishthir that he should not judge his mother, who was helpless at the time of Karna's birth and even at the time when he fell on the battlefield. Draupadi and her husbands took Yudhishthir to Bheeshma thinking that a philosophical discussion would heal him, but the control of gloom was so strong that even a conversation with grandfather could not pull him out of his melancholy. Then it was Krishna who played the cards of responsibility and duty for Yudhishthir, as he informed that bandits were terrorizing the helpless subjects. This led Yudhishthir to return to Hastinapur and to be crowned. The palace that once belonged to Duryodhan was also in despondence, and the Pandavas did not get any glimpses of pleasure. Draupadi ordered her servants to drop their mourning cloths and wear

clothes for Yudhishthir's coronation, pull down the dusted drapes in order to get the palace ready for the big day. The palace was the house where Draupadi would live the rest of her life, the war had brought back her longing for a home where she would belong. On the day of the coronation, the Pandavas found it difficult to enter the sabha again, as their hearts and minds were flooded with memories of the day when Draupadi was humiliated. It was Krishna, who saved the Pandavas from further melancholy. Post war Hastinapur was mainly a city of women, as now they were responsible for providing for the family. In order to meet with the needs, women had to step out of their homes. The working women were exploited, some had to be unpaid servants, some had to beg on the roads and some had to sell the only thing that was left to them, and was their bodies. This information about the women of Hastinapur troubled Draupadi as she was reminded of all the terrible things happened to her in the past and how helpless and hopeless she was. Her thoughts made her realize that she needs to do something in order to eradicate the sufferings of the women. She wanted a separate court for women where they could speak about their problems without any fear. Draupadi asked Kunti and Gandhari to help her in establishing the court for women, the three women took permission from Yudhishthir and gathered all the other women of the palace including Subhadra and Uttara, only Duryodhan's wife refused to join them. The court was not enough, the women needed wealth to deal with the sufferings of the women. It was Uttara, who took the first step as she gave up her wedding jewellery, this inspired the other women as well. Soon the women market developed and flourished. Hastinapur became a city where the women could go out and work without harassment.

Abhimanyu's son Parikist changed the lives of the Pandavas, he was able to pull them out of their gloom. All of them played their role of being a father to the fatherless child, Bheem taught him moves of wrestling, Arjun taught him archery, Nakul made him ride the horses, Sahadev taught him to how to talk to animals and Yudhishthir told him various stories. Through Parikist, the Pandava brothers were living the life of a father, that they could not do with their own children. On the day, when he was named, Vyasa told Draupadi about the future that waited for him and advised her to watch Parikist's temper, because his temper will only be the reason of his downfall. Upon hearing Vyasa's prediction, Draupadi focused on disciplining Parikist. She was rebuked by every other member of the household for her excessive harshness towards the child, but she knew that this was required. Parikist became the companion Draupadi had longed for since her childhood days. She realized that Parikist had wisdom beyond his age, so she enjoyed the conversations they had. As the time flew, Dhritarashtra grew restless and finally decided to leave the palace life and

spent the last days of his lives in the forest. Gandhari also announced that she would accompany her husband to the forest and be with him in his last days. On the day when the old couple were leaving for their hermitage, the Pandavas realized Kunti was also leaving with them. No amount of pleading from her sons, stopped Kunti.

A royal messenger came from Dwarka and informed the Pandavas that the men of Yadu clan had died, Balaram was also dead and no one knew where Krishna was. The moment the Pandavas thought that the game of gloom was over, they received the news of the loss of their dearest Krishna. Though none of them believed that Krishna was no more, Yudhisthir asked Arjun to go to Dwarka and find out what had happened and bring the women to Hastinapur. Following Yudhisthir's orders, Arjun left, while the Pandavas waited for Arjun to return, various rumours made their way to the Pandava court. While waiting for Arjun's return, the Pandavas noticed bad omens around them, that made them realize that Krishna was truly gone. When a helpless Arjun returned to the Pandavas, then they got to know how the Yadu clan was finished, how Balaram died and how they lost their beloved Krishna. Arjun did not bring back anybody with him, as he failed to protect any of them. The Pandavas were shocked to believe that the greatest warrior of all could not save people. The news of Krishna's death brought more gloom and despondence to the Pandavas, now without him, all of them that the purpose of life was over for them and all them wanted to die.

As the Pandavas got ready to leave Hastinapur and move towards the heavenly life, Draupadi remembered the old times when she had left the city. The two times she had left the city she had experienced different set of emotions, the first time she was new bride who had dreams in her eyes, the second time when she had been humiliated in a way no women should be, she left the city promising to take a revenge for the wrong. While standing at the gate of the city Draupadi's mind betrayed her, because she suddenly did not wanted to give up the life she had in Hastinapur, she wanted to stay and enjoy the life she had. Everybody including her husbands tried to stop Draupadi from joining them in this journey but she was always a rebellious woman who got immense pleasures in breaking the boundaries that the society created for the women. The Pandavas and Draupadi reached the base of the Himalayas, wearing clothes made of tree bark. From that point they had to continue their journey without turning back, and they would have to accept the fall of their companion because the mountains would not allow the individual to travel after a point because the individuals had flaws. While moving forward, after a certain point Draupadi realised that three of her husbands had already moved forward and were very far from her. Bheem and Yudhisthir were close to her but she

could not move forward, at that point she realized that the mountains would not allow her to move forward. Draupadi's fall startled Bheem, as he could not believe that Draupadi had any kind of flaw. He wanted to come and help Draupadi, but Yudhisthir reminded him of the law of the journey where he could not go back, he had to only move forward. When Draupadi heard Bheem's voice, who was reasoning with Yudhisthir, she realized that Bheem truly loved her, she even remembered the time when he had risked his life for her. When Yudhisthir's words made their way to Draupadi, she was mad at him for following the laws over human life, at that time she allowed herself to think about Karna, who would have not left her alone. When devastated Bheem questioned Yudhisthir, about the reason behind Draupadi's fall, Yudhisthir informed that even though she married all the five brothers but she truly loved one. Upon hearing this Bheem genuinely asked Yudhisthir about the man who had occupied Draupadi's heart, at this moment Yudhisthir hesitated because he knew who was the man who was loved by Draupadi more than anybody, but for her sake he lied to Bheem and took Arjun's name and at this point she realized that both Bheem and Yudhisthir had loved her all along. Draupadi's realization made regret her anger that she projected towards her husbands when she should have truly appreciated them.

While laying on her deathbed, she thought of the people she loved her entire life. Draupadi thought of Dhairya Ma, Dhriti, her boys, Parikshit and Karna, but somehow their faces were unrecognizable. Then she thought of Krishna, and to her surprise, she not only saw him but heard his teasing voice. This voice brought her comfort, that she could not put into words. Krishna mocked her because the way she was laying, and trying to remember prayers. He teased her saying that she does not know many of them, that's why he asked her to remember the times that made her truly happy. At that point, her mind was blank, she had no thoughts at all but when Krishna rubbed his hands over her forehead. Memories flooded her mind, and Draupadi was startled to witness Krishna in all the memories that took control of her mind. These memories made her happy, and gave her a trip down the memory lane. And finally when death welcomed her she realized that it was Krishna who was there with her, even before she was born as Draupadi.

III. FEMINIST READING

The Palace of Illusions by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni stands as the best example for the feminist readings of the epics. Often when the epics are talked about, the struggles of the male warriors are highlighted. And in the process, people often tend to forget the sufferings of the women, who were there with these warriors is even greater. In the novel,

Chirita Banerjee has beautifully re-narrated the story of the Mahabharata but through the eyes of Paanchali (Draupadi), who faced many challenges throughout her life yet came out strong.

It is through Paanchali, Chirita Banerjee has talked about the various problems that are faced by women who live in a patriarchal society.

From a tender age Paanchali had questioned the things that seemed wrong to her. Like her father naming her after him, her father opposing to her desires to study Warcraft with her brother. In the novel, Chirita Banerjee has shown how the women were considered the property of the men and how Paanchali broke these norms for her own sake. This is proved, Paanchali's father arranged a swayamvar for her only to strength his power, Paanchali's consent was not taken, in fact nobody truly cared to ask what she wanted. And when she agreed to get married, she was rebuked of the choices she made. Years later, again when she was considered as a property of her husbands, she faced the men bravely. When Yudhisthir lost to Duryodhan and Draupadi had to face the consequences, as she was humiliated in a court full of men who did not bother to raise their voices against the injustice. She had to took a stand for herself, and raised the question that why she was considered a property that her husband could own and how a man could consider his wife his property when he himself was not a free man.

Chirita Banerjee has also highlighted the importance of female education and the need for the females to work. Since Draupadi was a rebellious female, she betrayed her father and seeked education. Since she was educated, she knew the laws about land and property. That's why when Yudhisthir placed her as a bet, in the game of dice, she could fight back.

After the Great War had ended, Hastinapur became a city of women. The death of the male members in the war, had brought great responsibilities for the women. The women had to go out of the house in order to provide the family, in order to do so some became unpaid servants, some started working but faced a lot of exploitation and unfortunately some had to sell their bodies in order to earn something for the family. Then Paanchali was the one who wanted to establish a separate court for women where they could share their concerns without any fear. Since Paanchali propagated this idea, she received help from other women, and together they were able to form a women market that flourished, which made Hastinapur a city where women could continue to work without harassment.

IV. CONCLUSION

Through this research, I learned that women are stronger than the credit given to them as a member of the society.

The society restricts a women in many ways, but the women have to break some restrictions in order to stand for themselves. A female can stand for herself and question the injustice done to her, only if she is educated enough to know her worth. Female education and liberation is the need of the hour. If a society fails to provide the freedom, its female members needs in order to live a life of dignity, then there is no glory of a such a misogynistic society. In a society, the women should have the choice and power to make decisions that are best for her.

This research helped me in understanding, that females need equality over anything else. The feminists working for the betterment of the females, they are not asking for female domination over men rather there are asking for a society that is free of any form of domination.

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An Analysis of Walter Lee's Growth Trajectory Based on the Actantial Model

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Abstract— Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* remains a watershed moment in American theater, yet critical discourse surrounding its protagonist, Walter Lee Younger, often reduces his trajectory to a simplistic moral triumph. This essay moves beyond such readings by applying Greimas's actantial model to map the structural logic underpinning Walter Lee's transformation. Rather than charting a conventional arc of improvement, his growth is a fundamental restructuring of his relationship to the object of desire. Initially positioned as a passive receiver of his deceased father's legacy, Walter Lee becomes ensnared by a distorted object: wealth as a proxy for dignity. This deviation destabilizes the actantial structure, reconfiguring his family as opponents and his friend Willy Harris as a false helper. Only through the crucible of betrayal and the temptation of Lindner's bribe does Walter Lee recognize that accepting white paternalism would foreclose not only his father's dream but also his son's future. His final refusal constitutes not capitulation but reclamation—a conscious repossession of dignity as the authentic object. By exposing the deep structural mechanics of Walter Lee's awakening, this essay argues that Hansberry scripts a vision of Black masculinity rooted not in material acquisition but in subjective agency and generational honor, advancing an understanding of dramatic form as a vehicle for articulating minoritarian identity formation under systemic duress.



Keywords— *A Raisin in the Sun*, actantial model, dream, American Drama

I. INTRODUCTION

In *Structural Semantics: An Attempt at a Method*, Algirdas Julien Greimas proposed the “action metamodel” — the basic framework for structuralist narrative analysis, which aims to draw the functional role and relationship dynamics of narrative (Greimas). He divides the characters into six action elements according to their behaviors and functions:

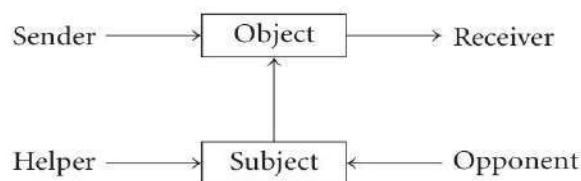


Fig.1 Greimas's actantial model (Greimas 207)

The model organizes six abstract actants (Subject, Object, Sender, Receiver, Helper, Opponent) along three

interlocking axes: the quest axis (Subject-Object), the communication axis (Sender-Object-Receiver), and the conflict axis (Helper-Subject-Opponent), framing narrative as a system of semantic and functional interactions rather than a sequence of character actions (Wang and Roberts 66-67). The relationship between three actantial binaries promotes the produce and development of the plot, and helps to analyze the relationship between characters, events and values in narrative works.

Lorraine Hansberry's drama *A Raisin in the Sun* about the hopes and aspirations of a struggling, working-class family living on the South Side of Chicago connected profoundly with the psyche of Black America. This article employs Greimas's actantial model to focus on analyzing the growth trajectory of the male protagonist Walter Lee, aiming to reveal a process of minority ethnic identity formation. Their growth is not simply growing and being better, but rather a process of transforming from a passive subject dominated by external ideologies to a spontaneous subject centered on ethnic identity dignity through the realization of true core values.

II. CONSTRUCTION OF THE ACTANTIAL MODEL OF WALTER LEE'S GROWTH TRAJECTORY

The growth of Walter Lee is one of the core themes of *A Raisin in the Sun*. Based on Greimas's actantial model and the stable relationships among the actants presented in the drama's ending, this article constructs an actantial model of Walter Lee's growth process. The functions of each actant are sorted out as follows:

Walter Lee: He is the subject in the actantial model. A thirty-five-year-old Black chauffeur, Walter Lee is deeply dissatisfied with his current living conditions. He dreams of getting rich overnight by investing in a liquor store and improving his life to become a respected boss.

Big Walter: As the sender, Walter Lee's father, his

dream was to own a big house and improve the living conditions of his family. The insurance money he obtained at the cost of his life carried the deep wish of improving the family's living situation and having their own space. As the eldest son, Walter Lee naturally became the receiver of this "family legacy".

Mama: As the owner of the family's decision-making power and the controller of the insurance money, Mama always remembers Big Walter's hard work to try to earn a big house for his family. Therefore, she has been guiding Walter Lee to return to and fulfill his father's uncompleted wish. She is the helper in the model.

Lindner: After the Younger family acquired a house in a white community, Lindner, as the representative of the white community's rejection of black neighbors, offered monetary compensation to prevent the Younger family from moving in. Clearly, he is the opponent in the play who hinders the subject from pursuing the object.

Accordingly, the model is constructed as follows:

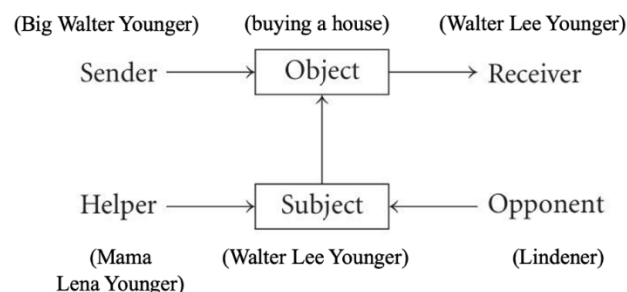


Fig.2 The actantial model of Walter Lee

III. THE ALIENATED OBJECT: WALTER LEE'S SELF-WORTH PURSUIT

The above model is a stable model that accomplishes at the end of the drama. The value object in this model is Big Walter's wish to "improve the family's living conditions and have their own independent space". At the same time, this wish symbolizes Walter's — and, more broadly, Black Americans' — struggle against fate in a society filled with racial discrimination. The reason why

their wish couldn't be realized was not because blacks didn't work hard, but because the social structure is dominated by whites, within which Black individuals occupy a marginalized position. Therefore, wanting to have an independent space symbolizes that blacks wanted to have a place in society and defend their dignity.

In the early stage of the play, the value object that Walter Lee pursued was different from it presented in the ending, causing this model to lose its stability. At this point in the narrative, Walter Lee functions as a passive subject. His pursuits and actions do not stem from a conscious recognition of his family's legacy or of his own self-worth; rather, they are shaped by the "money above all" ideology imposed by the white-dominated mainstream society. As the chauffeur of a white wealthy businessman, Walter is granted access to a prosperous world that does not truly belong to him. This close observation and contrast led him to regard "luxurious life" as a model of success and magnified his own material desires. At this point, Walter Lee was not an active subject with subjective consciousness, instead, he is a blind pursuer of wealth, driven by an external value system that defines success solely in material terms.

Exactly so, Walter Lee initially believed that money equals status and dignity. He thought that as long as he became wealthy, he would gain respect. Consequently, the value object he pursued was not the independence and dignity symbolized by the house that his family desired, but money. When the value object changed, Mama and the family became opponents on his path to pursue his dream, while his good friend Willy Harris became a helper who helped him realize his dream.

As Dr. Shalini Sharma mentioned in her article, "Walter Lee Younger's pursuit of personal dignity is most clearly manifested in his desire to invest the life insurance money in a liquor store. For Walter, the liquor store symbolizes financial independence and an opportunity to prove himself as a man capable of providing for his family in a way that brings him pride." (Sharma 28) However, the

reality was exactly the opposite. When he was looking forward to the day when he would earn a fortune, what he got was not wealth but the news that Willie Harris had absconded with the money.

Even so, he did not give up. He even proposed to accept the compensation offered by Lindner, continuing to pursue wealth at the cost of his dignity. If he chose to accept, he gave up both personal and collective racial dignity, and it marks a moment in which the value object in the original actantial model becomes completely alienated.

IV. WALTER LEE'S GROWTH: THE AWAKENING OF SUBJECTIVITY AND THE RECLAMATION OF VALUE OBJECTS

Willy Harris's betrayal and Lindner's temptation place Walter Lee at a moment of ultimate choice: whether to accept the compensation money that symbolizes humiliation and continue chasing an illusory dream of wealth, or to defend the family's non-negotiable dignity. This choice was no longer merely an economic consideration but had risen to a test of subjectivity. When he saw his son Travis, the symbol of the future of the family and even the black community, present, his thought underwent a decisive reversal. He realized that accepting this money not only meant selling his personal dignity but also sent a fatal signal to the next generation: the dignity and equal rights of black people can be marked in price and casually given away. This would lead to an endless oppression across generations, trapping future generations in the mentality and reality of being inferior. As one critic observes, "Finally, Walter denies the empty capitalist values he has absorbed (money is life), in order to affirm the core values inherited from the African American tradition (freedom and dignity), values which will spur him on to lead the charge for housing de-segregation" (Burrell). This action marks the deep values hidden in Big Walter's unfulfilled wish, transforming from a family heritage that was about to be abandoned into a self-assertion that Walter

Lee actively understood, reclaimed, and defended.

Thus, the value object return to its correct position and then the original actantial model also regained a stable structure. Mama's guiding role as a helper was confirmed, Lindner's nature as an opponent was exposed without reservation, and Walter Lee himself truly unified the dual identities of receiver and subject, evolving from a passive entity driven by desires to a conscious entity capable of controlling values and leading the family. The stability of the model is precisely the structural manifestation of the completion of the positioning of its subjectivity.

V. CONCLUSION

Walter Lee's growth is not a typical success story of the kind that inspires people. Instead, it traces a process where he lost his sense of self within the mainstream value myths, and then regained his identity and autonomy. Initially, he wrongly equated the material symbols of the white society with personal dignity and family happiness, falling into a common illusion criticized by Hansberry — “the desire for possessing things has rapidly replaced among too many of us the impulse for possessing ourselves, for freedom.” (Chapman 452). This value of money even once drove him to consider sacrificing his racial dignity in exchange for economic benefits, marking his complete loss.

However, the crucial turning point of the script lies in the fact that Walter eventually sees through his illusion. His refusal of the white community's buyout offer is not merely an individual moral decision; it constitutes, as Washington observes, “a strong and unqualified repudiation of American racist ‘values’” (Washington 122-123). Through this, Walter affirms that Black dignity is not a negotiable commodity. He moves away from the pursuit of externally imposed standards of success and toward the defense of an internally grounded sense of self, rooted in collective history and cultural value. Therefore, Walter's trajectory thus reveals a broader and more representative pattern of

awakening. For many marginalized groups struggling within oppressive social structures, the true American Dream practice often requires a painful and necessary transition from internalizing mainstream material values to reconfirming their own cultural and self-identity as the subject of dignity. It is precisely this transition that constitutes the play's most enduring and universal growth trajectory.

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Socio-Cognitive Representation of Alienation Lamming's *In the Castle of my Skin*

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Abstract— This paper adopts van Dijk's socio-critical discourse analytical framework to interrogate the theme of alienation in Lamming's novel *In the Castle of my Skin*. Although the theme of alienation has been widely discussed in literary and postcolonial studies, there remains a lack of integrated approaches combining alienation and sociocognitive analysis, therefore in the field of critical discourse analysis, scholars like van Dijk and van Leeuwen have developed frameworks for exploring ideologies and representations of social actors, similarly Harts has presented cognitive models that explores how discourse structures reflect and view underlying cognitive operations and in addition to that these models are widely applied to media discourse and political speeches but still their application to literary texts are remained underexplored and little scholars efforts has been devoted to examining alienation from a socio cognitive perspectives. therefore this study seeks to fill this gap by adopting a sociocognitive analysis framework that combine three models: van Dijk (ideological square), Harts (construal operations), and van Leeuwen (social actors representations). By using both qualitative and quantitative assessments of carefully selected textual extracts, the research scrutinises the construction of alienation in terms of micro-level representation in social actors, cognitive level construal operations, and macro-level ideological configurations. The results show that Lamming employs exclusionary and assimilative linguistic strategies to represent ruptured social relations and personal isolation in the colonial context. Cognitive construals are used to make alienation a tangible reality by profiling and metaphorical framing while ideological polarisation advances an anti-colonial moral vindication by framing the colonial agents negatively and positively reinforcing Black communal resilience. Consequently, alienation becomes simultaneously a symptom of colonial oppression and an element of principal resistance in the construction of post-colonial identity.



Keywords— Alienation, Socio-cognitive Approach, CDA, Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin*

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of alienation as the sharp disconnection of the individual and their community, as well as their nation-state by the subordination of the former to the latter and the subsequent displacement of the former by the latter (Taş, 2024). This results in the breach of identity integrity and the feeling of isolation in the context of post-colonial literary texts. The qualitative significance in this enquiry is seen in

the writings of George Lamming, especially in *In the Castle of My Skin*, (1953) in which personalities struggle with the emotional legacies of displacement through the practices of emigration and exile.

The interruption is linguistic, and discourse becomes a middleman between the institutions of dominance through cognitive and social cognition (van Dijk, 2008). Applying the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in accordance with

the socio-cognitive paradigm by van Dijk, which reflects mind patterns and social dominance elements, helps to support alienation as the linguistic formations reflect the patterns and hierarchies of the world.

Still, a significant gap remains: despite the large amount of scholarly work on the topic of alienation that has been authored by Lamming (Paquet, 2023; Singh, 2023); there is a lack of empirical research that conceptualises the operationalisation of van Dijk to question the discursive machinations that drive those stories. The lack hinders advanced appreciation of the role played by language in the process of building fragmented post-colonial identities cognitively and hinders advancement in linguistic education and ideology analysis (Wodak and Meyer, 2009). The current paper, therefore, aims to fill this analytic gap by formulating and exploring the following research questions, which involve a precise reading of a few passages in Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin*:

1. How does Lamming reflect alienation on the micro-level by employing social actor representation in *'In the Castle of My Skin'*?
2. How does he reflect alienation on the cognitive level by employing the construal operations in *'In the Castle of My Skin'*?
3. What ideologies does alienation underpin in the novel?

II. SOCIO-COGNITION OF ALIENATION

The concept of alienation has attracted much attention from different disciplines, from social and economic theory to philosophy and psychology (Williamson, 1997). Karl Marx's theory of alienation explains the way humans are alienated from their labor, society, human nature, and even self. This estrangement is developed in the capitalist systems as a result of the division of labor which therefore limits the life of a person to the functional role in the larger structure of a social class (Marx, 2009).

Senekal (2010) noted that many different classifications of alienation have been proliferated gained over time; however, Seeman's framework maintains its position as one of the most common references cited in current research. Senekal notes that "Seeman reformulated and elaborated on Marx's notion of alienation, and developed a methodological framework that is more appropriate for analyzing sociological trends" (Senekal, 2010, pp. 21 - 22).

A considerable amount of scholarship has focused on the 'social dimension of alienation' sometimes called the 'sociological process of alienation'. Karl Marx in particular identifies five critical determinants that contribute to this phenomenon, which collectively illustrate the manner in which social structures have the potential to engender

feelings of estrangement from one's labor, community, and selfhood and thus result in interactions with others that are not stable and satisfactory. The alienated individual is thus seen to be a "potentially disloyal citizen" (Marx, 2009).

CDA serves in much the same way as a forensic analysis of discourse. It assumes that lexical choices and phrasings express not only superficial meanings, but also serve as expressions and perpetuations of general social structures and systems of domination. Influential scholars such as Norman Fairclough and Teun van Dijk have shown how language can at the same time also work as a mirror of societal norm and a vehicle for subtle persuasion and resistance. By dissecting texts and speech, CDA allows for a more nuanced understanding and critique of the ways in which language constructs our perceptions, behaviors, and ultimately our social reality. Consequently, CDA is a way of doing discourse analysis that considers language a social practice and examines how ideologies and power relations are enacted through language.

The socio-cognitive approach to CDA articulated by Teun van Dijk is a framework that explicitly establishes linkages between discourse, cognition and society. This approach brings forward the premise that discourse is formed by social structures and mediated through cognitive processes. It combines linguistic analysis with the social and psychological dimensions, and thus forms an all-around way of exploring how discourse both influences and reflects the flow of power in a society. The important parts of socio-cognitive approach are macrostructures that is overarching topics or subjects within a discourse that facilitate in identifying the primary ideas conveyed in communication. On top of that, local meanings, including lexical choices, phrasal arrangements and syntactic structures, contribute to the meaning construction (van Dijk, 2003, pp. 352-371). These elements examine how specific linguistic choices reflect ideology or social prejudice, as well as models of context, which are mental representations used by people to interpret discourse in both speaking and listening. Such models explain the way in which discourse is influenced by situational factors such as time, place and audience. Mental models, including knowledge, attitudes and ideologies, further affect production and interpretation of discourse; therefore, they affect how individuals process and respond to discourse based on their belief systems and societal context(s). The present study discusses the concept of alienation in literary discussion that depicts alienation among Africans who had emigrated to Europe. This inquiry takes a critical perspective and utilizes a socio-cognitive approach.

III. METHODOLOGY

The research methodology is concerned with qualitative procedure. It is the qualitative inquiry that is used to explore and extract the meanings that individuals or groups attribute to social or human phenomena. The research process entails the development of research questions and procedures through a cyclic process; data is usually collected in the natural setting of the participants, inductive data analysis which is the process in which data is analyzed and leads to emergent themes, and the interpretation of data significance (Creswell, 2009).

The text that has been chosen to make this investigation is the text *In the Castle of My Skin* by George Lamming which is a reflection of the post-colonial era and the sense of alienation and identity crisis that the Africans went through. On the grounds of thematic relevance and representativeness, seven excerpts were selected, which can depict alienation. George Lamming was a leading Barbadian intellectual and his biographical discourse was closely associated with his political works and radical thought. He is a unique personality, a writer who professedly took sides with Karl Marx and believed that literature should be an active participant in the political life instead of shrubbery behind the fences of aestheticism. Such an attitude can be explained by his background in a society that disguises its own contradictions with conservatism and the cult of stability as it has a short history of radical intellectualism (Lewis, 2022). *In the Castle of My Skin* is the semi-autobiographical novel of Caribbean writer George Lamming, which was first published in 1970. The novel is a continuation of the tradition of Caribbean storytelling, a form of literature first arising out of the disconnection of the Old World (Africa) and the New World (the Americas). The ambiguity of tradition meeting the new world and self has been variously explicated, challenged, questioned, mixed or explored by many different Caribbean writers. The story by Lamming is more or less autobiographical in that he is an immigrant as he moved to America as well just like characters in the novel who moved out of Barbados. Also, the experiences and hardships of his early years are comparable to those of the character G., the other character in the reading. The narration is by G. in the first-person and in the third person omniscient perspective. van Dijk (2005) socio-cognitive method of critical discourse analysis (CDA) is used to analyze the selected data. The model is made up of three levels of analysis, discourse (micro-level), social (macro-level), and cognitive (where the two meet each other). Briefly, the model consists of:

1. Micro-level typically investigates the deployment of syntax, localized semantics, lexis, thematic elements,

schematic structures, and discursive devices. An eclectic model is employed at this level, drawing on van Leeuwen's (2008) Social Actor Representation (SAR) and Hart's (2014) Construal Operation (CO).

2. Cognitive Level comprises discourse structure strategies that underlie and represent mental models. Hart's (2014) Construal Operations are employed at this level.

3. Macro-level, social analysis scrutinizes the representations of power disparities among group members within society (van Dijk, 1995, 2005). The model's distinctive characteristic is an "us versus them" dimension, which entails portraying one's own group in an affirmative light ("Positive self-representation") while depicting other groups in a disparaging manner ("Negative other representation") (van Dijk, 1995, p. 22).

The qualitative part was conducted by analyzing and interpreting the discourse selected in the broader view of the post-colonial context. The quantitative part was conducted by counting the frequencies of the strategies of the framework in all the selected extracts to identify their percentages, conveying how George Lamming represents alienation in the post-colonial context.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

Two extracts, as examples, will be selected to be analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively:

4.1 Qualitative Analysis

Extract 1

"My birthday began with an almost total absence of family relations. My parents on almost all sides had been deposited in the bad or uncertain accounts of all my future relationships, and loneliness from which had subsequently grown the consolation of freedom was the legacy which my first year opened. My mother ... memory was again pursuing the line of discovery ... my birthday was still alive ... my father who ... left me the sole liability of my mother ..." (Ch.1, pp. 13-14)

Background

G. is the narrator who is a nine-year-old boy. He feels disappointed during his birthday when he becomes more sad than happy. He talks of his house and village as the water floods the streets and their roofs, which makes him feel lost and alienated on his birthday, which was supposed to be a celebration of his life, but sees the lack of any commemoration and the family relationship being constant. G. is brought up by his lone mother, who becomes his nurturer and only parent.

1. Micro-Analysis: Social Actor Representation.

a. Exclusion Suppression

Lamming uses exclusion in the text above to disguise the active agent that causes the narrator to be isolated and alienated. No agent is included and his father is not in the example of his birth began with an almost complete lack of family relations which includes that his father is not in their lives and he is physically and emotionally absent. Other exclusions have no trace in the representation where both social actors and activities are excluded out of the representation.

b. Inclusion

Impersonalization

Impersonalization is a discursive technique which involves presenting social actors (person or group of people) without identifying them with their human form and characteristics. This has been done in the text by abstractions like bad or uncertain accounts, thus making it not very clear what human agent is at fault.

Specification

There are also specifications of social actors that define them as individuals. The following example shows this: "My father left me, and the only liability of my mother".

Dissociation

The other manner to describe the representation of social actors in dissociation is in the text, G., the narrator, left alone without his father, is dissociated with his father-son bond. The lexical expression of dissociation is the word absence. Besides, the illustration of parental alienation with an almost complete lack of family relations, which is explicitly pointed to by stating that my birthday was characterized by a complete lack of family relationships, as each of the parents is divorced.

Nomination

Lamming presents the parental alienation of G. through informal proper nouns, like my father and my mother, to show how he lost his family and felt isolated by his family.

Assimilation

The passage contains the line that says my mother sat beside me and in front of the sewing machine within me. The narrator addresses his mother as a particular person and not as one of a group. This contrasts with his emotional and social isolation by the rest of the family.

2. Cognitive Analysis: Harts Construal Operations.

a. Attention

Profiling

Referred deixis of first person is recurring (such as my birthday, left me) highly describes the experiencing self, with the narrator being the only locus of consciousness. This

impact is an alienation that seems to be pre-determined and objective, as the alienation of the narrator is seemingly pre-eminent to intent, accusation, and emotional conflict.

Metonymy

The passage also creates alienation by creating metonymic construal, where human relations become abstract and nominal. The terms like family relations, accounts of relationships, replace emotional bonds with institutional or economic terms.

Scalar Adjustment

The alienation is enhanced by the construal operation of scalar adjustment where degrees are erased and the possibilities are lessened. Other phrases like, almost total absence, all my future relationships, sole liability alter the meaning towards the extreme sides of quantitative scale and qualitative scale.

b. Comparison

Categorization

Alienation is also supported by categorization which classifies experiences in evaluatively loaded conceptual frameworks. Such expressions like bad or uncertain accounts and legacy classify the familial past of the narrator as something destroyed and decisive.

Metaphor

Metaphor offers an essential frame of the concept of alienation. Economic and institutional spaces are metaphorically represented in relationships (relationships as accounts, life as legacy), and freedom is defined as a little consolation. In this case, emotional life is made out to be transactional and compensatory, but not relational.

c. Perspective

Deixis

Alienation is construed in the form of deictic positioning, especially the temporal deixis. The retrospective position (my birthday started) places the narrator in a detached position to childhood experience. This alienation is temporalized to become a condition of alienation which has been complete and stable, as opposed to an unresolved trauma. In a retrospective perspective, the narrator conceptually reenacts isolation as an identity-determining source, instead of a crisis that is subject to transformation.

3. Macro-Analysis: Ideological Square.

Ideological square introduced by van Dijk is applied to demonstrate how the text creates polarised image of Self and Others at the realm of family relation, responsibility, and emotional value. The four strategies can be followed in the story that G. narrates about his birthday and his disjointed family history.

Emphasize Our Good

In this passage, one can read 'our' as the self-constructed in respect of the mother-child relationship and the subsequent freeing out that the narrator offers to himself. The mother is implicitly esteemed as the only sustainable, responsible entity: she abandons him only the liability of herself, which ideologically re-inscribes dependency as a care and obligation moral inheritance. The positive result of the lack of family relationships is the creation of a strong sense of selfhood and autonomy by the narrator due to the absence of relations with the family members, which focuses on the internal resource and not on the absence.

De-emphasize Our Bad

The negative elements of the self (the narrator and his maternal relations) are backgrounded or alleviated. The narrative makes no speculations on the potential resentments of the mother as a sole liability. In fact, her liability is introduced as nearly as possible as an inevitable state of affairs, rather than as a moral failure or a decision. The vulnerability, sorrow, a sense of being abandoned, or even being bitter of the narrator himself is not explicitly worked through, but rather swiftly reworded by abstract nouns, which make his pain soft and intellectualize it, the loneliness, the consolation of freedom.

Emphasize Their Bad

The most obvious Others in the ideological square here are the parents, absent or put in bad or uncertain accounts of all my future relationships, on almost all sides. The term deposited in the bad or uncertain accounts creates the parents (particularly the father) as morally and emotionally bankrupt and presupposes their and their inability to adhere to their obligations. The father is also largely depicted in a negative light: he left the narrator with the mother as the only liability and this ideologically positions him as an irresponsible person who is offloading all the pressure on the mother and child.

Extract 2

"Low-down nigger people was a special phrase the overseers had coined. The villagers were low-down nigger people since they couldn't bear to see one of their kind get along without feeling envy and hate. This has created a tense relationship between the overseer and ordinary villagers. Each represented the other as an image of the enemy. The enemy was to be destroyed. "The image of the enemy was still alive. The enemy was My people. My people are low-down nigger people. My people don't like to see their people get on. The language of the overseer. The language of the civil servant." (Ch2, pp. 28-29)

Background

This extract is concerned with the description narrative of village life. In this section, the black overseers, whose position is slightly higher than the villagers in the colonial institutional structures, internalize and use supraliminal rhetoric against their own people. Such a phenomenon is reminiscent of the timeless history of post-emancipation plantation economies, where material scarcity creates intra-Black divides like envy and hatred, thus, constituting a broader trend of fractured consciousness that positions African ancestry opposite the imposed white standards.

1. Micro-Analysis: Social Actor Representation

a. Exclusion Suppression

By omitting the positive descriptions of the villagers and failing to recognize their agency and their virtues in the passage, the excerpt intentionally puts into invisibility the villagers in any sympathetic narrative. The pejorative connotation of the term used by the overseers, low-down nigger people, serves to strip away the humanness of the villagers, turning them into a de-humanised group of people who are characterised by nothing but envy and hostility which justifies their lack of power or promotion.

b. Inclusion Strategies

Impersonalisation

Villagers are depicted in depersonalized terms in terms of using generic names like the overseers and the mentioning of the civil servant which upholds an indeterminate institutional identity.

Personalisation

The personalisation of the narrator in saying 'My people creates a sense of kinship' though ironically, this creates a reflection of the disdain of the overseers and introduces an internally-consumed oppression.

Generalisation

A generalising tendency is apparent in the use of generalisers such as the villagers and their kind, which presuppose that all the members of the villagership will be described as envious and not differentiated. This super-generalisation is further enhanced by the pejorative term low-down nigger people which charges the whole of the Black underclass at the expense of class differentiation between overseers and the villagers.

Dissociation

The overseers do dissociation on behalf of the villagers by portraying them as the enemy which is a framing that fits well with the colonial power. This statement by the narrator ('My people are low-down nigger people') is a manifestation of a coerced act of self-dissociation in which the Blacks demean their own community as they strive to gain superiority.

Categorisation

Categorisation is upheld through the use of specified functional positions i.e. the overseers, the villagers, the civil servant and composite term 'My people are low-down nigger people' which then reduces people to colonial statuses.

Assimilation

Assimilation is noted as the overseers are internalized into the language of the overseer; the statement 'My people are low-down nigger people' goes further to annul individuality by imitating the white rhetoric of the same.

2. Cognitive Analysis Hart Construal Operations.

a. Attention

In the passage, the construal operations of Hart guide cognitive framing of the social actors, as well as conflicts, with antagonism as a priority of selective attention and figurative translation.

Profiling

The reference to the term a low-down nigger people is given prominence which makes the reader focus on the so-called envy and hostility of the villagers as the key features. The watchmen and their scoffing lines become vividly highlighted as the source of this pronouncement, and possible merits of the villagers are essentially relegated or eliminated.

Metonymy

The slur is a form of extrinsic metonymy, in which the racial epithet replaces the moral inadequacies of the whole villager group, arousing colonial images that are not directly supported by empirical data.

b. Comparison

Villagers and overseers are addressed as a dyadic contrast, each person has an image of the enemy to the other, thus intensifying their level of hostility.

Categorisation

The dynamic categorisation integrates overseers, villagers and civil servants into an increasing hostility group: "low-down nigger people, My people and the enemy, no neutral or intermediate categories".

Metaphor

The image of the enemy was still alive, uses a life-is-an-image metaphor, keeping conflict alive and as a persistent haunting presence, and transferring the social tension onto literal warfare.

c. Perspective

Deixis

Deictic changes define point of view: when overseers refer to their group as their kind, the group becomes as othered; when the narrator calls his people my people, the group is absorbed within itself, only to be reclassified as low-down nigger people, thus erasing self and other borders.

3. Macro-Analysis: Ideological Square.

The us/them formulation by van Dijk (1996) provides clarity on the polarity of the disquisition in which the overseers expand an ideological square which at the same time will elevate their position and diminish the villagers.

Emphasize Their Bad

Villagers are exposed to more intense attention on the vices, specifically the so-called low-down nigger people that shine the light on their jealousy, their hate and their lack of tolerance towards the success of others and position them as the natural enemy that is to be destroyed.

4.2 Quantitative Analysis

This section reviews the results of the qualitative analysis, discusses them, and answers the research questions in consensus.

4.2.1 Micro-Analysis

This subsection answers the research question that reads, "How does the writer reflect alienation on the micro-level by employing social actor representation in *'In the Castle of My Skin'*?"

4.2.1.1 Social Actor Representation

Table 4.1 shows the frequencies and percentages of SAR strategies in both novels.

Table 4.1 SAR Strategies in *'In the castle of my skin'*

Strategy	Frequency	Percentages
Suppression	14	9.2%
Backgrounding	2	1.3%
Nomination	5	3.3%
Categorization	16	10.5%
Impersonalization	11	7.2%
Personalization	14	9.2%
Generalization	18	11.8%
Specification	17	11.1%
Individualisation	17	11.1%
Assimilation	13	8.5%
Association	13	8.5%
Dissociation	13	8.5%
Total	153	

Considering van Leeuwen's strategies of social actor representations in both novels, it is possible to provide the quantitative outcomes in the table: *In the Castle of my Skin*, the number was 153. The resulting percentages uncover different discursive patterns in the construction of identities in colonialism, which agree with the previous qualitative results on alienation.

Repression and Disinterestedness

The data are dominated by suppression and impersonalization (17%), hence supporting exclusionary discourses that deny agency, which is evidenced in the Extract 1 of the chapter *In the Castle of My Skin*, with parental figures evaporating into an absence of family relations, thus, contributing to alienation between family members (9.2% of suppression).

Assimilation or Individualisation.

The proportion of assimilation was 8.5, the proportion of individualization was 11.1, the latter profile explaining personal a socialness (e.g., the utterance of My father left me in Extract 1). The author is thus inclined towards a personal/ exclusionary position (in terms of increased suppression and individualism), and establishes intimate alienation to the colony.

Association/Dissociation

Association and dissociation have relatively low values ((8.5% for Association, 6.3% for Dissociation) However, the underlying attitude toward dissociation in the qualitative focus in the novel 'Castle' (as the case of the parental relations in the Extract 1) enhances alienation even as it seems equivalent.

4.2.2 Cognitive Analysis

This subsection reviews the results of the cognitive analysis and discusses them to answer the second research question which reads "How does the writer reflect alienation on the cognitive level by employing the construal operations in the Data under analysis?"

Table 4.2 Construal Operations in the Two Novels

Operation	Frequency	Percentages
Profiling	12	12.0%
Metonymy (total)	19	19.0%
Scalar Adjustment	9	9.0%
Categorization	21	21.0%
Metaphor	17	17.0%
Deixis	22	22.0%
Epistemic Modality	0	0.0%
Total	100	100.0%

The table quantifies Hart's construal operations *In the Castle of My Skin*, revealing divergent cognitive framings of alienation tied to colonial stasis versus migratory flux. Metaphor leads both (22%), aligning with extracts: Categorization follows (21%) rigidified roles. *In Castle of My Skin*, higher profiling (19%) spotlights personal spaces, intensifying intimate alienation. The scalar Adjustment surged to 12% containment. Zero Epistemic Modality in *In the Castle of My Skin* (0%) asserts certainty.

Castle prioritizes profiled/certain construals for rooted fracture (village hierarchies); Emigrants scalar/metaphorical for suspended drift (oceanic voids), extending prior micro-analyses where *Castle* erases agents intimately, Emigrants dissociates proximities dynamically. The results quantify cognitive evolution from static imprisonment to liminal possibility.

4.2.3 Macro-Analysis

This part reflects the findings of the third level of analysis which determines the ideologies of the alienation discourse and answers the third research question: "What are the ideologies of the alienation discourse in the data under consideration?"

The ideological square of van Dijk reveals the ideological features of the discourse of alienation in *In the Castle of My Skin* as a polarized opposition between the vulnerable Black communities (marked as us) in search of genuine connection and the misleading colonial power (marked as them) which seeks to divide them. In this context, alienation is an effect of oppression and a place of possible resistance. Table 4.3 provides the frequency of the four ideological strategies in the two novels.

Table 4.3 Ideological Strategies

Strategy	Frequency	Percentages
Emphasize Our Good	10	26.3%
De-emphasize Our Bad	5	13.2%
Emphasize Their Bad	21	55.3%
De-emphasize Their Good	2	5.3%
Total	38	

The analysis of the ideological square establishes very sharp comparative trends in *In the Castle of my Skin* including 38 cases, happens through polarization. It turns out that 21 (55.3 per cent) cases of **Emphasise Their Bad** are dominant in *In Castle of My Skin*. This measure validates what was observed in the text: in the story, authoritarian parents or guardians are involved, as it is depicted in Extract 1: "low-down nigger people".

On the other hand, **Emphasise Our Good** occurs in 10 cases (26.3 per cent) in *In the Castle of My Skin*, meaning group strength. The deprecation of Their Good can be seen in only two moments (5.3%), practically killing the image of the colonial charity, just as the fatherly love is removed in the novel. **De-emphasis Our Bad** is still peripheral, 18.9 0.01 and 13.2 0.00 respectively, which places communal faults on the periphery.

Emphasis Their Bad ideologically naturalizes the territorial rupture, which is predominant in the novel. However, suppressions outlined by van Leeuwen and conceptualizations by Hart both achieve ideological closure in the village stasis being a reasonable cause to oppose and stagnant migration is a promise of a transnational utopia. These observations outline the transformation of the Lamming, who is a former colonial jail, into a moving diasporic potential.

The prevailing ideologies of the extracts of both novels are based on the anti-colonial morality polarization and vindication of the Black Self against the imperial Others, which makes the alienation a manifestation of the conscious resistance, not the DNA-imprinted flaw. These dynamics are also further measured by the ideological square by van Dijk in *'In Castle of My Skin'* and the percentage of combined Our Good and the Their Bad categories is 81.6. In this frame, dissonance of the village, absenteeism of parents and antagonism of overseers reveal the negative paradigms of the empire, and furthermore, homogenization is even promoted, thus naturalizing the Black consciousness as a superior legacy.

V. CONCLUSIONS

The integrated use of the social actor representation, construal operations and ideological square by van Leeuwen, Hart, and van Dijk has enabled the socio-cognitive discourse analysis to answer all the four research questions and achieve the four objectives. Therefore, the study concludes as follows:

1. Lamming illustrates the process of alienation methodically in the form of exclusionary and assimilative tactics that disintegrate social connections on grammatical level. *In the Castle of My Skin*, suppression eradicates the main actors like absent fathers and colonial myth-makers whereas individualization separates isolated subjects locked in strict school and family hierarchies so that the language that isolates the subjects of personal identity generates spaces of fracture of the self, where the personal identity is produced by excluding some subjects with the pronouns what and who.

2. Cognitive construal processes logically represent alienation as a perceptual fact which guides the interpretation by readers. The concept of colonial imprisonment in *'In the Castle of my Skin'* is made constructable in its profiling, which puts emphasis on personal non-entities and dehumanizing metaphors, as is the case with the publication of an enormous blue egg. This is enforced by a zero epistemic modality which introduces loyalty rituals and the absence of family as true ontological facts making entrapment as pre-given and inevitable.

3. Alienation is ideologically a moral vindication of anti-colonialism, where alienation becomes a testament to the superiority of the Black perceptions. The narrator of *In the Castle of My Skin* has made as much use of the Emphasise Their Bad technique as possible in demonizing colonial agents, village overseers, and absent parents to place anti-colonial feeling in a moral context.

4. *In the Castle of My Skin* creates a stasis of its fracture by omitting subjects who erase relation agents, by the profiled certainty of accentuating personal vacuity, and by the territorial ideology of naturalizing village containment as ethical opposition to colonial ranks.

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The Politics of Desire: Body, Space, and Queerness in Rituparno Ghosh's Cinematic Canvas

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Abstract— This paper explores Rituparno Ghosh's staging of desire that challenges established norms through the lens of body politics, queer sensibilities and spatial aesthetics that evoke desired emotions in *Unishe April* (1994), *Arekti Premer Golpo* (2010) and *Chitrangada: The Crowning Wish* (2012). Drawing on Michel Foucault's theory of biopower, Judith Butler's idea of gender performativity and Henri Lefebvre's concept of produced space, this paper explores an in-depth analysis of visual and textual colour schemes, stage designs and props across these three films. Whereas, *Unishe April* features intimate domestic interiors and maternal gestures that disrupt arbitrarily decided norms and *Arekti Premer Golpo* focuses on the trans identity in a medical gaze and dimly lit intangible spaces, *Chitrangada* turns the stage of theatre into a ritualized heterotopic gender fluid space. The study also digs into how recurrent themes such as gramophone, colourful textiles and quiet hallways do linger between the public and private spheres through the frame-by-frame interpretations of key moments. The study makes an assertion that Ghosh's presentation of visual arts creates queer enclaves inside heteronormative environments by merging spatial techniques with performative acts. In conclusion, this study showcases how Ghosh's avant-garde aesthetic interventions portray and impact the LGBT and queer identities.



Keywords— Body politics, Spatial elements, Heterotopia, Queerness, Heteronormative.

I. INTRODUCTION

Rituparno Ghosh's vibrant cinematic oeuvre comes to question under forcefully normalised society, but that never affected his ability to put forward what he stood for. This paper explores, examines, interprets the densely placed layers of the cinematic marvels like *Unishe April* (1994), *Chitrangada: The Crowning Wish* (2012) where Rituparno Ghosh directly influenced the presentation of spatial elements and the superbly crafted queer spaces that challenge heteronormativity and in *Arekti Premer Golpo* (2010), where under the direction of Kaushik Ganguly, Rituparno Ghosh acted to put life into the character itself. The stages lit by Ghosh portrayed heterotopic gender fluid spaces where the careful uses of luminosity and the symbolic elements that tries to develop a normalised queer enclave inside the gender rigid society. Drawing on ideas produced by Henri Lefebvre, the theory of gender

performativity proposed by Judith Butler and Michel Foucault's theory of heterotopia and biopower, Ghosh displays how everyday spaces construct themselves as the sites of negotiation and resistance.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Significant scholarly attention has been paid to the relationship between queerness, spatial aesthetics, and cinematic language, particularly in relation to South Asian film. Critics frequently point out how Rituparno Ghosh's visual storytelling subverts conventional gender norms and elevates marginal identities to the forefront of cultural representation, making his films an essential part of this conversation.

Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity forms a key theoretical foundation in queer film studies.

According to Butler, gender is not an innate identity but a repeated performance shaped by societal expectations (Butler 179). By embodying these performances in intensely emotional and visually charged environments, Ghosh's characters often challenge gender binary thinking. The interpretation of queer films is also influenced by Michael Foucault's concept of biopower, which is the control of bodies through social structures. In Ghosh's *Arekti Premer Golpo*, the portrayal of medical spaces and the intrusion of the clinical gaze directly speak to Foucault's critique of how power shapes bodily identity (Foucault 139). The movie questions the notion that identity needs to be repaired or categorised medically by problematising visibility and diagnosis.

Spatial theory is another key frame for understanding Ghosh's cinematic language. Henri Lefebvre's notion of produced space argues that space is socially constructed and actively shaped by cultural and political forces (Lefebvre 26). Ghosh uses domestic interiors, rehearsal spaces, and theatre stages not just as backdrops, but as dynamic sites of resistance and transformation. In particular, *Chitrangada*'s theatre space functions as a heterotopia, a place where alternate identities can temporarily emerge and be explored, a concept reminiscent of Foucault's idea of counter-sites (Foucault 24).

In conclusion, previous research emphasises how Ghosh's films are visual and spatial experiments that subvert heteronormative norms in addition to being narrative texts. Critics have demonstrated how Ghosh creates queer enclaves inside conventionally conservative settings by referencing theories of gender, power, and space. This makes his work both politically significant and artistically rich.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive approach to film analysis, focusing on how visual and spatial elements in Rituparno Ghosh's cinema articulate queer desire and challenge normative structures. Rather than relying on statistical data or surveys, the research is grounded in close reading and textual analysis, guided by theoretical insights from Judith Butler, Michel Foucault, and Henri Lefebvre.

The paper examines three of Ghosh's most thematically rich films: *Unishe April* (1994), *Arekti Premer Golpo* (2010), and *Chitrangada* (2012) (In *Unishe April* and *Chitrangada* as director and in *Arekti Premer Golpo* as an actor). These works were selected for their recurring engagement with questions of identity, space, and performance, making them ideal for exploring how Ghosh

constructs alternative queer narratives within heteronormative settings.

Key scenes from each film are analyzed frame by frame, paying particular attention to:

- Set design and spatial arrangement (domestic interiors, performance spaces, transitional zones)
- Visual-textual elements such as color palettes, lighting, props, and camera framing
- Symbolic motifs, including gramophones, mirrors, hallways, and fabrics
- Body politics and gesture, especially in relation to gender performance and gaze

The methodology involves aligning these visual cues with theoretical concepts. For instance, gendered performances are read through Butler's theory of performativity, while spatial transitions are interpreted using Lefebvre's and Foucault's ideas of produced and heterotopic space. Clinical and institutional settings, as seen in *Arekti Premer Golpo*, are analysed in light of Foucault's concept of biopower.

Throughout the process, the films are treated not only as narrative texts but also as cultural artifacts that reflect and reimagine queerness within a South Asian context. The goal is not to offer a definitive reading but rather to explore how Ghosh's stylistic choices, such as spatial, visual, and performative oeuvres, contribute to the creation of what might be called queer cinematic enclaves.

This interpretive method allows for a deep exploration of Ghosh's work and focuses on the potential of visual storytelling to question, resist, and reconfigure dominant narratives around gender and sexuality.

IV. DISCUSSION

Rituparno Ghosh's cinematic world is rich with subtle defiance—layered gestures, ambient spaces, and intimate silences that work together to stage queer desire in ways that resist conventional storytelling. Through an attentive manipulation of domestic and theatrical space, the politics of the body, and emotionally charged mise-en-scène, Ghosh constructs queer narratives that are deeply rooted in Bengali cultural contexts while simultaneously resisting their normative codes.

Ghosh reconfigures the inside of the home as a space for gender negotiation and emotional conflict in *Unishe April* (1994). The film, which is primarily set within a poorly lit flat in Kolkata, centres on the tense relationship between a mother and her daughter. Narrow hallways, dimly lit bedrooms, and peaceful living rooms where

mundane household tasks mask greater desires and regrets are the settings for the emotional tension. These interiors create a familiar yet unsettling atmosphere with their abundance of vintage furniture and warm earth tones.

Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's idea of produced space, the apartment becomes more than just a setting; it is an active participant in the characters' emotional journeys (Lefebvre 26). Her profession and independence defy conventional gender norms, making the mother figure who is generally considered as the epitome of conventionalism, a sign of upheaval rather than stability. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity offers insight into these familial dynamics. The daughter's anxiety about her mother's nonconformity reveals the social pressure to 'perform' idealized femininity, even within the private sphere (Butler 191).

Arekti Premer Golpo (2010) takes a bolder turn by bringing the transgender experience to the forefront. Here, Ghosh blurs the line between actor and character, casting himself in a dual role that echoes real-life figures while dramatizing personal identity struggles. The film navigates through clinical settings, old film studios, and motel rooms, using neon lighting and reflective surfaces to craft an ephemeral spatial grammar. These spaces feel intangible and constantly shifting, evoking what Michel Foucault terms heterotopias, spaces where social norms are suspended or inverted ("Of Other Spaces" 24). In medical settings, the trans body is subject to scrutiny, echoing Foucault's notion of **biopower**, where institutions exert control through the regulation of bodies (Foucault 139). Yet these same bodies resist categorisation. The protagonist's identity remains fluid, transcending binaries even as the world attempts to pin it down. Ghosh uses mirrors, flowing fabrics, and red lighting to visualize this resistance, turning the *mise-en-scène* into a field of psychological tension and quiet rebellion.

In *Chitrangada* (2012), Ghosh pushes this aesthetic experimentation further by staging gender transformation within a literal theatre space. The film adapts Rabindranath Tagore's play of the same name, but Ghosh turns the performance into a meditation on selfhood, transformation, and desire. The theatre is both a metaphor and a setting - a space where the protagonist negotiates his desire to undergo gender affirmation surgery. Here, Butler's concept of performativity becomes most literal: the stage becomes a space where gender is actively rehearsed, performed, and revised. The film also enacts Foucault's heterotopia, transforming the stage into a liminal zone where the boundaries between real and imagined, male and female, and self and tradition dissolve ("Of Other Spaces" 25). The repeated presence of symbolic objects - feathers, masks, traditional drums - infuse the scenes with ritualistic

overtones, aligning with Indian aesthetics of transformation and storytelling.

Across all three films, Ghosh returns to recurring motifs, such as gramophones, mirrors, textiles, and doorways - that bridge the divide between public and private, tradition and rebellion. These elements are not merely decorative but are charged with emotional resonance.

What unites these films is Ghosh's distinctive ability to make space feel alive, like imbuing corridors, curtains, and corners with the weight of desire, grief, and defiance. His visual grammar resists loud declarations and instead uses silence, softness, and texture to narrate queer lives. In doing so, Ghosh builds what can be called queer cinematic enclaves, emotional and spatial shelters where non-normative identities are not only seen but also hugged with the arms of care.

V. CONCLUSION

Rituparno Ghosh did not just tell stories; he created worlds. Worlds where silence speaks louder than dialogue, where a hallway can hold the weight of longing, and where gender is not a box to be checked but a choreography of becoming. His cinema, tender and defiant, turns the frame into a sanctuary for those whose desires are often left outside the margins of mainstream narratives. Through domestic interiors, theatrical stages, and ghostly institutional spaces, Ghosh carved out enclaves of queer survival, the spaces not only to exist but also to breathe, mourn, and transform.

By weaving Judith Butler's performativity, Foucault's critique of biopower and heterotopia, and Lefebvre's theory of spatial production into the visual grammar of his films, Ghosh built cinematic terrains that challenged what it means to belong. His characters resist neat definitions as they perform gender as poetry, inhabit space as resistance, and move through frames with the grace of defiance. Whether in the quiet mother-daughter confrontation in *Unishe April*, the fragmented identity in *Arekti Premer Golpo*, or the theatrical metamorphosis in *Chitrangada*, Ghosh's work does not ask for acceptance - it asserts presence.

In a region where queer lives are often shadowed by shame or invisibility, Ghosh's films offer something radical where emotional truth is rendered visible. He queered not only the characters but the very form of storytelling itself - its textures, its silences, its light. What emerges is not just a body of work, but a body of feeling: delicate, painful, exquisite. In looking at his cinema closely, we do not simply watch queer lives unfold - we feel them unfold in space, gesture, and gaze.

In the end, Ghosh's cinema teaches us that desire is not something to hide or fear, but something to stage - lovingly, defiantly, and with an eye toward liberation. And in that staging, he has left behind not just films, but safe spaces - frames within frames - where queerness is not a question, but an answer.

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Evoking Ethos through Life Writing: Interpreting Nayantara Sahgal's Life Narratives *Prison and Chocolate Cake* and *From Fear Set Free*

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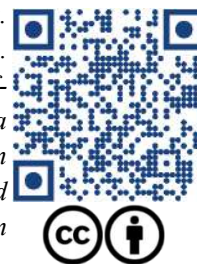
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Abstract— *An autobiography focuses on individual life while being firmly located in social experiences. The socio-cultural realities of the time aptly find an expression in the autobiographies written by women. Based on memory, experience and identity, women narrators reproduce the cultural modes of self-narration. Autobiographies play a significant role in bringing out cultural criticism and social change; a change in which women find their individual identity. The feminine sensibility arising due to the depiction of these memories is remarkable, presenting Indian ethos, values, and cultural background. Rapid developments in the fields of science, technology, economics and urbanization have affected modern societies immensely, both positively and negatively. Portrayal of Indian tradition, heritage, conventions, customs and festivals form an integral part of the two autobiographies written by Nayantara Sahgal: *Prison and Chocolate Cake* and *From Fear Set Free*. This depiction becomes a symbol through which the reader comes to know about her pride in the Indian ethos and respect for Indian culture. The present paper tries to probe how Sahgal's two remarkable autobiographies invoke posterities to feel dignity and delight in age old Indian ethos and how Sahgal commemorates Indian heritage.*



Keywords— *Ethos, heritage, cultural framework, autobiography, tradition and customs, portrayal of self*

Autobiographies play a significant role in bringing out cultural criticism and social change; a change in which women find their individual identity and respect. Writing autobiography has allowed women to use their voices in spaces that banned them from speaking. Narrating their life stories has made themselves heard, to take ownership of their stories and to finally control the narrative. When a person goes through one's memory and experiences and organize them through a careful selection, one gives shape and form to the indefinable and fluid self. Such narratives show how their author conceived and organized with efforts for writing 'a narrative on a life that, as Edward Said puts it, one had left as disorganized, scattered, uncentred' (Said 556).

Though life histories focus on individual lives, they are firmly located in social experiences. The socio-cultural realities of the time aptly find an expression in the

autobiographies of women. Ethos may be considered to hold the grounding principles expected to be owned by a general community, the example of which are love, equality, security, respect and so on. In today's world, the rapid developments in the fields of science, technology, economics, industrialization, and urbanization have affected human beings both positively and negatively. As per Cambridge English Dictionary, ethos means "the set of moral beliefs, attitudes, habits, etc., that are characteristic of a person or group" ("Ethos"). From preserving ethos to safeguarding oral traditions, music, crafts, and rituals, women are the quiet architects of cultural continuity. Their role has been both symbolic such as to represent the nation or culture on one hand, and functional as they transmit it to their children and other women. They deeply internalize culture and the religious

traditions, and communicate it to other social groups. ('Women as Bearers of Culture'3)

Cultural ethos in Indian history encompasses the characteristic spirit, beliefs, and values that define a culture and shape its practices, identity, and collective consciousness. It reflects the underlying ideals and norms present in literature, art, and social practices. This concept is evident in Indian English literature and folk tales, where poets and writers draw upon and resonate with the cultural values of their communities (Hiemstra). Cultural heritage is both a product and a process, always encompassing elements of the past, present, and future. It provides a wealth of resources for current and future generations. This is not a passive transmission but an active process of acquisition, preservation, and interpretation (Shongwe). Nayantara Sahgal, a prominent author of twentieth century of international repute, jubilantly writes about the galaxy of festivals celebrated at her home when she was a young girl in her first autobiography *Prison and Chocolate Cake*. Sahgal has written that towards the end of March, the Kashmiri New year, *Naoroz*, would begin with the flame-colored *gulmohar* blossoming in the garden and the household ladies clad in gay new saris. Her mother would wake them up saying '*Naoroz Mubarak*'- Happy New Year:

She would sit down on the edge of our beds, turn by turn, placing in front of her the thali she was carrying. The thali contained raw rice, the symbol of fertility, sweets of milk and coconuts, almonds or pistachio, fresh fruit, flowers, a little curd, a container with powdered red tika, and a mirror. After putting a tika on each of our foreheads with a finger dipped in red powder and curd, and giving us some of the sweets to eat, Mummie would hand us a mirror to see ourselves (Sahgal *Prison* 84).

Liveliest of all the festivals, for Sahgal, was *Holi*, when there were no barriers between young and old, master and servant, stranger and stranger, "At Holi we broke all bounds of convention and propriety and indulged in a riot of merry making, smearing one another's faces with colored powder and squirting colored water from syringes on each other and even on passer-by in the street" (*Prison* 84). The little pond where her father had carefully planted lilies would be rudely disturbed as dignified leaders of society; justices of the High Court, Congress Chiefs, and visiting dignitaries were carried to it amid shouts and plunged gasping into its cold, slimy depths.

The life writings of women can be seen as powerful social and historical documents. They may be said to have archival value as they provide us with micro-

histories of the times they were written in. Not only do they provide a world and wealth of detail, they also show us history from below. Accounts which offer the everyday practices of women and minorities have gained a unique validity since they offer us history or her story from a different perspective (Malhotra 13). Nayantara Sahgal writes that *Raksha Bandhan* too was celebrated in her family and she has related the story of the Hindu princess Kurnavati sending *rakhi* to the Mogul Emperor Humayun, accompanied by a desperate appeal for help against invading armies. Her sister Rita and Sahgal enjoyed the festival of *Guria Panchmi* more than any other festival when they were children. It was the festival of dolls and celebrated only by little girls. They would dress the dolls in pretty, new outfits, discuss their good and bad qualities, and arrange their marriages. Her mother Vijay Lakshmi Pandit would send for the *Maniharin*, the bangle seller woman, who would glide bangles onto their wrists. Mrs. Pandit's gesture indicate that she tried to provide a normal home life to her daughters despite the elders of the home being busy in various nationalistic activities. Diwali, mostly coming in November was the most beautiful of the festivals for Sahgal. She mentions of Rama, coming back from fourteen year's exile and worship of Goddess of Fortune, Lakshmi. Sahgal writes about the sharing aspect of the social life of India when on Diwali day trays of sweets and fruits were sent to the homes of relatives and friends and were distributed among the servants, while similar trays came to her house as well.

Women may not have played a dominant role in the recording of what is commonly understood as official history, but they surely have been the epicentres and key forces of social and cultural heritage preservation. They have performed the role of carriers of oral histories and narratives, while themselves being the active bearers and symbols of our social and cultural traditions. Being the nodal points of every familial unit, women have nurtured and sustained these traditions within their families over generations (Tiwari and Badgaiyan). Writing about Allahabad, the city where she was born and brought up, Sahgal has used mythological references in her autobiography *Prison and Chocolate Cake*. She has written that it was a place whose culture was a blend of the ancient civilizations of the *Ramayana* and the much later influence of the Moguls. Prayag was its original Hindu name and the Hindus considered it holy because it was the meeting place of the two sacred rivers, the Ganges and the Jumna. It had an added significance for them because it had been the scene of a moving incident from the *Ramayana*. Bharat met at this very place his elder brother Rama who was in exile of fourteen years then. She has mentioned how Bharat had put Rama's slippers on the

throne and had gone in search of Rama, determined to bring him back to his capital. It was in Prayag that their joyful reunion took place. Talking about the ancient history of Allahabad, Sahgal in her second autobiography *From Fear Set Free* writes, that dating from the time of Mahabharata, the area of Allahabad was scattered with reminders of its history. There was the Ashoka Pillar, erected in 240 B.C.

Women have a crucial role in the global preservation and vitality of cultural diversity and history. Their responsibilities in connection to intangible heritage are particularly important because they contain what may be called core regions and representations of cultural heritage, which are usually necessary for the maintenance of cultural identity (Rezaei 2). In *From Fear Set Free* Nayantara narrates that when she shifted to Bombay, the land of Shivaji, she and her husband were far from the North, moulded by its history of invasions through the mountain passes, its influences of Moghul culture, its civilization of the Ganges that extended from the Himalayas to Bengal. The Marathas, masters of India at the time of the British conquest, embody this difference. Sahgal has given a brief but enchanting account of the history of region by narrating that eclipsed for some three hundred years by Muslim rule, Hinduism revived in the seventeenth century. Under a dynamic and audacious leader Shivaji, the Marathas rose in sturdy guerrilla bands to reduce the imperial Mughal armies.

In the chapter 'Wedding Story', Nayantara Sahgal gives an exquisite description of Indian wedding ceremony and the three important weddings taking place at Anand Bhawan, though manner of each one was quite different from the other. She writes that her family was by no means an orthodox family, but it was a family deeply rooted in the country's cultural traditions. In India, the decisions regarding wedding have been bred on the ideal that all decision should be approached with a studied serenity.

Celebrating the centuries old traditions, heritage, conventions and customs form an integral part of the two autobiographies written by Nayantara Sahgal: *Prison and Chocolate Cake* and *From Fear Set Free*. This portrayal becomes a symbol through which the reader comes to know about her pride over the Indian traditions and respect for Indian culture. Sahgal's outstanding autobiographies invoke mases to feel pride in age old Indian ethos and imbibe them at the same time.

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Mapping the Mind: Psychogeography and Identity Formation in J.G. Ballard's *The Concrete Island*

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Abstract— This essay analyzes J.G. Ballard's *The Concrete Island* using the framework of psychogeography and argues that the book demonstrates the intimate relationship between development of identity and urban geographical context. Robert Maitland is placed on an abandoned freeway island in the story, which transforms this neglected part of the city into a psychological landscape that actively alters his awareness. Maitland's entrapment reveals the hidden emotional geographies of the contemporary metropolis by revealing underlying currents of violence, neglect, alienation, and emotional detachment embedded in contemporary urban planning. Rather than being a passive environment, the island is a dynamic force that destroys Maitland's social identity and reconstructs him through physical isolation and environmental pressure. The book illustrates how space itself creates, disintegrates and reinvents identity through Maitland's slow adaptation to this environment. *The Concrete Island* is considered in this research as a significant psychogeographical work that investigates the psychological and emotional effects of modern urban existence.



Keywords— *Psychogeography, Identity Formation, Urban Space, Emotional Geographies, Isolation, Modernity.*

Introduction

A distinctive place in J.G. Ballard's collection of works has been taken by *The Concrete Island*, which reflects a change from speculative futurism to a comprehensive analysis of psychological landscapes that exist within contemporary cities. The novel, which was published in 1974, tells the story of Robert Maitland, a wealthy architect who finds himself trapped on a traffic island created by intersecting motorways in London due to an automobile accident. Maitland is rendered invisible and immobile despite being physically surrounded by movement, speed, and modern technology.

This article asserts an argument that *The Concrete Island* acts as a psychogeographical examination of identity and urban space. Ballard redefines the city as a psychological apparatus that constantly influences human consciousness rather than as a neutral or practical locale. Instead of serving as a silent setting, the island functions as a dynamic force that employs environmental pressure and

spatial isolation to destroy Maitland's social identity and rebuild him.

According to Ballard, contemporary cities have psychological "islands"; places of invisibility and desertion which hold the suppressed emotions of urban existence. The novel illustrates how space itself creates, fragments, and reconfigures identity through Maitland's gradual integration to this environment. The novel highlights how abandoned urban areas behave as places for psychological accumulation, regions where alienation, violence, and repression develop through Maitland's entrapment.

Psychogeography and Ballard's urban imageries

This research endeavour tries to understand the relationship between the psyche and space, and for this it is necessary to make the psychogeographical lens clear. In its standard Situationist formulation, psychogeography looks into specific effects of geographical environments; either intentionally created or not, on individual's feelings

and actions. It emphasizes the psychological role of streets, intersections, transportation networks, and "leftover" zones, claiming that urban space is saturated with atmospheres that both influence and are shaped by human experience rather than being neutral.

In this regard, psychogeography's inability to differentiate identity from spatial form directly leads to the assumption that the motorway island is a psychological space that alters Maitland's consciousness. *Subjective mapping* and the *dérive* are two practices that already make the claim that relations to the built environment produce and transform identity. Ballard's fiction provides a fictional laboratory for this perspective with its recurring focus on corporate enclaves, high-rises, and motorways. It repeatedly stages how environments become experimental fields where the modern subject is dismantled and rebuilt.

The motorway island as a psychological liminal space

Ballard makes the idea of contemporary cities as clusters that make psychological "islands" understandable by using a deserted motorway island as the novel's primary setting. Maitland crashes on a piece of land that is both socially and geographically central. It is surrounded by flyovers and constant traffic, but it is functionally removed from the city's conceptual map. The lack of concern is both material overgrown weeds, abandoned trash, crumbling buildings and emotional, representing the apathy and blindness that modern urban planning fosters toward areas that don't seem to be useful.

The philosophical description of a "psychological terrain" becomes narratively concrete exactly within this abandoned motorway island. Maitland faces a dense field of emotions while stranded in an area that nobody else can see: anxiety and fear in the immediate aftermath of the crash, confusion as he realizes he is invisible, and then a gradual rise in anger, fascination, and even attachment to the island. The setting is perfect for dramatizing the disintegration of his previous persona and the formation of a new, geographically constructed self because it is neither entirely city nor nature, neither inside nor outside.

The mapping of emotional geographies and Entrapment

Ballard is capable of being "map" the psychological undercurrents of the contemporary metropolis in microcosm through Maitland's entrapment. An adverse cartography of the island has been developed by his repeated, unsuccessful attempts to draw attention or flee: poor visibility, barriers, blind curves, and steep embankments indicate locations where the sensible reason of traffic design creates areas of human invisibility. Every failure imprints anger, frustration, and desperation on particular spots, transforming the island into a psychic map

with distinct emotional intensities associated with specific locations.

This narrative consequently makes the "hidden emotional geographies" that were mentioned in the abstract comprehensible. Infrastructures that prioritize speed and flow while creating sections of abandonment, as well as design concepts that facilitate drivers' experiences while making some bodies and spaces literally and figuratively invisible, all combine to form a condensed diagram of larger metropolitan structures on the island. Therefore, Maitland's physical pain and mental collapse show an extreme form of what the contemporary city frequently creates and represses rather than a unique circumstance.

Disintegrating the social sense of self

According to the abstract, Maitland's social sense of self is shattered by the island and then rebuilt through environmental pressure and geographical isolation. His identity prior to the crash was based on his career success, wealth, mobility, and the prestige that came with his work as an architect and Jaguar driver. Once isolated, these markers become meaningless: his expensive clothing deteriorates, the luxury car becomes wreckage, and the symbolic capital of class and profession has no value in a place where survival relies on resourcefulness, perseverance, and physical fortitude.

The island actively removes the social self by enforcing circumstances that render prior positions and perspectives ineffective; this dismantling is not just symbolic. Because of his isolation, Maitland is forced to face the contingency of his previous identity, which reveals it to be a brittle construct supported by specific social norms and infrastructures. Thus, the expressway island serves as a psychogeographical tool that illustrates how urban identities rely on networks of affirmation, mobility, and visibility that can suddenly disappear.

Urban disappearance and psychological territories

The contemporary cities have psychological "islands"; places of obscurity and desertion that store the repressed feelings of city living. By giving Maitland an island that is both intricately linked to the city's circulatory systems and structurally written out of everyday perception, Ballard liberalizes this metaphor. Drivers, shielded by steel and glass, glide along smooth surfaces high above him, oblivious to the suffering below. In addition to creating areas where failures, accidents, and undesired bodies can vanish, the motorway network was built to maximize efficiency.

Viewed in this way, the island is not an outlier but a symbol of a larger urban issue. Many underpasses, service roads, fenced-off areas, and unused infrastructure act as storage for anxiety, debris, and ignored social problems.

Ballard's story emphasizes that these spaces are heavy with psychological weight. They contain the city's hidden violence, neglect, and loneliness, even as the visible city appears orderly and controlled. Maitland's descent into this space, along with his eventual inability to escape it, suggests that the city is burdened by these emotional remnants.

Adaptation, reconfiguration, and the production of identity

This research paper focuses on Maitland's gradual adaptation and how the novel shows that identity is produced, fragmented, and reshaped by space itself. This change is evident in his changing relationship with the island. At first, he sees it as a prison and a threat. Over time, the land becomes manageable and then familiar as he learns its paths, resources, and rhythms. He builds shelters, organizes food supplies, establishes lookout points, and starts to feel possessive of territory he once wanted to escape.

As he adapts, Maitland's identity shifts. His former self, defined by city life and social status, transforms into someone who finds a twisted sense of freedom within the island's limitations. The very isolation that broke down his social identity now creates a new sense of belonging, even if it is unstable and unhealthy. The choice or urge to stay on the island when he could leave clearly shows that the space has not just mirrored his inner feelings; it has created a new reality. The island has become central to his identity.

***The Concrete Island* as a critical psychogeographical text**

Bringing together these ideas, *The Concrete Island* can be understood, as abstract suggests, as a "critical psychogeographical text" that explores the emotional and psychological effects of modern city life. Ballard uses a car crash and an isolated island not to escape the city but to expose what its layout usually hides. The novel illustrates how infrastructures built for speed and efficiency create areas of erasure, how the city's neglected parts become full of emotion, and how individual identity is constantly being dismantled and rebuilt in response to these environments.

In this way, Ballard shifts psychogeographical issues from casual drifting and everyday walking to the extreme experience of being trapped in one hostile place. Maitland's story serves as a focused case study showing what occurs when a person is stuck on one of the city's psychological "islands," unable to move past it as a detached observer. The novel makes it clear that any serious examination of urban identity must consider the spaces of neglect and invisibility that support the seeming smoothness of city life.

CONCLUSION

The Concrete Island explores how cities shape, fracture, and change identity and mental health. Ballard turns a neglected motorway island into a psychological landscape, revealing the hidden emotional layers in modern cities. Maitland's entrapment shows the fragility of modern identity and the mental costs of urban environments that focus on speed, isolation, and invisibility.

The limited geography of the island tightens perception, heightens instinctual behavior, and upends emotional balance, cutting human interaction down to survival and territorial disputes. Ballard claims that modern cities create psychological "islands", spaces of neglect where ignored emotions, mental distress, and violence build up. Through its study of space and mind, *The Concrete Island* examines the emotional and psychological effects of urban life, offering a chilling critique of the unstable nature of modern identity.

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Narratives of Displacement and Reinvention in Bharati Mukherjee's 'Desirable Daughters'

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Abstract— This paper analyses the interconnected themes of displacement and reinvention in Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters* (2002) by highlighting how migration transforms identity across personal, cultural, and historical dimensions. This paper situates the novel within the broader context of diaspora studies, contending that Mukherjee reconceptualises displacement not solely as a state of loss, but as an active arena for self-creation. The narrative follows Tara Bhattacharjee's transition from a conventional, upper-caste Bengali upbringing in Calcutta to an unstable yet emancipating existence in the United States. This geographical shift undermines established norms of gender, marriage, and family, prompting Tara to scrutinise the myths that previously defined her sense of belonging. The paper argues that reinvention in the novel is neither smooth nor celebratory; instead, it manifests through fragmentation, memory, and a confrontation with both past and present. Mukherjee's complex narrative structure intertwines ancestral histories with modern diasporic experiences, illustrating the ongoing negotiation of identity between cultural memory and personal agency. Through an examination of the tensions between tradition and autonomy, as well as homeland and hostland, the study illustrates how *Desirable Daughters* convey displacement as a continuous process of ethical and emotional reconstruction. The novel, therefore, posits reinvention as a means of survival and a form of creative self-assertion in a transnational context.



Keywords— Myth, Memory, Diaspora, Displacement, Tradition.

Bharati Mukherjee (1940–2017) was a well-known Indian American writer whose work centres on women's perspectives, migration, and diasporic identity. She was born in Calcutta and then moved to the US. Her writing was heavily influenced by her own experiences as an immigrant. Mukherjee's writing is different from other nostalgic exile stories because it focuses on change and starting over as important parts of being an immigrant. Her important books, such as *Jasmine* (1989) and *Desirable Daughters* (2002), examine women in the diaspora and how their identities change as they relocate. This makes her one of the most important voices in Asian American and postcolonial literature. Mukherjee occupies a central position in diasporic and Asian American literary discourse for her sustained engagement with migration as a process of transformation rather than exile. Her fiction repeatedly

interrogates how displacement destabilises inherited identities while simultaneously generating new modes of selfhood. In *Desirable Daughters*, Mukherjee does not treat migration as a simple geographical shift; instead, she presents it as a psychological and cultural reconstitution of the self. The novel dramatises how identity emerges through rupture, negotiation, and reinvention.

James Clifford defines diaspora as a condition of “dwelling-in-displacement” (Clifford 9), a formulation that captures the paradox of inhabiting mobility itself. Tara Bhattacharjee, the protagonist of *Desirable Daughters*, exemplifies this state. Born into an upper-caste Bengali family and relocated to Silicon Valley through marriage, Tara exists between inherited memory and contemporary flux. The novel opens with the story of Tara Lata, the child-bride married to a tree after her fiancé's sudden death. When

dowry is demanded, her father defiantly declares, "I will see my daughter married to a crocodile, to a tree, before you get a single piece! I give dowry only to one who does not demand it. There will be a wedding tonight, the auspicious hour will be honored" (Mukherjee 14). This foundational narrative exposes the violence embedded within tradition while simultaneously introducing resistance. Displacement here is internal to culture before it becomes transnational.

Homi K. Bhabha's theory of hybridity provides a useful framework for understanding Tara's fractured consciousness. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha argues that cultural identity emerges in a "Third Space of enunciation" where meaning is negotiated rather than fixed (Bhabha 56). Tara inhabits precisely this third space. Initially, she conforms to patriarchal expectations. Reflecting on her younger self, she admits, "I was not the rebellious one. I was the pliant one, the one who conformed" (Mukherjee 27). This confession reveals how deeply internalised gender roles structure her identity. Yet migration unsettles this compliance. The American context introduces autonomy and individualism, destabilising inherited codes of obedience. Mukherjee's portrayal of reinvention, however, is not celebratory. Tara recognises the instability of immigrant self-fashioning when she observes that in America, one is "free to reinvent yourself, but you are also free to be lost" (225). Reinvention thus becomes double-edged: it promises liberation while threatening fragmentation. Clifford similarly insists that diaspora emphasises "'routes' rather than 'roots'" (Clifford 3), privileging mobility over origin. Tara's divorce from her wealthy husband dismantles the illusion that economic assimilation guarantees belonging. Instead, she must reconstruct her subjectivity outside the socially sanctioned roles of wife and daughter.

Mukherjee herself has articulated her resistance to the melancholic exile model. In *Conversations with Bharati Mukherjee*, she explains that she is interested in characters who "transform themselves" rather than remain nostalgic expatriates (Mukherjee qtd. in Edwards 18). This emphasis on transformation shapes Tara's narrative arc. Unlike static representations of diaspora, *Desirable Daughters* foregrounds agency. Tara's sisters, Padma and Parvati, further illustrate the multiplicity of diasporic negotiation. Although raised with shared values, they diverge in self-construction. Tara acknowledges this divergence when she reflects that they were raised with "the same stories, the same expectations," yet they ultimately "invented ourselves differently" (Mukherjee 236). Identity, therefore, is neither essential nor inherited; it is continually authored. Stuart Hall's influential articulation of cultural identity further clarifies this dynamic. Hall argues that identity is "not an essence but a positioning" (Hall 226). Tara's journey

illustrates this precisely: her identity shifts as her positionality changes, from Calcutta daughter to Silicon Valley wife to independent, self-questioning woman. The homeland she remembers is mediated through myth and memory, while the hostland demands adaptation. Neither location provides stable grounding. Instead, Tara occupies a fluid space where belonging is provisional. The narrative structure of the novel reinforces this thematic concern. By interweaving ancestral myth with contemporary diaspora, Mukherjee collapses linear temporality. The past does not disappear; it resurfaces, complicating reinvention. Yet the act of narration itself becomes empowering. Through storytelling, Tara reframes inherited myths and situates herself within a lineage of resistant women. Displacement thus becomes productive rather than purely traumatic. Therefore, *Desirable Daughters* reframes diaspora as creative reconstruction. While migration fractures inherited certainties, it also generates ethical and emotional recalibration. Tara's movement from conformity to self-awareness embodies Mukherjee's broader vision of immigrant identity as adaptive and self-fashioned. The novel suggests that identity is not a relic preserved intact but a narrative continually revised within historical and cultural tension. Through this layered exploration, Mukherjee positions displacement not as an endpoint of loss but as the beginning of reinvention. This study employs a qualitative, interpretive research methodology grounded in a meticulous textual analysis of Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters*. The main goal is to examine themes of displacement and reinvention by closely reading the narrative structure, characters, and symbols of the novel. The psychological and cultural transformation of the protagonist, Tara Bhattacharjee, is examined with particular emphasis on evolving transnational contexts. Postcolonial and diaspora studies have helped shape the theoretical framework. Key concepts such as 'hybridity' and the 'Third Space' proposed by Homi K. Bhabha, 'diaspora' as articulated by James Clifford, and 'cultural identity' as positioning developed by Stuart Hall are utilised to interpret identity as fluid, constructed, and negotiated rather than static. The research incorporates pertinent secondary criticism to contextualise the novel within extensive academic discourse, rendering the methodology analytical, theoretical, and text-focused rather than empirical.

Mukherjee has examined the complexities of psychic and spatial identity and the anguish of dislocation on multiple levels. The structures of patriarchy in Indian society differ from that in the West; consequently, Mukherjee has sought to transform her brand of feminism based on the reality of the obligatory dislocation they frequently experience. Indian expatriate writers do not solely express an exclusive foreignness in their identity; rather, their writing embodies

the viewpoint of individuals navigating the complexities of dual cultures. Mukherjee has presented a postmodern counter-narrative that both assimilates and celebrates American citizenship. This novel perspective maintains fundamental Indianness as exotic while seamlessly integrating into American materialism. Mukherjee aims to establish her distinctiveness within the wider realm of American literature through this category of experience. Migration and dislocation, whether voluntary or involuntary, are global and transcultural imperatives. Mukherjee's protagonists are all perceptive and possess varying degrees of training in the contemporary ethnic imagination. They are immersed in an environment of ambivalence concerning their identity, racism, sexism, and other forms of social oppression. They navigate displacement and confront the multicultural reality amid cultural differentiation and assimilation. Their cultural imperatives, in engaging with the unfamiliar essence of the new world, generate a narrative of co-optation and collaboration that the storyteller documents. Mukherjee has articulated the experience of living within a culture, both geographically and ideologically distinct from her chosen home and citizenship, thereby complicating her identity. This facet of her cultural exclusivity is prominently articulated in her critique of Americans. Mukherjee's sixth novel, *Desirable Daughters*, signifies a new trend in her oeuvre. During an interview with Dave Weich, Mukherjee states: "The authentic Strategy for this book was also using the width of the field of history, geography, Diaspora, gender, ethnicity, language - rather than the old-fashioned, long clean throw" (72).

In her earlier novels, diasporic transmigration signified a novel beginning and liberation from the constraints of conventional society. These novels portrayed attachment to one's native culture and homeland as undesirable, while total assimilation into the host culture was celebrated. It is to establish a locus of presence that diminishes the diasporic individual, facilitating the disconnection from the past and the deconstruction of the future. In *Desirable Daughters*, Mukherjee examines various patterns of belonging within global contexts, ranging from temporality to assimilative permanence, and additionally, hyphenated and unmixed nationhood. People in the diaspora tend to be centred on their primary identities, such as religion, ethnicity, territory, or nation. The majority of Mukherjee's novels address the issue of primary identities and their associated crises, as well as the transmission of ethnic characteristics. She considers the tenuous state of cultural translation in the postcolonial context, past, present, and future. The author depicts Tara Lata, only five years old, carried in a palanquin, dressed in ceremonial attire for her impending marriage. The eight and nine-year-old sisters are already

married. According to Hindu custom, it is believed that a father must arrange his daughter's marriage before she attains puberty; failure to do so renders him deemed ineffectual and unworthy. A palanquin supported by four attendants transports three daughters of a wealthy man, the youngest clothed in her bridal saree, her small hands embellished with crimson dye, and her hair oiled and styled. Her arms are burdened with dowry gold; bangles cover her delicate arms from wrist to shoulder. Juvenile voices intone a melody, hands strike, golden bracelets jingle. Tara Lata gains notoriety for her acts of resistance, therefore becoming a freedom warrior and martyr. Ironically, in his quest to uphold a swift Indian custom and confine his daughter to a life devoid of the distractions posed by a husband, children, and a mother-in-law, the father turns her into an emblem of fundamental womanhood within the traditional patriarchal symbolic order.

Tara's experience in *Desirable Daughters* reveals that displacement is far more complex than merely crossing borders. Bharati Mukherjee presents migration not as a dramatic escape from tradition but as an ongoing negotiation between memory and modernity. Tara's life in California does not erase her upbringing in Ballygunge; instead, it forces her to measure the distance between who she was expected to be and who she is trying to become. The movement from India to America becomes meaningful only when seen alongside the social codes that shaped her early identity. Her recollections of childhood make clear how tightly controlled her world once was. She remembers, "We were traditional Hindus, very orthodox Bengali Brahmins... We were afraid of Brahmos, fearing contamination from our own side" (Mukherjee 180). The fear of "contamination" suggests how identity was guarded through separation and suspicion. Even reformist groups were perceived as threats. Tara grew up in an atmosphere where belonging depended on preserving boundaries. Individual desire mattered less than family reputation and caste continuity. This atmosphere of vigilance becomes even more visible in her reflection on adolescent romance. She writes:

"Therefore, Ron Dey slipped under the most refined radar system in the world: Hindu virgin protection. So many eyes were watching, so many precautions were taken, and so much of value was at stake—the marriageability of Motilal Bhattacharjee's oldest daughter, which, unless properly managed, controlled the prospects of his second and third daughters as well that any violation of codes, any breath of scandal, was unthinkable." (32)

The metaphor of a "refined radar system" captures the intensity of social monitoring. Tara's body becomes a site

of communal investment. Her "marriageability" determines not only her own future but that of her sisters. In such a setting, love is secondary to strategy, and reputation outweighs individuality. The constant surveillance explains why migration appears to promise relief. America seems to offer distance from these suffocating expectations. Yet Tara's marriage to Bish in California reveals another layer of constraint. Her confession is strikingly personal: "When I left Bish (let us be clear on this) after a decade of marriage, it was because the promise of life as an American wife was not being fulfilled. I wanted to drive, but where would I go? I wanted to work, but would people think that Bish Chatterjee couldn't support his wife?" (82). The repetition of her wants shows a quiet hunger for autonomy. She does not seek rebellion for its own sake; she desires ordinary freedoms—mobility, employment, self-direction. However, even in America, she remains conscious of community judgment. The question of how others might interpret her actions echoes the earlier fear of scandal in India. Geography has changed, but scrutiny persists in subtler forms. Mukherjee's description of domestic life reinforces this sense of containment: "My world was Atherton, and the two weeks we spent each winter in Calcutta visiting his parents, with a few side visits to mine" (82). The word "world" feels ironic as Atherton represents prosperity and safety, yet it also signals isolation. Tara's daily life revolves around suburban routines, social expectations, and Bish's professional ambitions. The vastness of America does not automatically produce emotional expansion. Instead, she experiences a muted loneliness, a realisation that migration alone cannot generate fulfilment. What becomes evident is that displacement unsettles inherited certainties without immediately replacing them. Tara cannot return to the unquestioned obedience of her youth, yet she also cannot fully embrace the myth of American individualism. Even after her divorce, she remains entangled in diaspora networks that continue to define her through her former marriage. Identity proves persistent. It resists easy reinvention. The presence of her sisters highlights this complexity. Padma, living in New York, appears pragmatic and forward-looking, willing to adjust tradition to suit her ambitions. Parvati, who resides in India, embodies continuity rather than stagnation. Through these parallel lives, Mukherjee avoids presenting migration as the only path to transformation. Each sister negotiates cultural expectations differently, suggesting that reinvention depends as much on temperament as on location. Tara's growing awareness of her own contradictions shapes her gradual transformation. She begins to see that the codes governing her childhood were neither wholly oppressive nor entirely protective; they were part of a larger system that provided structure while restricting freedom. Likewise, her

American life offers opportunity but demands resilience. She must actively construct a sense of self rather than inherit one.

The subplot involving Chris Dey intensifies this realization. The intrusion of global violence into her private sphere disrupts any illusion of safety. It reminds her that mobility connects rather than isolates. Past and present remain intertwined. She cannot compartmentalise her Indian history and her American present. The two inform each other constantly. As Tara reflects on her ancestral narrative, particularly the story of Tara Lata, she recognises both distance and continuity. The tree bride represents a life determined by ritual and sacrifice. Tara's own life, by contrast, involves choice and mobility. Yet both women inhabit systems that define them in relation to others. This recognition fosters empathy rather than rejection. Tara's reinvention does not require disowning her origins; it requires understanding them. The power of the novel lies in its refusal to simplify displacement. The vigilant "Hindu virgin protection" (32) does not disappear when Tara boards a plane to America. It lingers as memory, as caution, as an internalised awareness of how women are watched and judged. Similarly, the promise of American freedom does not automatically dissolve inherited anxieties. Tara's struggle reveals that identity in diaspora is layered, shaped by movement but anchored in recollection. Through Tara's voice, Mukherjee portrays reinvention as gradual and often uncomfortable. It unfolds in moments of doubt, in decisions that seem minor but carry emotional weight, in conversations that expose hidden expectations. Tara learns that she cannot simply step into a new identity; she must assemble it piece by piece. Her journey suggests that displacement is not solely about loss. It creates the possibility of questioning, of re-evaluating the roles assigned by family and society. Therefore, Tara's experience demonstrates that migration transforms perception more than it changes essence. She remains marked by her upbringing, yet she refuses to be confined by it. Her reinvention emerges not from rejecting the past but from engaging with it critically. In this sense, *Desirable Daughters* presents displacement as a space of tension and growth. Identity is neither fixed nor entirely fluid; it is shaped through negotiation, memory, and the courage to redefine oneself within and beyond inherited boundaries.

CONCLUSION

Desirable Daughters depicts displacement as a deeply transforming yet unresolved state that reconfigures personal identity across cultural boundaries. Bharati Mukherjee depicts migration as an ongoing process rather than a conclusive endpoint, prompting individuals to reevaluate their inherited ideas, gender roles, and societal allegiances.

Tara's path illustrates that reinvention is neither immediate nor definitive; it unfolds through engagement with memory, familial heritage, and the influences of both native and diasporic communities. The narrative, therefore, challenges binary oppositions between tradition and modernity, India and America, and captivity and freedom. It emphasises complexity, illustrating how cultural norms endure in novel contexts, while new experiences contest entrenched beliefs. Mukherjee underscores the emotional labour inherent in constructing a personality that transcends borders through rich storytelling and contemplative narration. By examining Tara's developing consciousness, the essay asserts that identity in a transnational context is fluid and self-constructed. Displacement, while disconcerting, serves as a catalyst for awareness and development, allowing the protagonist to assert a more self-defined and critically analysed sense of belonging.

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Silent Resistance in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula* and *Beloved*

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Abstract— *The fiction of Toni Morrison offers a powerful exploration of the lived experiences of African American women shaped by histories of slavery, racial discrimination and patriarchal oppression. While resistance in literature is often associated with overt political rebellion or collective activism, Morrison frequently presents more subtle, internalized forms of defiance that emerge in everyday life. This paper examines the theme of silent resistance in three of Morrison's most significant novels, The Bluest Eye, Sula, and Beloved. Through characters such as Claudia MacTeer, Sula Peace, Nel Wright and Sethe, Morrison demonstrates how marginalized individuals resist dominant systems of power through psychological defiance, memory, and personal autonomy. These quiet acts of resistance may appear private or invisible, yet they challenge racialized beauty standards, patriarchal expectations and the historical trauma of slavery. By foregrounding these subtle forms of agency, Morrison redefines resistance as an ongoing struggle for dignity, identity and cultural survival.*



Keywords— *Silent Resistance, Black Feminism, African American Literature, Female Agency, Cultural Identity.*

Introduction

African American literature has long served as a site for examining the complexities of racial oppression and the strategies of resistance developed by marginalized communities. Within this literary tradition, Toni Morrison's novels occupy a distinctive place due to their deep engagement with history, memory, and the psychological effects of systemic violence. Morrison's work consistently interrogates the structures that shape Black life in America, particularly the intersecting forces of racism, sexism and economic marginalization. However, rather than portraying resistance solely through explicit acts of rebellion, Morrison often explores quieter forms of opposition that emerge through emotional resilience, personal decision-making and narrative memory.

The concept of silent resistance becomes particularly relevant in the context of Black women's experiences. Historically, Black women have confronted multiple systems of oppression that limited their opportunities for

public protest or political visibility. In such circumstances, resistance frequently took more subtle forms, such as acts of self-definition, refusal to internalize dominant ideologies, or the preservation of communal memory. Morrison's novels capture these nuanced forms of resistance by focusing on the interior lives of her characters and the everyday choices through which they challenge oppressive structures.

In *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, and *Beloved*, Morrison constructs narratives in which resistance is embedded in ordinary actions rather than dramatic revolutions. Characters struggle with internal conflicts, cultural expectations and traumatic histories, yet within these struggles, they develop strategies of survival that undermine the ideological foundations of oppression. Through these portrayals, Morrison demonstrates that resistance can exist within silence, memory and emotional endurance.

Silent Resistance in *The Bluest Eye*

In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison presents a devastating critique of racialized beauty standards and the destructive effects of internalized racism. The novel follows Pecola Breedlove, a young Black girl who becomes convinced that possessing blue eyes will make her beautiful and loved by others. Pecola's desire for blue eyes reflects the pervasive influence of white cultural ideals that equate beauty with whiteness and render Blackness invisible or undesirable. Throughout the novel, Morrison reveals how these standards infiltrate the consciousness of Black communities, shaping the ways individuals perceive themselves and others.

While Pecola ultimately succumbs to these oppressive ideologies, Morrison introduces Claudia MacTeer as a figure who embodies a different response to dominant beauty standards. Unlike other children who admire white dolls and movie stars, Claudia instinctively rejects these symbols of whiteness. When she receives a white doll as a gift, she destroys it in an attempt to understand why it is considered beautiful. This action represents a subtle yet significant act of resistance. Claudia's refusal to accept the doll's supposed beauty challenges the cultural norms that elevate whiteness while marginalizing Black identity.

Claudia's resistance is not expressed through political language or organized activism; rather, it emerges from an intuitive rejection of imposed values. Her childhood anger toward the doll reflects a deeper questioning of the social structures that define beauty and worth. Moreover, Claudia's role as the adult narrator of Pecola's story transforms memory into a form of resistance. By recounting the events that led to Pecola's downfall, she exposes the societal forces responsible for her suffering. The act of remembering and narrating Pecola's story prevents her tragedy from being forgotten or dismissed, thereby resisting the cultural silence surrounding the experiences of marginalized individuals.

Silent Resistance in *Sula*

In *Sula*, Morrison explores themes of individuality, friendship, and social conformity within the Black community of the Bottom. The novel centres on the relationship between Sula Peace and Nel Wright, two women whose lives reflect different responses to societal expectations. Through their contrasting choices, Morrison examines the tensions between communal belonging and personal freedom.

Sula Peace emerges as one of Morrison's most radical characters precisely because she refuses to conform to the traditional roles assigned to women. Within the social structure of the Bottom, women are expected to marry, raise children, and prioritize the stability of the community. Sula rejects these expectations, choosing instead a life defined by

independence and personal exploration. She refuses marriage, engages in relationships without commitment and travels beyond the boundaries of her hometown. As a result, the community perceives her as immoral and threatening.

Yet Sula's actions represent a powerful form of silent resistance. She does not organize a rebellion against the community nor does she attempt to persuade others to adopt her lifestyle. Instead, her resistance lies in her simple refusal to live according to the rules imposed upon her. By asserting her right to define her own life, Sula challenges the patriarchal norms that restrict women's autonomy.

Nel Wright, in contrast, initially embraces the conventional path of marriage and domesticity. However, after her husband abandons her and Sula dies, Nel undergoes a moment of profound realization about the limitations that shaped her life. She recognizes that her identity had been constrained by societal expectations and that her friendship with Sula represented a lost possibility for freedom. Nel's awakening illustrates another form of silent resistance, an internal recognition of suppressed desires and the reclaiming of emotional autonomy.

Silent Resistance in *Beloved*

Among Morrison's works, *Beloved* offers perhaps the most complex exploration of resistance in the context of slavery's historical trauma. The novel follows Sethe, a formerly enslaved woman who struggles to rebuild her life after escaping from the plantation known as Sweet Home. However, the past continues to haunt her, both figuratively and literally, through the presence of Beloved, the ghost of her deceased daughter.

The central event of the novel, Sethe's decision to kill her child rather than allow her to be returned to slavery, represents an extreme yet deeply symbolic act of resistance. Within the institution of slavery, enslaved mothers were denied authority over their own children, who could be sold or abused without consequence. Sethe's decision, though tragic, asserts a form of maternal agency within a system designed to strip her of humanity. By choosing death over enslavement for her child, Sethe refuses to allow the institution of slavery to determine her child's fate.

Beyond this dramatic act, Morrison portrays other forms of silent resistance through the preservation of memory and communal solidarity. The characters in *Beloved* repeatedly confront the memories of slavery that society attempts to suppress. Through storytelling and recollection, they resist the erasure of historical trauma. The community of women who gather to exorcise Beloved from Sethe's home also demonstrates the power of collective healing. Their actions reflect the importance of communal support in overcoming the psychological legacy of slavery.

Theoretical Perspectives on Silent Resistance

Understanding silent resistance in the novels of Toni Morrison requires engagement with several important theoretical frameworks that examine power, identity and the lived experiences of marginalized communities. Morrison's fiction does not simply narrate stories of oppression; it also interrogates the subtle ways individuals resist dominant ideologies within everyday life. The concept of silent resistance can therefore be illuminated through perspectives drawn from Black feminist theory, postcolonial theory, and theories of power and discourse. These frameworks help explain how Morrison's characters resist systems of racial and gender domination through internal consciousness, cultural memory and personal agency.

Black feminist theory provides one of the most significant interpretive lenses for examining Morrison's representation of resistance. Scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins and bell hooks argue that Black women's experiences cannot be understood through frameworks that separate race, gender and class. Instead, these structures of oppression intersect and shape everyday realities. Within such contexts, resistance often emerges through forms that are not always visible within dominant historical narratives. Collins emphasizes that Black women develop "subjugated knowledge" through lived experience, meaning that their understanding of oppression and survival becomes itself a form of resistance. Morrison's female characters embody this idea by resisting dominant cultural narratives through everyday acts of self-definition. For instance, Claudia's rejection of white beauty ideals in *The Bluest Eye* demonstrates how marginalized individuals can challenge oppressive ideologies even in childhood. Her refusal to admire white dolls represents an early recognition of how racial hierarchies operate within cultural representations. Through Claudia's perspective, Morrison illustrates how resistance begins with the refusal to internalize dominant definitions of beauty and worth.

Black feminist thought also highlights the significance of community and storytelling as forms of resistance. bell hooks argues that marginalized communities often preserve their identities through shared narratives and collective memory. Morrison incorporates this idea throughout her novels by presenting storytelling as a powerful means of reclaiming suppressed histories. In many ways, the narrative structure of Morrison's fiction itself becomes an act of resistance. By centring Black women's voices and experiences, Morrison challenges literary traditions that have historically marginalized or silenced them. Her novels insist on the importance of remembering experiences that mainstream historical narratives have attempted to erase.

Postcolonial theory further deepens the understanding of silent resistance in Morrison's work by examining how colonial systems of power shape cultural identities. Scholars such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi K. Bhabha have argued that marginalized subjects often resist domination through subtle cultural practices rather than confrontation. Spivak's concept of the "subaltern" highlights how oppressed individuals are frequently denied a voice within dominant discourse. Morrison's novels respond to this condition by creating narrative spaces in which marginalized voices can speak and be heard. Characters who appear socially powerless often express resistance through interior consciousness, memory and emotional resilience.

In *Sula*, for example, the character of Sula Peace resists the social expectations of her community not by organizing political protest but by refusing to conform to prescribed gender roles. Her rejection of marriage and domesticity disrupts the cultural norms that attempt to define women's identities through motherhood and family stability. Postcolonial theory helps explain how such acts of nonconformity challenge hegemonic social structures. According to Bhabha, resistance often occurs in the "interstitial spaces" where individuals negotiate between dominant expectations and personal identity. Sula's life represents such a space of negotiation, where her refusal to conform becomes a quiet yet powerful challenge to patriarchal authority.

Another important theoretical framework for understanding silent resistance in Morrison's fiction comes from the work of Michel Foucault, whose ideas about power and resistance have significantly influenced contemporary cultural theory. Foucault argues that power is not concentrated solely within institutions such as governments or legal systems; rather, it operates through everyday social practices and cultural norms. Because power functions in diffuse and subtle ways, resistance must also occur at multiple levels within society. Acts of resistance may therefore appear small, localized or even invisible.

This perspective is particularly useful when examining Morrison's portrayal of characters who challenge oppressive systems through personal choices rather than collective rebellion. In *Beloved*, Sethe's decision to kill her child rather than allow her to be returned to slavery represents a profound assertion of agency within a system designed to strip enslaved individuals of autonomy. While this act is morally complex, it demonstrates how resistance can emerge from deeply personal motivations shaped by the trauma of historical oppression. Sethe's refusal to allow slavery to claim her child reflects the ways individuals resist

systems of domination even when their options are severely limited.

Foucault's theory also highlights the role of discourse and memory in shaping power relations. In Morrison's novels, the act of remembering becomes a crucial form of resistance against historical erasure. Characters repeatedly confront the suppressed memories of slavery, racism and communal trauma. By narrating these experiences, Morrison challenges dominant historical narratives that attempt to minimize or ignore the violence inflicted upon Black communities. Memory, therefore, functions as a political and cultural act that preserves histories often excluded from official records.

Taken together, these theoretical perspectives reveal that silent resistance in Morrison's fiction operates across multiple dimensions, psychological, cultural and historical. Black feminist theory emphasizes the importance of lived experience and communal knowledge in shaping resistance, while postcolonial theory highlights the subtle strategies through which marginalized individuals challenge dominant ideologies. Foucault's analysis of power further demonstrates how resistance can occur within everyday practices and personal decisions.

Through these theoretical frameworks, Morrison's novels can be understood as complex explorations of how marginalized individuals navigate oppressive systems while preserving their humanity. Silent resistance in her work does not necessarily overthrow structures of power immediately; instead, it gradually destabilizes them by asserting alternative forms of identity, memory and agency. Morrison's narratives thus reveal that even the quietest acts of defiance possess transformative potential, challenging the ideological foundations of racial and gender oppression while affirming the resilience of Black women's experiences.

Morrison's Reimagining of Resistance

In the fiction of Toni Morrison, resistance is not limited to overt acts of rebellion or political confrontation; instead, it is often embedded within the intimate spaces of everyday life, memory and personal agency. Morrison reimagines resistance by shifting attention away from dramatic revolutions and toward the quieter forms of defiance through which marginalized individuals assert their humanity within oppressive social structures. Her novels challenge conventional understandings of resistance by illustrating how acts of survival, self-definition and emotional resilience can function as powerful responses to systems of racial and gender domination. In works such as *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula* and *Beloved*, Morrison portrays characters who resist oppression not through organized

movements but through subtle gestures that challenge the ideological foundations of racism and patriarchy.

One of the central ways Morrison redefines resistance is through the rejection of internalized oppression. In many of her narratives, characters confront cultural systems that attempt to impose negative identities upon them. Morrison demonstrates that resisting these imposed identities requires a psychological struggle that occurs within the individual consciousness. For instance, characters who question dominant beauty standards, gender roles or social expectations reveal how resistance can begin with an internal refusal to accept oppressive definitions of selfhood. By depicting such struggles, Morrison emphasizes that resistance is not always visible or publicly acknowledged; rather, it may emerge through the gradual development of self-awareness and critical consciousness.

Another significant aspect of Morrison's reimagining of resistance lies in her emphasis on memory and storytelling. Morrison's narratives repeatedly return to the histories of slavery, racial violence, and communal trauma that shape the lives of African American communities. Rather than presenting history as a distant or closed chapter, Morrison portrays it as a living force that continues to influence the present. Through the act of remembering and narrating these experiences, her characters resist the cultural amnesia that often surrounds the history of oppression. Storytelling becomes a method of reclaiming voices that have been marginalized or erased from official historical narratives. In this way, Morrison transforms narrative itself into a form of resistance, allowing suppressed histories to be acknowledged and preserved.

Morrison also reimagines resistance through the exploration of female autonomy and identity. Many of her female characters challenge patriarchal structures by asserting control over their own lives and choices. These acts of defiance may appear subtle or unconventional, yet they disrupt the rigid social expectations imposed upon women. By portraying women who question traditional roles or pursue independence, Morrison exposes the limitations of social systems that attempt to regulate female behaviour. Such portrayals highlight the ways in which resistance can occur through personal decisions that redefine the boundaries of acceptable identity and agency.

Equally important in Morrison's vision of resistance is the role of community. While individual acts of defiance are significant, Morrison frequently emphasizes the importance of collective support and shared memory in confronting oppression. Communities within her novels often serve as spaces where marginalized individuals find strength, healing, and affirmation. Through communal rituals, storytelling and solidarity, characters create networks of

resistance that challenge the isolation produced by oppressive systems. These collective forms of resistance demonstrate that survival is not solely an individual achievement but a shared cultural process that depends upon relationships and mutual care.

Ultimately, Morrison's reimagining of resistance reveals that defiance does not always appear in dramatic or revolutionary forms. Instead, resistance can be found in the persistence of identity, the preservation of memory, and the assertion of dignity within environments designed to suppress them. By focusing on these quieter forms of resistance, Morrison expands the conceptual boundaries of what resistance means and how it operates. Her narratives suggest that the struggle against oppression is not limited to moments of public protest but is also carried forward through everyday acts of resilience that sustain cultural identity and human dignity across generations.

Conclusion

Through *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula* and *Beloved*, Toni Morrison offers a profound reimagining of resistance within African American literature. Rather than focusing exclusively on overt political rebellion, Morrison reveals the significance of silent resistance, those subtle acts of defiance that occur within the private spheres of emotion, memory and personal choice. Characters such as Claudia MacTeer, Sula Peace, Nel Wright and Sethe challenge oppressive systems not through public protest but through their refusal to accept the identities imposed upon them.

Claudia's rejection of white beauty ideals, Sula's defiance of patriarchal expectations, Nel's internal awakening, and Sethe's assertion of maternal agency all illustrate how resistance can emerge within everyday life. These acts may appear quiet or invisible, yet they disrupt the ideological structures that sustain racial and gender oppression. Morrison's portrayal of silent resistance underscores the resilience of Black women as they navigate complex power systems while striving to preserve their dignity and identity.

By highlighting these intimate forms of defiance, Morrison expands the meaning of resistance itself. Her novels demonstrate that survival, memory and self-definition are powerful acts that challenge oppressive histories and affirm the enduring strength of marginalized voices.

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From Anthropocentrism to Ecological Relationality in Anuradha Roy's 'The Folded Earth'

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Abstract— This paper analyses Anuradha Roy's *The Folded Earth* through the critical framework of environmental humanities, delineating a conceptual transition from anthropocentrism to ecological relationality. The novel, set in the fragile yet resilient landscape of the Himalayas, shows how human lives are connected to nonhuman nature, challenging the idea that nature is merely a backdrop to human drama. The study contends that by examining the protagonist Maya's emotional isolation, grief and her gradual adaptation to her environment, Roy redefines human subjectivity as relational rather than dominant. The mountains, forests, rivers and animals are not merely aesthetic phenomena; they are also active forces that shape memory, loss, healing and moral awareness. Using eco-critical ideas, the paper shows how the text breaks down binaries such as human/nature, culture/wilderness and control/vulnerability. Roy's story implies that humility, coexistence and awareness of ecological interdependence are necessary for survival and meaning. *The Folded Earth* depicts environmental fragility alongside individual trauma, articulating an alternative ecological consciousness that opposes exploitative modernity and emphasises care, reciprocity and responsibility. The novel enhances contemporary Indian eco-literature by promoting a relational ethics that connects human existence to the rhythms and constraints of the natural world.



Keywords— Anthropocentrism, Ecological Relationality, Eco-criticism, Himalayan Landscape.

Anuradha Roy is a well-known Indian novelist, editor and publisher. People love her writing because it is both poetic and complex. She was born in Kolkata and went to school in Hyderabad. She studied English literature at Presidency College in Kolkata and then at the University of Cambridge. Roy's fiction consistently explores themes of identity, memory, social hierarchies and notably, the changing relationship between humans and the natural world. Her novels often question anthropocentric worldviews, showing how people's desires, control and moral choices affect and often change the places they inhabit. The DSC Prize for South Asian Literature went to *Sleeping on Jupiter* in 2016 and the Tata Literature Live! award went to *All the Lives We Never Lived*. The book won the Book of the Year Award in 2018 and was longlisted for the Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction. Roy's work has

been translated into many languages and is known for moving beyond stories that focus on people to ones that highlight the interconnectedness of ecosystems. This challenges the idea of human dominance and calls for a more relational view of nature.

Anthropocentrism is a human-centred philosophical viewpoint that asserts humans as the primary holders of value in the universe, regarding non-human creatures, plants and ecosystems as resources for human exploitation. Roy critiques anthropocentric ideologies in her novel *The Folded Earth* by emphasising environmental degradation in the fragile Himalayan landscape, demonstrating how human political encroachment and infrastructure development hinder a biocentric, ecologically balanced existence. An illustrative example of this is portrayed in the novel through the character Chauhan, the

administrator of Ranikhet, in the sentence, "He would...off to inspect the site of a new amusement park, his flagship project, for which a swathe of oak forest was being cleared. It was pointless saying to tourists...Ranikhet was to have sight" (Roy 161). This scenario illustrates the aggressive invasion of nature disguised as development, when an untouched oak woodland, symbolising ecological continuity and cultural heritage, is sacrificed for a recreational venture, an amusement park. This narrative instance of deforestation in the novel closely parallels the historical Chipko Movement of the 1970s, a prominent environmental protest led by rural women in Uttarakhand who physically protected trees from felling.

Roy adopted the image of a literary eco-activist to denounce the erosion of ecological ethics, illustrating how capitalism and patriarchal aspirations for growth compromise the fundamental relationship between people and the environment. In commemoration of the Chipko movement, her novel reaffirms literature as a powerful instrument for advancing environmental justice and eco-centric ideas. Roy exposes the intrinsic arrogance of anthropocentrism and social hierarchies in *The Folded Earth* through a scene in which nonhuman life is denigrated for intruding upon a human-defined domain of privilege. A hotel manager at Asphen Lodge arranged a gathering on the hillside, a region historically occupied by pastoral animals and local herders, attended by high-ranking bureaucrats, generals and brigadiers. During the party's disruption caused by a herd of animals inadvertently entering due to the caretaker Puran's negligence, Mr Chauhan, the administrator of Ranikhet, violently declared, "Enough!" he shouted towards Puran...lock you up...with your damned cows and Goats...I will tackle this with immediate effect" (Roy 59), thereafter erecting a signboard that prohibits cattle, therefore symbolically designating non-human lifeforms as intruders in an ecological realm that is now designated as a domain exclusively for human use. Chauhan's outburst and the imposition of spatial boundaries on animals exemplify the entrenched belief in human superiority, resonating with Lori Gruen's epistemological framework of anthropocentrism in *Critical Terms for Animal Studies*: "Anthropocentrism is expressed by individuals in particular acts or statements that indicate a chauvinist attitude to animals, such as 'animals are mindless,' but it also informs our epistemologies or what we think we know about animal 'min'" (Gruen 48).

This research utilises a qualitative, interpretative framework grounded in ecocriticism to examine the shift from anthropocentrism to ecological relationality in Roy's *The Folded Earth*. The study involves a comprehensive textual analysis of the work, focusing on narrative voice, character-environment interactions and representations of

the Himalayan landscape as an active, relational entity rather than a mere backdrop. The analytical framework is based on foundational ecocritical concepts, including interconnection, non-human agency and environmental ethics. The methodology selectively integrates postcolonial ecological theory to situate the text within the socio-cultural and geographical contexts of contemporary India. Secondary sources, including critical articles on ecocriticism and Roy's literature, are employed to augment the theoretical framework and contextual understanding. The study seeks to illustrate how the novel redefines human subjectivity as interconnected with, rather than dominant over, the natural world by integrating literary analysis with ecological theory.

Roy's *The Folded Earth* can be productively read as an ecocritical narrative that interrogates anthropocentric modes of thinking and advocates an ethics of ecological relationality. Set against the fragile Himalayan ecosystem of Ranikhet, the novel foregrounds the complex interdependence between human lives and the nonhuman world, exposing how environmental degradation, displacement and ethical erosion are outcomes of human-centred development. Rather than romanticising nature as a passive or healing force, Roy presents it as an active presence, vulnerable, responsive and increasingly silenced by modern interventions. In doing so, *The Folded Earth* aligns with the central concern of ecocriticism: the critique of nature's reduction to a utilitarian resource and the recovery of place-based ecological consciousness.

Maya's arrival in Ranikhet after the death of her husband, Michael, marks the novel's initial movement away from an urban, anthropocentric environment toward a landscape governed by natural rhythms. Michael's death during a trek to Roopkund destabilises the illusion of human mastery over nature. Although deeply attached to the mountains, Michael approaches them through endurance and conquest, assumptions that ultimately prove fatal. His death in a snowstorm underscores what Lawrence Buell terms the "environmental unconscious," the failure to recognise nature as an autonomous force operating beyond human intention (22). Nature here is not hostile; it simply refuses to conform to human desire. Maya's subsequent life in Ranikhet illustrates a gradual reorientation toward ecological embeddedness. Her work at the church-run school and later at the jam-making unit reflects a sustainable engagement with the local environment. The factory transforms local fruit into economic sustenance without depleting the land, exemplifying an ecocritical model of coexistence rather than extraction. Such integration of labour and landscape resists anthropocentric capitalism, which, as Timothy Morton argues, treats nature as an "external object" rather than an interconnected system (55).

Charu's character deepens the novel's ecocritical dimension through her intimate, embodied relationship with the mountains. Her knowledge of forests, cattle and weather patterns is experiential rather than institutional, challenging dominant epistemologies that privilege formal education over ecological literacy. Charu's discomfort in the city further reinforces Roy's critique of urban modernity. The city assaults her senses with pollution and confinement: it "smelled of putrid things, filthy drains, sewage, burning rubber and smoke from factories" (Roy 214). The sky, once expansive and blue, appears "slate-grey," obstructed by concrete and smoke (214). This sensory estrangement exemplifies ecocriticism's concern with how industrial spaces sever humans from meaningful contact with the natural world.

Ama, Charu's grandmother, represents an older ecological consciousness rooted in survival, care and moral accountability. Although illiterate, Ama demonstrates a profound respect for animals and the land, coupled with an uncompromising ethical stance regarding human violence. Her decision to expel her abusive son reflects a moral ecology in which destructive behaviour, toward humans or nonhumans, is intolerable. Roy does not idealise Ama; her reliance on superstition coexists with her ecological awareness, suggesting that traditional knowledge systems are complex and internally contradictory. This portrayal resonates with Greg Garrard's argument that ecocriticism must resist simplistic binaries of "primitive harmony" versus "modern destruction" (16).

The most explicit ecocritical voice of the novel emerges through Diwan Sahib, whose memories function as a record of ecological loss. He recalls a time when forests were alive with animals and human presence was minimal. His lament that the forest has become "a park... a resource, a factory" exposes the anthropocentric language that legitimises ecological violence (Roy 176). The transformation of forests into economic units exemplifies what Ramachandra Guha describes as the displacement of subsistence ecologies by state-driven development (98). Diwan Sahib's grief is not nostalgic but ethical; he recognises that modernisation has severed reciprocal relationships between humans and the land.

This ecological disruption intensifies with the arrival of Mr Chauhan, whose ambition to turn Ranikhet into the "Switzerland of India" reflects a postcolonial continuation of colonial environmental aesthetics (Roy 50). Roads, benches and tourist infrastructure are imposed without regard for local ecology or community needs. Animals that once roamed freely are expelled and green spaces are replaced by concrete. Such "development" reinforces anthropocentrism by prioritising visual order and

economic gain over ecological balance. Veer functions as a human embodiment of anthropocentric exploitation. As a professional climber and entrepreneur, he treats the mountains as commodities and opportunities for profit. His abandonment of Michael during the fatal trek and his manipulation of Diwan Sahib reveal a worldview devoid of ecological or ethical responsibility. Veer's actions illustrate Val Plumwood's critique of mastery, where nature and vulnerable lives are reduced to expendable means (52).

The political violence depicted during the election period further extends the novel's ecocritical framework. The attempted assault on Beena, a deaf-mute girl, parallels the violation of the land by political spectacle and pollution. Just as nature is exploited without consent, marginalised bodies are subjected to violence and silencing. Roy thus demonstrates that anthropocentrism operates across domains, normalising domination wherever vulnerability exists. By the end of the novel, ecological and human displacement converge. Diwan Sahib dies, Charu leaves the mountains and Ama retreats deeper into isolation. Maya remains a witness to irreversible change. Diwan Sahib's admission, "They have no voices any longer," captures the devastating silence imposed on the natural world by unchecked development (Roy 178). The loss of animal calls symbolises not only environmental degradation but the erosion of ethical listening.

The novel raises a disturbing question about what it really means to live ethically in an environment that is not very stable. The mountains in *The Folded Earth* are not shown as perfect or easy to understand; instead, they are changeable, resistant and often indifferent to what people want. This tumultuous relationship makes it hard to simply celebrate being part of the environment. Instead, it emphasises a state of limited understanding and control. This picture makes you think about how being responsible for the environment might mean being aware and moderate instead of controlling or preserving it. The story thus suggests an ecological ethic based on humility, in which humanity recognises its dependence on uncontrollable forces.

There is a lot of tension between individual consciousness and systemic authority. It seems like acts of kindness, being aware of the environment and being aware of the environment are important but not enough when compared to the forces of bureaucratic planning, tourism and political aspirations. Land changes happen slowly and people often use language about improvement and organisation to justify them, making it hard to stay against them. This conflict shows that environmental damage does not always show up as obvious destruction. Instead, it can happen slowly over time, making degradation seem normal.

The depiction of environmental change as gradual and cumulative challenges simplistic perceptions of ecological disaster and highlights the emotional fatigue linked to extended ecological decline.

The novel also prompts reflection on displacement as an ecological as well as emotional condition. Leaving the mountains is not merely a physical move; it also signifies that long-lasting ties between people and their environment have been broken. The resulting sense of alienation is marked by changes in how people perceive their senses, such as differences in air, sound and space that change how they see themselves and the world around them. These examples show how important memory and emotion are for understanding the environment. They also show that environmental damage is felt just as strongly through absence and silence as it is through visible harm. The story makes readers see ecological problems as something that affects them personally, not just as an abstract environmental problem.

This study emphasises *The Folded Earth* as a crucial ecocritical work that challenges anthropocentric interpretations of Indian hill narratives. By redirecting focus from anthropocentric loss to the incremental silencing of the Himalayan environment, the paper effectively illustrates how Roy transforms nature from a mere picturesque setting into an ethically significant entity. The analysis transcends mere descriptive ecofeminist analogies and situates the novel within broader ecocritical discussions of commodification, development and ecological displacement. This pivotal stance reinforces the argument by demonstrating that environmental degradation in the novel is not incidental but fundamentally integrated within political, economic and cultural systems that prioritise human ambition over ecological equilibrium.

A significant feature of the study is its interpretation of location as a dynamic agent rather than a static environment. This study analyses Ranikhet as a contested ecological place influenced by tourism, bureaucracy and capitalist aspirations, aligning Roy's story with ecocriticism's focus on spatial ethics and environmental justice. The author persuasively contends that anthropocentrism in the novel is evident not only in the explicit exploitation of land but also in nuanced language and administrative procedures that recharacterise woods as resources and mountains as commodifiable experiences. This discovery enables the research to connect literary analysis with practical environmental discourse, underscoring the significance of ecocriticism in modern Indian literature.

Nonetheless, the study also presents opportunities for additional essential development. Although it adeptly

delineates the shift from anthropocentrism to ecological relationality, a more profound exploration of indigenous environmental epistemologies pertinent to the Himalayan region could enhance the thesis. Furthermore, the analysis should be augmented by contextualising Roy's work among other Indian ecocritical writings to emphasise its uniqueness within the national literary canon. Nevertheless, the research offers a nuanced, morally informed interpretation of *The Folded Earth*, illustrating how Roy's narrative compels readers to reevaluate their ecological responsibilities amid a rapidly escalating environmental crisis.

CONCLUSION

Therefore, *The Folded Earth* articulates a distinctly ecocritical vision that challenges anthropocentrism and advocates ecological relationality. Roy does not propose a return to a pristine past; instead, she urges an ethical reimagining of coexistence grounded in humility, attentiveness and restraint. By foregrounding place, memory and interdependence, the novel affirms ecocriticism's central claim: that human survival is inseparable from the survival of the more-than-human world.

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Unveiling Caste Discrimination in Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan*

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Abstract— *Omprakash Valmiki's autobiography, Joothan, is a powerful narrative that exposes the deep scars of caste discrimination in Indian society. This article aims to unveil these scars by highlighting the theme of caste discrimination as portrayed in Joothan. This study argues that Joothan functions not only as a personal memoir but also as a socio-political testimony that challenges caste-based injustice and calls for social equality.*

Keywords— *Caste discrimination, public humiliation, poverty, social exclusion, marginalisation*



Introduction

Dalit literature is a significant Indian literary movement that exposes caste oppression and amplifies the voices of marginalized Dalit communities. Emerging prominently in the mid-20th century, it draws inspiration from social reformers like Phule, Ambedkar and Narayana Guru, as well as the Dalit Panthers movement. Spanning multiple Indian languages, it reflects both individual and collective experiences of injustice. Women Dalit writers such as Bama and Urmila Pawar further expanded the discourse by highlighting gendered oppression within caste.

Omprakash Valmiki, one of the foremost Dalit writers in Hindi, depicted the brutal realities of caste discrimination in works like *Joothan*, *Salaam* and *Guspethiye*. His autobiography *Joothan* remains a landmark text, chronicling the humiliation, poverty and systemic barriers faced by Dalits. This article explores Valmiki's narrative to understand how caste shape's identity and examines the broader implications of caste-based marginalization for social justice in contemporary India.

Caste Discrimination in *Joothan*:

Caste-based Discrimination highlights the gap between society's professed values of equality and the harsh

realities faced by marginalized groups. Omprakash Valmiki, in his autobiography *Joothan* chronicles his experiences as a Dalit, the endless struggles faced by him to attain the basic needs, and how he managed to become a respectful men accepted by society. He beautifully lays down the instances of hostility faced by him and his society due to discrimination.

Valmiki describes the domination of Tagas over Chuhra. Tagas, a society composed of high-class men and Chuhra were the untouchables. The author belonged to the marginalized community, Chuhra. Chuhra lived in a filthy, unhygienic, unsanitary and a contaminated area. On the other hand, Taga people lived cozily, getting their works done by the untouchables. Chuhra people were always committed to heavy labour in the field. The most tormenting part for Chuhra was not the labour but the attitude towards them by Tagas. Despite the heavy labour, they were always paid meagre amount or sometimes they work without pay. The upper-class people did all sort of things to tear apart the basic respect an individual holds. Chuhra were always summoned by their caste name. "If a person were older than we were, then he would call us OE, Chuhra" (*Joothan* 2). Name is considered as an identity of an individual, by summoning caste names their identity is lost. This

derogatory practice is picturized in Mulk Raj Anand's work *Untouchable*. The author beautifully presents the practice of upper class towards the downtrodden. "Posh Posh, the sweeper is coming." (Anand 45).

Omprakash Valmiki, in *Joothan* sheds light on how, in his time, even the educational institutions were bound by the inhumane practice of caste-based discrimination. The role of teachers has indeed transformed his life, but not on a positive side. Teachers during his period were just educated men with polluted minds, they never really grasped the essence of being civilized. Valmiki's guru humiliated him in all possible ways as he was not able to withstand a Dalit being educated. "Take him away from here. The Chuhra wants him educated. Go, go otherwise I'll have your bones broken" (*Joothan* 7).

Though the practice of the term untouchability is scorned nowadays, it was a normal and acceptable practice during the days of Omprakash Valmiki. It echoed through every nook and corner, be it an educational setting or a place of worship. The untouchables weren't allowed to drink water from the glass, that was kept as a common school utility. If they were thirsty, they would cup their hands and water will be poured into them from a height. (*Joothan* 19).

The concept of discriminating people based on their castes prevailed not only among the upper-class society, but by every individual whose houses were away from the fences of the untouchables. Omprakash faced all levels of discrimination imposed by every sect of people. During his school days, he approached a dhobi to iron his wrinkled clothes for school. But without any hesitation, the dhobi sternly denied his plea by declaring that his ironing tool was reserved only for the upper-class people, extending his service to Omprakash would cost him his daily livelihood. "We do not wash the clothes of Chuhra-chamaras. If we iron them, the Tagas won't get their clothes washed by us" (*Joothan* 21).

Suffering the torments and humiliation in silence, inflicted by Tagas was an everyday life of an outcast. Consistently, Chuhras were humiliated by part of tagas, headmaster of school, and even by common people who were just above their caste. There was no place for prestige or honour in their lives. The basic human rights were rightfully and most cruelly removed from the lives of the outcasts. They were merely used for jobs which were considered as spiteful and disgusting. The tagas insulted every single habit or custom followed by the Chuhras, insulting them for having pork as their staple food and so on. "Abey Chuhre ka, you eat pork" (*Joothan* 21). The laughter which continues this statement tears apart every speck of respect that an outcast carries.

The upper caste offers leftover foods to Chuhras when there is a chance of the food going to waste. The leftovers are a part and parcel of Chuhras's living. Their three meals of the day and sometimes even the best food offered to them were leftover rotis and rice. The Chuhra has to cup his hand while food was thrown into it from a height. Even this food is offered in a very small quantity, if anyone dares to ask for some more, they are publicly humiliated. "You are taking a basketful of Joothan and on top of that you want food for your children? Don't forget your place, Chuhri" (*Joothan* 13).

The most heart-breaking moment is when one realises that even the auspicious wedding ceremony in the Chuhra community is incomplete without an offering from the Tagas. The Tagas used to humiliate the groom party claiming it as the excessive desire of Chuhras to loot hefty amount from the Tagas. "The stomach of these Chuhras are never filled" (*Joothan* 37). Omprakash Valmiki has picturized the ill state of downtrodden people for whom even the food is seen as a luxury aspect rather than a necessity.

The term respect is tarnished completely and is totally discarded from the dictionary of Chuhras. The Tagas would utilise the labour of Chuhras for their convenience as if it is their birth right. The cruellest part is that they never get paid for these works and on top of that they were summoned by derogatory terms and titles. "Chuhra has to work without pay for the Tagas and whenever, one worked the employee's dead cattle was a part of his job" (*Joothan* 40). Valmiki depicted Chuhras in the novel *Joothan* as play toys to satisfy the pranks, bullies and torments of upper-class people which was evident through the incident where the police men used to arrest men from Chuhra Basti for no valuable reason.

Clothing is considered as a basic human need. The way one dresses has been categorized under the labels of caste, class and other barbaric customs. If a Dalit happens to wear a well stitched cloth, it is considered as an arrogant, prideful and most disrespectful attitude. One of the authors friends who belongs to Chuhra Basti has spent most of his childhood in town, as a result wears fancy clothes in Basti all the time. This irritated the upper-class people to the extreme. "Teachers and students disliked him for that. How dare he be superior to them? He was born in a Chuhra home" (*Joothan* 57).

The author and his friend are sent on some errands to a Taga's house. Unaware of their caste, the Taga has treated them with utmost hospitality. When the author is bombarded with a sudden question about the caste, the atmosphere has changed to a total blue. The laughter, warmth and formalities which they experienced a minute

before has crushed into uncompletable pieces. "Obscenities began to rain from the elder's mouth. His eyes were fierce and his skinny body was harbouring the devil" (*Joothan* 60).

The efforts of great figures like Ambedkar which included advocating for constitutional reforms to abolish untouchability, bore fruit over a long period. During this period, Dalits continued to live with endless taunts, meaningless insults and much more. This kind of life has made them numb to realise any kind of improvements or efforts. The Dalits were kept so out of the society that, they never knew about the value and importance of independence, vote of individual and the idea of democracy.

Most people did not understand the true meaning of democracy. They couldn't grasp the importance of stuffing a piece of paper in the ballot box. How innocent were those people, totally uncomprehending of the meaning or value of independence. (*Joothan* 86)

The idea of educating a Dalit is often seen as a foolish thing. Valmiki's father faced endless criticisms for his decision to give Valmiki a proper education. A marginalised individual is considered dumb or is perceived as only a loser. If one tries to outsmart the Tagas or tend to show improvement in his skills, the evil veil of caste strangles him like a cobra tied around neck. When Valmiki, questions his teacher about his doubt, his teacher bluntly turns him down by mocking his caste name. "Look at this Chuhra pretending to be a brahmin" (*Joothan* 71).

Even after gaining education, a job and fame as a writer, Valmiki could not escape caste discrimination. His own family abandoned him for refusing to adopt a new, caste-free surname. His friends never invited him to gatherings, though sanitation workers often did. "That's what will happen if you keep using Valmiki. You will be seen as a sanitation employee" (*Joothan* 150). Dalit writers, scholars, and activists all struggled with inner conflict and fear.

The writers, intellectuals and activists in the Dalit movement have to struggle constantly with their inner conflicts. There is so much fear lurking in the dark recesses of the heart that prevent us from leading normal lives. (*Joothan* 147)

Even though people were educated about the foolishness of caste, the old ideology was still deeply rooted in their behaviour.

In *Joothan*, Valmiki shows how people never let him forget his caste. "The surname of yours will drastically blemish your prestige one day" (*Joothan* 151). This proves

that caste was not only practiced but consumed in such large portions that it became part of people's very identity and behaviour. Caste follows a person from birth, even though no one chooses where they are born.

Conclusion

Caste discrimination in India, rooted in ancient texts like the Rigveda and Manu smriti, continues to marginalize Dalits, Adivasis and OBCs by restricting access to education, employment and social equality. This article examines Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan*, where his personal suffering represents the collective trauma of millions subjected to untouchability. Valmiki exposes the violence, humiliation and psychological harm caused by caste, challenging dominant Brahminical narratives that suppress Dalit voices. The autobiography reveals how caste dehumanizes individuals both materially and emotionally, with *Joothan* symbolizing the community's enforced degradation. The research highlights the urgency of addressing caste-based injustice through policy reform, inclusive education and social awareness. Valmiki's narrative translates Ambedkar's philosophy into lived experience, showing how caste persists despite modern progress.

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Nāṭyaçāstra: An Indigenous Knowledge System and a Model for Modern Theatre Performances

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Abstract— Performance is the key factor of the play. In the magnus opus of the performance, the Nāṭyaçāstra, different aspects of the play are analyzed in detail. Nāṭyaçāstra is a perfect example of Indian indigenous knowledge system. Even though it is dealing with the fifth veda, i.e. Natya, such a comprehensive analysis of performance can't be seen in the entire world. Structure of the play, stage, acting, properties are explained in detail in this book. Each play can be performed in many ways and every performance is a text. Each performance interprets text in its own way and a director can raise the play to a higher realm and transcend the limitations of a text. Two approaches are there for a play text- 'textual' and 'theatrical'. Both the approaches interpret text in different ways. While 'textual' approach gives emphasis on the analysis of the play text, theatrical approach gives emphasis to the technical elements of the play. These technical elements include acting, costume, make up and stage properties. Structure of the play is also very significant. Based on the structure of the play, play text is divided into different divisions. Bharata classifies the Rasa under eight categories (Ashtarasa) and gives the corresponding Bhava which gives rise to the rasa. These are known as Sthayi bhava or pervading stable emotion. This book, Nāṭyaçāstra, provides even minute observations on the ways of enjoying 'rasa', i.e., the ways of enjoying a play. This book Nāṭyaçāstra is a great contribution of Indian indigenous knowledge system. This paper is an analysis of Nāṭyaçāstra as an indigenous knowledge system and model for modern theatre performances.



Keywords— Performance, Structure, Natya, Rasa, Bhava.

Performance is an interpretation of the play. Each play can be performed in many ways and every performance is a text. Since human imagination is boundless, a number of varied performances are possible. Each performance interprets text in its own way and a director can raise the play to a higher realm and transcend the limitations of a text. Two approaches are there for a play text- 'textual' and 'theatrical'. Both the approaches interpret text in different ways. While 'textual' approach gives emphasis on the analysis of the play text, theatrical approach gives emphasis to the technical elements of the play. These technical elements include acting, costume, make up and stage properties. There are several opinions regarding the necessity of preference on any one of these areas. But the theoreticians are of different opinions in this case. Since both these areas are important for the play, an amalgamation

of both these elements becomes very important. Tutun Mukherjee's opinion regarding the "textual" and "theatrical" approaches is worth quoting in this regard:

It is obvious that while the 'literary approach' would insist on a 'written' text and confine itself to the thematic explorations of that text (as though the theme were not a product of performance!), the 'theatrical approach' would take the theatre productions as interpretations of the drama script even though they might or might not do justice to the spirit or the possibilities of the text. For the 'literary approach,' the dramatist 'controls the meaning;' for the 'theatrical approach,' the director and the performers have the ability to 'manipulate the meaning;' and so on. The theatre and drama researcher is expected to

deal with apparently dissimilar - although intimately correlated - types of textual material: one that is produced for theatre and another that is produced in theatre. (15)

Structure of a play is very important in its performance aspects. Structure of the play determines the pace and strength of the play. A play opens up before the spectators within a short span of time. Performers and directors are the medium of this. It is not a blueprint of action, but it is a necessary mechanism to shape the perception of audience. Structural coherence or unit is not a constraint but it is a basic driver of dramatic action, character development, engaging spectators and meaning creation. Structure gives the play unity and the division of a play text depends on the nature of structure. Structure is the basis of the experience of a spectator. It is an organizing principle and a dynamic narrative force. Structure is thus a narrative engine. It selects, arranges and places events in its respective places. Vijay Tendulkar observes: "In a performing art, the structure is not seen but *felt*. One can quote any number of instances where the performance of a play or an otherwise serious film could not consistently involve the audience and make a sharp impact in spite of many good points because of a faulty structure" (50). While analyzing the structure theories of *Nāṭyaṣāstra* assume supreme importance in the analysis of scope of performance in texts. M.Hiriyanna, the genius in Indian Aesthetics remarks,

That is, the creations of art must leave a moral influence on the spectator without his knowing that he is being so influenced. Though theoretically, the theme of art may be anything which has a basis in life, this additional requirement makes it necessary to restrict the scope of the artist's choice to the higher aspects of life. Otherwise, art not only ceases to exert any moral influence; it may turn out in the end to be a means of corrupting character and degrading ideals. (172)

Ravi Chaturvedi emphasizes that even the word 'performance' is not used by Bharata in his text, "Bharatamuni has discussed this transformation in detail. Interestingly, or may be amazing for some of the theorists, he doesn't use the word 'performance' in his entire book of 36 chapters. Rather, he very frequently and definitely uses the word 'prayog' or 'the experiment' for the act of playing" (7).

Nāṭyaṣāstra is considered as the *magnum opus* on dance and drama, Bharata's *Nāṭyaṣāstra* can be viewed as a major influence on the theatricality and the structure of plays. *Nāṭyaṣāstra* is the greatest contribution of Indian aesthetics and it provides a scientific as well as structured

analysis in the construction and performance of texts. Keith observes:

The work, which we have under the title *Bhārātīya Nāṭyaṣāstra*, is extremely badly preserved in the manuscript tradition, a fact due in part to the comparatively late date of any commentary upon it. We have only a few references to an exposition of the *Nāṭyaṣāstra* by Mātrgupta, a somewhat mysterious figure with a more or less legendary connection with Kālidāsa, with whom he has even identified. (290-91)

Nāṭyaṣāstra is a perfect example of Indian indigenous knowledge system, Even though it is dealing with the fifth veda, i.e. Natya, such a comprehensive analysis of performance can't be seen in the entire world. The period in which *Nāṭyaṣāstra* is formed is still a subject of debate. Majority of the scholars hold the opinion that *Nāṭyaṣāstra* is written during the early decades of Christian era. There are also views that the author Bharata is not a single person, but a group of people. Some have the opinion that the majority of the books were written by the disciples of Bharata. This great book contains thirty-six chapters and six thousand verses. There are also many doubts that books like *Bhārātāsutrā* or *Nātāṣāstrā* had already been there before the evolution of *Nāṭyaṣāstra*. Origin of *Nātaka*, construction of *Natyamandapa*, theory of *Rasa*, hand gestures, music, and use of percussion instruments, in short, everything related to *Natya* are dealt with detail in *Nāṭyaṣāstra*. Keith observes in connection with the content of *Nāṭyaṣāstra*:

In treatise, as we have it, is elaborate, covering the whole ground connected with the drama. It deals with the architecture of the theatre, the scenery, and the dress and equipment of the actors; the religious ceremonial to be observed at every representation; the music, the dance, the movements and gestures of the actors, and their mode of delivery; the division of roles; the general characteristics of poetry; the different classes of drama, and the emotions and sentiments which form a vital element in the drama. There is confusion, complexity and repetition in the work, but that much of it is old cannot be doubted. (291)

An overall view of the contents of the chapters of *Nāṭyaṣāstra* can be given like this. First chapter deals with the origin of *Nāṭyāvedā* and *Nāṭyāprāyogā* in story form. Second chapter describes the formation of *Nāṭyāgruhā*. While third chapter explains the *Rangādevathāpoojā*, different kinds of dance forms are explained in the fourth chapter. Fifth chapter is the detailed description of *Poorvārangāvidhi* and sixth chapter analyses *Nāndi* and

five types of *Dhruvageethi*. Sixth and seventh chapters are detailed discussions of *rasa* and *bhava*. Chapters till the 11th deal with the *Chaturvidhābhīnayā* like *sātvika*, *āngikā*, *vāchikā* and *āharyā*. While *Chāri* (exercise with one leg) is the topic of 11th chapter, 12th chapter analyses *Mandalams* (like *Kalasa* of Kathakali). While 13th chapter examines the changes that we intend to consider in *Gathi* (course of story), 14th chapter explains *Kakshyā* (position of character on stage) and *Lokā-nāṭya dharmi*. From 15 to 22nd chapters, *Vāchikābhīnayā* is explained. *Ahāryabhīnayā* is described in 23rd chapter and it analyses on the usage of costumes. When 24th chapter deals on common acting, 25th chapter focuses on the acting and other *Upachāras* of characters like prostitutes. Peculiarities of *āngikābhīnayā* and the qualities prescribed for viewers are expressed in 26th and 27th chapters. From 28th to 31st chapter, there are the prescriptions regarding the usage of musical instruments. While qualities of singers and music directors are analysed in 32nd chapter, usage of percussion instruments like *Mrudāngam* is explained in 33rd chapter. 34th chapter *Prakrithivichāram* deals with the difference in characteristics of hero and heroine and 35th chapter includes valuable advises regarding the selection of people to include into the theatre as characters. The last, 36th chapter, *Nāṭyavathāra* explains the ways in which *Nāṭya*, that is born in heaven, arrives earth to amuse people. *Nāṭyaçāstra* concludes with this chapter and this book can be termed as an encyclopaedia, which includes almost all aspects of *Nāṭya*.

Nāṭyaçāstra projects the view that every performance can be divided into ten forms named *Dāçarūpaka*. They are *Nāṭaka*, *Prakarāṇa*, *Bhāṇa*, *Prahasana*, *Dima*, *Vyāyoga*, *Samavakāra*, *Vīthī*, *Anka* and *Ihāmrga*. This division is based on the *Vrithibhedā* or nature of content, hero and sentiments. According to *Nāṭyaçāstra*, every play is characterised by its five stages. They are *ārambha* (beginning), *Yatnā* (hard work), *Prāptyāçā* (desire from possibility to attain the aim), *Niyathapthi* (whether they will achieve it or not, period of tension) and *Phalāgama* (attainment of result). This analysis is connected with the action of *Nayāka* and is termed as *Avasthā Panchakam*. Each act of the play is constructed on the basis of these stages with the aid of five *Arthāprakrti* like *Bīja* (germ), *Bindu* (drop), *Pathāka*, *Prakari* and *Karya* (denouement). This division is connected to the various conditions of *Vasthu* (object). When *Avasthā Panchakam* and *Artha Prakrithi* meet at the junctures, they are classified as *Sandhis*. Five *Sandhis* are termed as *Mukha*, *Pratimukha*, *Garbha*, *Vimarça* and *Nirvahaṇa*. This may be extended to ten acts

Plot must be a well-known one for *Nāṭaka*. All *Sandhis* should be in good combination in this form. Hero

should be a chivalric and famous king. *Nāṭaka* is advised to be a combination of divine characters, results of *Dharmarthakama mokshas*, *Ankavibhaga* (Act Divisions) and *Pravesaka*. The plot of *Nāṭaka* must be the story of a king filled with the mixture of happiness and sorrow and different *rasas* and *bhavas*. It must observe the *Arthaprakari* and it must develop *Bīja* without extending the plot much. One *Ankām* must explain one day's incidents in connection with *Bīja*. There is also a direction that hero or heroine must be there in each *Ankām*. There may be five to ten *Ankāms* in each *Nāṭaka*. *Pravesaka* may be utilised for indicating incidents which happen in more than a day. *Nāṭaka* may not show incidents which extends over a period of more than one year. War, loss of power and death must be indicated only through *Pravesakam*. *Adbhutha* (wonder) *rasa* must be there in *Nirvahaṇa* of each *Nāṭaka*.

In *Prakarāṇa*, the plot and the hero are determined by the poet. It is the story of Brahman, business man, minister, priest, commander of armed forces, etc. *Nayaka* should be a chivalric person. It must not be a *Divyacharita* or it must not include the comforts of a king. Common people and servants should be there in *Prakarāṇa*. Story of prostitutes can also be included in *Prakarāṇa*. If the story is family-oriented, then there may not be a prostitute. All other stipulations are like that of *Nāṭaka* in *Prakarāṇa*. *Natika* is another *Uparūpa*, which may be built by combining the elements of *Nāṭaka* and *Prakarāṇa*.

Samavakāra has the *Kadhabīja* of the conflict between *Deva* and *Asura*. Hero of *Samavakāra* must be a well-known person. There are only three *Ankāms* for *Samavakāra*. There may be three deceptions. One of that must be as per the moving of the plot, another as per the will of god and the third one must be out of vengeance. There may be three types of act of "running" enacted by the characters. One must be due to war or flood. Another may be of storm, setting fire, etc and the third one must be due to imposition of curfew in the city. There must also be three types of *Sringara* aimed at different objectives like *Dharma*, *Artha* and *Kama*. There may be twelve heroes and the story line period must be eighteen hours. All four *Sandhis* except *Vimarsanam* must be there in the play. Each *Anka* must be different from the other.

In *Dāçarūpa* form *Ihāmrga*, there may be divine and high characters, war due to a divine lady, a good plot and there must be three *Sandhis* except *Garbha* and *Vimarsana*. This *Rūpa* gives emphasis to the *rasa Sringara* and there may be reasons for lack of belief. There may be calamities, running, attacking, kidnapping ladies and hitting. War must come to peace in crooked ways.

Plot must be well-known for *Dāçarūpa* form *Dimam*. There may be all four *Sandhis* except *Vimarsanam*.

Hero should be a famous person in society and there may be sixteen heroes in this *Rūpa*. All *rasas* should be portrayed except *Sringara* and *Hasya*. There must be four *Ankām* and its literature must be *Rasadeeptha* and must contain all *bhavas*. Thunder, lightning, solar and lunar eclipses, war, attack, etc must be portrayed in this *Rūpa*. *Magic* and witchcraft must be there in this form. Lots of wooden dolls may also be utilised. Gods, serpents, demons, ghosts must be there in this form.

In *Vyayoga*, hero must be a well-known man in society but he should not be a divine personality. There are only very few lady characters in *Vyayoga*. There must be only one *Ankām*. The story is limited to one day. There may be all other *Sandhis* except *Garbha* and *Vimarsana*. Lots of conflicts among men must be there like that of *Samavakāra*. War, duel and conflict must be there in this form.

Ankām has its plots well-known. There are only *Mukha* and *Nirvaṇa Sandhis* in coming *Rūpas*. Characters should not be divine ones, but human beings. This *Rūpa* focuses on *Karuna* (pity) *rasa*. There may be characters, who are receding from war and hitting hard at their enemies. There may be a lot of lamenting by women. This *Rūpa* may be a combination of disinterested words and worried gestures.

Prahasanam can be divided into *Sudhaprahasanam* and *Sankeernaprahasanam*. In *Sudhaprahasanam*, there may be humorous conversations to an ascetic or Brahmin by *Nikrishta* characters (characters of lower birth). There may be heaps of humorous or sarcastic remarks. There should be a strict plot. In *Sankeernaprahasanam*, there must be eunuchs, prostitutes and spendthrifts. Costumes and gestures should be evident. Practical aspects of the world and crooked activities must feature in the plot.

Bhāṇa expresses the experiences of self and descriptions of others. This one act *Rūpa* depends on different subjects. One person should enact the parts of all characters. This is like answering another's questions. This *Rūpa* is in question-answer form.

Vīthī has only one *Ankām* and one or two characters. This can portray all *rasas* and *lakshanas*. This must have thirteen different aspects and *rasa bhāva* in correlation with the peculiarities of characters.

Another important aspect of Sanskrit *Natya* theory is the theory of *Rasa*. S.S.Barlingay examines the origin and relevance of this concept:

The word *rasa* was borrowed, as is stated, by Bharata from *Atharvaveda* for explaining the theory of stage- drama, He states this in the seventeenth verse of the

first chapter of *Natyasastra*..*rasan atharvanad api* (poetic embellishments) like Bhamaha. Rhetoricians belonging to the school of *alamkara* like Bhamaha, Dandin and Vamana use it for explaining the nature of poetry. The word *rasa* is also used in the sense of sound or noise as also for taste. Its etimology is traced to the root, *ras+* (*ghan*). (87-88)

Every dramatic presentation is aimed at evoking in the minds of the audience a particular kind of aesthetic experience, i.e., *Rasa*. *Rasa* can be explained as “aesthetic relish.” Bharata says that *Natya* is the imitation of life (*Lokanukruti*) wherein the various human emotions have to be dramatically glorified (*Bhavanukirtanam*) so that the spectator is able to flavor the portrayed pleasure and pain (*Lokasya sukhaduhkha*) as *Natyarasa*. This *Rasa* experience will entertain and enlighten the spectator who hence becomes the *Rasika*.

The word, *Rasa*, means *Rasyate Anena iti rasāh* in Sanskrit, i.e., *rasa* is generated from the act of being propitiated. The extract of a fruit is referred to as *rasa* which itself is the essence of it, the ultimate flavour of it. Bharata succinctly encapsulates the theory of *Rasa* in his most famous formula-like *Rasa sutra* thus: *Vibhava anubhava vyabhicharisamyogat rasanishpattih* (Pushpendra Kumar 187). Priyadarshi Patnaik observes:

According to Bharata, it is from a combination of *bhavas* that *rasa* arises. *Bhavas* can be roughly translated as psycho- physiological states in a man and they are broadly of three kinds- *sthayibhavas*, *vyabhicharibhavas* and *sattvikabhavas*. *Sthayibhavas* which can be translated broadly as stable and permanent states, are those which dominate or persist throughout a work. (7)

The aesthetic relish is produced (*rasanishpattih*) by a combination of the determinants (*vibhava*), consequents (*anubhava*), and transitory states or fleeting emotions (*vyabhicharibhava*). It is explained that *Rasa* is the essence derived from the various ingredients. He gives the parallel of the extract, *rasa*, got from various condiments, having different tastes, when combined becomes delectable to taste. Hence, that which can be tasted or flavoured (*asvadya*) can be termed as *Rasa*. Just as the gourmet with a refined taste relishes good food, so also cultured and learned persons taste and relish the well-established dominant mood (*sthayibhava*) created by various *bhavas* and *abhinaya*. This aesthetic relish, which is possible only through mental perception, is termed as *natyarasa*. Even the terms *vibhava*, *anubhava*, and *vyabhicharibhava* refer to stage representations. It naturally follows that what they produce should only be *natya rasa* (sentiments pertaining to the dramatic spectacle). One enjoys experiencing the emotions with the artistes, and sometimes even visibly expresses it by shedding tears or

laughing spontaneously. But both the artiste and the spectator are well aware that neither of them is going through it in reality. This enjoyment is *Natyarasa*. S.N.Dasgupta exemplifies the enjoyment of spectator in this way:

In the subconscious and unconscious regions, there are always lying dormant various types of emotion-motive complexes. When through artistic creation a purely universal emotional fear, amour etc. are projected in the mind they become affiliated to those types of emotion-motive complexes and this mutual affiliation or apperception or implicit recognition of identity immediately transforms the presented artistic universal into artistic joy or *Rasa*. It is for this reason that in experiencing artistic joy there is a kinship and identity among all art enjoyers. (194)

The 6th and 7th chapters of the *Nāṭyaṣāstra*, known as the *Rasadhyaya* and *Bhavaadhyaya* respectively, together bring out the concept of the *Bhava-Rasa* theory of Bharata, and have hence become the bedrock for all deliberations on aesthetics, including the most brilliant contribution of Abhinavaguptacharya, whose *Abhinavabharati* remains till date the best commentary on the *Nāṭyaṣāstra*. *Bhava* is derived from the root *bhu-bhavati*, that is, “to become,” “to come into existence.” Bharata gives a causal quality to *Bhava*, saying *bhavayanti iti bhava* (Pushpendra Kumar ChVII 1), that is, a thing or mental state that brings its awareness or makes one conscious of it, which pervades one like a particular smell.

Bharata classifies the *Rasa* under eight categories (*Ashtarasa*) and gives the corresponding *Bhava* which gives rise to the *rasa*. These are known as *Sthayi bhava* or pervading stable emotion. They are *Rati* (love), *Hasa* (mirth), *Shoka* (grief), *Krodha* (anger), *Utsaha* (heroism), *Bhaya* (fear), *Jugupsa* (disgust), and *Vismaya* (wonder) (Pushpendra Kumar chVI 17). The corresponding eight *Rasas* are *Sringara* (amorous), *Hasya* (humorous), *Karuna* (pathetic), *Raudra* (furious), *Vira* (valorous), *Bhayanaka* (horrific), *Bibhatsa* (repugnant), and *Adbhuta* (wondrous). (15) There are three types of *Bhava*, namely, *Sthayi* (eight types), *Vyabhichari* (thirty three), and *Satvika* (eight), totaling to forty nine. The *Satvika bhava* is the physical manifestation of intense emotion. They are *Sthamba* (petrification), *Sveda* (perspiration), *Romancha* (horripilation), *Svarabheda* (voice change), *Vepathu* (trembling), *Vaivarnya* (facial colour change), *Asru* (weeping), and *Pralaya* (fainting) (15). *Vibhava* is the cause (*Karana*), the main stimulating cause being termed as *Alambana vibhava* (the determinant), and, the environmental factors that are additional causes termed as

Uddipana vibhava (excitant). *Anubhava* is the consequent physical reaction through action, word and facial expression that follows (*anu*), as the impact of the *vibhava*. The thirty three *Vyabhichari bhavas* (also referred to as *Sanchari bhavas* in some editions), are transitory, fleeting emotions based on psychological states of the mind. Several such emotions follow one after the other, one replacing the other, strengthening the *Sthayi bhava* at each stage, till finally the *Sthayibhava* is established and there is *Rasanubhava*. “Just as in music a procession of notes in certain combinations reveals a characteristic melodic whole or *raga*, similarly it seems that the representation of *bhavas* reveals *rasa* as an aesthetic whole” (Pande 313).

For instance, in the play *Abhijnānashākuntalam*, Kalidasa uses King Dushyanta's coming to the hermitage to pay respects to the sage, as the *Alambana vibhāva*. The girls' talk, the bee, their attire, the flower garden and such others become the *Uddipana vibhāva*. On Dushyanta's entry, fleeting emotions like confusion, wonder, fear, curiosity, bashfulness and such others seem to fill the minds of all the characters present. The blossoming of love between Shakuntala and Dushyanta is gradually established through the reactions of both of them to the conversation of the Sakhis with the King. If the “patra” enacting as Shakuntala is able to show the *satvikabhava* of *romancho* (horripilation) or *vepathu* (trembling) out of the new experience of love which is strange to an ashramite and Dushyanta is able to portray *sthambha* (petrification) on seeing her beauty and *romancho* on knowing her lineage, then the *rati sthayi bhava* gets established in the mind of the people who can experience the *sringara rasa*.

Bharata says that *Bhava* and *Rasa* are mutually dependent. The performer or producer, be it an actor, dancer, singer, instrumentalist, or stage craftsmen, should be conscious of the *sthayi bhava* and the *rasa* that they are striving to establish. This will help them realise their *Siddhi* through *Rasotpatti*. Prof. B. M. Chaturvedi explains the mode of enjoying *rasa*:

Later on, *Nāṭyaṣāstra* itself explains how the *rasa* is relished. Men eat different types of condiments, relish different tastes and get pleasure. In the same manner, spectators relish the *sthayibhavas* suggested through the presentation of the *bhavas* and the *Natya* and get pleasure. This is the reason why they are called *Rasa* in the *Natya*. It is clear from this that *Sringara*, etc. are given the name *Rasa* because they are relished in a *Kavya*. (41)

Later there were efforts to co-ordinate all the *rasa* to bring in a new *rasa*. On the other hands, there were also interesting attempts to synthesize all *rasas* into a single *rasa*. Mohan Thampi explains this in his essay “*Rasa as Aesthetic Experience*”:

Thus, with the contribution of detailed analysis of various aspects of plays, this book provides even minute observations on the ways of enjoying ‘rasa’, i.e., the ways of enjoying a play. This book *Nāṭyaṣāstra* is a great contribution of Indian indigenous knowledge system. It was taken as a model for the development of Western theatre. Indian Theatre has its origin in this wonderful book. This kind of a magnum opus is not there in world literature. Hence it is a unique one. All Indians can be proud as they are born in the land of *Nāṭyaṣāstra*. It is a great example of indigenous knowledge system and a definitely a model for modern theatre performances.

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Dilemmas and Breakthroughs in the Collaborative Governance of Taxation for Internet Anchors in the Digital Age

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Abstract— *In the digital age, internet anchors have emerged as a new type of occupation, with their income scale continuously expanding. The tax collection and administration work are facing numerous dilemmas. The current tax laws do not clearly define the corresponding tax categories for new-type incomes such as tips and commissions. The involvement of platforms and brokerage companies creates complex legal relationships among multiple parties, making it difficult to fulfill withholding obligations. There is an information barrier between tax authorities and platforms, and the supervision work has been in a passive state for a long time. It is proposed that at the legislative level, the rights, responsibilities and tax-collection standards of all parties should be clarified. At the technical level, the platform data should be connected with the tax system to achieve real-time interaction of tax-related information and risk early-warning. The tax authorities should be promoted to transform from post-event supervision to in-process intervention, and the platforms should be required to strengthen compliance review responsibilities. Ultimately, a governance mechanism involving multiple parties and featuring long-term effectiveness should be established to maintain the tax order.*



Keywords— *Digital age; Internet anchors; Tax collection and administration; Collaborative governance.*

I. INTRODUCTION

At the current stage of the development of the digital economy, the online live-streaming industry has witnessed rapid growth, supported by technological advancements and updated operational models. It has become an important driving force for expanding consumption and cultural dissemination, and has also given rise to a new occupation-"internet anchor". This occupation has been

officially recognized by the state. Public statistical data shows that the number of employees in the current online live-streaming industry exceeds 38.8 million^[1], forming a large-scale and vibrant employment ecosystem. With the rapid expansion of the industry, the problem of tax evasion has gradually become prominent, emerging as a key hidden danger restricting the regulated development of the industry. In 2021, a fine of 1.341 billion yuan was imposed

on Viya for tax evasion^[2], triggering extensive discussions throughout society. From 2024 to 2025, tax evasion cases involving Jin Qianqian, Yu Yang^[3], Wang Zibo^[4] and others were successively exposed. The repeated occurrence of tax evasion issues among the anchor group reflects a disconnect between tax collection and administration and industry development. In November 2025, Peng Xuanzhi, a top anchor with over 30 million followers, was found to have declared a total tax payment of less than 1.6 million yuan from 2021 to 2023. Eventually, the tax authorities legally recovered the tax and imposed a total fine of 4.1505 million yuan^[5]. In these cases, high-income anchors concealed their real income for a long time, and the amount of tax evaded was relatively large, revealing certain defects in the current tax collection and administration system for internet anchors. How to improve the tax collection and administration system and maintain tax order is a difficult problem that we need to continuously tackle.

II. DIFFICULTIES IN DETECTING INCOME CONCEALMENT AND SPLITTING BY ONLINE ANCHORS

The problems faced in the tax collection and administration of internet anchors can be analyzed from five dimensions: income verification, subject definition, implementation of withholding obligations, information supervision, and tax compliance. These five aspects are intertwined and together pose a systematic challenge to the current tax governance system in dealing with new digital business models.

(1) Difficulties in income verification and tax item classification

The income sources of online anchors are highly diversified. They include not only the signing fees paid by platforms, but also various forms such as live-streaming tips, sales commissions from live-streaming e-commerce, advertising placements, and the exchange of virtual gifts. This diversified income structure presents the problem of ambiguity in tax item attribution. At present, there is no unified tax governance standard for various types of income of online anchors, resulting in frequent disputes in

practice. Take the tip income as an example. Whether it should be classified as labor remuneration income or business income determines the applicable tax rate and the tax burden level. However, there is currently no clear legal definition. Labor remuneration income refers to the income earned by individuals from providing labor services, while business income refers to the income obtained by individuals from legally engaging in paid service activities, including services in education, medical care, consulting, etc. There is a certain commonality between the two, that is, both include income from individuals' service activities. Therefore, without mandatory regulations and classifications in laws and policies, it is difficult to determine the nature of the anchor's tip income, which leads to the problem of choosing the applicable tax rate. Meanwhile, the lack of a tax-calculation basis further exacerbates the difficulty of verification. A large amount of income directly enters the anchor's personal account through non-traditional channels such as rewards and gifts, which is outside the scope of the current invoice issuance system. As a result, it is difficult for tax authorities to obtain a complete tax-calculation basis, which objectively leaves room for anchors to conceal income and evade taxes.

(2) It is difficult to detect the concealment and splitting of income by online anchors

Some online anchors may conceal their income by signing "Yin-Yang contracts". Online anchors' activities are not limited to the online realm. They also receive remuneration through offline activities and the creation of IP products. Some taxpayers conceal taxable transactions by taking advantage of the intangibility of the transaction objects. Internet transactions involving digital goods and services are usually intangible, easily reproducible, and have zero marginal cost. This allows taxpayers conducting such transactions to conceal some or all of the transaction traces from the tax authorities, resulting in tax losses^[6]. In order to conceal their income, some anchors sign "Yin-Yang contracts" with merchants. They transfer most of their income directly to personal accounts instead of settling through the corporate accounts, thus concealing the source of this part of the income. At the same time,

they open multiple payment accounts and bank cards to receive fixed-amount income over a long period, so as to split their income. Such "Yin-Yang contracts" are difficult to detect. If tax inspectors only check the corporate accounts and back-end transaction records of the anchors according to traditional methods, they will not easily discover this situation. Therefore, a comprehensive inspection of the anchor's personal bank accounts and related accounts is required.

(3) Information asymmetry between tax authorities and taxpayers

We can observe that the tax evasion behaviors of online anchors often go undetected for many years. This indicates that there is a lack of monitoring of the tax-related information of online anchors on the Internet, and there is a certain degree of information asymmetry between tax authorities and taxpayers. Although live-streaming platforms hold core transaction data such as the anchors' reward records, sales turnover from live-streaming e-commerce, and fans' consumption, due to the imperfect information reporting mechanism, platforms either report only part of the taxable income or report it with a serious time lag. As a result, tax authorities have difficulty grasping the real income situation in a timely manner. They can only rely on post-event spot checks or complaint leads for tax inspections and are unable to achieve precise supervision of the entire industry. This information barrier directly leads to a serious lag in the discovery mechanism. Under the traditional "post-event punishment" model, the highly mobile and concealed income of anchors can remain outside the scope of supervision for a long time. Taxpayers take advantage of the time difference in supervision to avoid tax obligations. By the time the problem is exposed, a huge amount of tax arrears has been accumulated, which has a great impact on both the pressure of tax payment and public opinion. This situation shows that there is no good prevention and warning effect on the tax evasion behaviors of online anchors. The governance method has always remained at the stage of punishing the mistakes that have already been made and has not transformed to active prevention.

III. ANALYSIS OF THE REASONS FOR THE DIFFICULTIES IN TAX COLLECTION AND MANAGEMENT OF ONLINE ANCHORS

(1) Imperfect tax legal system

At present, some tax laws, regulations, or regulatory documents were formulated a long time ago and have not been updated or repealed since, making it difficult to meet the new situation of current economic development and the needs of handling tax-related cases^[7]. The online live-streaming industry is a typical representative of the digital economy, and its development speed far exceeds that of traditional industries. The corresponding tax legal system has not been updated in a timely manner. For example, when the current Individual Income Tax Law of the People's Republic of China and its implementation regulations classify income types, they rely on the existing understanding formed by traditional labor and business forms, which cannot fully adapt to the new forms of income such as rewards, commissions, and slotting fees in the live-streaming industry. The boundary between labor remuneration and business income, which was clearly distinguishable in the past, has begun to become blurred in the new transaction structure. In the provisions of business income, the expression "other production and business activities" is a general term with a broad extension, leaving a lot of room for interpretation in the actual implementation process. There is flexibility in the definition process, which brings difficulties in application for tax law enforcement. It also allows some practitioners to adjust the nature of their income through form packaging to reduce the taxes and fees they need to pay. In order to attract enterprises to settle in and increase tax revenue, some localities have relaxed the applicable conditions for approved collection in the policy implementation process. The income that should be included in the comprehensive income and calculated according to the progressive tax rate can enjoy a lower tax burden by borrowing the identity of "business income". This policy loophole formed based on local interests weakens the unity and fairness of the tax system and offsets the institutional rigidity of tax legality.

(2) The sources of online anchors' income are complex

Online anchors have a wide variety of income sources, which poses considerable difficulties for tax authorities to grasp their real income situation. In terms of types, anchors' income mainly includes signing fees paid by platforms, commissions from live-streaming e-commerce, cash converted from user rewards, fees for advertising placement, and remuneration for participating in offline activities. Moreover, the settlement cycles of different types of income vary greatly. Rewards are often settled daily, while advertising commissions are usually delayed by 1-3 months. Some income also involves cross-regional or even cross-border settlements, further increasing the complexity of income accounting and exacerbating the complexity of income composition^[8]. Among these, the process of realizing user rewards is the most complex. Users first need to purchase virtual currency on the platform through payment tools such as WeChat Pay and Alipay, then use the virtual currency to buy virtual gifts like "rockets" and "sports cars" and send them to the anchors. Finally, the anchors convert the received gifts into RMB for withdrawal according to the platform's rules. There are no paper contracts, invoices, or receipts in the whole process, only electronic data are left, and these data are in the hands of the platform. If the platform does not take the initiative to provide them, it is very difficult for tax authorities to verify how much money the anchors have actually received. What makes supervision even more difficult is that many anchors receive payments not through corporate accounts but directly through their personal bank cards, WeChat, or Alipay accounts. Some even use the accounts of their parents and relatives to disperse funds, mixing business income with daily life expenses, creating a so-called "off-the-books" operation. As a result, it becomes difficult to trace and confirm where the income comes from, what its nature is, and how much tax should be paid.

(3) Platforms fail to fulfill their withholding and payment obligations

The online live-streaming industry involves multiple entities such as platforms, brokerage companies, advertisers, and payment institutions, and the legal relationships among them are relatively complex.

According to tax laws, the withholding agents vary depending on the cooperation methods chosen by the anchors^[9]. According to the provisions of the "Law of the People's Republic of China on the Administration of Tax Collection," the withholding agent should be a unit that has the right to decide on the payment object and the payment amount. However, in the multi-party payment chain, this standard is difficult to apply clearly. In practice, platforms often claim that they are only technology providers and do not have an employment relationship with the anchors, so they do not assume the withholding obligation. Brokerage companies claim that they are only intermediary service providers and not the direct payers. Although advertisers are the source of funds, they are far from the specific live-streaming business. Each party shirks responsibility based on its own interests, resulting in the failure of the withholding obligation. Even if the withholding agent is finally identified, since most relationships between platforms, brokerage companies, and anchors are cooperative rather than employment relationships, fulfilling the withholding and payment obligation requires specially-equipped financial personnel to calculate taxes and file tax returns on time, which means an additional significant cost, further reducing the willingness to take the initiative to fulfill the obligation.

(4) Tax authorities face high law-enforcement difficulties

Under the platform-based economic model, the number of individual operators within the platform is becoming increasingly large. For individuals who are not required to register as market entities according to the law and do not apply for the issuance of invoices on behalf of others, it is difficult for tax authorities to obtain their tax-related information and implement effective supervision. The cost for tax authorities to collect taxes from each individual operator within the platform may even be higher than the amount of tax itself^[10]. The process of realizing anchors' income, represented by user rewards, is highly complex, involving multiple links such as the purchase of virtual currency, gift exchange, and platform withdrawal. There are no paper contracts or invoices throughout the process, and the electronic data are

completely in the hands of the platform. Coupled with the large differences in the settlement cycles of different incomes and the involvement of cross-regional settlements in some cases, even if tax authorities find abnormal clues, it is difficult to penetrate the layers of packaging to verify the real income scale. The law-enforcement cost is high, and the difficulty of obtaining evidence is great, so the supervision is always in a passive response state. In the tax-related cases exposed in recent years, many anchors have signed "Yin-Yang contracts" with merchants, transferring most of their income directly to personal accounts without going through corporate settlement, making it difficult for tax authorities to obtain the real income sources through public channels. If anchors use the means of fund dispersion to evade supervision, opening multiple bank cards, WeChat, and Alipay accounts under their names or even borrowing the accounts of relatives to receive payments, and splitting business income into scattered transactions and mixing them with daily transfer funds, creating an "off-balance-sheet cycle" beyond corporate supervision, it will make it even more difficult to trace the flow of funds.

IV. SUGGESTIONS FOR THE COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE OF ONLINE ANCHORS' TAXATION

(1) Improve Relevant Tax Laws and Regulations

Tax-related laws and regulations, being rigid rules and regulations, should keep pace with the times and be continuously updated. It is recommended that national government agencies improve the existing tax laws and regulations, and conduct a thorough review in light of cases that have occurred in recent years. The tax department should formulate guiding documents regarding the tax payment of online anchors, clarify the legal nature of various types of income, distinguish the criteria between labor remuneration and business income, and solve the practical difficulties in determining the nature of income. In this process, the income sources of online anchors should be sorted out, classified according to the sources, and the applicable tax items should be specified respectively. At the same time, the application of the

policy on verified collection should be strictly regulated to prevent local governments from creating tax "havens" indirectly. With regard to the tip income of anchors, it should be classified as either "wages and salaries income" or "labor remuneration income" for taxation based on the legal relationship between the anchor and the platform or brokerage company, rather than being treated as "contingent income". It should be included in the comprehensive income for final settlement after the end of the tax year. A detailed interpretation should be made on the nature of the income of e-commerce anchors and their derivative side-business incomes, and the nature of income and tax rates in different situations should be clearly defined to prevent anchors from evading taxes due to the vague definition of income nature^[11]. Meanwhile, the tax department should issue regulatory documents as soon as possible to clearly define the scope of application of verified collection.

(2) Tax Authorities Strengthen Supervision Activities

Tax authorities are the core of the collaborative governance framework. Their role is reflected in the transformation from passive tax audits to a function that emphasizes both proactive supervision and tax-paying services. Faced with the characteristics of high concealment and great mobility of online anchors' income, tax authorities should start with basic management. They should fully identify the distribution of tax sources of live-streaming platforms in their jurisdictions, establish a contact mechanism for key platforms, obtain tax-related information through regular communication, keep track of the income scale and tax-paying dynamics of anchors, and turn "information islands" into "data connectivity". As more and more taxpayers' trading activities are completed in the form of e-commerce, such as online signing, offline trading, online payment, and electronic book-keeping, tax audits and case selection should, on the basis of traditional methods, use the Internet to collect and analyze data to identify enterprises with potential problems^[12]. Secondly, tax authorities should select professional personnel to conduct in-depth tax guidance and policy briefings at platforms, help anchors and platforms clarify their tax-paying obligations and standardize the tax declaration

process. By providing services at the forefront of business operations, the probability of involuntary tax evasion can be reduced from the source. In the risk assessment stage, relying on big data means, tax authorities should focus on monitoring anchors with large income fluctuations or abnormal tax burdens. Special investigations and assessments should be carried out on anchors involved in large amounts of taxes, and timely intervention should be made upon discovering problems, thus achieving a shift from post-event pursuit to in-process control. Through the dual-drive of strengthened supervision and services, tax authorities can implement policies, help online anchors master tax knowledge in time, and pay taxes on schedule.

(3) Platforms Effectively Fulfill Supervision Duties

As the main business location of online anchors, platforms have a clearer understanding of the income sources of online anchors. If platforms can effectively fulfill their supervision duties, it will reduce the difficulty for tax departments to conduct tax inspections^[13]. Firstly, platforms should establish a real-time reporting mechanism for tax-related information, synchronize the core business data of anchors to tax authorities in a unified standard format, break through information barriers, and enable tax authorities to timely grasp the real income situation. This is the technical prerequisite for achieving precise supervision. Secondly, platforms should set up specialized tax compliance departments or equip themselves with professional personnel within the platform, responsible for verifying the identity of anchors, dynamically tracking their tax-paying situations, and regularly auditing the status of anchors' accounts. For accounts that have not declared tax for a long-time, have abnormal tax registrations, or are suspected of obvious tax evasion, platforms should take measures such as restricting withdrawals, suspending settlements, or even banning accounts, embed tax compliance requirements into the daily operation process of the platform, and force anchors to actively fulfill their tax-paying obligations. Through the dual-check of data reporting and compliance review, platforms add an extra line of defense for anchors to pay taxes on time, and jointly strengthen the network of collaborative governance with the government and tax

authorities.

(4) Strengthen Regular Supervision

In the digital age, one strategy to regulate the emerging negative phenomena is to establish a supervision mechanism in line with the characteristics of the era. Technology should be used as a foundation to enhance the adaptability of the tax system and tax collection and management in the digital age. An intelligent tax supervision system for the live-streaming industry should be established, which can capture real-time data such as anchors' transaction flows, reward records, and commission income from live-streaming sales, and conduct comparative analysis in combination with indicators such as the number of fans and sales volume to accurately identify abnormal tax declarations. If signs indicate a serious inconsistency between an anchor's fan base, public visibility, and tax payments, this can be detected in a timely manner, preventing a recurrence of cases like Peng's. At the same time, the integration of electronic invoices and blockchain technology can be promoted to ensure the non-tampering and traceability of transaction information, and solve the problem that the "tax control by invoices" fails in paperless transactions. The punishment mechanism should be improved. Greater penalties should be imposed on anchors who deliberately evade taxes, a liability-investigation mechanism should be established for platforms that fail to fulfill withholding obligations and intermediary agencies that assist in tax evasion, and the warning effect should be exerted through the exposure of typical cases.

V. CONCLUSION

The rise of the online live-streaming industry is a microcosm of the development in the digital era. This new business form has created a large number of job opportunities, enriched the cultural life of the public, and also posed profound challenges to the traditional tax governance model. The existing tax collection and management system still has deficiencies. The tax collection and management of online live-streamers face problems such as difficulties in income assessment, high information barriers, and the failure of withholding

obligations, which reflects the structural tension between the existing institutional framework and the operational logic of the digital economy. To break this deadlock, relying solely on the after-the-fact punishment-style law enforcement approach cannot achieve the expected results. It requires the collaborative efforts of the government, tax authorities, and platforms. In terms of legislation, it is necessary to clarify the nature of income and tax standards; in terms of technology, it is necessary to break through information barriers and achieve data sharing; in terms of implementation, it is necessary to strengthen the compliance responsibilities of platforms and implement the active supervision functions of tax authorities. Only in this way can we achieve the transformation from passive response to collaborative governance. Tax governance in the digital era is a test of the flexibility of the system and a call for governance wisdom. Only by continuously improving the legal model, strengthening the collaboration among subjects, and enhancing the technological adaptation can the tax system maintain stability and make long-term progress in the digital wave.

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Investigating the Human–Nature Relationship in *Amitav Ghosh's The Hungry Tide*

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Abstract— *The intricate and often indefinable relationship between human beings and the natural world has received sustained critical attention under the theoretical framework of ecocriticism. This approach foregrounds not only human experiences but also the representation of the physical environment in literary texts, emphasizing their interdependence. In the twenty-first century, ecocritical discourse reflects an intensified global awareness of environmental crises, including climate change, global warming, and rising carbon emissions, all of which have accelerated ecological degradation. If such destructive trends remain unchecked, they pose a serious threat to the sustainability of modern civilization. Against this backdrop, Amitav Ghosh, recipient of the Jnanpith Award, presents in his novel The Hungry Tide a compelling narrative that interweaves human lives, ecological vulnerability, and climatic uncertainties in the fragile tidal landscape of the Sundarbans. The novel serves as a powerful literary exploration of environmental consciousness, portraying the complex dynamics between nature and marginalized communities inhabiting the deltaic region. This paper examines how human interventions, driven by ignorance, survival needs, and developmental pressures, contribute to ecological imbalance. It further analyzes whether nature and humanity are depicted as protectors or adversaries of one another, and reflects on the ethical responsibility of humankind in fostering ecological harmony, ensuring sustainable coexistence, and safeguarding the environment in the age of globalization.*



Keywords— *Ecocriticism, Human–Nature Relationship, Environmental Degradation, Climate Change, The Hungry Tide*

Introduction

Since the earliest stages of human civilization, the relationship between humanity and nature has been marked by interdependence, adaptation, and transformation. In primitive societies, human survival relied upon a harmonious coexistence with the natural environment. Gradually, however, the evolutionary and technological advancement of humankind shifted this balance. What initially emerged as a struggle for survival evolved into systematic intervention, control, and exploitation of natural resources.

In its earliest phase, human interaction with nature was governed by necessity. Over time, the development of

tools, organized societies, and economic systems enabled humans to reshape landscapes, redirect rivers, and exploit forests and minerals. This transition from adaptation to domination intensified the contradiction between human ambition and ecological equilibrium. The rise of industrialization and capitalist market forces further accelerated environmental exploitation. Technology, consumerism, and modern lifestyles have contributed to deforestation, biodiversity loss, global warming, and climate instability. Ironically, the modern world that relentlessly extracts from nature simultaneously raises slogans advocating environmental conservation.

In the twenty-first century, environmental degradation has become one of the most pressing global

crises. Climate change, rising sea levels, and ecological displacement are no longer distant possibilities but lived realities. This growing ecological consciousness has found expression in literature through the emergence of ecocriticism—a critical approach that studies the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Ecocriticism, along with environmental humanities and environmental ethics, seeks to foreground nature not as a passive backdrop but as an active presence shaping human destiny. Literary texts, therefore, become powerful mediums for raising environmental awareness and interrogating the ethical responsibilities of humanity.

It is within this critical framework that Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Hungry Tide* gains particular relevance. Set in the fragile and ecologically volatile landscape of the Sundarbans, the novel presents a complex interplay between human survival, ecological vulnerability, and political power. The Sundarbans, with its shifting tides, mangrove forests, and frequent cyclones, becomes more than a geographical setting—it emerges as a dynamic force that shapes human lives and destinies. Through the experiences of marginalized communities, environmental researchers, and local inhabitants, the narrative exposes the fragile balance between protection and destruction, coexistence and conflict.

By situating human struggles within the unpredictable rhythms of the tidal ecosystem, the novel questions anthropocentric assumptions and highlights the ethical dilemma of development versus conservation. Thus, *The Hungry Tide* serves as a compelling literary text for examining how nature and humanity function alternately as protectors and adversaries, and how sustainable harmony remains essential for the survival of both.

Ecocriticism

The term *ecocriticism* was first introduced by William Rueckert in his 1978 essay "*Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism*." Since then, it has evolved into a significant interdisciplinary field within literary and cultural studies. Ecocriticism examines the relationship between literature and the physical environment, expanding critical inquiry beyond anthropocentric perspectives to include the non-human world as an active and meaningful presence in texts. It challenges the traditional privileging of human experience and instead situates humanity within the broader ecological system.

At its core, ecocriticism promotes an ethical reorientation toward nature. It underscores the responsibility of individuals and societies to engage in sustainable practices that ensure ecological balance and intergenerational justice. Rather than treating nature as a

passive backdrop for human drama, ecocritical theory interprets landscapes, rivers, forests, animals, and climatic forces as dynamic agents that shape narrative structure and thematic development. The approach also intersects with environmental ethics and environmental humanities, encouraging readers to reassess their moral accountability toward the natural world.

In the twenty-first century, ecocriticism has gained renewed urgency in response to escalating environmental crises such as climate change, biodiversity loss, deforestation, and ecological displacement. The theory employs literary texts as interpretive sites through which environmental concerns can be articulated, questioned, and critically examined. It expands the concept of "the world" in literature to encompass the entire ecosphere, recognizing that all living organisms possess intrinsic value and the right to exist within their natural habitats.

Ecology itself concerns the intricate and often indefinable interrelationships between living organisms and their environments. Ecocritical literary works foreground this interdependence, exploring the tensions, harmonies, and contradictions between human ambition and ecological limits. Through narrative imagination, such texts cultivate environmental consciousness and advocate for a more balanced coexistence between humanity and nature.

In this regard, Amitav Ghosh stands out as a writer deeply engaged with ecological concerns. Many of his works reflect an acute awareness of environmental vulnerability, climate change, and the socio-political implications of ecological crisis. His fiction not only portrays the beauty and fragility of natural landscapes but also interrogates the ethical responsibilities of human communities toward sustaining the planet.

Human–Nonhuman Interdependence

Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* offers a profound literary exploration of the interdependence between human and nonhuman life forms. The novel situates its narrative within the fragile ecosystem of the Sundarbans, where land and water continuously reshape each other, and survival becomes a shared yet contested condition. Here, nature is not a passive backdrop; it is an active, dynamic force that structures existence. Humans, animals, rivers, tides, and forests coexist within a complex ecological network in which no single entity can claim absolute dominance.

The Sundarbans, often described as "tide country," is portrayed as a bioregion marked by instability and transformation. Islands emerge and vanish with the rhythms of the tides, emphasizing the impermanence of territorial claims and human settlements. The shifting landscape reveals a deltaic world where ecological vulnerability

defines both human habitation and nonhuman survival. Marginalized communities struggle to carve out livelihoods amid cyclones, saline intrusion, and political neglect, while wildlife faces habitat fragmentation and declining biodiversity.

The novel foregrounds the tension between anthropocentric and ecocentric perspectives. Among the most striking nonhuman presences is the Royal Bengal tiger, a powerful symbol of wilderness and ecological authority. The tiger’s conflict with villagers reflects not merely a physical confrontation but a deeper ethical dilemma: whose survival takes precedence in a shared habitat? Similarly, the endangered Ganges river dolphin and Irrawaddy dolphin embody ecological fragility and the urgency of conservation. Alongside crocodiles, mangrove forests, and the resilient “sundari” trees, these nonhuman characters articulate a silent yet forceful presence that challenges human-centered assumptions.

Ghosh’s narrative reintegrates literature with environmental studies by presenting an ecosystem where each organism—human or otherwise—possesses intrinsic value. The relentless tides that inundate and retreat from the mangrove forests symbolize nature’s autonomy and cyclical power. Thousands of mangroves disappear beneath rising waters only to re-emerge hours later, suggesting resilience yet also vulnerability in the face of climate change and salinity intrusion.

The anthropocentric belief that humans are the supreme and most significant entities in the universe emerges as a root cause of ecological damage. Through the character of Piyali Roy, whose resistance to the killing of a tiger underscores an ethical commitment to wildlife preservation, the novel asserts that nonhuman beings have an inherent right to existence. The conflict between villagers and wildlife is therefore not framed as a simplistic opposition but as a tragic outcome of developmental pressures, poverty, and ecological imbalance.

Ultimately, *The Hungry Tide* advances a vision of coexistence grounded in ecological humility. It suggests that harmony can be achieved only when humans recognize themselves as integral components—rather than masters—of the broader biosphere. The survival of humanity, as the novel intimates, is inseparable from the survival of the nonhuman world.

Ecological Crisis and Sustainable Futures

Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide* powerfully demonstrates how the illusion of human supremacy collapses when confronted with the overwhelming force of nature. The fragile certainty of human control dissolves in moments of ecological crisis—whether in Kanai’s sudden encounter with the tiger or in the devastating cyclone that

engulfs Piya and Fokir. Such episodes reveal the precariousness of human existence within volatile ecosystems and expose the limits of anthropocentric confidence.

The episode of the tiger, described in the novel as an embodiment of “horror,” raises a profound ethical paradox. When a predator enters a human settlement, it is immediately condemned and marked for punishment; yet the systematic destruction of wildlife and habitats by humans is rarely regarded with equal moral urgency. This asymmetry reflects the imbalance between human survival strategies and ecological justice. The narrative thus interrogates the moral hierarchy that privileges human life while normalizing environmental exploitation.

Set in the ecologically sensitive delta of the Sundarbans, the novel portrays a fragile equilibrium between conservation and livelihood. The inhabitants of this “tide country” depend directly upon forests, rivers, and fisheries for survival, yet their very presence places pressure on the delicate ecoregion. Conversely, the relentless tides, cyclones, and salinity intrusion threaten human settlements, erasing boundaries and uprooting permanence. The tidal forces that shape and reshape the landscape symbolize both creation and destruction—bestowing sustenance while claiming lives.

The tragic death of Fokir during the cyclone underscores the intimate and often fatal bond between humanity and nature. Through Moyna’s loss, the narrative foregrounds the vulnerability of marginalized communities whose survival is inseparable from ecological risk. Poverty, displacement, and marginalization intensify environmental degradation, creating a cyclical relationship in which social injustice and ecological crisis reinforce one another. The plight of refugees ordered to vacate protected land further highlights the tension between conservation policies and human rights. Preservation of the environment, though essential, becomes ethically complex when it displaces already dispossessed populations.

The contrast between Piya, a marine biologist researching the endangered Irrawaddy dolphin, and Fokir, an uneducated fisherman with profound experiential knowledge of the tides and waterways, illustrates two complementary approaches to conservation—scientific inquiry and indigenous ecological wisdom. Although Piya initially relies on institutional authority for guidance and protection, she ultimately recognizes the value of local knowledge embodied by Fokir. His intuitive understanding of currents, safe passages, and dolphin habitats reveals that conservation cannot succeed without acknowledging community-based ecological practices.

The shifting tides of the Sundarbans mirror the oscillation between joy and tragedy in human life. Just as climatic conditions change abruptly, moments of happiness transform into agony, reminding readers of the unpredictable rhythms of nature. Through these interwoven narratives, the novel articulates a deeply rooted interconnectedness between humans and the environment. It suggests that environmental conservation cannot be separated from social justice, and that sustainable coexistence demands empathy, ethical responsibility, and recognition of nature's autonomous power.

Ultimately, the text calls for a balanced vision in which ecological preservation and human dignity are not seen as opposing forces but as mutually dependent imperatives for collective survival.

Myth and Ecological Guardianship

In Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide*, myth functions as a cultural and ecological mediator between humans and the natural world. The lyrical description of the landscape—"late November... crisp and cool with a gentle breeze and honeyed sunlight"—reveals the aesthetic richness of the deltaic environment. Yet alongside this beauty lies human indifference; through Kanai's perspective, the narrative suggests that modern individuals, absorbed in routine and ambition, often overlook the silent grandeur of nature.

The novel embeds within its ecological framework the powerful folk myth of Bonbibi, revered as the guardian of the forest in the Sundarbans. For the islanders, Bonbibi is not merely a symbolic figure but an ethical authority who regulates access to the forest and ensures protection from the tiger. Her presence establishes a moral geography within the biome, where survival depends upon reverence, restraint, and acknowledgment of nature's sovereignty. The belief in an invisible boundary between the realms of Bonbibi and Dakkhin Rai—often associated with the tiger—creates a psychological and cultural discipline that governs human conduct in the wilderness.

Through Nirmal's reflection on this "imaginary border," the novel demonstrates how myth can function as an ecological code of ethics. What may appear as superstition to outsiders operates as a deeply internalized system of environmental regulation. The fear and reverence inspired by Bonbibi cultivate humility before the forest's power, discouraging reckless exploitation. In this sense, myth becomes pro-naturalistic: it preserves ecological balance by embedding conservation within cultural consciousness.

The complex topography of the Sundarbans—its shifting islands, dense mangroves, and unpredictable tides—demands a delicate equilibrium between human and

nonhuman realms. Myth symbolically enforces this balance. It reminds islanders that they are guests within the domain of beasts and tides, not masters of it. Ecology, folklore, and belief systems intertwine to sustain collective responsibility toward the environment.

Furthermore, the narrative reflects broader Indian cultural traditions in which nature is venerated through spiritual symbolism. Rivers, trees, animals, and forests are often worshipped as embodiments of divine presence. Such practices reveal the deep interconnection between nature and culture, where environmental ethics are encoded within religious imagination.

By foregrounding the myth of Bonbibi, the novel suggests that sustainable coexistence may require not only scientific intervention but also cultural narratives that inspire reverence for the natural world. Myth, therefore, emerges as a protector—of both the forest and the fragile human communities that depend upon it.

Conclusion

Amitav Ghosh, through *The Hungry Tide*, presents a profound meditation on the inseparable bond between human existence and the natural world. The novel establishes that any disruption of ecological balance inevitably rebounds upon humanity itself. Human progress, survival, and development are fundamentally rooted in an intimate relationship with nature; when this relationship shifts from coexistence to domination, the consequences become destructive and irreversible.

The narrative underscores that every species—human and nonhuman alike—contributes to the wholeness of the biosphere and possesses an intrinsic right to exist. However, the anthropocentric worldview that places humans at the center of all value systems has led to excessive exploitation of forests, rivers, and wildlife. The text warns that the destruction of nature ultimately amounts to the destruction of human civilization. Ecological imbalance, climate instability, and biodiversity loss are not isolated crises but interconnected symptoms of this flawed ideology.

Set in the ecologically fragile and geographically dynamic delta of the Sundarbans, the novel sensitizes readers to one of the world's most unique mangrove ecosystems. By weaving together personal histories, environmental realities, and cultural myths, Ghosh creates a nuanced form of climate fiction that avoids didacticism while powerfully evoking environmental consciousness. His narrative validates indigenous myths and traditional ecological knowledge as meaningful frameworks for understanding and negotiating environmental crisis. Such myths function not merely as cultural artifacts but as ethical instruments that foster reverence and restraint.

Ultimately, *The Hungry Tide* calls for a reorientation of human attitudes—from domination to humility, from exploitation to stewardship. The novel suggests that ecological harmony can be sustained only when humanity recognizes itself as an integral component of the larger ecosphere. Through its intricate portrayal of tides, forests, animals, and marginalized communities, the text affirms that the survival of humankind is inseparable from the preservation of nature.

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Resource Extractivism, ‘Resource Curse’ and Mining Catastrophe in Hari Kurissery’s *Manalazham*

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Abstract— The historical roots of resource extractivism can be traced back to the colonial times when various European powers had ceaselessly plundered the human resources, predominantly in the form of slaves, and natural resources like minerals, gold, diamond, ivory, and wood mainly from the African and Asian countries, and brought them to their native lands in order to accelerate the growth of the Industrial Revolution. Extractivism, as defined by Naomi Klein in the book *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate* (2014), connotes “a nonreciprocal, dominance-based relationship with the earth, one purely of taking” (Klein, 2014, p.168). She, further, adds that extractivism is “directly connected to the notion of sacrifice zones- places that, to their extractors, somehow don’t count and therefore can be poisoned, drained, or otherwise destroyed” (Klein, 2014, p.169). However, the couple of terms – “resource extractivism” and “resource curse” are closely linked, and the latter can be unequivocally called an inevitable byproduct of the former. The term “resource curse”, as theorized by Richard M. Auty in his highly acclaimed work, *Sustaining Development in Mineral Economics: The Resource Curse Thesis* (1993), refers to the “problem of plenty”/ “paradox of plenty”, which foregrounds that “the countries that are rich in natural resources, and whose economy is based primarily on extracting and exporting those resources, find it more difficult to develop” (Lang et al., 2013, p.61). However, in my research paper, I shall closely examine the renowned Malayalam journalist cum writer Hari Kurissery’s novel *Manalazham* (2015), translated into English by Santosh Alex in 2021 as *Sandy Depth*, through the theoretical framework of resource extractivism and “resource curse”, as they largely fit into the context of the unbridled and illegal sand excavation from agricultural fields, the thoughtless destruction of hills in the name of road construction, and the ever increasing level of air pollution owing to open brick kilns in the imaginary village called Mannida located in the present-day state of Kerala, as depicted in the novel.



Keywords— *Manalazham*, mining catastrophe, neo-colonialism, Resource extractivism, resource curse.

I. INTRODUCTION

They say that we have come to this earth to destroy the world. They say...that we devour everything, we consume the earth.

—Girolamo Benzoni, *History of the New World* (quoted in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Nutmeg’s Curse*, 2021)

In the third world countries, like India, the impact of colonization, as a functional devise of imperialism, is extremely profound and all pervasive, even in the 21st century. In fact, a new form of colonialism, rather an

extension, which “represents imperialism in its final and perhaps its most dangerous stage” (Nkrumah, 1965, p. 4), has emerged in the post-colonial countries in the name of ‘neo-colonialism’, a term coined by Kwame Nkrumah, the first President of Ghana and chief exponent of pan-Africanism, in his famous book, *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965). The term, ‘neo-colonialism’, suggests that despite gaining political freedom by the formerly colonized countries, “the ex-colonial powers and the newly emerging superpowers such as the United States continued to play a decisive role in their cultures and

economies through new instruments of indirect control, such as international monetary bodies, through the power of multinational corporations and cartels which artificially fixed the prices in world markets, and through a variety of other educational and cultural non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Ashcroft et al., 2025, pp.236-237). Perhaps, the most recurrent and debated term, pertaining to both colonialism and neo-colonialism, is resource extractivism or simply, "extractivism" (a term coined by the Uruguayan social scientist Eduardo Gudynas), which refers to "those activities which remove large quantities of natural resources that are not processed (or processed only to a limited degree), especially for export" (Lang et al. 2013, p.61). Although, resource extraction had set in long back in the colonial times with the large-scale plundering and exporting of human resources in the form of slaves, and natural resources in the form of minerals, gold, diamond, ivory, and sylvan resources like cotton and woods from the colonized countries of Asia and Africa to the homelands of the European colonizers, as a neo-colonial enterprise, it came into being much later in the 20th century. In this capital driven world, the neo-colonialist powers excessively indulge in various extractivist activities, like crude oil extraction, and ore and coal mining, in the resource-rich underdeveloped nations for illimited profit. And, in course of time, other natural objects like land, water, and river sand are also robbed of in this colossal exploitative mission, thus, immediately and directly affecting the lives of the 'ecosystem people', who are from "those communities which depend very heavily on the natural resources of their own locality- against 'omnivores', individuals and groups with the social power to capture, transform and use natural resources from a much wider catchment area; sometimes, indeed, the whole world" (Guha and Martinez-Alier, 1997, p.12). Thus, to these vulnerable people, this very nature's bounty, ultimately, turns out to be a "resource curse", a term coined by Richard M. Auty in *The Sustaining Development in Mineral Economics: The Resource Curse Thesis* (1993), which advocates that "not only may resource-rich countries fail to benefit from a favourable endowment, they may actually perform worse than less well-endowed countries" (Auty, 1993, p.1). The actual cause of "the resource curse", often known as "the paradox of plenty"/ "the problem of plenty", is further addressed by Albert Acosta as he posits that "most of what is produced by the extractivist industries is not for consumption in the domestic market but basically destined for export" (Lang et al., 2013, p.63). In this fashion, the resource-endowed countries are deprived of their own riches and compelled to embrace sheer poverty by the extractivist forces like multinational organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, and the leading economies like the USA, China, and Japan. In this regard,

we are, at once, reminded of the US president Donald Trump's recent implementation of his aggressive global mantra "drill, baby, drill" by dramatically capturing Nicolás Maduro, and asserting dominion over Venezuela's vast oil reserves. As Trump said, reported on 6th January, 2026 in *The Guardian* by Noor and Milman, "The oil companies are going to go in, they are going to spend money, we are going to take back the oil, frankly, we should've taken back a long time ago. A lot of money is coming out of the ground; we are going to be reimbursed for everything we spend." In this very context of severe neo-colonialist and neo-imperialist domination, the Indian-born journalist and writer Hari Kurissery's Malayalam environmental novel *Manalazham* (2015), translated into English as *Sandy Depth* (2021) by Santosh Alex, that showcases a vibrant gallery of horrifying images of rampant sand extraction, calls for a close consideration. Unlike the common practice of sand excavation from rivers, the novel exclusively deals with the theme of unbridled illegal sand mining from agricultural wetlands, through the formation of countless deep sand pits. Consequently, numerous deaths occur owing to sudden exposure to these deadly pits. It also engages with the theme of loss of rare medicinal plants and fertility of cultivating lands, located in Mannida and its immediate vicinity, in the present-day state of Kerala. The novel also sheds light on other ecological concerns such as the levelling of hills by soil mining under the garb of road construction and the local people suffering from various respiratory problems caused by air pollution from open brick furnace, followed by a number of environmental protests. Thus, the novel vividly shows how despite being replete with natural resources, Mannida is destined to undergo the "resource curse" in the form of underdevelopment.

II. "THERE'S NOTHING TO INVEST, IT'S JUST SCOOPING AND COLLECTING THE SAND": MAPPING RESOURCE EXTRACTIVISM AS A NEO-COLONIAL ENTERPRISE IN MANALAZHAM

Resource extractivism as a neo-colonial venture is a dominant discourse in Hari Kurissery's eco-fiction *Manalazham*. In the very opening chapter of the novel, titled "Reptile", we get a glimpse, for the first time, of the unlawful and unrestrained sand extraction, when the novel's protagonist, Sachidanandan, a disabled person, coming to the village Mannida to serve as a guest teacher of Sanskrit at the Nelpara School, is guided at Kalarimukku by "the water drops that fell from the sand lorry showed the way to Mannida" (Kurissery, 2021, p.10). The large-scale sand extraction from the river Kallada had earlier increased the river's depth to such an extent that "even if the dam

explodes and the water flows into the river, it can hold the water" (Kurissery, 2021, p.26), thus preventing the river from flooding and rendering the agricultural lands, situated by the river banks, infertile. As Radhakrishnan, an environmental activist of Mannida and Sachidanandan's companion, gives a detailed account:

Every time the older generation waited for the fertile soil to be deposited on the banks of the river...When there was no fertile soil people started new ways of cultivation. Salt deposits occurred on the land. They lost their way of cultivation. (Kurissery, 2021, p.26)

Thus, the Mannida people had gradually shifted their daily labour from the agricultural fields to the brick backing areas and later on to the sand excavating agricultural wetlands.

This massive transition leads to an unimaginable increase in the price of lands, and gives birth to a sudden rise of a number of sand dealers or contractors like Chandran Pillai, Bennichan, Rameshan, and Raghavan, who act as neo-colonial agents through largely operating their extractivist ventures by purchasing people's lands, and hiring the local people, and employing them in sand mining as per their individual skill:

There are so many contractors. The fields which were not worth rupees five hundred for a cent were bought for five thousand or twelve thousand rupees. Then they make lakhs of rupees. There's payment for everything, those who show the way for the lorry, those who check the employee, the one who shows the route is provided with a mobile, bike and cash, the one who ferries the boat, the one who scoops the sand, motor mechanic, lorry owner, tea shop person, lottery person and the woman who spends the night with those coming with money. There's money everywhere. (Kurissery, 2021, p.27)

In addition, the overwhelming presence of tipper lorries, plying on the roads and carrying loads of excavated sand at a very rapid speed, terrifies the villagers and even bus drivers who immediately make way for them. In order to put an end to this alarming situation, Sachi reports to the district collector, and informs several local newspapers. Along with the villagers and the other members of Mannida Protection Committee, Sachi puts up a number of protests against the illegal sand mining claiming it as the root cause of all the troubles, only to find that everyone, ranging from the police, the administrative officials to the political leaders, and ministers, is in close liaison with the sand mafias. When the district collector informs the leader of the ruling party about the environmental issues looming large in Mannida, the leader draws a parallel between the sand mining Mannida

and the oil extracting Saudi Arabia, and declares the very practice of sand mining as a way to becoming "self-sufficient":

In Arab countries they are mining oil from the land ... What's wrong in mining sand from the land, which is for the growth of the village. The village is standing on its own. It's becoming self-sufficient. Mahatma Gandhi too said to be self-sufficient...It's like petro dollar. Have you heard of environmental problems in Arab Countries? (Kurissery, 2021, p.92)

This very remark of the leader not only unveils his neo-colonial extractivist mindset but also justifies Naomi Klein's definition of extractivism as "a non-reciprocal, dominance-based relationship with the earth, one purely of taking" (Klein, 2014, p.195).

The novel effortlessly shows how the agricultural lands as an integral part of the earth are colonized, and reduced to a mere commodity "for the use of the others, giving them no integrity or value of their own..." (Klein, 2014, p.195):

Children told that huge motor is used for sucking the sand from depths. A big hose is dropped in water. It would go down till the bed and do the dredging. Sand, water, and mud would suck through the hose. The other end mud goes out along with water. (Kurissery, 2021, p.36)

The lines staunchly display how the inhabitants of Mannida including the extractors look upon this nature's plenty as mere sources of income by totally denying its existential essence. It instantly reminds us of the important observation made by the historian William Cronon that "European perception of what constituted a proper use of the environment...thus became a European ideology of conquest" (Ghosh, 2021, p.71).

III. "MANNIDA IS A PLACE WHICH LIVES BY SELLING ITSELF": READING MANALAZHAM IN THE LIGHT OF "RESOURCE CURSE"

Located on the banks of the river Kallada, Mannida is blessed with natural resources like topsoil, golden sand, and good quality mud. In spite of having such plenty, the village does not have a sustainable economic growth. This is a clear case of "resource-curse", which indicates such a paradoxical situation in which the abundance of natural assets of a resource-rich country or locale ultimately proves to be a curse to its development. The likes of Chandran Pillai, Bennichan, Rameshan, and Sudhakaran, who are largely instrumental in extensive sand mining from agricultural fields, export the extracted sand to the other

states and earn huge profit. The people of Mannida who are engaged in sand mining as daily labourers are also paid handsome wages. Despite such monetary gain, they suffer from an acute financial crisis, owing to a lavish life-style. Whatever they earn, they spend extravagantly and mostly in consumption of alcohol. Thus, going bankrupt, these people even have to take loan from the co-operative bank and pay the amount back along with huge interest. On the other hand, the owners reap the maximum profit out of it. As Radhakrishnan aptly points it out in a conversation with Sachidanandan:

Sir, the income of the most of the people of Mannida are double than the outside people. It's like the UGC salary. There are people who don't sweat and make money by informing the number of lorries plying here. The income is lost in many ways here. The main way is that of liquor, prostitutes, hotels, lotteries and hospitals. (Kurissery, 2012, p.97)

Going bankrupt, these people even have to take loan from the co-operative bank and pay the amount back along with huge interest. When the government come in their aid in terms of providing rice at low price, free education in the school, and various study materials free of cost, the shop owners reap the maximum profit out of these too. As Radhakrishnan describes:

If the poor people don't buy rice for rupees one a kilo, it is sold at rupees nine and thirty-five rupees a kilo in the black market. Also, they make money from the sales of liquor and lottery. Also, they make money from the medicines too. (Kurissery, 2021, p.97)

On the other hand, those who neither work for the contractors, nor possess a substantial plot of land which they can sell for mining, have to suffer also, for their land is no longer suitable for cultivation. Thus, this bidimensional disadvantage keeps the ultimate financial prospect of Mannida ever at bay, validating Richard M. Auty's idea of "resource curse", rephrased by Alberto Acosta that "countries that are rich in natural resources, with economies mostly based on the extraction and export of these resources, find it more difficult to ensure the well-being of their citizens" (Vivares, 2020, p.391).

IV. "THERE IS A SERIOUS ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEM IN MANNIDA": REPRESENTATION OF MINING CATASTROPHE IN *MANALAZHAM*

As narrated in Kurissery's novel, the unbridled sand and clay mining from the cultivating lands of Mannida gives birth to a plethora of sand pits as deep as "the length of tall coconut tree" (Kurissery, 2021, p.26), which culminates in

the loss of a number of both human and non-human lives, due to accidental exposure. Apart from this, the novel also addresses diverse environmental concerns such as the demolition of buildings, loss of natural biodiversity in the form of herbal plants, destruction of hill, ravaging air pollution, water pollution and water scarcity. In the words of Sachidanandan:

The mountains have been destroyed, the fields have become pits, infants fall into these pits and have died, people have health problems because of the smoke emanating from the chimney... (Kurissery, 2021, p.119)

The heedless scooping of sand from the profound depth of soil by the sand extractors often leads to sudden demolition of buildings close to the mining sites, thus, rendering the lives of the Mannida people vulnerable. As the novel reads:

Many of the villagers didn't know that the motor situated in the faraway field was scooping sand under their home foundation. Within weeks their building walls and floor got cracks and after some months it collapsed. (Kurissery, 2021, p.36)

The novel, in its 17th Chapter titled "Desi Medicine" reflects on the destruction of natural biodiversity in the form of herbal plants, like sidhamakara dhvajam, because of the soil mining and the mono-culture plantation of rubber:

Since the soil mining was done on the fertile sand the medicines were lost eventually. Those places where the sand mining was done rubber is planted. There's no guarantee that for the next rain herbs and shrubs will sprout at those places. Sachi explained to the students that due to the mining of the sand the natural biodiversity of the place would be lost. (Kurissery, 2021, p.79)

Under the ruse of road extension as a public welfare and developmental project, many hills and mountains located in Kanathurkunnu and Mundakapadam have been destroyed leaving only pits. In the exotic imagination of the novelist, Kanathurkunnu, in its current state, looks "like a beautiful woman lying after removal of her breasts" (Kurissery, 2021, p.101). Since the hills and the mountains are the natural reservoirs of water, the ground water level drops significantly with their destruction, subsequently causing low water level in other sources of water also:

P.R spoke on the importance of mountains; they collect water within themselves...The well of this place must have dried up. He asked the people who gathered at that place. It was true. It's five years since the wells have dried up. (Kurissery, 2021, p.102)

Such destructive endeavours undertaken against the earth solely for making Mannida better for its people also substantiate the idea of "terraforming" (a term coined by Jack Williamson in his 1942 short story "Collision orbit"), meaning "the alteration of earth's landscape" (Pak, 2016, p.1) for human causes. The idea is perhaps best presented in Amitav Ghosh's famous non-fiction *The Nutmeg's Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis* (2021), in which Ghosh talks about how the European colonizers considered the earth as "a "frontier" to be "conquered" and "colonized"" (Ghosh, 2021, p.54).

The water shortage continues to be a severe crisis in Mannida and its surrounding areas. The father of one of Sachi's students is seen to express his disgust to Sachi that, for the first time in his life, the water in his well has dried up. The ever water-rich Akaththukavu temple pond has also gone dry. Moreover, the river water gets contaminated courtesy to the disposal of various sorts of waste into its body:

Today many of the water bodies are the place to dispose the waste and garbage. By the time we understand the importance of water, it would perish. The sewage waste and the slaughter waste is being dumped into the river. The Public Works Department has not understood that the small drains are connected to the water bodies. They deem as if they don't know about the factory waste being dumped into the river. (Kurissery, 2021, p.180)

As Sachi starts living in Mannida, he goes on experiencing the terrible state of the place marked by extremely poor air quality due to the overwhelming presence of varied poisonous gases and harmful particles emanating from the open brick furnaces situated near the river banks. Almost everybody ranging from the children to the oldies has to pay the price as they suffer from different toxic air-invited diseases like asthma, skin allergy, and intense breathing problem. The exact cause of these problems is pointed out in clear terms by Vasu Pillai, the tea-shop owner as he narrates:

When they (the brick furnace people) don't get blue mud, they mix clay with vandal. Then this foul smell emanates if you are somewhere near to it, then you will faint and fall...Vandal actually is a bad mud, which is not formed properly. This consists of soiled leaves and twigs. When it's set to fire many poisonous gases come out. (Kurissery, 2021, p.32).

V. CONCLUSION

Hari Kurissery in his eco-narrative *Manalazham* dexterously sketches a lively picture of the neo-colonial resource extractivism and its detrimental effects. The novel, in its limited space, exhibits how the extractivist economy of Mannida guides its people to nurture in them infinite greed and violence. Their extreme yearning for money gradually silences their voice of resistance turning them into spineless parasites. Despite putting up a number of resistances led by Sachi and other local activists, Mannida continues to flow in its own familiar rhythm, disregarding its internal anomalies. The unimaginable resource exploitation meted out on Mannida at the expense of its sustainable development inevitably makes it a "sacrifice zone", a place which "to their extractors, somehow doesn't[don't] count and therefore can be poisoned, drained or otherwise destroyed, for the supposed greater good of economic progress" (Klein, 2014, p.196). The novel in its own way reveals that the word 'development' is very often fraught with the hermeneutics of suspicion and offers a message that sustainable development is the only alternative in this regard.

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A Review of the Application of Foreignization in Literary Translation

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Abstract— This article reviews the application of foreignization in literary translation, explores the evolution, similarities and differences of foreignization views between the East and the West, and their implications for contemporary translators. This article summarizes the attitudes and contributions of various scholars in the history of China and the West towards foreignization, and compares the differences in the use of foreignization between China and the West. Through a review of the perspectives and applications of foreignization in both China and the West, this article reveals the important role of foreignization in conveying cultural differences and promoting cultural exchange, and provides theoretical guidance and methodological references for translators in literary translation practice.



Keywords—Comparison between China and the West; foreignization; literary translation; translation history.

I. INTRODUCTION

With the acceleration of globalization, cultural exchange and integration have become one of the important characteristics of the world today. In this context, the importance of translation as a bridge for cross-cultural communication is self-evident. Translation is not only the conversion of language, but also the dissemination of culture and the exchange of ideas. Among them, foreignization, as a special translation strategy, deserves our in-depth exploration of its evolution in the history of Chinese and Western translation and the translation concepts it embodies. This article attempts to reveal the cultural, historical, and social factors behind it, as well as how these factors affect the selection and application of foreignization strategies. At the same time, this article will also compare and analyze the differences in the views of foreignization in translation between China and the West, explore their causes and impacts, and provide insights for today's translation practice based on these differences. This article will also explore how to flexibly apply foreignization strategies in literary translation practice based on the application suggestions of various scholars on the concept of foreignization in translation to achieve the

best balance between the original text and the translated text.

II. THE EVOLUTIONARY HISTORY OF FOREIGNIZATION BETWEEN CHINA AND THE WEST

Any translation idea, no matter how modern and novel it may be, is gradually formed. The emergence of foreignization is no exception. It is an extension and expansion of literal translation theory in traditional translation theory, and has undergone gradual evolution in this process. Literal translation mainly describes a translation method that imitates the form and style of the original text, while foreignization focuses on respecting and preserving the language and cultural differences of the source language, and pays more attention to cultural translation. The gradual extension of literal translation to foreignization is a gradual process, and the two are not in a sequential or substitutive relationship. In other words, modern translation studies not only discuss foreignization, but also literal translation. It can be said that the emergence of foreignization is a deepening and

concretization of literal translation in traditional translation studies. Therefore, the two are both interrelated and distinct from each other.

2.1 The Evolution of Foreignization in Western Countries

In the West, the idea of foreignization can be traced back to the word for word translation mentioned by Cicero, Horace, and St. Jerome in ancient Rome, which is the embryonic form of literal translation. Jerome believes that in literary translation, translators can and should use a style that is easy to understand to convey the meaning of the original work, but in Bible translation, literal translation should be the main approach (Tan Zaixi, 2004). Augustine often translated the cohesive forms of prepositions and verbs in Greek as two separate units, indicating that he was more inclined towards literal translation than Jerome, emphasizing the form and structure of words (Tan Zaixi, 2004).

The most famous translator in the early Middle Ages, Manlius Boethius, although neglected the unity of content and style in translation, he considered the connection between literal translation and literary genres, which was a significant advancement in translation theory (Tan Zaixi, 2004). In medieval English translation, translators generally followed the principle of using word for word translation when possible and using literal translation when impossible, and interpreting this principle differently in different situations (Tan Zaixi, 2004). This reflects the dialectical grasp of the relationship between literal translation and free translation by translators in medieval English translation, adhering to the principle of literal translation while reflecting flexibility. This is a relatively mature concept of literal translation, which still has theoretical value to this day.

During the Renaissance, the famous German poet and translator Sebastian Brant elaborated on the method of translating poetry: as long as the rhythm allowed, the translated poem should be translated word for word to give the translation the characteristics of poetry. However, from Brent's translation practice, he did not strictly adhere to this viewpoint in his translation, as there are almost no traces of word for word translation in his translations (Tan Zaixi, 2004). This inconsistency between theory and practice is not an isolated phenomenon. Johannes Reuchlin, a German humanistic writer of his time, adopted a word for word translation method in his translation practice.

In modern times, the debate between literal translation and free translation has evolved into a debate between the ancient and modern schools of thought. Bachet de Meziriac of the ancient school proposed three principles that translators must follow, namely, they must not add

private goods to the original work, must not make additions or deletions to the original work, and must not make any changes that undermine the original intention (Tan Zaixi, 2004). Daniel Huet believes that translators should first focus on the original author's meaning and wording, and try to reproduce their style as much as possible (Tan Zaixi, 2004). Charles Batteux argued for the principle of fidelity and accuracy and literal translation based on language analysis, confirming that "human characteristics" determine the "universal natural word order", and therefore translation rules should "preserve the original word order as much as possible" (Tan Zaixi, 2004).

Through a brief review of the history of Western literary translation, it can be found that although most literary translators tend to lean towards free translation, there have been advocates for literal translation at any time. The early concept of literal translation mainly remained at the level of language meaning and formal style, without involving a wide range of fields such as culture, poetics, society, ethics, and ideology. Over time, literal translation has gradually extended and expanded into foreignization, providing basic clues for the development of Western foreignization ideas.

Friedrich Schleiermacher proposed two completely different translation methods in his speech: one is to bring the reader closer to the original author, and the other is to bring the original author closer to the reader (Lin Lin, 2012). He advocates for the first method, which is the foreignization method, believing that this method can allow readers to appreciate foreign cultures and respect the differences in the source language and culture. This idea is extremely important in the history of Western translation theory and has become one of the important documents of Romantic translation theory. In China, scholars often trace Schleiermacher's ideas on foreignization when exploring the issues of foreignization and domestication.

Walter Benjamin's theory of foreignization in translation extends traditional literal translation to the level of "pure language", enriches the connotation of literal translation, highlights the importance of language form in literary translation, and emphasizes the complementarity between languages (Li Zhiling, 2021). Antoine Berman first proposed the concept of "translation ethics", advocating respect for language and cultural differences in the original work, and advocating the achievement of translation ethics goals through foreignization translation (Berman, Antoine, 1984). Lawrence Venuti's theory of foreignization in translation is the core of his translation philosophy, inspired by Goethe and Schleiermacher, and incorporating the research perspectives of Benjamin and Bellman. It is an inheritance and development of the tradition of

foreignization in translation. Venuti's view on foreignizing extends the literal translation perspective to the levels of poetics, culture, and ethical politics, with richer connotations and positive significance for translation research (Yunhong Liu, 2013).

2.2 The Evolution of Foreignization in China

In China, the concepts of foreignization and domestication have gradually formed with the deepening of understanding of translation, especially as translation is included in the research agenda as a cross-cultural activity. The widespread use of domestication and foreignization terms began after Venuti proposed relevant strategies. Looking back at the history of translation theory in China, it can be found that the debate between domestication and foreignization in contemporary China has gone through the debate over "literary quality" in ancient times, as well as the debate between literal translation and free translation in modern times. This chapter will follow this clue to specifically describe and analyze how the traditional Chinese literal translation theory has extended to today's foreignization translation theory.

In ancient China, the debate between literal translation and free translation was first manifested in the debate over the "quality" of Buddhist scripture translation, which became the embryonic form of the literal translation concept in modern China. Zhi Qian's "Preface to the Dharma Sentence Sutra" reflects the early translation perspective of the "Quality" school, emphasizing the faithful transmission of Buddhist scripture ideas in simple language forms, and opposing the addition of literary talent beyond the meaning of the scriptures (Chen Fukang, 2000). Dao'an's translation theory further emphasizes being faithful to the meaning and content of the original text, and opposes arbitrarily adding literary style to the translation and deviating from the original intention (Chen Fukang, 2000).

In modern times, with the further deepening of translation understanding and the influence of Western translation theories, the debate between "textual translation" and "qualitative translation" has been replaced by the debate between "literal translation" and "free translation". Rightist scholars such as Liang Shiqiu and Zhao Jingshen advocate free translation, while left-wing scholars such as Lu Xun and Qu Qiubai advocate literal translation. Lu Xun's perspective on literal translation already includes the awareness of foreignization in translation, advocating that translation must retain an exotic atmosphere, which is similar to what we call "foreignization" today.

In the late Qing Dynasty, Lin Shu and Yan Fu emphasized the trend of "creative" domestication translation. In the process of reflection and resistance, Lu Xun's views on

language, culture, and translation underwent a transformation. His view on foreignization in translation extends the literal translation theory to the levels of poetics, culture, and politics, injecting new content into traditional Chinese translation theory and expanding the scope of translation research. Lu Xun's view on foreignization in translation was not only inspired by Western thought, but also in turn influenced Western foreignization in translation, such as Venuti's, and had a profound impact on contemporary Chinese foreignization in translation (Gao Yu, 2000).

Besides Lu Xun, his younger brother Zhou Zuoren also agreed with the translation method of "literal translation". Liu Bannong clearly supports the Zhou brothers' literal translation proposition, and Fu Sinian also advocates the strategy of foreignization in literal translation, believing that literal translation and free translation are not opposed, but dialectically unified. In addition, Zheng Zhenfeng and Mao Dun also generally agree with Lu Xun's literal translation view (Chen Fukang, 2000).

Liu Yingkai first defined "domestication" and believed that "English to Chinese translation should be done as much as possible, while Chinese to English translation should be done as much as possible". He pointed out that "domestication" is an extreme form of free translation (Liu Yingkai, 1987). Sun Zhili, on the other hand, explicitly proposed that literary translation should focus on foreignization, with domestication as a supplement, becoming one of the most profound translation theorists in contemporary China to discuss the issues of foreignization and domestication (Sun Zhili, 2002).

In summary, the Chinese theory of foreignization translation has gradually developed its own unique characteristics based on the absorption of Western ideas. The similarities and differences in the perspectives of foreignization between China and the West have further enriched the perspective of global translation research.

III. DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES IN THE FOREIGNIZATION IN LITERARY TRANSLATION BETWEEN CHINA AND THE WEST

3.1. Similarities between Chinese and Western on foreignization

From a historical perspective, both Chinese and Western perspectives on foreignizing have undergone an evolutionary process. By comparison, it can be found that the two have both similarities and differences.

Whether in the East or the West, the proposal of the concept of foreignization in translation is a reflection on

the mainstream of domesticated translation. In the West, Schleiermacher's advocacy of foreignization strategy is a resistance to domestication translation since neoclassicism. Bellman explains the negative consequences of domestication translation by listing 12 forms of deformation of the original text, and therefore advocates foreignization translation. Venuti discovered through his study of the translation history of English and American literature since the 17th century that domestication translation dominates and reflects the cultural hegemony of English and American cultures. Therefore, he proposed the method of foreignization translation to resist this cultural hegemony. In China, the foreignization method is a reflection and criticism of the domestication translation adopted by Lin Shu and Yan Fu during the late Qing Dynasty. Liu Yingkai, by analyzing the phenomenon of excessive domestication in literary translation in China, clearly points out that "domestication is the wrong path in translation". Sun Zhili argued through rich translation examples that literary translation should adhere to the principle of "foreignization as the mainstay and domestication as the secondary".

Secondly, both Chinese and Western perspectives on foreignization have gone through a process of extending from the linguistic level to the cultural level. Goethe yearns to absorb foreign cultural nutrients through foreignization and create a more vibrant new culture. Schleiermacher hopes to enrich and develop the language and literature of Germany through foreignization. Benjamin hopes to demonstrate the kinship between languages through foreignization, while Venuti hopes to achieve equal communication between different cultures. In China, Lu Xun advocated the truthful introduction of foreign ideas and cultures through foreignization, while maintaining the "exotic atmosphere" of the original text. Both Liu Yingkai and Sun Zhili advocate preserving expressions with distinct cultural characteristics through foreignization.

Thirdly, although the concept of foreignization in translation between China and the West originates from different cultural traditions, both pursue the ultimate ideal of "ethics of diversity". Bellman and Venuti in the West have systematically discussed this "ethics of diversity", while Chinese foreignization theorists, although not systematically elaborated, have implied this ethical ideal in their theories and practices (Sun Zhili, 2003).

3.2 Differences between Chinese and Western on foreignization

Firstly, the Western view of foreignizing adopts a confrontational attitude towards mainstream domestication translation. For example, the two translation methods

proposed by Schleiermacher are binary opposites. The Chinese concept of foreignization adopts a coordinated and balanced approach, advocating "foreignization as the main approach, and domestication as the secondary approach". Sun Zhili dialectically proposed that literary translation should adhere to this principle.

Secondly, the goal of Western foreignization in translation is not to be faithful to the original text, but to maximize the translator's subjectivity and highlight the heterogeneous components of the original text. Bellman believed that the signifier and the signified, as well as the meaning and form, are opposed, that is, retaining the signified form requires abandoning the signified. The Chinese concept of foreignization emphasizes the use of foreignization to make the translation fully faithful to the original text, including the heterogeneous content and language form of the original text (Sun Zhili, 2001).

Thirdly, the Western concept of foreignization in translation magnifies the uncertainty of meaning infinitely, granting translators freedom by canceling translation meaning, thereby maximizing the heterogeneity of the original text. Benjamin, Bellman, and Venuti all proposed that translation is not about conveying meaning, but about showcasing form. The Chinese concept of foreignization acknowledges the uncertainty of meaning, but does not negate its certainty. Instead, it advocates for the maximum reproduction of the original meaning through foreignization translation (Sun Zhili, 2007).

Fourthly, the Western concept of foreignization in translation often overlooks translation practice, leading to theoretical detachment from reality. Benjamin advocates driving readers and meaning out of translation activities, in order to achieve the ideal of "pure language" freedom for translators. This kind of thinking is obviously detached from reality and has a utopian color. The Chinese concept of foreignization emphasizes the combination of theory and practice, which is more suitable for guiding translation practice, making the translation faithful to the original text and taking into account the reader's acceptance ability.

Fifthly, Western views on foreignization rarely consider the acceptance of readers, and even extreme exclusion of readers, believing that the translation is not intended for the readers. Bellman and Venuti's theories hardly address the issue of reader acceptance. The Chinese concept of foreignization in translation emphasizes not only being loyal to the original author, but also taking into account the reader's receptive ability (Sun Zhili, 2004).

Through these comparisons, it can be seen that there are similarities and differences in the perspectives of foreignization between China and the West in literary

translation, further enriching the perspective of global translation research.

IV. THE ENLIGHTENMENT OF FOREIGNIZATION ON CONTEMPORARY TRANSLATORS' LITERARY TRANSLATION

In the West, the view of foreignization denies the unity between foreignization and domestication, while the view of foreignization in China emphasizes both opposition and dialectical unity between the two. Xu Jianping and Zhang Rongxi proposed that in cross-cultural translation, foreignization can be appropriately used as a supplement to domestication, while in Chinese English translation, domestication should be maximized to promote communication (Xu Jianping & Zhang Rongxi, 2002). Chen Lili analyzed the reader's acceptance ability, the development of translation methods, and the trend of cultural integration, and proposed that foreignization is the trend (Chen Lili, 1999). However, the necessity of domestication translation should not be underestimated, and translators need to find the best balance between domestication and foreignization. Huang Yanchun and Huang Zhending proposed four general principles for the application of foreignization and domestication, with the principle of "as much foreignization as possible" as the primary principle (Huang Yanchun & Huang Zhending, 2010). Yuan Xiaoning and Liu Cheng believe that translators should adopt either domestication or foreignization translation methods based on specific situations, or a combination of both (Yuan Xiaoning & Liu Cheng, 2002). However, with the advancement of globalization, foreignization will become the overall trend. Xiong Bing advocates that, whenever possible, translators should try to use the method of foreignization or foreignization with interpretation to deal with cultural factor words (Xiong Bing, 2003). After comparing five translation strategies for handling cultural information in the original text, Jiang Xiaohua pointed out that foreignization is the best strategy for conveying cultural factors and has profound significance for cultural dissemination and exchange (Jiang Xiaohua, 2003).

The concept of foreignization focuses on the source language author, emphasizes the translation and integration of heterogeneous cultures, and takes into account the reader's acceptance ability. Therefore, translators should not only follow the principle of foreignization, but also flexibly use foreignization and domestication methods in specific translation contexts.

In literary translation, for sentences with distinct and unique cultural connotations, the principle of foreignization should be followed, that is, to foreignize as

much as possible and convey the foreign cultural characteristics of the original work to the greatest extent possible. The translator should be responsible not only to the original author and faithfully reproduce their true intentions, but also to the target readers, conveying the foreign culture of the original text truthfully. When implementing the principle of foreignization in translation, translators should flexibly apply domestication and play its complementary role. This is determined by the complex factors of translation activities, including the purpose of translation, the subject matter and genre of the original text, the significance and role of cultural content in the original text, the education level and reading purpose of the readers, the historical background and social ideology, etc.

In addition, when translating sentences with distinct and unique cultural connotations, one should have a sense of the times and view their degree and trend of foreignization in conjunction with the development of the times. Translators should not only see future trends, but also be grounded in current realities.

Through foreignization, translators can more realistically reproduce the cultural characteristics of the original text, allowing readers to feel the unique charm of foreign cultures while reading the translated text. This not only helps to enhance the literary value of the translation, but also promotes understanding and communication between different cultures. Therefore, translators should flexibly apply foreignization and domestication strategies in literary translation to achieve the best translation effect.

V. CONCLUSION

This article provides a systematic review of the application of foreignization in literary translation, revealing the historical evolution, core concepts, and importance of foreignization in contemporary translation practice in both the East and the West. It also analyzes the inspiration of foreignization in translation for contemporary translators. The concept of foreignization in translation requires translators to strive for foreignization when translating sentences with distinct cultural connotations, in order to maximize the reproduction of the foreign cultural characteristics of the original work, while flexibly applying domestication strategies in specific translation contexts. Through a review of the perspectives and applications of foreignization in both the East and the West, this article reveals the important role of foreignization in conveying cultural differences and promoting cultural exchange. Foreignization not only enriches readers' cultural perspectives, but also promotes equal dialogue and understanding between different

cultures in the context of globalization, providing valuable theoretical guidance and practical reference for translators in literary translation practice. In summary, the concept of foreignization has important theoretical value and practical application significance in contemporary literary translation, which is worthy of in-depth research and flexible application by translators.

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Representation of Race: A Derridean Analysis of Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

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Abstract— This study revisits the question of race in Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and challenges the long-standing view that the novel is inherently anti-racist. Racism is approached here as both personal prejudice and systemic discrimination rooted in perceived racial and ethnic differences, most often directed at marginalized groups. While some scholars regard racism as an innate human tendency, others understand it as socially produced and sustained by cultural and institutional forces. Although *Huckleberry Finn* is widely celebrated for its apparent critique of slavery and racial injustice, this study reconsiders such claims by asking whether Twain truly opposed slavery or simply represented its cruelty for narrative effect. It also questions whether his depiction of enslaved characters fully escapes racial bias and stereotyping. Drawing on Jacques Derrida's concept of "double reading," the analysis uncovers tensions and contradictions within the novel's racial representations. Through content analysis and a descriptive-analytical approach, the study ultimately suggests that Twain's portrayal of both enslaved people and slaveholders remains unresolved in its stance toward racial objectivity and resistance to bias.



Keywords— Conscious, Deconstruction, Double Reading, Jacques Derrida, Mark Twain, Racism

I. INTRODUCTION

Racism, as a belief system, is regarded as one of the persistent phenomena present in both small and large communities worldwide. Some scholars argue that racism is innate and that every human harbors racist views to some extent. Conversely, other researchers argue that racism is not inherent but rather learned from societal norms and structures. In both perspectives, racism functions to divide people into categories based on religion, sect, skin color, region, gender, biological features, and racial characteristics.

The term *race* is widely employed across all layers of society, including institutions and systems such as politics, economics, and the legal framework. These institutions

often work collectively to reinforce and perpetuate various forms of discrimination and inequality against certain groups. Such systemic discrimination, embedded within institutional structures and societal practices, has contributed to the widespread notion that some races are inherently superior to others.

Mark Twain is recognized as an American humorist, novelist, and travel writer. He is best remembered today as the author of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and is widely considered one of the greatest American writers of all time. It is commonly believed that *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* does not directly address racism. Even prominent critics of Twain's works have claimed that racism is not a central concern in the novel.

Before the emergence of deconstruction, all critical approaches implicitly agreed upon certain conventions or rules of literary interpretation. These methods assumed that literary texts possess stable meanings and that the role of criticism is to uncover those meanings. Deconstruction challenged these assumptions, which had been foundational to previous critical frameworks. Rather than attempting to replicate the author's intended meaning, deconstruction seeks to identify the text's "blind spots"—areas where the text contradicts itself or reveals unintended meanings. It aims to bring what is hidden to light. Moreover, concepts that philosophy typically takes for granted become the focus of critical scrutiny in Derridean deconstruction.

In contrast to previous studies of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, this research aims to uncover the novel's racist implications. Ultimately, it proposes an alternative interpretation that diverges from more conventional readings, arguing that the novel contains multiple and contradictory meanings. Therefore, this study attempts to explore representations within Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* that may suggest a racist perspective—although whether such a perspective can be definitively attributed to Twain remains indeterminable.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885) occupies a complex and often contentious position within the American literary canon. Since its publication, the novel has elicited polarized responses, ranging from early condemnations of its vernacular style and perceived vulgarity to effusive praise by literary figures such as T. S. Eliot and Ernest Hemingway, the latter famously claiming it as the origin of modern American literature (Messent, 1997, p. 103; Champion, 1991, p. xxi). Laurie Champion provides a comprehensive overview of this evolving critical reception, tracing the novel's fluctuating status—from celebrated literary innovation to a source of moral and pedagogical controversy—through successive waves of scholarly interpretation (Champion, 1991, p. xii).

Twentieth- and twenty-first-century criticism has increasingly foregrounded the novel's treatment of race and its representational politics. Frances W. Kaye argues that Twain's narrative enables readers to engage with the ethical ambiguities of slavery and racial oppression only at a superficial level, arguing that the text "gives us no more of this reality than we can bear" (Kaye, 1999, p. 14). Echoing this critique, Elaine and Harry Mensh, in *Black, White, and Huckleberry Finn*, offer a systematic analysis of racial depictions within the novel, concluding that Twain's portrayal neither disrupts entrenched racial

ideologies nor offers a substantive critique of white supremacy; rather, it may tacitly reinforce prevailing prejudices (Mensch & Mensch, 2000, pp. 6–8).

Recent theoretical interventions, particularly those influenced by critical race theory and Afropessimism, have further interrogated the novel's structural limitations. Sebastian Rao, in his Afropessimist reading, argues that Twain's text remains ensnared in white narrative frameworks that inhibit authentic Black subjectivity. While acknowledging the novel's critique of racism, Rao asserts that its moral discourse remains fundamentally white-centered, thereby constraining its ability to fully represent or reckon with Black suffering (Rao, 2023, pp. 12–13). In contrast, Jocelyn Chadwick Joshua mounts a spirited defense of Twain's linguistic choices, particularly his deployment of vernacular and racially offensive language. She argues that these transgressive elements are central to the novel's disruptive force, resisting the impulse toward sanitization and preserving its critical edge (Chadwick Joshua, 1998, p. 89).

An intensified focus on the character of Jim has also reoriented recent scholarly discourse. Shelley Fisher Fishkin, in *Jim: The Life and Afterlives of Huckleberry Finn's Comrade*, examines the historical and literary reception of Jim over more than a century, arguing that Twain's use of dialect was a deliberate and subversive strategy to humanize a Black character within a deeply racialized cultural context (Fishkin, 2024, p. 127). Fishkin's work foregrounds Jim not merely as a figure within the narrative but as a cultural symbol whose legacy continues to shape and inform debates on race, identity, and literary representation.

Together, these diverse critical engagements underscore the enduring relevance—and deep ambivalence—of *Huckleberry Finn* in American literary and cultural discourse. The novel persists as a contested site where questions of authorship, race, narrative ethics, and historical memory are continually negotiated and reinterpreted.

In his essay on *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, titled "Mr. Eliot, Mr. Trilling, and Huckleberry Finn," Leo Marx argues that *Huckleberry Finn* did not originally occupy its current prestigious place in the American literary canon. T. S. Eliot and Lionel Trilling were two of the most influential critics whose praise helped elevate the novel to canonical status. However, Marx criticizes these critics for attempting to justify what he sees as the novel's disappointing ending. According to Marx, the meaning of Huck and Jim's journey is "not in the least obscure" (Marx, 1953, p. 425).

Marx asserts that it is due to Huck's "instinctive humanity" that he decides to help Jim escape slavery.

However, this study suggests that the meaning of the journey is ultimately indeterminable. Marx believes that Huck defies the values of the society he has absorbed from figures like Miss Watson. Yet there is evidence in the novel indicating that Huck's selfless decision was influenced by the moral guidance he received earlier from Widow Douglas—a character Marx does not even mention. Marx finds the ending disappointing because Jim is set free by Miss Watson. According to Marx, Miss Watson (Widow Douglas's sister) "exhibits all the outstanding traits of the valley society" and is, in short, "the Enemy" (Marx, 1953, p. 426).

Overall, this study challenges Marx's claim that the meaning of Huck and Jim's journey "is not in the least obscure" (Marx, 1953, p. 425). It argues that the novel, rather than presenting a single, coherent message, offers multiple, conflicting interpretations that resist closure.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

In this research, the researchers have employed a qualitative approach focused on Derrida's double reading as a deconstructive methodology. The material is *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), and the data analysis method is textual interpretation (close reading).

Jacques Derrida's notion of *double reading* constitutes a foundational methodological strategy within deconstructive criticism. This approach entails two interconnected yet distinct stages of textual interpretation. The initial reading engages with the text according to its apparent structural coherence and internal logic. In this phase, the critic adopts the interpretive framework the text offers, affirming its ostensible unity and the stability of its meaning. A second reading—guided by Derrida's deconstructive methodology—uncovers deeper contradictions that complicate the novel's apparent moral coherence.

IV. FINDINGS

However, a second reading—guided by Derrida's deconstructive methodology—uncovers deeper contradictions that complicate the novel's apparent moral coherence. Despite Huck's moments of compassion, he continues to refer to Jim in dehumanizing terms, employing racial slurs that reflect the enduring presence of racist ideology. For instance, Huck states, "He's just a nigger, and that's all there is to it" (Twain, 1885, p. 110), a remark that starkly illustrates the persistence of racial prejudice even within seemingly progressive moments. Furthermore, Jim is frequently depicted through reductive stereotypes—portrayed as superstitious, naive, and overly dependent—traits that align more closely with minstrel

caricatures than with the portrayal of a fully developed character. Thus, although the narrative appears to foster empathy, it simultaneously reinforces the very racial tropes it purports to critique.

The novel's ending further exposes the limitations of its critique. Jim's emancipation is not the result of a principled rejection of slavery or a transformative moral awakening, but rather the outcome of a narrative convenience—Miss Watson's death and her posthumous decision to free him. Huck, instead of engaging with or challenging the societal institutions he has come to question, opts for withdrawal:

"I reckon I got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest" (Twain, 1885, p. 451).

This symbolic departure suggests not a genuine transformation, but evasion. As revealed through Derrida's framework, the narrative ultimately reverts to the status quo, leaving dominant social and racial hierarchies fundamentally unchallenged and its deeper ideological tensions unresolved.

V. DISCUSSION

Applying Derrida's deconstructive approach reveals deep moral contradictions in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* that complicate its critique of racism and slavery. Although Huck shows some empathy toward Jim, his use of racial slurs and Jim's stereotypical portrayal undermine the novel's progressiveness, reflecting entrenched racist attitudes even in moments of compassion. Huck's ethical struggles further expose the limits of his moral growth, as his guilt centers on violating white property rights rather than recognizing slavery's injustice.

This symbolic departure suggests not a genuine transformation, but evasion. As revealed through Derrida's framework, the narrative ultimately reverts to the status quo, leaving dominant social and racial hierarchies fundamentally unchallenged and its deeper ideological tensions unresolved.

In conclusion, Derrida's theory of double reading enables a more nuanced interpretation of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, not merely as a critique of racism and moral hypocrisy, but as a profoundly ambivalent text that both contests and reinforces dominant ideological structures. While Twain offers moments of ethical reflection and social critique, these are frequently undermined by narrative choices and racial representations that complicate, if not contradict, the novel's emancipatory potential. Through this dual interpretive approach, readers gain a more comprehensive understanding of the novel's ethical and ideological complexity.

Jim's freedom, granted through narrative convenience, and Huck's symbolic withdrawal underscore the novel's failure to truly challenge racial hierarchies. Derrida's double reading thus offers a nuanced view of the text as an ambivalent work that both critiques and reinforces dominant ideologies, presenting readers with a complex ethical and ideological landscape rather than a clear moral resolution.

VI. CONCLUSION

Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* occupies a contentious position within the American literary canon. While frequently lauded for its critique of slavery, the novel is equally implicated in perpetuating racial ideologies. Through the application of Jacques Derrida's theory of double reading, this analysis demonstrates how the text simultaneously constructs and dismantles its moral claims. The surface narrative, centered on Huck's apparent ethical development and his resistance to pro-slavery values, ostensibly positions the novel as an anti-racist work. However, a more rigorous deconstructive reading reveals significant ideological fractures that complicate this interpretation.

Central to these contradictions is the character of Jim, who functions both as a catalyst for Huck's moral evolution and as a figure shaped by persistent racial stereotyping. Although Jim plays a pivotal role in the narrative, he is seldom granted the interiority or narrative agency required to challenge the minstrel tropes that define his depiction. The disparity between the novel's ostensible empathy and its underlying complicity with racialized discourse undermines its claim to moral advancement. Huck's ongoing use of racial slurs and his failure to interrogate the legitimacy of slavery further underscore the limitations of his ethical maturation and, by extension, the novel's critical reach.

These limitations are further exemplified in the novel's conclusion. Jim's liberation arises not from a systemic or moral transformation, but from a narrative convenience—Miss Watson's death and her posthumous manumission of Jim. Huck's decision to retreat to the frontier symbolizes not resistance, but evasion of the very social order he briefly seemed to question. Rather than challenging the ideological foundations of racial oppression, the narrative ultimately reinstates them. As Derrida's framework reveals, this return to the status quo is not an incidental narrative failure but a structural component of the text's ideological operation.

In sum, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* emerges as a profoundly ambivalent text—one that aspires to critique institutional injustice while remaining enmeshed in the

cultural ideologies it ostensibly seeks to subvert. Derrida's theory of double reading facilitates a more nuanced critical engagement with the novel's ethical and ideological tensions. This interpretive approach does not diminish the novel's literary significance; rather, it situates the text within a broader conversation about literature's capacity to both reflect and reinforce dominant cultural values. Attending to these internal contradictions allow for a deeper understanding of the possibilities and constraints of moral representation within the American literary tradition.

Therefore, whether consciously or unconsciously, Twain's portrayal of certain characters in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* reveals racial biases, indicating an element of racism in his characterization. Nevertheless, the novel's overarching thematic concern remains an anti-slavery critique.

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Single parenting in proficiency on the English language: Predictor of academic performance

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Abstract— *This study aimed to assess the single-parenting in proficiency on the English language and its relationship to academic performance in the English subject among the Junior High School students at Mauricio V. Landingin Integrated School, Sirawai District, School Division of Zamboanga del Norte, during the school year 2025-2026. There were one hundred seventy-two (172) respondents involved. It utilized survey and descriptive-correlational research methods. Weighted mean, standard deviation, and Spearman Rank-Order Correlation Coefficient (Spearman rho) were the statistical tools used with JAMOV as the statistical software. The level of single parenting in proficiency in the English language was moderate. The students' academic performance was very satisfactory. The levels of single parenting in proficiency in the English language, and students' academic performance were not significantly correlated. Based on the findings and conclusions, the author recommends that the (School Heads School, Principals, Head Teachers, and department heads) use the findings of the study as a basis for the provision of technical assistance to the teachers to further improve the delivery of instruction. The English teacher would also use the findings of the study in reflecting on their teaching practice for continuous improvement. Guidance Counsellors/Advocates would use the findings of this study as a basis for crafting a values formation intervention program to help single-parent learners.*



Keywords— *single parenting, proficiency in the English language, academic Performance*

I. INTRODUCTION

Parenting is widely recognized as one of society's most significant responsibilities because it directly shapes children's physical, emotional, and cognitive development (Bornstein et al., 2021). Through consistent guidance and support, effective parenting helps instill values, regulate behavior, and prepare children to become responsible and productive members of society (Darling & Steinberg, 2017). However, parenting occurs within diverse family structures, including single-parent households. Single parenting has increasingly become a global reality due to marital dissolution, labor migration, or the death of a spouse (Amato, 2014). Although this family arrangement often places greater financial and emotional burdens on the custodial parent, it also reflects resilience and adaptability

as single parents continue to fulfill complex parental roles despite constraints (Bastaits & Mortelmans, 2016).

Globally, single parenting is regarded as a critical social issue because it is frequently linked to economic vulnerability, reduced parental well-being, and disparities in children's educational and health outcomes (Lut et al., 2021). Evidence suggests that single-parent households—particularly in low- and middle-income countries—are more likely to experience poverty, limited healthcare access, and elevated levels of parental stress, which may increase risks of behavioral difficulties among children (Kareem et al., 2024). While many single-parent families demonstrate strengths and adaptive coping, structural inequalities such as limited childcare support, gender wage gaps, and weaker social protection systems continue to intensify the difficulties faced by custodial parents (Lansford, 2021).

Academic performance is strongly influenced by language proficiency, particularly in English, which remains a major medium of instruction in many educational systems, including the Philippines. Research indicates that learners with stronger English proficiency tend to demonstrate higher comprehension, improved critical thinking, and better academic achievement across subject areas (Martinez & Tejada, 2020). For students in single-parent households, however, English language development may be constrained by reduced parental supervision, fewer literacy-enriching experiences at home, and financial limitations that restrict access to learning resources (Alampay & Jover, 2020). These conditions may contribute to proficiency gaps that negatively affect reading, writing, and overall content mastery, thereby influencing academic performance (Kareem et al., 2024). Nonetheless, studies emphasize the importance of protective factors—such as parental warmth, teacher scaffolding, peer collaboration, and institutional support—which can buffer disadvantages and enable students from single-parent households to perform comparably with peers from two-parent families (Banawi et al., 2023).

Despite growing interest in family structure and educational outcomes, research on the relationship between single-parent family arrangements and students' academic performance remains limited, particularly because many studies have focused largely on developed societies. In response to this gap, the present study aims to examine factors that may strengthen or weaken the relationship between single parenting and students' academic outcomes. Specifically, this study investigates the relationship between single parenting and English language proficiency among students at Mauricio V. Lingatian Integrated School, and how family structure may influence English language skills and, consequently, academic performance.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

English Language Proficiency

Proficiency in the English language is widely recognized as a key predictor of students' academic success, especially in contexts where learners must access textbooks, research articles, and assessment tasks written in English. In a large-scale regression study involving 4,959 university students, English proficiency significantly predicted GPA, with the effect varying across faculties (Azkiyah et al., 2023). Similarly, evidence from higher education indicates that prior English exam performance can predict later academic achievement in English courses, with self-rated English proficiency helping to explain this relationship (Chakiso et al., 2025). These findings suggest that strengthening English proficiency supports learning not only by

improving communication skills but also by expanding students' access to academic resources and meeting classroom demands that rely heavily on English.

English proficiency also develops through core language subskills, particularly vocabulary knowledge, reading engagement, and balanced competence across listening, reading, speaking, and writing. A meta-analysis found a meaningful positive relationship between reading interest and vocabulary acquisition among EFL learners, indicating that students who read more and enjoy reading tend to acquire more vocabulary (Santi et al., 2021). In addition, institutional assessment research shows that well-designed CEFR-based proficiency tests can demonstrate strong reliability and validity across major English skills and may even predict performance on international measures such as the TOEIC (Waluyo et al., 2024). Together, these studies highlight that English proficiency is not a single skill but a multidimensional competence strengthened by sustained reading exposure, vocabulary growth, and assessment systems aligned with internationally recognized standards.

Single Parenting

Single parenting can shape learners' English language proficiency through differences in time, supervision, emotional climate, and material resources available for language learning at home. In a large descriptive survey of secondary students in Ekiti State, Nigeria, learners from dual-parent households generally showed stronger engagement and better performance in English than those from single-parent homes, suggesting that family structure may relate to how consistently students practice and receive support in English learning (Akinyemi et al., 2025). However, evidence also shows that the relationship is not always uniformly negative: research among Nigerian secondary students found that single parenting did not necessarily exert a significant negative direct effect on overall academic performance when learner motivation and perceived community support were accounted for, implying that single-parent learners can still perform well when protective factors are present (Hiko et al., 2023).

A key explanation is that home and parenting processes not family structure alone influence language outcomes. Using data from 975 first-year Chinese undergraduates, family environment and parenting styles were linked to English language proficiency, and parenting style helped explain how family conditions connect to English outcomes (Xu et al., 2024). In a related line of evidence among Chinese university EFL students, parental involvement significantly predicted multiple components of L2 motivation, reinforcing that students' English development is partly supported by how much parents (or caregivers) participate, encourage, and scaffold learning mechanisms that may be

harder to sustain consistently in many single-parent households due to workload and role strain (Guo et al., 2025).

Studies suggest that support systems and the quality of involvement can buffer risks to single-parent learners' language development. Among adolescents raised in single-parent households, structured learning programs that required regular attendance and homework completion were associated with higher school connectedness and academic engagement factors that can indirectly strengthen language learning through persistence and participation (Pandya, 2023). At the same time, meta-analytic evidence indicates that not all parental homework involvement is equally beneficial: autonomy-supportive involvement is positively associated with achievement, while other forms (e.g., controlling or frequent direct help) may be unrelated or even negatively linked. This highlight practical strategies schools can recommend to single parents (e.g., routines, encouragement, and autonomy support) to promote stronger literacy and English learning outcomes (Xu et al., 2024).

Academic Performance

The academic performance of students across different educational levels, especially at the secondary level, can be influenced by numerous elements, including institutional, socioeconomic, motivational, and family factors, with the family regarded as a main agent of socialization (Bago, 2022). Academic performance denotes the extent of knowledge acquired by students and can be quantified through numerical scores and their corresponding transmuted grades. It also pertains to how students engage with their studies and manage or complete various assignments given by their educators. The factors influencing a student's academic achievement may be internal or external to the school environment. A range of variables must be considered to identify the factors influencing the quality of academic success (Lozano et al., 2020). Academic performance is considered an accomplishment that reflects the potential abilities of every student and the effectiveness of every school. Furthermore,

student motivation directly influences performance in the curriculum. Motivation is an inner drive that causes an individual to act and to persevere; it energizes behavior, initiates action, directs effort, and strengthens persistence. Many factors affect a student's motivation to learn, including interest in the subject matter, perceptions of usefulness, the desire to achieve, self-confidence and self-esteem, patience and persistence, the approval of others, and the ability to overcome challenges (Agito, 2013).

Academic performance is commonly assessed through examinations or continuous assessment; however, there is no universal consensus on the optimal evaluation methods or on the relative importance of procedural knowledge (e.g., skills) versus declarative knowledge (e.g., facts). Academic achievement is frequently measured through tests, quizzes, projects, and other performance tasks, yet educators and scholars continue to debate which aspects of learning should be emphasized (Atienza et al., 2017).

In the Philippine context, the Department of Education (DepEd) has established a standardized assessment and grading policy under DepEd Order No. 8, s. 2015, which outlines guidelines for evaluating learners' academic performance. Under this policy, academic performance is assessed based on four components—Written Work, Performance Tasks, Quarterly Assessment, and the corresponding weight distributions across learning areas. This system emphasizes both content mastery and the application of skills, aligning with the idea that academic achievement encompasses not only factual knowledge but also students' ability to apply what they have learned in practical contexts (Department of Education, 2015).

III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework is presented in below. Part I presents the independent variable, single parenting, and its influence on learners' English language proficiency, as measured using a 20-item instrument (Akinyemi et al., 2025). Part II presents the dependent variable, the students' academic performance in English, based on their First Quarter grade in the subject (DepEd, 2015).

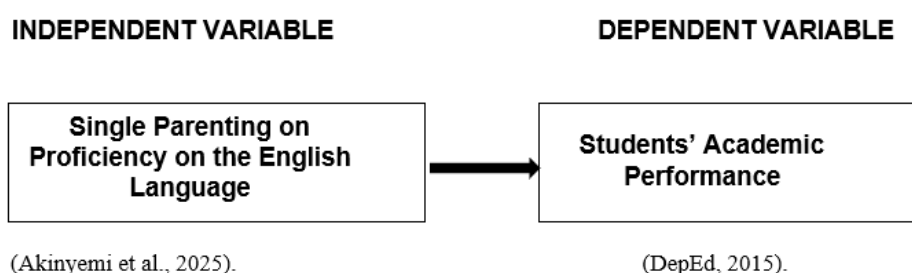


Fig.1: the framework reflects a correlation between single parenting, and its influence on learners' English language proficiency and students' academic performance in English. The study intends to examine the influence of single parenting in English language proficiency and students' academic performance in English.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to assess the single parenting in proficiency on the English language and its relationship to academic performance in the English subject among the Junior High School students at Mauricio V. Landingin Integrated School Sirawai District, Schools Division of Zamboanga del Norte, during the first quarter of the school year 2025-2026.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the respondents' perceived level of single parenting proficiency in English language?
2. What is the respondents' level of academic performance during the first quarter?
3. Is there a significant relationship in the perceived level of single parenting in proficiency on English language and level of academic performance in English subject?

Hypothesis

Numerous studies have demonstrated the significant influence of single parenting on learners' English language proficiency and academic performance during the first quarter (Akinyemi et al., 2025). Building on this research, the current study seeks to explore the effect and relationship between single parenting and English language proficiency, as well as students' academic performance.

Scope and limitation of the study

This study is limited to the single-parenting proficiency in the English language and academic performance among the one hundred seventy-two (172) Junior High School Students during the school year 2025-2026. It also limited its scope to single parenting in proficiency in the English language with twenty (20) items. This study is intended to assess the significant relationship between single parenting proficiency on English language and students' level of academic performance. Other descriptors of single-parenting proficiency in the English language and academic performance may exist, but this study focused on the ones listed above.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study included survey and descriptive-correlational research methods. The survey method was employed since the researcher gathered data through a questionnaire of single parenting in proficiency on English language. Clark et al. (2021) defined a survey as a research method used for collecting data from a predefined group of respondents to gain information and insights on various topics of interest. On the other hand, correlational research is a non-

experimental research method in which a researcher measures variables, understands, and assesses the statistical relationship between them with no influence from any extraneous variable (Bhat, 2019). Therefore, a correlational analysis was performed to determine the significant relationship between single parenting in proficiency in English language and students' academic performance.

The researcher received permission from the Department of Education to distribute the questionnaires in order to start the data collection process. Designated teacher representatives assisted in this process. After taking ethical factors into account, it was decided that an ethical assessment was not required because there were no delicate human issues.

The following ranges of values with their descriptive interpretation will be used:

Single-Parenting in Proficiency on English Language

Scale	Range of Values	Description	Interpretation
5	4.21 – 5.00	Strongly Agree	Very High
4	3.41 – 4.20	Agree	High
3	2.61 – 3.40	Somewhat Agree	Moderate
2	1.81 – 2.60	Disagree	Low
1	1.00 – 1.80	Strongly Disagree	Very Low

To describe the academic performance of the respondents, the researcher used the following descriptors and grading scale based on DepEd Order No. 8 S. 2015.

Students' Academic Performance

Scale	Description	Grading Scale
5	Outstanding	90 – 100
4	Very Satisfactory	85 – 89
3	Satisfactory	80 – 84
2	Fairly Satisfactory	75 – 79
1	Did Not Meet Expectations	Below 75

Data presentation and analysis

The data are presented following the statement of the problems of the current study. The study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What is the respondents' perceived level of single parenting proficiency in English language?

Table 1: Perceived Level of Single Parenting in Proficiency in the English Language

Statements	AWV	SD	Description	Interpretation
1. My parent(s)/guardian regularly check my written English assignments or schoolwork.	3.02	1.32	Somewhat Agree	Moderate
2. I get enough help at home with my English Language homework.	2.91	1.14	Somewhat Agree	Moderate
3. I enjoy reading English storybooks or newspapers at home	3.65	1.18	Agree	High
4. I feel encouraged to practice the English Language at home	3.26	1.18	Somewhat Agree	Moderate
5. I feel more confident in English when my parent is actively involved	3.23	1.16	Somewhat Agree	Moderate
6. I rarely practice speaking English at home due to limited family interaction	3.13	1.18	Somewhat Agree	Moderate
7. My parent does not often engage me in English conversations.	3.55	1.05	Agree	High
8. I feel less confident speaking English because I lack support at home.	2.91	1.32	Somewhat Agree	Moderate
9. I can express myself fluently in English even with one parent at home.	2.98	1.15	Somewhat Agree	Moderate
10. I find it hard to complete reading or writing tasks in English without parental help.	2.95	1.21	Somewhat Agree	Moderate
11. I have access to English Language resources (textbooks, dictionary, internet).	3.81	1.14	Agree	High
12. My family structure affects how often I read or write in English at home.	2.99	1.01	Somewhat Agree	Moderate
13. I find it difficult to focus in English class because of challenges at home.	2.77	1.12	Somewhat Agree	Moderate
14. My family condition sometimes distracts me emotionally in English class.	2.74	1.18	Somewhat Agree	Moderate
15. I miss English Language classes to help my parent at home.	2.63	1.35	Somewhat Agree	Moderate
16. I would perform better in English if I had more academic guidance at home.	3.93	0.98	Agree	High
17. I find it difficult to participate in oral English activities in class.	2.70	1.29	Somewhat Agree	Moderate
18. My parent attends school functions like PTA meetings.	3.30	1.20	Somewhat Agree	Moderate
19. I get help with correcting my English grammar or essay writing at home	2.64	1.27	Somewhat Agree	Moderate
20. I struggle to meet English homework deadlines due to a lack of supervision.	2.72	1.26	Somewhat Agree	Moderate
Overall	3.09	0.61	Somewhat Agree	Moderate

Source: (Akinyemi et al., 2025).

Table 1 portrays the perceived level of single parenting in relation to English language proficiency. The data reveal a nuanced and somewhat contradictory picture of the perceived impact of single parenting on English language proficiency. While students report a moderate overall influence (Overall AWV = 3.09), a deeper analysis uncovers a critical divergence between access to resources

and the provision of active academic support. On the positive side, students strongly agree that they have high access to English language resources such as books and the internet (Statement 11) and that they personally enjoy reading in English (Statement 3). However, this potential appears to be undermined by a significant lack of interactive engagement: students agree that their parents do not often

engage them in English conversations (Statement 7), and they only somewhat agree that they receive help with homework or grammar (Statements 2 and 19). This gap culminates in the study's most definitive finding a strong consensus that performance would improve with more academic guidance at home (Statement 16). This suggests that the primary challenge is not material deprivation but an "engagement gap," or the absence of dialogic, corrective, and encouraging interactions that foster language confidence and practical skills.

Furthermore, the moderate agreement with statements about emotional distraction (Statements 13 and 14) and missing classes to help at home (Statement 15) points to broader socio-emotional burdens that can indirectly affect academic focus and consistency. Overall, the results indicate that

students in single-parent households are motivated and resource-equipped but are critically limited by a lack of sustained, interactive academic partnership at home, which may stifle confidence and hamper the full realization of their English language potential.

The current finding agrees with the study of Amato et al. (2015), which indicated that single parenting can introduce socio-emotional stressors that disrupt children's academic focus and motivation. It further suggests that the key limitation in many single-parent households is not resource scarcity but the "engagement gap"—the lack of consistent communicative and emotional interaction that nurtures language competence and self-efficacy.

2. What is the respondents' level of academic performance during the first quarter?

Table 2: Level of Students' Academic Performance

Scale	Range of Value		Description	Frequency	AWV	Description
1	1.00-1.80	below 75	Did not meet Expectations	6	3.47	Very Satisfactory
2	1.81-2.60	75-79	Fairly Satisfactory	26		
3	2.61-3.40	80-84	Satisfactory	46		
4	3.41-4.20	85-89	Very Satisfactory	69		
5	4.21-5.00	90-100	Outstanding	25		
Total				172		

Source: DepEd Order No. 8 S. 2015.

Table 2 displays the level of students' academic performance. The data indicate that students' academic performance is notably positive, clustering strongly in the upper tiers of the grading scale. The overall average weighted value (AWV) of 3.47 falls within the "Very Satisfactory" description, corresponding to a grade range of 85–89. This strong overall performance is driven by the majority of respondents, with **94 students (54.65%)** achieving either "Very Satisfactory" (69 students) or "Outstanding" (25 students) ratings. Furthermore, an additional **46 students (26.74%)** fall within the "Satisfactory" band (80–84), meaning that **over 80%** of the students are meeting or exceeding satisfactory academic expectations. However, the data also reveal a subgroup of students who may be struggling, with **32 students (18.60%)** performing in the "Fairly Satisfactory" or "Did Not Meet Expectations" categories. This distribution suggests that

while the student body as a whole is performing very well, there is a distinct group that may require additional academic support to reach the level of their peers. The high overall performance is particularly significant given the previously noted moderate challenges in home academic support, which may indicate strong student resilience or the effectiveness of school-based learning in compensating for domestic limitations.

The present finding contradicts the study of Camacho and Naparota (2025), who reported that Grade 7 and 8 students' academic performance in their study was only "Satisfactory," suggesting that the respondents in the present research performed above comparable cohorts.

3. Is there a significant relationship in the perceived level of single parenting in proficiency on English language and level of academic performance in English subject?

Table 3: Test of Relationship between the Levels of Single Parenting in Proficiency in English Language and Students' Academic Performance

Variables	rho-value	p-value	Interpretation

Single Parenting in Proficiency in English Language and Students' Academic Performance	-0.049	0.524	Negligible/slight negative correlation Not Significant

Table 3 presents the test of the relationship between the perceived level of single parenting's influence on English language proficiency and students' academic performance. Using the Spearman Rank-Order Correlation Coefficient (Spearman's rho), the results indicate a negligible and statistically non-significant relationship between these variables ($\rho = -0.049$, $p = 0.524$). Thus, the null hypothesis is not rejected. This suggests that there is virtually no monotonic association between students' perceived influence of single parenting on their English proficiency and their actual grades. In practical terms, a student's perception of how their single-parent household supports or hinders their English learning cannot reliably predict academic performance. A student who reports significant challenges at home may still perform very well academically, and conversely, a student who reports strong home support may not necessarily achieve the highest grades. This important finding implies that students' academic resilience may be high and that factors within the school environment such as effective teaching, personal motivation, peer influence, and individual ability may be stronger determinants of grades than perceived challenges or support related to family structure. Although the correlation is slightly negative, it is too small and non-significant to be interpreted as meaningful, reinforcing the conclusion that the challenges documented in the study do not directly translate into lower report card scores.

The current finding is supported by Hiko and Baysen (2023), who reported that while single parenting may introduce emotional and social challenges, its direct effect on students' grades is often not significant once school support systems and student motivation are considered. Their study further emphasized that academic performance is more closely associated with teacher engagement and peer collaboration than with household composition.

V. DISCUSSION

Single parenting may influence learners' English language proficiency through differences in time for supervision, the emotional climate at home, and access to learning resources. In this study, the respondents reported a moderate level of single-parenting influence on English learning, suggesting that while learners are generally motivated and have access to resources (e.g., books and internet), they experience limited interactive support at home, particularly in English conversations and homework guidance. Despite these

perceived challenges, the students' academic performance in English during the first quarter was "Very Satisfactory", with most learners clustering in the higher grade bands. When the relationship between the two variables was tested using Spearman's rho, the result showed a negligible and non-significant correlation, indicating that perceived single-parenting influence on English proficiency did not predict students' first-quarter English grades. This suggests that learners' academic outcomes may be shaped more strongly by school-based factors such as teaching effectiveness, classroom support, and peer collaboration as well as individual motivation and resilience, rather than family structure alone. Consistent with related research, the findings highlight that while single parenting may introduce emotional and social pressures, its direct impact on grades may be minimal when protective factors and school support systems are present.

VI. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study found that while students perceived a moderate influence of single parenting on their English language learning particularly in terms of limited interactive support at home such as English conversations and homework guidance their first-quarter academic performance in English remained Very Satisfactory, with most learners achieving higher grade levels. Moreover, the negligible and non-significant correlation between perceived single-parenting influence on English proficiency and actual English grades indicates that single parenting, as perceived by students, does not reliably predict academic performance in the subject. These findings imply that school-based factors (e.g., effective instruction, classroom support, and peer collaboration) and learner-related strengths (e.g., motivation and resilience) may play a more decisive role in shaping academic outcomes than family structure alone, suggesting that the potential challenges linked to single parenting can be mitigated when protective supports are present.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Conceptualization, research methodology, data gathering and analysis is performed by the authors.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

All authors declare no conflict of interest.

ETHICAL REVIEW STATEMENT

The research is submitted to the ethical review committee and approved for the conduct of the study. It does not involve human-sensitive issues.

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Female Confinement and Resistance in Charlotte Perkin Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*

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Abstract— This qualitative study examines Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* through feminist criticism to explain how the text depicts female confinement and resistance under patriarchal systems. Using close textual analysis, the study focuses on three narrative elements: characters, setting, and symbolism. Findings reveal that confinement is enforced through John's dual authority as husband and physician, which restricts the narrator's mobility, voice, and writing, producing physical and psychological captivity. The nursery environment further materializes control through its isolating and infantilizing features, while the wallpaper functions as a central symbol of oppressive domestic ideology. At the same time, the narrator's secret journal, her identification with the trapped woman in the wallpaper, and her final tearing of the pattern demonstrate resistance as a gradual but disruptive assertion of agency. Overall, the study concludes that the narrator's breakdown emerges from denied autonomy, yet her acts of defiance expose the persistence of female resistance within restrictive social structures. This study recommends exploring gender with class and mental health discourse, comparing historical confinement with modern gendered controls, and examining domestic space as discipline.



Keywords— Female Confinement, Resistance, *The Yellow Wallpaper*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Qualitative Study, Feminist

I. INTRODUCTION

Female confinement and resistance are core concepts in feminist literary studies because they expose how patriarchal power limits women's agency while also provoking acts of refusal. Female confinement refers to the social, medical, and domestic systems that restrict women's mobility, speech, labor, and self-definition. In Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*, confinement is enforced through the rest cure, marital authority, and the narrator's physical isolation, turning "care" into control. Recent medical-humanities scholarship stresses that such gendered treatments historically positioned women as unreliable narrators of their own bodies, so obedience and silence became part of therapy (Villar, 2024). In contrast, female resistance refers to the strategies women use to contest these constraints, whether quietly through hidden self-expression or openly through disruptive actions. Baruiz et al. (2023) describe resistance in Gilman's story as

developing from suppressed awareness into overt rebellion once confinement becomes unbearable.

This study is significant because *The Yellow Wallpaper* continues to speak to present-day concerns about women's autonomy, mental health, and institutional authority. Contemporary research links the narrator's breakdown not to personal weakness but to structural oppression, emphasizing that confinement itself generates psychological harm (Madan, 2025; Villar, 2024). At the same time, recent feminist readings highlight that resistance in the text is meaningful since it represents an attempt to reclaim selfhood within a system designed to erase it (Liu, 2025). These perspectives show that Gilman's story remains a valuable framework for examining how women's suffering and defiance are shaped by power relations that can persist in modern forms.

This study aims to analyze how female confinement and resistance are represented in *The Yellow*

Wallpaper by focusing on three narrative elements: characters, setting, and symbolism. This study will contribute to the field by offering an integrated, element-focused account of confinement and resistance in the story. By synthesizing feminist perspectives with textual evidence, the study strengthens current interpretations that connect Gilman's work to ongoing debates about gendered care and domestic control.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

This study examines the text through Feminist criticism, which reviews how literature presents gender roles, power distribution, and social expectations. Tyson (2014) notes that women's voices are often limited in literary representation, and this pattern reflects pressures

present within society. *The Yellow Wallpaper* illustrates this concern through the narrator's inability to influence decisions regarding her own health. John, who functions as both husband and doctor, directs her treatment and daily tasks. This dual role strengthens the structure of authority placed around her. Studies of patriarchal domestic norms show that women were often treated as dependents rather than partners (Hedges, 2009).

The study utilizes feminist criticism to explain how domestic routines and medical instructions restricted women's expression. It also provides a framework for understanding the narrator's resistance. Her writing and symbolic connection to the woman in the wallpaper show an effort to form a sense of identity despite restrictive conditions.

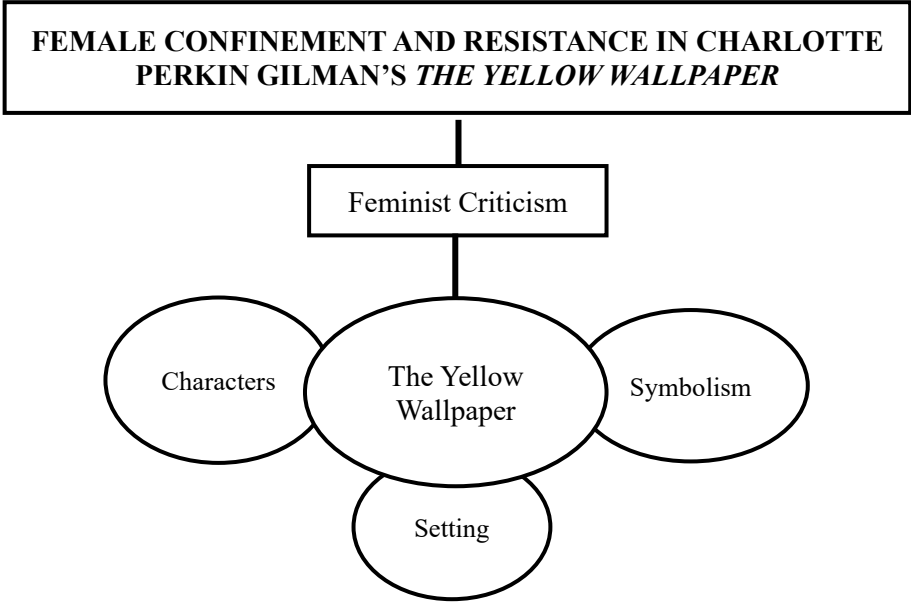


Fig.1. Schematic Diagram of the theoretical and conceptual framework of the study

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholars widely interpret *The Yellow Wallpaper* as a feminist critique of patriarchal marriage, rigid gender roles, and women's oppression. Contemporary criticism argues that the text exposes how marriage functions as a structure of male dominance that limits women's autonomy and silences their self-expression. Hume (2010) notes that the narrator's marriage places her in a position where obedience is expected and emotional dependence is reinforced, reducing her identity to that of a compliant wife. Similarly, Lanser (2014) emphasizes that Gilman portrays marriage as a site where male authority is normalized, allowing husbands to exert control over women's physical and psychological lives under the guise of care.

Building on this feminist perspective, recent studies further examine how male authority within marriage is reinforced through professional and social power. John's dual role as husband and physician has been interpreted as a representation of institutionalized patriarchy, where medical discourse legitimizes male control over women's bodies and voices. Treichler (2012) argues that the narrator's opinions are dismissed precisely because they challenge masculine rationality, reinforcing the idea that women's perspectives are unreliable. Likewise, Smith (2018) explains that the story critiques how women's submission is framed as necessary for marital harmony, thereby restricting self-expression and reinforcing gendered oppression.

In addition to confinement, scholars have explored the narrator’s actions as forms of resistance that develop throughout the narrative. Acts such as secret writing, fixation on the wallpaper, and the final breakdown are interpreted as strategies through which the narrator asserts agency within oppressive conditions. Gilbert and Gubar’s ideas have been extended by later critics, with Barui et al. (2023) arguing that resistance in the story progresses gradually from internal awareness to overt rebellion. Similarly, Liu (2021) suggests that the narrator’s breakdown should be read not as madness alone but as a refusal to comply with the roles imposed upon her, marking a shift from silence to defiance.

The yellow wallpaper itself has been widely analyzed as a powerful symbol of patriarchal ideology, mental imprisonment, and silenced female creativity. Scholars interpret the wallpaper’s chaotic patterns as reflecting the oppressive structures that entrap women within domestic spaces. Delashmit and Long (2015) connect the wallpaper to the narrator’s psychological deterioration, arguing that her obsession mirrors her growing awareness of confinement. More recent studies, such as Villar (2024), view the wallpaper as a site of awakening, where the narrator projects her suppressed identity and ultimately recognizes the constructed nature of her oppression.

Despite extensive feminist interpretations, much of the existing scholarship places strong emphasis on thematic concerns such as patriarchy, madness, and resistance while giving limited attention to how these ideas are embedded in the narrative structure itself. Few studies closely examine how character roles, setting, and

symbolism work together to formally construct confinement and resistance within the text. This study addresses this gap by offering an integrated, element-focused analysis that demonstrates how oppression and resistance are not only thematic but also structurally embedded in Gilman’s narrative, thereby contributing a more comprehensive understanding of *The Yellow Wallpaper*.

IV. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative textual-analysis design to examine Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *The Yellow Wallpaper* and explain how female confinement and resistance are represented in the narrative. Guided by feminist literary criticism, the analysis relies on close reading of the primary text, with passages systematically selected and interpreted according to three elements: (1) characters; (2) setting; and (3) symbolism. Through repeated reading, relevant textual evidence is extracted under these categories, coded for themes of restriction and defiance, then interpreted using feminist concepts to synthesize how confinement is constructed and how resistance develops within it.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the textual analysis of Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *The Yellow Wallpaper* in relation to female confinement and resistance. The discussion is organized through three analytic tables that examine characters, setting, and symbolism.

Table 1. Characters

Characters	Textual Evidence	Relevance to Female Confinement and Resistance
The Narrator	“I am absolutely forbidden to ‘work’ until I am well again.” “There comes John, and I must put this away.” “I’ve pulled off most of the paper, so you can’t put me back!”	Confined patient; resists through secret writing.
John	“He is very careful and loving, and hardly lets me stir without special direction.” “He hates to have me write a word.”	Patriarchal doctor enforcing rest-cure control.
Jennie	“Jennie is a perfect and enthusiastic housekeeper.” “She takes all care of the house.”	Domestic enforcer reinforcing female compliance.

Table 1 shows that female confinement and resistance in *The Yellow Wallpaper* are primarily carried by the characters’ roles and interactions. The narrator’s quoted lines (“forbidden to work,” hiding her writing, and later asserting she has “pulled off most of the paper”) illustrate a

movement from enforced passivity to open defiance. Recent medical-humanities readings explain that her confinement is not self-chosen but produced by the rest cure and by John’s authority over her daily life. Roethle (2021) notes that the narrator is positioned as a patient whose creativity

and autonomy are treated as dangerous, so silence becomes part of “treatment.” Villar (2024) similarly argues that the story exposes how gendered medical practice discredits women’s self-reporting, making the narrator’s deterioration a result of being controlled rather than cared for. Within this pressure, her secret journaling functions as an early, covert form of resistance that preserves her voice against suppression (Roethle, 2021; Villar, 2024).

John’s textual evidence in the table (“careful and loving,” restricting her movement, “hates to have me write a word”) supports recent views of him as the key agent of confinement. This emphasizes that his power is structural because he combines marital and clinical authority, enabling

him to define reality for the narrator and dismiss her protests as symptoms (Roethle, 2021). Madan (2025) describes John as a figure of patriarchal rationality who frames restriction as protection, which intensifies the narrator’s dependence and helplessness. Jennie, while less overtly controlling, reinforces confinement through her role as the “perfect” housekeeper. Recent feminist analyses argue that such characters embody internalized domestic ideology and normalize women’s caretaker compliance, helping sustain the patriarchal order John represents (Baruiz et al., 2023). Together, the characters show how confinement is enforced through male authority and maintained through domestic femininity, while resistance develops through the narrator’s escalating refusal to accept those roles.

Table 2. Setting

Setting	Textual Evidence	Analytic Meaning
Nursery	“The windows are barred for little children.” “It is a big, airy room... and rings and things in the walls.”	Infantilizing surveillance
Nailed bed, scratched floor	“The bed is nailed down.” “There are scratches and gouges on the floor.”	Forced immobility, past struggle
Country-house isolation	“We are here for three months.” “I don’t want to go outside.”	Separation, rising pressure

Table 2 indicates that confinement is materialized in space. The nursery operates as a gendered cage. The nursery room is not a neutral bedroom but a space designed for control: barred windows, wall rings, and its former function as a child’s room position the narrator in an infantilized, monitored state. Recent studies argue that this infantilizing domestic setting mirrors patriarchal logic, where women are treated as dependent subjects whose choices must be managed “for their own good” (Roethle, 2021). The room’s size and airiness only heighten the irony because the openness does not equal freedom; instead, it disguises restriction under the appearance of care (Roethle, 2021).

The nailed bed and scratched floor intensify the setting’s meaning by embedding immobility and past

struggle into the space itself. The bed that cannot be moved literalizes forced stillness, while the gouges on the floor suggest earlier attempts to resist, implying a repeated history of female confinement in this same room. Finally, the narrator’s isolation in the country house extends confinement beyond the room. Being removed “for three months” from neighbors, work, and community cuts her off from social grounding. A recent feminist study on isolation in the text maintains that separation from support systems accelerates identity breakdown, making the country estate a structural pressure that pushes the narrator inward toward obsession (Social Science Review Archives, 2025). Taken together, the setting shows a layered environment of restriction where space itself participates in producing psychological collapse.

Table 3. Symbolism

Title	Symbol	Relevance
The Yellow Wallpaper	Yellow wallpaper	Patriarchal trap; site of revolt
	Woman behind the wallpaper	Female self seeking freedom
	Secret journal writing	Covert defiance under control

Table 3 shows how Gilman’s symbolism maps the movement from female confinement to resistance. The

yellow wallpaper functions as a material sign of patriarchy that surrounds and invades the narrator’s life; its “unclean”

color and chaotic pattern embody the disorder produced by enforced silence and rest. Recent journal studies read the wallpaper as a structural trap that mirrors medical and marital domination, while also becoming the object through which the narrator recognizes oppression (Baruiz et al., 2023). As her attention to the wallpaper intensifies, the symbol shifts from décor to a coded system she must interpret, and scholars argue that this interpretive labor is itself a resistant act because it creates meaning against John's imposed narrative of illness (Liu, 2025).

The woman behind the wallpaper develops that symbolism by personifying confinement. Recent feminist analyses describe this figure as a collective female self trapped in social roles, so the narrator's obsession signals awakening to a shared condition of enclosure rather than a purely private delusion (Baruiz et al., 2023). Finally, secret journal writing symbolizes covert resistance under censorship. Because the rest cure forbids creative work, writing becomes a hidden survival practice that preserves identity and voice. Contemporary mental-health scholarship links this silenced self-expression to psychological collapse, supporting the view that the narrator's writing and her final tearing of the paper are related stages of rebellion against the same patriarchal structure (Hassan & Farooq, 2024). Together, the symbols form a progression: patriarchy as enclosure (wallpaper), the confined female self (woman in the pattern), and resistance first hidden then unleashed (journal writing and the paper's destruction).

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined how *The Yellow Wallpaper* portrays female confinement and resistance through characters, settings, and symbolism. The findings show that John's medical and marital authority enforces the rest cure, silencing the narrator and intensifying her physical and psychological captivity, while the nursery setting and the wallpaper itself embody patriarchal control. At the same time, the narrator's secret writing, identification with the trapped woman, and final tearing of the wallpaper reveal resistance as a growing, if disruptive, assertion of agency under oppression.

Future research may explore intersections of gender with class and mental health discourse, compare historical confinement with modern gendered controls, and examine domestic space as discipline. Educators may also integrate feminist criticism with rest-cure history to connect the story to real social institutions.

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The Conditional *enkil* as a Subtriggering Trigger: Evidence from Malayalam

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Abstract— This paper examines the role of the conditional morpheme *enkil* in the Malayalam quantifier *aar-enkil-um*, arguing that *enkil* functions as a covert subtriggering trigger analogous to the subjunctive mood in Catalan as described by Dayal (2009). Building on the observation that English *any* is acceptable with necessity modals only when subtriggered by a post-nominal phrasal modifier, we show that *aar-enkil-um* is grammatical in non-overtly-subtriggered necessity modal contexts because *enkil* itself provides the subtriggering effect. This *enkil*-induced subtriggering is, however, strictly modal-specific: unlike overt subtriggering, which rescues *aar-um* in episodic contexts, the conditional *enkil* does not produce a subtriggering effect in episodic sentences, and *aar-enkil-um* remains ungrammatical in episodic contexts even with overt post-nominal modification. This modal-specificity reveals a previously undescribed constraint on covert subtriggering and has implications for the theory of free choice indefinites cross-linguistically.



Keywords— Conditional Morphology; Free Choice Items; Malayalam; Negative Polarity Items; Subtriggering.

Introduction

The phenomenon of subtriggering — the rescue of a free choice item (FCI) in an otherwise illicit context through the addition of a post-nominal phrasal modifier — has been well-documented for English (LeGrand 1975; Dayal 1998) and several other languages. In English, **any** is unacceptable with a necessity modal unless subtriggered:

- (1a) ***Ram must capture anybody.**

'Ram must capture anybody.'

- (1b) **Ram must capture anybody he sees.**
(subtriggered)

'Ram must capture anybody he sees.'

Similarly, **any** is unacceptable in episodic sentences but can be rescued by subtriggering:

- (2a) ***Minnu helped any child.**

'Minnu helped any child.'

- (2b) **Minnu helped any child that came up to her.** (subtriggered)

'Minnu helped any child that came up to her.'

Dayal (2009) observes that in languages where mood is morphologically visible, the subtriggering effect may be carried by mood rather than by an overt post-nominal modifier. Her Catalan data are illustrative:

- (3a) **Van enaltir qualsevol voluntari que hagués participat en l'operació** (grammatical, subjunctive)

'They praised any volunteer that had [subj.] taken part in the operation.'

- (3b) * **Van enaltir qualsevol voluntari que havia participat en l'operació** (ungrammatical, indicative)

'They praised any volunteer that had [indic.] taken part in the operation.'

In (3a), the subjunctive mood produces a subtriggering effect that licenses the FCI; in (3b), the indicative does not. Dayal (2009) attributes this to the fact that the subjunctive introduces a set of non-actual possible individuals, which is precisely the domain needed for the FCI to be felicitous. This paper proposes that the Malayalam conditional

morpheme **enkil** in **aar-enkil-um** plays an analogous role, functioning as a covert subtriggering trigger in necessity modal contexts. Crucially, however, this **enkil**-induced subtriggering is modal-specific: it does not extend to episodic contexts, where the actuality requirement of the predicate clashes with the conditional semantics of **enkil**. This modal-specificity is, to our knowledge, a novel empirical finding in the literature on subtriggering.

The paper is organised as follows. Section 2 provides the theoretical background on subtriggering and the licensing of FCIs. Section 3 introduces the Malayalam quantifiers **aar-um** and **aar-enkil-um** and the conditional morpheme **enkil**. Section 4 presents the core data: the grammaticality of **aar-enkil-um** in non-subtriggered necessity modal contexts. Section 5 tests the modal-specificity claim through the episodic context data. Section 6 proposes an analysis, and Section 7 concludes with residual problems.

Subtriggering: Theoretical Background

The term 'subtriggering' was introduced by LeGrand (1975) to refer to cases in which **any** is licensed by a subordinate clause. Dayal (1998) extended the notion to include adjectives and post-nominal modifiers more generally, showing that FCIs like **any** are felicitous in episodic sentences only in the presence of a post-nominal modifier. The reasoning is that FCIs are universal quantifiers over possible individuals; in episodic sentences without a modifier, there is no set of possible individuals to quantify over, rendering the FCI infelicitous. A post-nominal modifier introduces a set of possible individuals satisfying the modifier's restrictor condition, thereby supplying the domain the FCI requires.

Dayal (2009) characterises the licensing environments of **any** as follows: it is acceptable in generic statements (but not partitive generics), with possibility modals, with necessity modals only if subtriggered, and in episodic statements only if subtriggered. The key question for necessity modals is why subtriggering is specifically required there but not with possibility modals. The answer lies in the semantics of the modal operators: possibility modal operators allow strengthening through domain widening (Aloni 2002), while necessity modals do not, unless the domain is restricted by a subtriggering modifier.

The Catalan data from Dayal (2009) show that subtriggering need not be overt: the subjunctive mood itself can supply the relevant domain restriction. This opens the theoretical possibility that other morphological elements — such as conditional morphemes — might serve a similar function. The Malayalam data examined in this paper confirm this possibility while also revealing an important limit: such morphological subtriggering triggers may be constrained to specific modal environments.

The Malayalam Quantifiers and the Conditional *enkil*

Malayalam has two counterparts for the English indefinite **any**: **aar-um** (who+CONJ, 'everyone'/'anyone') and **aar-enkil-um** (who+if+CONJ, 'someone'/'anyone'). In **aar-um**, the **-um** is the conjunction operator applied to the wh-word **aar** ('who'), yielding an infinite conjunction (universal force). In **aar-enkil-um**, **enkil** means 'if' and applies to **aar** before the conjunction, yielding an infinite disjunction (existential force). Both quantifiers function as NPIs and FCIs, as demonstrated by the following pairs:

- (4) **aar-um ii pariikSa paas aak-um** (FC Reading)

who-CONJ this test pass be-MOD
'Anyone will pass this test.'

- (5) **aar-um var-illa** (NPI Reading)

who-CONJ come-NEG
'No one will come.'

- (6) **aar-enkil-um vann-aal mati-aa-yirunnu** (FC Reading)

who-if-CONJ came-if enough-be-ASP PRES
'It would be enough if anyone came.'

- (7) **aar-enkil-um ii pariikSa paas aa-kum-oo** (NPI Reading)

who-if-CONJ this test pass be-will-Q
'Will anyone (at least one person) pass this test?'

The conditional morpheme **enkil** is a well-established conditional marker in Malayalam. When suffixed to an NP it can convey the meaning 'at least'; when it occurs at the end of a clause, it can mean 'although'. In **aar-enkil-um**, it is embedded between the wh-word and the conjunction, yielding a conditional-existential quantifier. This paper proposes that the conditional semantics of **enkil** — its introduction of a set of non-actual, hypothetical individuals — is precisely what produces the subtriggering effect in necessity modal contexts.

The Core Finding: *enkil* as Subtriggering Trigger in Necessity Modals

In English, necessity modals that contain **any** become grammatical when subtriggered:

- (8a) ***Ram must capture anybody.**

'Ram must capture anybody.'

- (8b) **Ram must capture anybody he sees.**
(subtriggered)

'Ram must capture anybody he sees.'

In Malayalam, **aar-um** behaves as English **any** does in this environment: it is ungrammatical without subtriggering but can be rescued by overt subtriggering. **aar-enkil-um**, however, is grammatical even without overt subtriggering. Consider the minimal contrast:

(9a) * **amita ivar-il aar-e-yum iSTa-ppeTa-Nam**

Amita these-LOC who-ACC-CONJ like-MOD

'Amita must like anyone.'

(9b) **amita ivar-il aar-e-enkil-um iSTa-ppeTa-Nam**

Amita these-LOC who-ACC-if-CONJ like-MOD

'Amita must like anyone/someone.'

(10a) * **John ii peNNungaL-il ninnum aar-e-yum theraññ eTukk-aNam**

John these girls-LOC from who-ACC-CONJ choose take-MOD

'*John must choose any of these girls.'

(10b) **John ii peNNungaL-il ninnum aar-ey-enkil-um theraññ eTukk-aNam**

John these girls-LOC from who-ACC-if-CONJ choose take-MOD

'John must choose any (one) of these girls.'

In (9a) and (10a), **aar-um** is infelicitous in the necessity modal context without overt subtriggering. In (9b) and (10b), **aar-enkil-um** is grammatical in the same environments without any overt post-nominal modification. The only difference between the grammatical and ungrammatical forms is the presence of **enkil** in the quantifier. This strongly suggests that **enkil** itself is responsible for the grammaticality of **aar-enkil-um** in these non-subtriggered necessity modal contexts.

When overt subtriggering is applied, both quantifiers become grammatical in necessity modal contexts:

(11a) **kaaNu-nna aar-ey-um ram piTi-k'k'aNam** (subtriggered)

see-PRES who-ACC-CONJ Ram capture-MOD

'Ram must capture anybody he sees.'

(11b) **kaaNu-nna aar-e-yenkil-um ram piTi-k'k'aNam** (subtriggered)

see-PRES who-ACC-if-CONJ Ram capture-MOD

'Ram must capture anybody he sees.'

This confirms that overt subtriggering rescues **aar-um** in necessity contexts, and that **aar-enkil-um** is felicitous both with and without overt subtriggering in such contexts. The analysis proposed here is that **enkil**, by introducing conditional (non-actual) semantics, provides the set of possible individuals that the FCI requires — precisely the function served by the subjunctive in Catalan. Just as the Catalan subjunctive licenses **any** by ensuring that the relative clause describes a non-actual set of individuals rather than an actual one, **enkil** licenses **aar-enkil-um** by embedding the quantifier in a conditional domain.

The Modal-Specificity of *enkil*-Induced Subtriggering

Having established that **enkil** functions as a subtriggering trigger in necessity modal contexts, we now turn to the critical question of whether this effect is general or modal-specific. The test case is the episodic context. In English, **any** is unacceptable in episodic sentences but can be rescued by overt subtriggering:

(12a) ***She hated anybody.**

'She hated anybody.'

(12b) **She hated anybody who was not a Jew.**
(subtriggered)

'She hated anybody who was not a Jew.'

Both Malayalam counterparts are ungrammatical in plain episodic sentences:

(13a) * **avaL aar-ey-um veRu-ttu**

she who-ACC-CONJ hate-PAST

'*She hated anybody.'

(13b) * **avaL aar-e-yenkil-um veRu-ttu**

she who-ACC-if-CONJ hate-PAST

'*She hated anybody.'

When overt subtriggering is applied to the episodic sentences, however, the two quantifiers diverge sharply:

(14a) **Jew alla-yirunna aar-ey-um avaL veRu-ttu** (grammatical)

Jew not-be who-ACC-CONJ she hate-PAST

'She hated anyone who was not a Jew.'

(14b) * **Jew alla-yirunna aar-e-yenkil-um avaL veRu-ttu** (ungrammatical)

Jew not-be who-ACC-if-CONJ she hate-PAST

'*She hated anyone who was not a Jew.'

This contrast is confirmed with additional data:

(15a) **ii vazhi pooy-a aar-ey-um amita sahaayi-ccu** (grammatical)

this way pass-PAST who-ACC-CONJ Amita help-PAST

'Amita helped anyone who passed this way.'

(15b) *** ii vazhi pooy-a aar-e-yenkil-um amita sahaayi-ccu** (ungrammatical)

this way pass-PAST who-ACC-if-CONJ Amita help-PAST

'*Amita helped anyone who passed this way.'

The results of (14)–(15) establish the modal-specificity of **enkil**-induced subtriggering unambiguously. **aar-um** is rescued by overt subtriggering in episodic contexts (14a, 15a), as expected given its domain-widening properties. **aar-enkil-um**, however, remains ungrammatical in episodic contexts even with overt subtriggering (14b, 15b). The conditional **enkil** does not produce a subtriggering effect in episodic sentences. More strikingly, the presence of **enkil** actively blocks rescue: overt subtriggering, which would otherwise be sufficient to license a free choice reading, cannot overcome the incompatibility that **enkil** introduces in the episodic context.

Analysis

The core of the proposed analysis is as follows. The conditional morpheme **enkil** introduces a set of hypothetical, non-actual individuals into the domain of the quantifier. In necessity modal contexts, this is precisely what is required for a subtriggering effect: the set of possible

individuals satisfying the conditional condition supplies the restrictor that the necessity modal operates over. The structure of **aar-enkil-um** in necessity modal contexts is analogous to a sentence with a subjunctive relative clause in Catalan: both introduce a set of non-actual individuals that the FCI quantifies over, making the sentence felicitous.

In episodic contexts, however, the semantics of the conditional **enkil** becomes incompatible with the actuality requirement of the episodic predicate. Episodic sentences assert that an event occurred at a specific time in the actual world. The conditional **enkil** introduces a hypothetical or non-actual domain, which conflicts with the assertion of actuality required by the episodic predicate. This conflict cannot be resolved by overt subtriggering, because the post-nominal modifier operates over actual individuals in the episodic context, while **enkil** continues to impose its non-actual domain restriction. The result is an irresolvable clash between the actuality of the episodic assertion and the hypotheticality of the conditional domain.

aar-um, lacking the conditional **enkil**, does not face this clash. Its domain-widening property extends to any sufficiently restricted domain, including one restricted by a post-nominal modifier in an episodic context. Overt subtriggering provides the restrictor needed to define a set of possible individuals, and **aar-um** quantifies over that set, yielding a grammatical sentence. This asymmetry — overt subtriggering rescues **aar-um** but not **aar-enkil-um** in episodic contexts — is therefore predicted by the analysis.

Table 1 below summarises the licensing conditions established in this paper and their comparison with Dayal's (2009) characterisation of English **any**:

Table 1. Licensing Conditions and Subtriggering Effects

Context	English any	aar-um	aar-enkil-um
Necessity modal (no subtriggering)	*	*	ok
Necessity modal (subtriggered)	ok	ok	ok
Episodic (no subtriggering)	*	*	*
Episodic (subtriggered)	ok	ok	*
Possibility/permission modal	ok	ok	ok
Generic + partitive	*	*	*

The table reveals that **aar-enkil-um** patterns with English **any** and **aar-um** in most environments, but diverges in two critical respects: it does not need overt subtriggering in necessity modal contexts (because **enkil** supplies the subtriggering effect), and it cannot be rescued by overt subtriggering in episodic contexts (because **enkil**'s conditional semantics is incompatible with episodic actuality). These two divergences are the direct

consequences of the modal-specific subtriggering mechanism proposed in this paper.

Conclusion and Residual Problems

This paper has proposed that the conditional morpheme **enkil** in the Malayalam quantifier **aar-enkil-um** functions as a covert subtriggering trigger in necessity modal contexts, analogous to the subjunctive mood in Catalan (Dayal 2009). This **enkil**-induced subtriggering accounts for the

grammaticality of **aar-enkil-um** in non-overtly-subtriggered necessity modal contexts where **aar-um** — like English **any** — is ungrammatical. The proposal is further supported by the modal-specificity of the **enkil**-induced subtriggering: unlike overt subtriggering, which rescues **aar-um** in episodic contexts, **enkil** does not produce a subtriggering effect in episodic sentences, and **aar-enkil-um** remains ungrammatical in episodic contexts even with overt post-nominal modification.

The modal-specificity of **enkil**-induced subtriggering is a novel finding that adds to the cross-linguistic picture of how morphological elements can carry subtriggering effects. It also raises new questions. Why does **enkil**'s conditional semantics produce the subtriggering effect only in modal contexts? Is the incompatibility of **enkil** with episodic actuality a general property of conditional morphemes, or specific to **enkil** in Malayalam? What is the relationship between the subjunctive mood cross-linguistically and conditional morphemes in terms of their subtriggering-triggering capacity?

Additionally, the behaviour of **aar-enkil-um** with negation raises related questions. **aar-enkil-um** is infelicitous with negation alone (* **aar-enkil-um var-illa**) but felicitous when the negative element is clause-external to the **enkil-um** element (**aar-enkil-um var-um-ennə ñaan pRatiikSik'k'unnilla**, 'I don't expect anyone to come'). This suggests a locality condition on the interaction between the conditional **enkil** and negative licensing that requires further investigation. The asymmetry in imperative contexts — **aar-enkil-um** is blocked in the negative imperative while **aar-um** is blocked in the positive imperative — also awaits a principled account within the framework proposed here. These residual questions are left for future research.

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Colonial Conceptions of Femininity: Analyzing Agnes and Song in David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly*

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Abstract— David Henry Hwang's play *M. Butterfly* portrays the characters of Agnes and Song Liling as opposing forces that reveal the complex intersections of gender, race, and colonial power. This paper examines the contrasting roles of Agnes and Song as representations of the "real woman" and the "ideal woman", respectively. The paper also explores how their relationships with Gallimard expose the fragility of his colonial fantasies. Gallimard's obsession with Song is rooted in his Western stereotypical view of the East as submissive, exotic, and idealized. Agnes represents the grounded reality that does not fit in such constructed fantasies. This challenges the larger colonial myth of power and dominance and emphasizes how Gallimard's illusions fall apart. By focusing on Agnes and Song as contrasting forces, this paper argues how Hwang deconstructs the racial and gendered stereotypes often projected in arts and literature, which later define cultural identities, revealing the realities hidden beneath the fantasies of colonialism. Through this lens, *M. Butterfly* offers a critique of the politics of gender and race in Western perceptions of the East.



Keywords— West, East, Ideal Woman, Colonial Fantasy, *M. Butterfly*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Western cultural view of Asians often promotes images of compliant, subservient characters represented as flowers who bend over and blush, which is often perpetuated by media, including film and literature. One of the major notable examples of these types of stereotypes is *Madama Butterfly* by Giacomo Puccini; the story is a borrowing from and has been influenced by other literary works written previously, one of which was Pierre Loti's French novel *Madama Chrysantheme*, published in 1887. (Szuster, 2022) Many other such works of art that express similar themes exist that further support these stereotypes that are present in Western society as pertaining to the Eastern culture.

The storyline of *Madama Butterfly* centers around a 15-year-old Japanese woman named Cio-Cio-San, who marries Pinkerton, an American naval officer. Pinkerton

later leaves Cio-Cio-San, returning to America to marry an American woman, Kate. Three years later, Pinkerton returns to find Cio-Cio-San has had a child (the result of their marriage) while he was away, and Cio-Cio-San, ultimately, in a state of overwhelming grief, commits seppuku after Pinkerton and his new wife decide to adopt the child. (Greenberg, 2020)

The play *M. Butterfly* is a deconstruction of such previous narratives, where the roles and power positions are reversed from previously stereotypical views. The play is based on a true story and critiques the Western perceptions of Eastern femininity and challenges stereotypical Asian representations (Choe, 2022). The real accounts of an espionage case and the relationship between French diplomat Bernard Boursicot and Beijing Opera singer Shi Pei Pu inspired Hwang to write this play. (Johnson, 2018, p. 125) Rene Gallimard, a former French diplomat, and Liling Song, a Chinese opera singer who turns out to be a

spy and a man, are having a love affair and are the subjects of the drama. A two-paragraph article in *The New York Times*, May 1986, about French diplomat Bernard Bouriscot's treasonous disclosure of a sensitive national secret to his Chinese "girlfriend", Pei-Pu Shi, who concealed "his" sexual identity behind the "modest" Chinese attire, became the base for the story. (Liu, 2002) The play is also intertwined and post-colonial deconstruction of Giacomo Puccini's opera *Madama Butterfly*.

The play investigates the multifaceted relationships among culture, gender, and power through the experiences of eclectic characters such as Song Liling, a Chinese opera singer, and René Gallimard, a French diplomat. Gallimard's wife, Agnes, however, stands in stark contrast and is characterized by simplicity and "realness," and thus is placed in juxtaposition with Song, who represents the Orientalist stereotype of the exotic and submissive "other." Hwang employs both Agnes and Song to expose and critique fantasized colonialism and gender identities.

Gallimard's belief in what an ideal woman is differs from the realities of his wife's life, and the physical, biological, and emotional distinctiveness of being a woman. In this light, this paper investigates the characteristics of Agnes and Song's roles, and "the real" versus "fantasy" within the play, as well as examines how the fantasy represents cultural stereotypes of the East, and analyzes how power operates within the relationships between Gallimard and the two characters, and exposes the deeper colonialist beliefs Gallimard perpetuates.

This research uses both postcolonial and feminist critiques to show how Gallimard's illusions about his power and superiority in relation to Agnes and Song provide him with a false sense of identity that is ultimately undermined by the reality of East-West power relations.

II. CONSTRUCTED IMAGE OF THE FANTASIZED "IDEAL WOMAN"

The character of Song Liling in *M. Butterfly* is that of an idealized and almost mythical conception of womanhood that René Gallimard has created in his mind. The "ideal woman" that Gallimard envisions in Song Liling is based on his fantasies and desires for control, which are rooted in his colonial beliefs. From the first time Gallimard meets Song Liling, he is taken with her physical beauty and grace and interprets everything she does as an example of perfect femininity. After their first encounter, he states, "...my body shook once more - with the entrance of Butterfly." (Hwang, 1986, p. 9). Gallimard believes that Song Liling is not just a woman but also an exotic, submissive archetype of femininity: someone who satisfies his desires

and reinforces his image as a powerful Western man who can possess this "other." Through his view of Song Liling, Gallimard perpetuates the stereotypical representations of women and the Orient by assuming there is a clear relationship between how a woman looks on the outside and her inner truth. (Kondo, 1990, p. 15).

In the central narrative of the play, Song has an important part to play as the character himself is playing a role that is constructed entirely to meet the expectations and fantasies of Gallimard, who represents the West. Song even addresses this by saying, "It's one of your favorite fantasies, isn't it? The submissive Oriental woman and the cruel white man." (Hwang, 1986, p. 17)

Song's identity is constantly changing, transitioning from one construction to another throughout the performance and constantly reconfiguring based upon Gallimard's perceived notions of the ideal woman being obedient and docile. As the play continues, it becomes clearer to the audience that Song is not how Gallimard perceives her, but rather that she is playing a role to provide the illusion of power and control that Gallimard desires. Song has been constructed as a character for Gallimard in accordance with the fantasy created by the West about the East. Gallimard's perception of Song as being exotic and submissive, despite her wittiness, is consistent with the broader perception of the East by the West as being mysterious and submissive.

Said argues that the Western imagination constructs the Oriental world as mysterious, alien, and in contrast to the rational, self-assured West. (Said, 1979, p. 5) Furthermore, Said sees this binary opposition between East and West as having formed in part through these contrasting representations, and thereby, representing the whole "Orient" as irrational, mystical, and feminine. (Said, 1979, p. 103) This ideological construction of the Orient forms part of what led to Gallimard viewing Song in this way, and parallels the way colonial ideology functions. His views about Song include many dimensions that can be understood as a result of his roles as both a French diplomat stationed in China and then later as an individual who desired to possess and control Song. Thus, he does not see Song as an individual person, but as an object of desirability and control.

In this scenario, Song's beauty, grace, and "femininity" are not qualities she inherently possesses but rather performative ones that confirm the qualities Gallimard, as a white man, fantasizes about the East. In the same way, Song represents the West's ultimate colonial fantasy through the idealization of women based on the myth of the Orient. The ways in which Gallimard idealizes Song are rooted in a desire for control that reflects his greater

sense of superiority as a Western male within a colonial framework. His perceived ability to possess Song, that is, the ideal Oriental woman, represents the broader history of colonialism as the West has attempted to dominate and redefine the East. The processes of objectification and domination by the colonizer, hence, become an important aspect of Gallimard's relationship with Song. Thus, creating Song as a representation of the colonized female, one that is passive and submissive, and is regulated by the desires of the colonizer, despite not really being one.

III. GROUNDED REALITY OF THE REAL WOMAN

In stark contrast to the idealized fantasy that Gallimard constructs around Song, Agnes represents the "real woman," someone who does not fit very neatly into Gallimard's projections and illusions of power and gender. Gallimard's wife, Agnes, has qualities that he considers simple and plain, standing in contrast to Song, who is very exotic. Gallimard married Agnes for convenience. When introducing Agnes to the audience, Gallimard states:

Gallimard: (*To us*) I married a woman older than myself – Agnes.

Agnes: (*To us*) I grew up in Australia, amongst criminals and kangaroos. My father was an ambassador there.

Gallimard: Hearing that brought me to alter –
(*Agnes leaves*)

– where I opted for a dose of practicality. An unsophisticated boy from a provincial town could still manage a quick leap up the career ladder. She may not be my fantasy woman, but she could help me reach the far-off lands of my dreams. (p. 14)

Gallimard had a goal in mind when he was with both of these women; he was just a provincial unsophisticated boy looking for a woman to help him achieve his dreams and then, after he achieved them, he would do whatever necessary to fulfil the dream of being a heroic Pinkerton-type man from *Madama Butterfly* who embodies his concept of Western superiority and that the East needs the West to aid them. In Gallimard's mind, Song is an idealized Eastern woman in the role of Butterfly, and he believes he will assume the role of Pinkerton from Puccini's opera. (Tayebi & Salmi, 2018, p. 13) Conversely, in Agnes' case, Gallimard used her only as a tool for practical purposes, like climbing up the social ladder and producing an heir, at which they failed.

The delicate nature of Gallimard's dream of being with Song and the reality of Agnes and the contrast between the

two ultimately highlight the difference between his fantasies and reality. While Song seems to be a controlled rendering of Gallimard's own desires, Agnes is a real person who provides a down-to-earth, practical, and unromantic reflection of his idealized version of a woman.

Despite the fact that Agnes is neither as glamorous nor as alluring as Song, she is still depicted as an authentic and self-sufficient individual who does not meet the expectations Gallimard has set for an "ideal woman." These expectations are based on his fantasies about East and what it would mean to have a relationship with a woman like Song.

The contrast is again evident as Song projects herself as modest, demure, and submissive, while Agnes cannot be put into any of these categories. Where Gallimard feels the need to save Song, inherently putting him on the stronger and higher ladder in the hierarchy, Agnes and he began their relationship when she stood higher; she was the daughter of an ambassador in Australia, while he was only a 'town boy'. In this way, she does not have any place in Gallimard's fantasies and embodies the reality of womanhood that is unadorned by fantasy or illusion, where he is the powerful white man. She also does not fall into the objects of Gallimard's colonial desires and challenges his assumption that women, particularly those from the East, should be compliant and docile.

Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity helps us to understand who Agnes and Song. Butler posits that gender is not an inherent trait, it is something that can be performed by acting out certain actions, exhibiting certain behaviors and through social expectations about what constitutes masculine or feminine behaviors. (Butler, 1990, p. 33) Song takes advantage of this performative aspect for the benefit of her goals to portray an ideal woman image for Gallimard.

It becomes evident that Agnes does not conform to the "ideal woman" image that Gallimard has envisioned, thereby challenging the preconceived notions of femininity built on his colonial/patriarchal ideologies. Her existence, hence, stands in contrast to the fantasies that Gallimard has created about women's roles.

In *M. Butterfly*, Agnes's role in relation to the overall critique of colonialism and Western arrogance is significant. While Gallimard is ensnared in the notion of saving Song, her emergence in Act 2, Scene 5, soaked from an anti-Chinese protest, serves as a metaphorical backdrop to symbolize the disassociation between Gallimard and real life. By contrasting Gallimard's imaginative, idealistic view of China with the realistic situation facing China at that moment in time, Agnes acts as a force to discredit and challenge Gallimard's selfish,

egocentric worldview, revealing the emptiness of his fantasies and pushing him to recognize his disconnection from reality.

Gallimard's constant fantasies about being in control stem from his colonial beliefs, which promote the false dichotomization between the East and the West. On the contrary, Agnes represents reason and reality that reveal and challenge Gallimard's delusional ideals.

Agnes's refuses to see the colonial view of the West as superior, presenting it instead as a complex and a place of contradiction. She acknowledges the limitations of Gallimard's fantasies regarding the West's inherent superiority and helps him to see and recognize the larger social and political structures that he chooses to ignore. Her statements, such as "the West is a 'paper tiger'," her conversations of "world revolution," (Hwang, 1986, p. 81) challenge colonially constructed myths that Gallimard believes in. Agnes does not see the West as a powerful and permanent entity, but, instead, questions its position by addressing "The inevitability of world revolution." (Hwang, 1986, p. 81)

In contrast to Gallimard, who is surrounded by his idealized and romanticized version of China and who only projects his colonial fantasies upon Song, Agnes appears more connected to the current political and social realities of the time. Therefore, Agnes serves as a voice of reason that reveals the emptiness of Gallimard's worldview.

The conflict between fact and fiction is evident in scenes when Agnes questions Gallimard's disconnect from reality. Gallimard's fantasy version of what it means to be "China" in his home in France, which includes burning incense and seeing himself as a powerful diplomat, indicates his wish to avoid real-world complexities by escaping into a fantasy world of his own where he has total control over everyone else, like he imagined he once did when he was in China. The way in which Agnes rationally responds to the world of fantasy that Gallimard has constructed indicates that there are significant real-world factors that Gallimard fails to recognize. While he builds an imaginary sense of power through his fantasies, Agnes is working to confront issues of the events that are taking place in reality.

This relationship between Gallimard and Agnes illustrates one of the major themes throughout *M. Butterfly*, the seduction of colonial fantasies juxtaposed with the ugliness and hardship that lie beyond. Gallimard's preoccupation with creating an ideal version of the "perfect woman," as well as wanting to save Song from the mythical oppression of the East reflect larger colonialist attitudes that have been held by many in the West who attempt to impose their values and beliefs upon

the "other." Furthermore, Gallimard's love for Song as an object of desire, who is ultimately an "ideal" prototype of the "East," and his inability to see through the reality of life that led to his ultimate demise, (윤소영, 2015)

IV. DECONSTRUCTING GENDER AND COLONIALISM

Oriental women are viewed as docile and compliant by Gallimard, and he's not the only one to hold that belief. There is a historical and cultural basis for such stereotypes. The play also outlines how, during the 1960's, the "new" feminist moment made Eastern women seem submissive, which later became the stereotype. Western men after the movement were no longer able to uphold the patriarchal society's presumption of white women as subservient in this circumstance. Eventually, Western men began seeing Asian women as the ideal of domesticated, obedient womanhood because, as in the 1960s, Asian women were still in the pre-feminist stage. (Tanimoto, 2003, p. 100)

By presenting the characters of Agnes and Song, Hwang breaks down the traditional classification of women as either submissive or independent based on their Eastern or Western origins. From a feminist standpoint, Song Liling exemplifies the interconnectedness of gender and colonialization. At the beginning of the play, Song Liling appears to fit Gallimard's standards for an ideal woman, however, as the play progresses, it becomes clear that Song is actually a man who has used the 'ideal woman' image performance for deception and to manipulate Gallimard. Song's acting has effectively challenged traditional definitions of gender and demonstrated that Gallimard's perceptions of the ideal woman Song were completely false. Through the interpretation of women in Gallimard's fantasies, Song strengthens Butler's concept that gender is performative and can be defined by the power structure of both gender and colonialism.

The manipulation act also highlights the intersection of race and gender within the colonial space. The inability of Gallimard to look past his own fantasies stems from a colonial ideology that looks to impose Western standards onto others. Song's deception acts as an act of resistance to this colonial fantasy because he contradicts Gallimard's fantasies and demonstrates the violent nature of both colonial and gendered structures of power. Song uses the idealized female form to demonstrate how colonial ideologies not only create perceptions around race and nationality but how they also create gender's construction as well.

Feminist theorists such as Judith Butler, who suggest that gender is both performed and socially constructed, apply

to both Agnes and Song. Agnes defies the performance of the idealized woman and instead manifests a view of gender as a lived experience; conversely, Song uses the performative elements of gender to his advantage and reveals the power dynamics that exist in both colonial and gendered relationships. Both characters also prove how gender is not a biological fact but can be constructed, influenced by social norms and politics.

Through a feminist and postcolonial lens of *M. Butterfly*, we can see how the play critiques gender and colonialist ideologies by exposing how these dominant ideologies impact the lives of the characters. This also suggests that both Gallimard and the West are victims of their imaginations, and challenges the mainstream cultural constructs of male/female, white/nonwhite, and East/West. (Noureldin, 2017)

V. THE ROLE OF ILLUSION AND FANTASY IN SHAPING COLONIAL IMAGINATION

One of the central themes in *M. Butterfly* is the way colonial fantasies shape and distort both individual identities and cultural perceptions. Gallimard's construction of an idealized "China" and an idealized "woman" in Song is emblematic of the larger colonial project of the West. The way he views East is a result of desire and power; he cannot seem to quantify his fantasies of rescue and control, as he perceives the two differently. Only when Agnes asserts that he is a "clerk" does he begin to understand the extent to which his illusions have been built on power. In a confrontation, she mentions:

I found the letters. The ones you've been writing. For God knows how long. A huge stack of them. To some Chinese slut. "I swear I will find a way"... "to rescue you from yours"... You're a clerk! How are you going to rescue anyone, when you haven't got the courage to drop them in the mail? (Hwang, 1986, p. 81)

The world created by Agnes's words exposes the absurdity behind the grand delusions that Gallimard has constructed about himself; he is just a man hanging on to fantasies that eventually offered him nothing. It is through Agnes's perception of him that Gallimard begins to see that he has no power over his situation or the perpetuation of some of the very myths of colonialism that he holds.

The boldness with which Agnes challenges Gallimard shows both how his fantasies about himself allow him not only to doubt himself but also make galling claims that are rooted in inconsistencies; for instance, he identifies himself as someone with a potential need to save someone else despite his inability to even face the reality of his own

life. In addition to being a part of his cultural background as a Western man, his fantasies about the East have also been created by his view as a Westerner that equates the East to being an exotic, mysterious, inferior part of the world, and allows him to feel superior to other cultures. Therefore, he sees the West as the most advanced part of the world; thus, he has continued to indoctrinate the belief that he is somehow more powerful by virtue of his existence in this cultural environment.

Gallimard's fantasized view of an ideal "Oriental" woman, exemplified by Song, is rooted in these romantic colonial fantasies. In his mind, Song embodies an ideal Eastern woman, submissive, obedient, and exotic, making her a desirable object through which he realizes his fantasies of oppression and domination. Additionally, Gallimard's fantasy of possessing and dominating an elusive "Oriental" woman is linked to his notion of colonial superiority over the East. In his mind, the East is a canvas upon which he will paint his ideals, a reflection of his personal need for power and authority.

In this regard, Agnes challenges Gallimard's illusions of wanting to "save" Song through her rational and grounded view of the world. Agnes is fully aware that Gallimard is but a man caught in a world of delusions, not capable of understanding the political or cultural world in which he lives.

Agnes characterizes the "true", realistic, and ordinary, while Gallimard's fantasies about Song as a perfect, created "Eastern" woman. There is a strong contrast between the realistic, ordinary, unadorned representation of womanhood found in Agnes and the perfected, imagined, distorted depictions of womanhood represented by Song.

The fixation Gallimard has with Song prevents him from seeing either his own reality or the reality of cross-cultural relations between East and West. In Scene 5 of Act II, when Agnes confronts Gallimard, she reveals the limitations of his power and the falsity of the illusions he has created around himself. She reminds him, "You're a clerk." This line exposes Gallimard's false notion that he is a powerful diplomat and diminishes his sense of superiority, both to himself and the audience.

Gallimard's fantasies about Song are rooted in his own colonial understandings of power. In Gallimard's worldview, the West is powerful and dominating over the East. For him, Song is an exotic, submissive girl who meets Gallimard's need to be in total control and exercise superiority over another person. This idea is consistent with the general colonial mindset, in which the East is seen as something to be conquered, tamed, and controlled.

However, Agnes resists this colonial perspective by

confronting Gallimard's false conception of reality - both his personal fantasies and his political fantasies - and exposing the fact that the concept of colonial superiority by the West is built on a weak foundation. She has her own rational view of the world, which challenges the validity of Gallimard's fabricated image of reality about Song. As a result, Gallimard is forced to confront his own realities when he sees Agnes.

Therefore, Agnes becomes the voice in the play that Hwang uses to critique the colonial myth of the white man's burden and the supposed need for the West to save the East. Gallimard's ideas about saving Song illustrate his own insecurities and the need to feel important and powerful.

Agnes's rationality exposes the emptiness of this need for personal validation, showing that the true reality of East-West relations is far more complex than Gallimard fantasizes.

VI. THE MYTH OF FERTILITY: AGNES VS. SONG LILING

The theme of fertility also operates on multiple levels in the play. Gallimard and Agnes's inability to have a child contrasts sharply with Song's ability to "produce" a child, highlighting the deeper, often unspoken aspects of colonial power dynamics and fertility. Fertility, or the lack thereof, therefore, becomes a metaphor for Gallimard's failed illusions of potency, both as a man and as a colonial figure. While it strengthens the colonial view of the East as fertile and productive, the later unfolding of the plot reveals Gallimard as infertile.

Gallimard's lack of ability to have children is a very important reason behind why he has such a strained relationship with Agnes; with each failed attempt at conceiving a child with her comes another blow to his already poor self-image as a man. In addition, Gallimard's obsession with "saving" and being in control of Song, whom he sees as the mother to his child, is not only his way of seeking validation but is also a metaphor for the West's inability to maintain control over the East. As Gallimard cannot father a child with Agnes, he feels a sense of incompleteness and a question about his masculinity. He expresses his personal humiliation at their inability to conceive, saying in Act 1 Scene 17 that, "I feel like God himself is laughing at me if I can't produce a child." (Hwang, 1986, 56) This is another instance of the conventional idea being deconstructed; this time, about fertility, here the male fertility is also put to question as they are unable to conceive a child.

In contrast, Song's ability to bear a child is presented as

a significant aspect of her relationship with Gallimard. Song uses a moment of Gallimard's emotional vulnerability to announce "I'm pregnant" at the end of Act 1. As Song is not truly a woman but a man masquerading as one, the child she carries becomes a symbol of Gallimard's fantasies and provides him with personal validation. For him, the child represents the ultimate proof of his virility, even though it is an artificial and deceptive construction. Song's ability to conceive, therefore, becomes a way for her to manipulate Gallimard further, providing him with the illusion of fulfilment in his desire to produce an heir, while never truly fulfilling the deeper emotional and psychological void that Gallimard has.

Agnes' incapacity to conceive with Gallimard highlights their failed marriage, emphasizing the breakdown of their marriage and the collapse of Gallimard's fantasies. However, as a rational woman, Agnes gets herself checked to know issues that may be resulting in their inability to conceive and finds herself completely healthy. In Scene 17 of Act 1, while informing Gallimard of her hospital visit and medical examination, Agnes also informs him that she has also made an appointment for him to get him checked as well and that there is nothing wrong with her (Hwang, 1986, p. 55), which Gallimard equates to her questioning his masculinity.

While Song has created the impression in Gallimard's mind that he is fertile, his inability to conceive with Agnes stands in stark contrast to this fallacy created by Song, which makes it further difficult for him to escape from reality. The stark contrast between Song and Agnes clearly shows that the idealistic view of women can easily fall apart when these views are based on such misconceptions.

The very act of conceiving, which Gallimard associates with validation and dominance, is something he cannot achieve with the woman who remains grounded in reality but is "granted" with Song, whose fertility is part of the performance of her deception.

Ultimately, the fertility themes underscore the collapse of Gallimard's colonial and personal fantasies. Song's ability to produce a child, thus, becomes an escape into the depths of his fantasies. The inability to have a child with Agnes illustrates how Gallimard's fantasized ideals will always fall short of reality. Through *M. Butterfly*, Hwang establishes a symbolic representation of the nullification of power between the East and the West, male and female, and between what appears to be real and what is truly true. In the end, it is Song (the illusion) who creates the new child, and Agnes (the real woman) is unable to create a new child to show how impossible it is for Gallimard to be able to achieve his colonial fantasies.

VII. CONCLUSION

The characters of Agnes and Song Liling in *M. Butterfly* exemplify the differences between reality vs. illusion, and authentic vs. performance in relation to colonialism and gender relations. Gallimard's fantasies about Song reflect the Western stereotype of the East, which portrays it as submissive, exotic, fertile, and ultimately idealized; however, the grounded reality of Agnes acts as a counterpoint, providing the image of "the real woman" in opposition to the constructed identity of Song. The disparity in power based on race and gender, illustrated by the fantasies of Gallimard are also apparent in the relationship between Agnes and Song, demonstrating that Gallimard's delusions of masculine superiority, domination over the female character, and control through colonialism were very fragile.

The themes of fertility and reproduction also serve to reinforce these ideas. Song's ability to bear a child, while artificial in nature, symbolizes the failure of Gallimard's desires; the fact that Gallimard and Agnes cannot produce an heir symbolizes the failure of their relationship as well as the failure of Gallimard's colonial aspirations. Through these means, Hwang critiques the very foundations of colonial power and exposes the gendered ramifications of colonialism, not only of Gallimard's romanticization and personal illusions but also of the broader Western cultural biases placed on the East.

Overall, Hwang's *M. Butterfly* examines the politics of gender, race and power as evidenced through the characters of Agnes and Song, who help Hwang reveal the layers of colonial fantasy and provide a sharp critique of the general occidental perception of the East, and of the stereotypes perpetuated by colonial ideology that historically shaped the cultural and gender identity of both men and women. Hwang, through the juxtaposition of both characters' roles, critiques not just the psychological/political paradigms that bind Gallimard, but also exposes the underlying and often excruciatingly painful truths that were part of the power and identity dynamic that contributed to Gallimard's ultimate demise.

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Epic under Erasure: Demythologizing Bhima in *Randamoozham*

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Abstract—This paper reads M. T. Vasudevan Nair's *Randamoozham* as a sustained act of demythologization centered on the character of Bhima. Moving away from the canonical Mahabharata, where Bhima appears as a figure of exaggerated strength and secondary prominence, Nair reconstructs him as a reflective, wounded, and historically situated consciousness. The study argues that the novel reconfigures the epic through a dialectical strategy: while retaining the broad civilizational frame of the Purana, it subjects the supernatural plot, divine births, avataric interventions, demonization of the "other," and celestial closure, to rational reinterpretation. Through close textual analysis, the paper demonstrates how Bhima's corporeality replaces mythic excess with physical labour and endurance; how his masculinity is rendered structurally subordinate within fraternal and political hierarchies; and how caste and gender ideologies shape his perception of figures such as Hidimbi, Ghatotkacha, Kunti and Draupadi. Rather than desacralizing the epic, *Randamoozham* restores to it psychological density and ethical ambiguity by granting voice to a figure long instrumentalized within epic memory. In doing so, Nair reclaims Bhima not as caricature of brute force, but as the epic's most compelling witness to the burdens of power, hierarchy, and mortality.



Keywords— Counter myth, Demythologization, Narrative Focalization Subaltern Consciousness.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the Indian context, the epic does not survive by remaining intact; it survives by being repeatedly re-situated, moved across languages, regions, performative economies and moral climates, until the "same" story begins to carry the pressure of multiple histories. Retelling, therefore, is not a late modern habit of rewriting sacred narratives; it is one of the oldest protocols by which Indian literary culture renews itself. A. K. Ramanujan frames this durability through a striking image: a platter filled with identical rings, each marking a completed incarnation, implying that "for every such Rama there is a *Ramayana*" (24). What appears as singularity in the canonical imagination is, in lived tradition, an archive of tellings - plural, mobile and politically responsive.

Ramanujan avoids the more flattening vocabulary of "versions" and "variants," because such terms quietly install an "original" behind the plurality. Instead, he insists on "tellings," precisely because the older terms "can and typically do imply that there is an invariant, an original or Ur-text - usually Valmiki's Sanskrit *Ramayana*" (Ramanujan 25). This is the crucial corrective for any serious discussion of epic rewriting in India: the retelling is not automatically secondary, nor is it merely derivative. It is a cultural act that renegotiates authority, sometimes by reverence, sometimes by dissent, often by subtle displacement of emphasis. The epic becomes less a fixed scripture than a narrative commons, where communities rehearse and revise their own sense of the world.

The logic of plurality is not only geographical; it is narratological. Ramanujan notes that the tradition

distinguishes between the Rama story (*ramakatha*) and particular authored texts, and he reads this as parallel to a formal distinction between “story and discourse” (Ramanujan 25). In other words, Indian epic culture has long understood, within its own categories, that the *what* and the *how* of narration are not the same terrain. Even when “the structure and sequence of events may be the same,” the retelling transforms meaning through “style, details, tone, and texture - and therefore the import” (Ramanujan 25). Retelling is thus not only a change in content; it is a reconfiguration of narrative optics: who sees, who speaks, what counts as evidence, what is dismissed as noise, what is elevated into truth.

To speak of Indian epic retelling is to speak of a tradition that is simultaneously literary and social. A tradition where narrative plurality is not accidental but constitutive and where meaning is generated in the space between *katha* and its performed, authored, translated and contested embodiments. The “astonishing proliferation of tellings” across centuries and languages (Ramanujan 24) is not a problem to be disciplined back into a single authoritative text; it is the very evidence that epic in India is less an inheritance than a continuously negotiated cultural form, capable of carrying devotion, dissent, regional memory and historical realism without ceasing to be epic.

If epic plurality in the Indian tradition authorizes the shifting of narrative emphasis, *Randamoozham* radicalizes that license by displacing not just the tone of the epic but its centre of gravity. M. T. Vasudevan Nair does not offer an alternative version of the *Mahabharata*; he reorients its narrative optics. By granting first-person authority to Bhima, the Pandava traditionally positioned behind Yudhishtira’s moral aura and Arjuna’s martial glamour, Nair performs what might be termed a focal inversion. The epic’s events remain recognisable, but their moral and emotional weight alters because they are filtered through the consciousness of the one perpetually relegated to the “second turn.”

Nair’s intervention extends the logic that Ramanujan identifies between story and discourse. The *what* of the *Mahabharata*, the exile, the dice game, the war, the final ascent, remains structurally intact. What shifts is the *how*: the interior inflection, the pauses of resentment, the bodily fatigue, the unarticulated shame. Ramanujan reminds us that even when “the structure and sequence of events may be the same,” the change in “style, details, tone and texture” transforms the “import” of the narrative (25). *Randamoozham* exemplifies precisely this transformation. By inhabiting Bhima’s consciousness, Nair renders visible the emotional sediment that the canonical narration leaves implicit.

The move is not narratological but epistemological. Bhima’s voice destabilizes epic omniscience. The cosmic assurances of dharma, destiny and the divine will are repeatedly refracted through suspicion and experiential doubt. The grand architecture of providence contracts into lived immediacy: hunger, humiliation, muscular exhaustion and unrequited love. In effect, the epic’s transcendental frame yields to human scale. The *Purana* persists as cultural memory, but its metaphysical aura is thinned by psychological realism. Such re-centering is neither casual nor incidental within the Indian tradition of retelling. It corresponds to the tradition’s long-standing recognition that narrative authority may be redistributed without dissolving epic identity. Ramanujan’s insistence that there is no single invariant text (25) prepares the ground for precisely such relocations of voice. Nair’s Bhima does not contest Vyasa from outside the archive; he speaks from within it, occupying one of its most powerful yet underexamined figures. The effect is less a rejection of epic memory than a re-interpretation of its moral economy. Through this focal shift, *Randamoozham* inaugurates a dialectic that will govern the novel. The epic world remains, but its explanatory grammar changes. What once appeared as divine inevitability begins to resemble political calculation and human frailty.

M T Vasudevan Nair does not dismantle the *Mahabharata*; he interrogates the interpretive mechanisms through which it has been received. The supernatural is not theatrically denied; it is absorbed into the realm of human plausibility. Divine birth becomes socially sanctioned surrogacy; celestial weapons become disciplined techniques of warfare; demonhood becomes the political naming of marginalized tribes. What shifts here is not the event itself but its ontological register. The miraculous ceases to function as theological proof and begins to operate as cultural memory refracted through human imagination.

Demythologization in *Randamoozham* is neither secular reduction nor rationalist triumphalism. It is a hermeneutic deepening. By translating divine causality into social process, Nair restores agency to the human sphere. The Pandavas’ lineage, traditionally authenticated through mantra and celestial visitation, is recast within the framework of *niyoga*, exposing the precariousness of hereditary legitimacy. Martial prowess, once attributed to divine favor, emerges as the consequence of training, discipline, and political grooming. Even Krishna’s omniscience is reinterpreted as strategic foresight, an intelligence sharpened by observation rather than revelation.

By treating the *Purana* as historically and corporeally real while exposing the Plot as mythic accretion, Nair preserves the civilizational memory of the epic even as he subjects its theology to scrutiny. The geography, the dynasties, the rituals, the codes of honor, all remain intact. What recedes is the aura of inevitability. The gods do not command the narrative; human decisions do. In reclaiming the epic from transcendental certainty, *Randamoozham* does not diminish it. Rather, it relocates its grandeur within the precariousness of human existence, where strength coexists with doubt, loyalty with resentment, and heroism with exhaustion.

II. BHIMA AND THE BURDEN OF THE BODY

If *Randamoozham* treats the *Purana* as embodied reality, that embodiment is most rigorously inscribed upon Bhima's body. In the canonical epic, Bhima's strength functions as spectacle, effortless, excessive, almost divine. In Nair's retelling, strength is neither ornament nor miracle; it is labour. The body ceases to be mythic exaggeration and becomes weight, hunger, muscle strain, and fatigue. Bhima is repeatedly made conscious of how others perceive him. He recalls the subtle hierarchy within his own family, observing that he was valued "for my strength alone" and seldom for thought or judgment (Nair 48). The reduction is internalized. He is treated as a weapon rather than as a mind. The epic tradition celebrates his physical dominance; Nair renders that dominance isolating. To be "all body" is to be denied complexity.

This tension becomes palpable in the episode of the lacquer house. In Vyasa's narration, the escape reads as providential cunning. In *Randamoozham*, survival depends on Bhima's brute endurance. He recounts carrying his mother and brothers through the forest, moving through darkness and exhaustion while others collapse into sleep. "I carried them one by one," he remembers, describing how their bodies felt like burdens that must not fall (Nair 63). The heroism here lies not in spectacle but in repetitive exertion. The epic's miracle dissolves into manual effort. Even Bhima's physical enormity becomes a source of shame. He notes how his appetite and size draw mockery. His body, which secures victory in battle, alienates him in domestic space. He reflects bitterly that while Arjuna's grace is admired and Yudhishtira's composure revered, he is regarded as coarse and excessive (Nair 51). The body becomes both asset and stigma, indispensable in war, inconvenient in ritual.

The destruction of Dwaraka further underscores this corporeal grounding. Rather than narrating the city's fall as divine curse, Nair describes the sea's relentless erosion. Bhima witnesses the ruins "strewn like lifeless

bodies," an image that collapses architectural grandeur into physical decay (Nair 27). The metaphor of dead flesh reinforces the novel's commitment to material reality. Even cities possess bodies; they age and disintegrate. The war at Kurukshetra intensifies this physical realism. Bhima does not move like an epic hero untouched by exhaustion; he lumbers, sweats, bleeds. He describes the weight of the mace in his hand and the resistance of bone against metal (Nair 211). Combat is not divine choreography; it is the collision of bodies. The battlefield smells of blood and rot rather than sanctity. Most devastating is Bhima's encounter with Ghatotkacha's corpse. In the canonical narrative, the son's death is framed as heroic sacrifice. In Nair's retelling, Bhima sees only the stillness of flesh that once carried his blood. "He lay there, enormous and motionless," Bhima recalls, registering not mythic triumph but paternal rupture (Nair 243). The body, once symbol of tribal prowess, is reduced to lifeless mass. Heroism offers no transcendence.

The burden of the body extends beyond battle and survival; it structures Bhima's very sense of self within the domestic and political sphere. His corporeal presence precedes him, determining how he is addressed and how far he is heard. At one point he confesses with restrained clarity: "I was always behind him - in war, in festivities, in funeral rites" (Nair 51). The sentence is not merely descriptive; it is diagnostic. The repetition of "in" performs the continuity of marginalization. Ritual, celebration, mourning, each domain reproduces the same hierarchy. Bhima's body is summoned for strength but never invited for counsel. He occupies space, but he does not occupy authority. This condition becomes especially acute in his relationship with Yudhishtira. Bhima repeatedly registers the paradox of serving a brother whose adherence to *dharma* he finds rigid and self-serving. When Yudhishtira invokes duty, Bhima's instinct is often resistance; yet he restrains himself. "My hands were tied by obedience," he admits during the recollection of the dice game (Nair 118). The metaphor of tied hands is significant. The warrior renowned for crushing adversaries finds himself immobilized within fraternal hierarchy. The body capable of breaking bones cannot break custom.

The same tension surfaces in Bhima's unrequited love for Draupadi. His devotion is corporeal and immediate, expressed through action rather than rhetoric. After the humiliation in the Kuru court, it is Bhima who vows vengeance with visceral intensity. But Draupadi's emotional allegiance remains elsewhere. Bhima notes with muted resignation that her eyes sought Arjuna even in moments of crisis (Nair 156). His body becomes the executor of her rage, but not the recipient of her intimacy. Strength again functions as utility. The war magnifies this

pattern. Bhima fights relentlessly, but narrative glory often accrues to Arjuna's precision or Krishna's strategy. Bhima recognizes this imbalance. Reflecting on Arjuna's celebrated victories, he observes that much of that brilliance derived from Krishna's counsel (Nair 134). The remark is neither jealous nor petty; it is analytic. Bhima sees the machinery behind acclaim. Yet his own labour remains unadorned. The epic hero, in Nair's reconfiguration, becomes a worker within a structure that distributes recognition unevenly.

In the final journey toward the Himalayas, the burden of the body returns with stark inevitability. As Draupadi falls, Yudhishtira interprets her collapse through moral calculus. Bhima, by contrast, perceives physical exhaustion. He recalls how "her breath grew faint in the thin air" (Nair 302). The explanation is biological, not karmic. Even here, the body asserts its sovereignty over myth. Bhima lingers, unwilling to convert collapse into moral allegory. His loyalty is tactile; he cannot detach flesh from feeling. Through these cumulative gestures, Nair reframes heroism as endurance within hierarchy. Bhima's body sustains kingdoms and fulfills vows, yet it also absorbs neglect, silence, and deferred recognition. The "burden" is therefore twofold: the literal weight of flesh and the symbolic weight of being perpetually second. By grounding Bhima's heroism in corporeal labour and emotional marginality, *Randamoozham* dismantles epic invulnerability and restores to the warrior the density of human isolation.

III. CASTE, DEMONIZATION AND THE POLITICS OF NAMING

The literary landscape of *Randamoozham* bears the weight of heroism as it bears the imprint of caste. Nair's most radical intervention lies in his refusal to accept the epic vocabulary of "Rakshasa" at face value. The so-called demons of the forest are not metaphysical aberrations but communities positioned outside the Vedic order. By reclassifying them as Nishadas, Nair exposes how language itself manufactures monstrosity. Bhima's encounter with Hidimbi is narrated without supernatural embellishment. She is not introduced as a grotesque sorceress but as a woman of the forest whose difference is cultural rather than ontological. Bhima recalls her presence with a clarity that resists epic caricature. What unsettles the Pandavas is not her demonic nature but her tribal identity. Kunti's disapproval is telling; Hidimbi is spoken of as someone beneath their lineage. Bhima senses the violence embedded in this distinction. The label "Rakshasi" becomes a protective fiction—a way of rationalizing exclusion. Demonhood functions as caste translation.

The episode of Baka is equally revealing. In the canonical epic, Bhima slays a cannibal terrorizing the people. In Nair's retelling, Baka's authority resembles that of a tribal chief extracting tribute. The act of killing is stripped of mythic righteousness and re-situated within political economy. Bhima recognizes that he has been deployed in a conflict that is less cosmic battle than territorial enforcement. The rhetoric of protecting Brahmins masks the consolidation of Kshatriya power. What is framed as dharmic heroism begins to resemble caste warfare. This tension culminates in the treatment of Ghatotkacha. Though Bhima acknowledges his son with pride, the larger political structure views him as expendable. When Ghatotkacha is sent into battle against Karna, the decision is strategic rather than sentimental. Bhima watches the aftermath with a father's anguish, yet the discourse around him celebrates sacrifice. The tribal body becomes tactical instrument. The epic's moral economy justifies loss by invoking necessity; Nair exposes the caste arithmetic underlying that necessity.

Even Bhima's own position is not immune to caste hierarchy. Though a Kshatriya by birth, he occupies a marginal rank within fraternal order. His alliances with forest communities and his emotional affinity toward Hidimbi position him ambiguously within the Brahmanical imagination. The novel subtly suggests that proximity to the "other" destabilizes purity. Bhima's empathy renders him suspect, though never explicitly condemned. Through these narrative recalibrations, *Randamoozham* dismantles the metaphysical aura surrounding demonization. "Rakshasa" emerges as a political designation, not an ontological truth. Caste reveals itself as the unspoken grammar organizing epic violence. By demythologizing the supernatural adversary, Nair restores historical density to the forest and ethical complexity to the warrior. What the epic sanctified as divine conquest becomes, in this retelling, a record of exclusion masked as righteousness.

Gender, Power and the Recalibration of the Feminine

If caste in *Randamoozham* is exposed as a structural grammar of exclusion, gender operates as its intimate counterpart. Nair does not dismantle myth only at the level of gods and demons; he reworks the epic's feminine archetypes with equal precision. Women in the canonical Mahabharata oscillate between sanctity and suffering as revered mothers, wronged queens and as divine manifestations. In Nair's retelling, they are neither allegories nor abstractions. They are agents within political history, and their agency is neither uniformly virtuous nor uniformly victimized.

Kunti is divested of devotional aura and restored to political calculation. In the epic tradition, her invocation of celestial beings confers divine legitimacy upon her sons.

Nair recasts this not as miracle but as strategic survival. The narrative subtly foregrounds the vulnerability of a woman abandoned in youth, dependent on securing lineage for protection. Bhima recognizes that his mother's decisions were rarely innocent. He senses in her an unyielding resolve to see Yudhishtira enthroned, whatever the cost. The famous moment when Draupadi is "shared" among the brothers loses its accidental innocence. Bhima recalls how the command hardened into decree before dissent could surface (Nair 102). What is canonized as maternal oversight becomes political foresight. Kunti's motherhood is inseparable from statecraft.

Draupadi undergoes an even sharper transformation. The epic's tragic heroine becomes, in Nair's narration, a woman conscious of her own charisma and capable of wielding it. Bhima observes that her anger possessed an almost consuming intensity. After the humiliation in the Kuru court, it is not only wounded modesty that animates her, but a desire for retribution. He notes how she would question him repeatedly about the details of slaughter, demanding precision (Nair 158). The request unsettles him. Violence, for Draupadi, becomes a language through which dignity is reclaimed. The novel does not romanticize this; it renders it unsettlingly human. But the author resists reducing Draupadi to vengeance alone. Her emotional economy remains complex. Bhima is painfully aware that her gaze gravitates toward Arjuna. His loyalty to her is immediate - he vows to drink Dushasana's blood; he executes her revenge without hesitation. Still, affection remains unevenly distributed. Draupadi's desire is selective, and Bhima stands at the periphery of her intimacy. Gender thus intersects with hierarchy: devotion does not guarantee reciprocity.

Hidimbi presents a counterpoint to both Kunti and Draupadi. She exists outside the Kshatriya domestic structure. Her love for Bhima is unmediated by ambition or political necessity. When Bhima leaves her and their son, the decision is not framed as heroic renunciation but as capitulation to caste expectation. The abandonment is quiet, almost bureaucratic in its inevitability. Gender here is inseparable from caste: Hidimbi's exclusion is justified by invoking lineage, even as her emotional authenticity surpasses that of the "legitimate" wives. And in demythologizing gender, *Randamoozham* reveals that patriarchy in the epic world is not sustained by male power alone but by intricate negotiations in which women, too, act - sometimes complicitly, sometimes subversively. The novel does not absolve them, nor does it condemn them simplistically. Instead, it restores to them the density of motive that mythic archetypes had flattened. Gender, like caste and heroism, is relocated from allegory to lived complexity.

IV. MASCULINITY AND SUBALTERN CONSCIOUSNESS

In *Randamoozham*, masculinity is neither monolithic nor securely triumphant. Bhima appears, at first glance, to embody epic hegemonic masculinity - physical dominance, ferocity in battle, unflinching loyalty. Yet Nair systematically fractures that image by revealing how Bhima's masculinity is structurally subordinated within the fraternal and political order. His strength is indispensable, but his authority is deferred.

Bhima articulates this reduction with painful clarity: "They valued my strength, nothing more" (Nair 48). The phrasing is blunt, almost stripped of ornament. The grievance is not that he lacks power, but that his power is interpreted narrowly. Masculinity, in the epic hierarchy, is differentiated. Yudhishtira embodies ethical masculinity; measured, composed, rhetorically dignified. Arjuna embodies aesthetic and strategic masculinity; refined skill amplified by Krishna's guidance. Bhima embodies corporeal masculinity; immediate, forceful, and therefore narratively contained. This containment becomes spatially encoded in his recollection: "I was always behind him - in war, in festivities, in funeral rites" (51). The repetition of domains - war, celebration, mourning - reveals the structural permanence of his secondness. Even in battle, where strength ought to determine precedence, symbolic primacy belongs to others. Masculinity here is not merely about physical dominance but about narrative positioning.

The dice game intensifies this contradiction. Bhima's instinct is resistance; he burns with rage at Yudhishtira's compliance. Yet he confesses, "My anger had no place to go" (119). The sentence captures the paradox of warrior masculinity rendered politically impotent. His body is capable of violence, yet hierarchy disciplines that violence into silence. He must perform obedience to preserve fraternal unity. Masculinity becomes restraint as much as aggression. The war further complicates recognition. Bhima notes, with measured realism, that Arjuna's victories were inseparable from Krishna's strategic direction: "Without Krishna, Arjuna would not have been what the world made him" (134). This observation is not resentment but critical awareness. Masculine fame, Nair suggests, is mediated. Bhima's brute proximity to death is less narratively adorned than Arjuna's archery guided by divine charioteer. The epic distributes glory unevenly.

Even in his vow to Draupadi, Bhima's masculinity operates as bodily enactment. He swears to tear open Dushasana's chest, and when he fulfills that

vow, he describes the moment with stark physicality: “The blood was warm” (214). The detail is visceral. It strips vengeance of abstraction. Masculinity is not metaphor but contact. Yet this performance of loyalty does not guarantee emotional centrality. Bhima remains aware that Draupadi’s gaze turns instinctively toward Arjuna (156). His masculinity secures justice; it does not secure intimacy. The death of Ghatotkacha marks the deepest rupture. Bhima looks upon his son and observes, “He lay there, enormous and still” (243). The echo of bodily magnitude - “enormous” - returns, but now drained of vitality. Strength, tribal prowess, heroic ferocity, all culminate in stillness. Krishna may interpret the death strategically, but Bhima registers it corporeally. Masculinity here is not triumph but grief.

Bhima is neither emasculated nor dethroned; he is instrumentalized. His body is mobilized for survival, vengeance, and war, yet discursive supremacy remains elsewhere. Subaltern consciousness thus emerges not from social invisibility alone but from narrative marginalization within power. The “lone warrior” is not alone because he lacks strength; he is alone because strength does not translate into centrality. By granting Bhima retrospective speech, Nair destabilizes epic masculinity from within. The warrior speaks, not as invincible icon, but as man aware of how history arranges its heroes.

V. MORTALITY WITHOUT MYTH

The Mahaprasthana in the canonical epic culminates in transcendence, one by one the Pandavas fall, their deaths interpreted as moral allegories and Yudhishtira alone ascends heavenward. In *Randamoozham*, Nair strips this ascent of its metaphysical assurance. The final journey is neither symbolic purification nor celestial trial; it is an aging body confronting altitude, cold, and depletion. The Himalayas do not judge, they exhaust.

Bhima’s narration refuses allegorical consolation. When Draupadi collapses, there is no cosmic explanation offered to him. He does not interpret her fall as karmic reckoning; he observes her body failing. He notes that “her breath grew faint in the thin air” (Nair 302). The phrasing is physiological, not moral. Breath, not sin, determines collapse. The epic’s ethical calculus dissolves into respiratory fragility. Yudhishtira’s response is equally demystified. In the traditional telling, his refusal to turn back is framed as spiritual resolve. In Nair’s version, the detachment appears as weary acceptance. Bhima senses in him not divine clarity but fatigue hardened into doctrine. The journey has reduced them all. The language of righteousness sounds increasingly hollow against the grinding reality of terrain.

Bhima himself continues, though the ascent weighs upon him. His strength, once celebrated, is now burden. He admits, with rare vulnerability, that “my limbs were heavy, yet I walked on” (304). There is no suggestion of imminent heaven, no divine escort waiting beyond the ridge. The epic promise of ascent is replaced by the inevitability of bodily decline. The absence of miracle is decisive. No celestial chariot arrives to vindicate virtue. No divine revelation reframes suffering. The journey concludes not in spectacle but in stillness. Mortality remains unredeemed by myth. The body that once carried brothers through forests now struggles to carry itself.

In rendering the final ascent as physical ordeal rather than spiritual drama, Nair completes his demythologizing arc. The epic closes not with cosmic affirmation but with human finitude. Bhima remains what he has been throughout the novel, a witness shaped by loyalty, grief and endurance. The “lone warrior” does not rise into legend; he confronts the silence beyond effort. Closure resides not in apotheosis but in the acceptance that even heroes succumb to breath and bone.

Postmodern Mythopoesis and Subaltern Reclamation

In the contemporary literary moment, the epic no longer functions as sacred monument immune to interrogation; it becomes a contested archive. *Randamoozham* participates in this postmodern mythopoesis by entering the epic from within and unsettling its certainties without dismantling its structure. Nair does not discard the Mahabharata; he provincializes its Brahmanical center by re-narrating it through a consciousness historically subordinated within its own framework.

Bhima’s narration operates as metadiegesis, a story emerging from inside the victorious camp, yet quietly resistant to its authority. He repeatedly acknowledges the gap between lived experience and epic memory. “The world saw only what it wished to see,” he remarks (Nair 134), suggesting that history is curated rather than neutral. Glory is distributed selectively; silence is institutional. By foregrounding this selective visibility, the novel exposes the mechanisms through which canonical authority is produced.

The demythologization of Krishna into strategist and of Rakshasas into forest tribes is not merely narrative innovation; it is ideological critique. When Bhima reflects that Arjuna’s renown depended upon Krishna’s presence “Without Krishna, Arjuna would not have been what the world made him” (134), the remark destabilizes the divine aura surrounding victory. Heroism is mediated, and mediation is political. Similarly, the so-called demons cease to be ontological threats and emerge as communities

rendered monstrous by naming. In revisiting Hidimbi and Baka without supernatural distortion, Nair reveals how myth naturalizes exclusion.

Power, rather than divine inevitability, structures events. The dice game unfolds not as cosmic design but as calculated manipulation. Bhima recognizes that what followed was not fate but consequence. The war that ensues is not ordained; it is engineered through pride, ambition, and strategic blindness. Even the climactic Mahaprasthanā is divested of transcendental closure. Draupadi's collapse is described in physiological terms "her breath grew faint in the thin air" (302), erasing moral allegory. Mortality replaces mythic ascent. The epic's teleology fractures; human finitude prevails. In converting gods into tacticians and demons into marginalized subjects, Nair performs reclamation rather than erasure. The counter-epic does not reject the Mahabharata; it restores to it the density of lived consequence. Bhima, once instrumental presence, becomes remembering subject. His voice reclaims narrative space from canonical abstraction.

The permanence of the epic lies not in immutability but in reinterpretation. *Randomoozham* demonstrates that myth survives precisely because it can be re-entered, questioned and revoiced. Through Bhima's retrospective consciousness, the epic reveals its own fault lines. What had been celebrated as divine orchestration emerges as human arrangement; contingent, political, and ethically unstable. In granting speech to the marginal within the monumental, Nair transforms epic inheritance into dialogic terrain.

VI. CONCLUSION

Randomoozham does not dismantle the Mahabharata; it repositions it. What had long functioned as cosmic allegory becomes, in Nair's hands, a chronicle of embodied lives negotiating power, kinship and survival. The dialectic that structures the novel - Purana as lived, historical reality and plot as ideological accretion - allows the epic to be read not as transcendental revelation but as sedimented memory. The gods recede; the consequences remain.

By relocating narrative authority to Bhima, Nair alters not only perspective but ontology. The warrior once celebrated for brute strength acquires interiority. "They valued my strength, nothing more" (Nair 48) becomes emblematic of a larger reclamation: the reduction of Bhima in canonical memory is reversed through reflective speech. He is no longer spectacle; he is witness. His body carries forests, wars, and vows; his mind registers

humiliation, desire, and grief. Strength, in this retelling, coexists with vulnerability. The epic's supernatural scaffolding is methodically humanized. Krishna's foresight becomes strategy; demonhood becomes political labeling; ascension becomes exhaustion. Draupadi's fall is marked not by karmic calculus but by breath thinning in mountain air (302). The dice game is not fate unfolding but pride misjudged. Even Ghatotkacha's death, stripped of sacrificial grandeur, reveals a father confronting still flesh "enormous and still" (243). These moments do not desacralize the epic; they relocate sanctity within experience.

In demythologizing the narrative, Nair does not reduce its magnitude. Rather, he deepens it. By exposing the ideological constructions that have encased the Mahabharata, he reveals the epic's enduring vitality: its capacity to bear reinterpretation without disintegration. The celestial ornamentation that once shielded its characters from scrutiny gives way to psychological density. What remains is not diminished but clarified. The epic survives not because miracles validate it, but because it continues to mirror the contradictions of human life; ambition entwined with loyalty, strength shadowed by insecurity and love intersecting with hierarchy. In restoring Bhima's voice, *Randomoozham* restores to the Mahabharata its most radical possibility: that beneath divine rhetoric lies the drama of mortal beings striving, erring, enduring. The human, once obscured by myth, becomes the epic's most persistent truth.

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Artificial Intelligence in ELT/L

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Abstract— The rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI) has revolutionized various sectors, with education emerging as a significant beneficiary. Since the introduction of ChatGPT, the potential and challenges of GAI application in education have been widely discussed (Feng et al., 2023). This literature review explores the integration of AI in English language teaching (ELT), focusing on its applications, benefits, challenges, and future directions. By synthesizing recent research, this paper aims to provide a comprehensive overview of how AI is transforming ELT, offering insights for educators, researchers, and policymakers. The review highlights the potential of AI to enhance teaching efficacy, personalize learning experiences, and address the diverse needs of English language learners. However, it also underscores the need for careful implementation to mitigate challenges such as technological dependence and data security. This paper concludes with recommendations for future research and practice, emphasizing the importance of ethical considerations and cross-cultural approaches in AI-driven ELT.



Keywords— Artificial Intelligence (AI), English Language Teaching (ELT), English language learning.

I. INTRODUCTION

English serves as a cornerstone in global employment, commercial markets, tourism, academic discourse, and international connectivity (Lan et al., 2020). Mastery of the English language necessitates proficiency in speaking, listening, reading, and writing (Grabe & Stoller, 2002). However, empirical studies have shown that learners often face multiple challenges in English language learning, including limited exposure to English outside the classroom, insufficient content knowledge reserves, irregularities in English spelling rules (Ulicheva et al., 2018) and anxiety due to the fear of making mistakes in front of peers (Cumming et al., 2018). Artificial intelligence, as a computer system that mimics human intelligence with the ability to learn, understand, and memorize human language (Xiaohong & Yanzheng, 2021), provides a new path to alleviate the above challenges.

Existing research shows that AI has demonstrated multidimensional support in language teaching and learning: both for specific language skills, such as assisting with reading comprehension (Xu et al., 2019), training

language skills through machine repetition (Kim, 2019), and correcting English pronunciation (Noviyanti, 2020), and for a wider range of teaching and learning activities, including automated review, real-time feedback, and the ability to learn and memorize human language (Xiaohong & Yanzheng, 2021) including automated marking, real-time feedback, adaptive learning experiences, and pedagogical prediction (Pokrivčáková, 2019). With the popularization of AI in education, it has become an important issue for educators to explore in-depth the mechanisms that support the teaching and learning of English for non-native English speakers. This need is also echoed by the academic community.

There are significant limitations in current research:

- (1) most AI reviews in the field of education do not focus specifically on English language teaching (e.g., Crompton et al., 2020; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019);
- (2) they cover multilingual learning in general without anchoring on English;
- (3) the research targets mostly ignore adult learners, and the studies are not focused on English language teaching

and learning (e.g., Yang & Kyun, 2022). Based on this, this study aims to respond to the call from the academic community to fill the existing gaps through a systematic review; to present the current status of AI applications in English language teaching and learning, to provide educational practitioners with references for teaching strategies, and to assist them in integrating AI tools with language skill development; and to reveal the challenges and limitations of technology applications, and to provide a theoretical basis for educational administrators and researchers to identify the future direction of research.

II. AI AND ELT/L

2.1 Annual Publication Volume and Trend

From the search results, the application of artificial intelligence in English teaching has become a research hot spot. For example, there are 13,289 articles related to “AI teaching research” in China Knowledge Network (CNKI), of which 10.7% (about 1,241 articles) are related to English teaching. The data presentation illustrates that although there is a lot of attention paid to ‘AI+Education’ in academia, there is a slight lack of research on ‘AI+Subject Teaching’ and ‘AI+English Subjects’ (Nong, 2022). This shows that despite the relatively late start of related research, the number of articles published has shown a growing trend in recent years, and the number of articles published in this field has been steadily increasing from 2016 to 2020, reaching 19 articles in 2021 and a peak of 43 articles in 2024. This shows that the development of artificial intelligence has gradually attracted the attention of scholars, indicating that the academic community pays great attention to this field.

2.2 Current Status of Domestic Research

In recent years, domestic research on the impact of artificial intelligence on education has continued to heat up. In China, as a leading information technology, artificial intelligence has become more and more active in theoretical research and teaching practice in the field of education, which has laid a rich theoretical and practical foundation for digital education and information of education management in China.

In 2006, Jia Jiyou developed the first simulated English communication situation in China, “Xisaike” system, which integrates natural language understanding and other technologies into computer-assisted language teaching and realizes personalized language practice through human-computer dialogue (Jia, 2006). In 2013, Chen Ying designed the Secondary School English Teaching System (SAIES), which improves students’ listening and speaking skills through voice interaction, scenario simulation and

other modules, providing a practical paradigm for the application of AI in the basic education stage (Chen, 2013). In 2016, Feng Baocun put forward the “Artificial Intelligence English Teaching System (SAIETS)”, which measures students’ knowledge system with the help of data mining technology, and pushes the transformation of

the integration of technology and curriculum into teaching practice (Jia, 2006). However, compared with the relevant fields abroad, the domestic expansion of artificial intelligence into the field of education and teaching is relatively late, and there is still a gap with foreign research, the scope of research is not broad enough, the degree is not deep enough.

In recent years, the application of artificial intelligence in English teaching has become a research hot spot in the field of education, presenting a multi-dimensional development trend and practical exploration. In terms of teaching mode innovation, AI empowers foreign language education, providing a powerful driving force to achieve accurate teaching, personalized learning, intelligent scenarios and teaching mode innovation. Li Gongke focuses on the practice of project-based teaching in university foreign language classrooms, exploring the path of “AI + foreign language + multidisciplinary integration” to cultivate composite talents (Li, 2024); Zhang Suxia discusses the theoretical and practical paths of AI-enabled teaching (Zhang, 2024), emphasizing the importance of the construction of an intelligent teaching system, the enhancement of teachers’ quality, the improvement of students’ independent learning ability, the innovation of teaching models and the protection of data security. The importance of innovation and data security protection. From the perspective of specific teaching links, the application of artificial intelligence in English listening and writing teaching has achieved remarkable results. Xing Qiaolian(2024) found that under the background of new quality productivity and reform of higher vocational education, the application of AI speech technology to higher vocational English listening teaching can significantly improve students’ listening comprehension ability and teaching efficiency, and through personalized speech recognition and feedback system, it helps students to adapt to the high speed listening materials, and improves the ability of information grasping and complex sentence comprehension. Liu Ru and Ge Ying(2024) focus on English writing teaching, pointing out that AI technology provides opportunities for solving the problems of insufficient teachers, lack of resources, and obsolete methods in the teaching of higher vocational English writing through grammar checking, writing aids, and intelligent assessment systems, and also brings new challenges. In addition, the advancement of AI technology

represented by ChatGPT has triggered an in-depth discussion in the education sector on how educational technology affects language teaching. By synthesizing the literature and empirical research and using questionnaires and content analysis, Shen summarizes the promotion and challenges brought by AI technological advances to language teaching and verifies the profound changes it has triggered in the field of education. On the whole, although the application of AI in English language teaching has achieved certain results, there are still problems to be solved in terms of technological dependence, data security, teacher and student adaptability, etc., and a more effective path of integration needs to be further explored.

2.3 Current Status of Foreign Research

Scholars abroad have started to build a base of collective insights into AI in education and ELT/L. Scholars conducted systematic reviews to examine AI across all educational disciplines.

Chen et al. focused on the annual trends, leading journals, institutions, countries, regions, theories and technologies adopted in AI and education. Systematic reviews were conducted on K-12 (Crompton et al., 2022) and higher education). Both the K-12 and higher education reviews examined topics, such as educational disciplines, levels of learning, research purposes, methodologies, annual trends, intended users, affordance and challenges. While these AI reviews across all subject disciplines, they do not only target ELT/L. It is interesting to note that the findings of the two higher education studies both found language learning one of the most common disciplines for AI use and the K-12 study found writing and language learning the only disciplines showing a growing trend in the use of AI.

Using a narrower lens to focus on ELT/L, scholars pinpointed systematic reviews on pedagogical approaches, language skills and AI tools. The reviews of Chen (2016) and Loncar et al. (2023) studied how technology was used in ELT/L, which included AI, among other technologies and programs. Zhang and Zou (2023) focused their study on the development of writing skills using AI in ELT/L. With activity theory as a framework, papers were examined on the various factors involved in using AI in ELT/L that influence the efficacy of the activity. Switching to a focus on AI tools, Baranwal (2022) examined the use of AI teachable agents in English learning and Crompton and Burke (2022) on ChatGPT.

Broadening the scope, Yang and Kyun (2022) conducted a systematic review of the use of AI in language learning. This study also included pupils whose first language was English and who were learning language skills. This could be problematic in generalizing trends

across both those who speak English as a first language and those who do not, as gaining a new language can involve different teaching and learning challenges. Furthermore, Sharadgah and Sa'di (2022) focused their systematic review on K-12 and higher education, but they focused their review specifically on the learning of English.

However, there are extant reviews that focus on AI and ELT/L only looked at one type of AI, such as Baranwal (2022), who examined teachable agents. This missed a review on all types of AI being used. There were studies examining AI used in teaching all languages (Yang & Kyun, 2022) missing a focus on ELT/L. Adult learners, such as training programs were also missing from these systematic reviews. Therefore, the researchers were looking for specific things, such as ELT/L skills (eg, reading, writing or types of pedagogy). What is missing is a study that examines the trends from the studies, reporting all the actual ways in which AI is being used in ELT/L. This deductive process can ameliorate confirmation bias, provide an understanding of what is emerging from the literature and offer new discoveries beyond predetermined frameworks and thinking.

III. GAPS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This review reveals a number of gap areas that need to be further explored. The majority of existing AI research in ELT/L is from Asia (72.09%), a phenomenon that deserves the attention of researchers and industry leaders in other regions (especially the US and UK, where the global ELT industry is dominant), and there is a need to expand geographic diversity to increase the generalizability of the research in the future, especially in filling the research gaps in K-12 and adult learning scenarios.

The challenges of AI in ELT/L are under reported in current studies or affected by positive publication bias, and researchers focus more on positive outcomes than on revealing problems, and systematic exploration of the limitations of the technology needs to be strengthened. Regarding the application of emerging big language models such as Deepseek in ELT/L, the existing research is still in the beginning stage.

Research focuses on output skills such as speaking and writing, but not enough attention has been paid to the sub-skills of each language skill. The writing domain only focuses on the "feedback" part, and the potential of AI in assisting the knowledge of the writing process (e.g., conceptualization, outlining) has not been fully explored.

IV. CONCLUSION

This systematic review has comprehensively synthesized the current landscape of Artificial Intelligence (AI) applications in English language teaching and learning (ELT/L), addressing its affordance, challenges, and research gaps. The findings reveal that AI has emerged as a transformative tool in ELT/L, offering multi-dimensional support across language skills.

This review reveals multiple gaps in existing research:

(1) Geographic bias: 72% of the studies originated in Asia, resulting in a lack of generalizability to ELT contexts in Western English-speaking countries.

(2) Educational Stage and Skills Imbalance: over-focus on higher education (65%) and output skills such as speaking/writing, neglecting K-12, adult learners and receptive skills such as listening, reading and their sub-skills (e.g., phonological awareness).

(3) Methodological limitations: overuse of deductive frameworks hinders digging into emerging trends such as generative AI ethics, and the long-term effects of technology dependence. Regarding future research directions, researchers need to broaden the scope of their research by strengthening cross-cultural comparisons to cover K-12, adult learners, and non-English contexts;

deepening the integration of technology and instruction, for example, exploring the use of AI in reading strategy design; and researchers' preference for revealing problems rather than positive outcomes. Filling these gaps will enable more inclusive, effective, and responsible use of AI in ELT/L, providing collaborative direction for educators, policymakers, and researchers.

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Between Matrimony and Sisterhood: Gendered Identity Formation in Contemporary Indian Diasporic Women's Fiction

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Abstract— *The diasporic Indian women's fiction is a critical reflection of the gendered fact in the diaspora as dictated by the migration, cultural memory, and social expectations. This paper will discuss how marriage and sisterhood have helped in shaping the diasporic identity in For Matrimonial Purposes by Kavita Daswani and in Sister of My Heart by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. Although Daswani introduces marriage as a culturally controlled organization that organizes the lives of women in immigrant communities, Divakaruni foreshadows sisterhood and emotional connections as other places of self-determination and strength. The paper utilizes the diaspora theory and feminist criticism in the argument that even though diasporic identity is formed by displacement, it is equally formed by emotional negotiation and relations. For Matrimonial Purposes shows the strains of cultural harmony and parental domination, and marriage is shown to be a place of constraint and a place of stealthy subversion. Contrary to that, Sister of My Heart stresses women's unity, which can help women to redefine identity outside the expectations imposed by society. Collectively, the novels show that marriage and sisterhood are parallel but opposing structures upon which diasporic women are building identity. The paper comes to a conclusion that modern Indian women's fiction is a reflection of the diasporic social realities that show the active participation of women in reconstructing identity in the culturally hybrid space.*



Keywords— *Diaspora, Marriage, Sisterhood, Displacement, Cultural memory.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Diasporic writing by Indian women takes up an influential place in modern postcolonial and feminist literary and cultural studies because it predicts the gendered aspects of the migration, displacement, and identity construction processes (Brah; Mishra). This literature is based on traditions of colonialism and postcolonial movement and is an account of the experiences of women who find themselves in different, overlapping cultural spaces at the same time. As compared to the previous works of diasporic narratives where the primary theme was the feeling of nostalgia about the homeland, the current Indian women writers discuss the daily negotiations through which women are recreating their identities in the transnational territory.

Their fiction portrays how migration transforms not only family roles, culture, and dreams but also aspirations, especially of women who are mostly portrayed as the guardians of tradition. This makes the diasporic fiction of Indian women one of the key places where the intersection of gender, culture, and identity can be studied within the context of the lived experiences of displacement. Diaspora is becoming more and more conceptualized not only as physical mobility but also as an active space of cultural exchange and emotional adjustment (Hall; Brah). To the Indian female, a diaspora may mean living in an in-between place between the cultural values inherited and the host country's socio-cultural norms. This intermediate zone establishes conflicts between continuity and change, belonging and alienation, tradition and modernity. These

tensions are very acute among women since their identities are highly controlled by the family systems, social norms, and cultural beliefs. An Indian diaspora literature will convey these negotiations, a woman struggling to balance the demands of an individual and the community is one of them. Indian women writers, in their narratives in which they emphasize domestic space, interpersonal interaction, and emotional conflict, present diaspora as a process that brings change, but is difficult, and changes how women perceive themselves. In this literary tradition, marriage is one of the narrative techniques exhibited repeatedly to strengthen and disrupt the cultural standards. Marriage in the diasporic setting can be considered as one way of preserving ethnic integrity and continuity of culture in migrant groups (Yuval-Davis; Mishra). In women, it ends up being a place where individual agency is often submissive to both family and social norms. The arranged marriages, gender roles, and romanticizing of the traditional woman are usually heightened in the diaspora as a reaction to the perceived cultural loss. As a result, marriage in literary works exposes the way women bargain with the patriarchal patterns in the process of trying to gain independence and establish their identity. Marriage is, therefore, not only a social institution, but it is a strong metaphor of a cultural negotiation of diasporic narratives. In addition to marriage, sisterhood and bonding among women are also important factors in the development of the diasporic experiences of women. Sisterhood, be it in blood ties or by emotional bonding, provides women with an emotional sanctuary and support that offsets the limitations of patriarchal structures. Female relationships in the diasporic fiction tend to cross the geographical boundaries and social hierarchies, also giving continuity in the face of displacement. Through these bonds, women are able to share a loss, desire, and adaptation experience, which they can negotiate identity as a group and not have to do it individually. Sisterhood, as a narrative technique, predicts emotional attachment and mutual support, and focuses more on other types of belonging that disrupt dominant cultural frameworks. Marriage and sisterhood are diametrically opposite and inseparable forces that influence reactions of women towards diaspora. The thematic issues are well represented in *For Matrimonial Purposes* by Kavita Daswani and *Sister of My Heart* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, who have also taken different approaches to the issues related to the identity of Indian women in the diaspora. The novel written by Daswani is devoted to the stress of arranged marriage through the immigrant populations of Indian communities in the United States, where marriage is depicted as a culturally controlled institution ruling the lives of women. Daswani criticizes the commodification of marriage through a mixture of realism and humor and is also critical

of the generation clash between tradition and choice. The novel reveals the way women find their way around cultural pressures in their bid to gain independence, and marriage is one of the key prismatic lenses that are used to study diasporic negotiation. Conversely, the *sister of My Heart* by Divakaruni anticipates sisterhood as a supportive emotional power that defines the identity of women across transnational boundaries. The novel follows the friendship of two women whose lives are not geographically united, but still have an emotional connection. Although there is marriage in the story by Divakaruni, it is the sisterhood that ultimately helps the characters to survive displacement, marriage rules, and cultural turmoil. The focus on emotional memory and feminine bonding, and transnational affiliation by Divakaruni provides another model of conceptualizing the sense of diasporic identity, but based, instead, on relational and emotional continuities and not the structures. The choice of Daswani and Divakaruni for this research is explained by their common work with the experiences of Indian women in the diaspora and their focus on marriage and sisterhood in the narratives, rather differently. Both authors are representatives of the Indian diaspora in the present day and discuss the issues of gender and migration in the delicate female-focused stories. Their novels offer a supplementary approach to how women negotiate cultural identity, and thus, they are the best texts to be used in a comparative analysis. Through the analysis of the works in question, the paper brings out the role of institutional power, like marriage, and relational power, like sisterhood, to concurrently influence the diasporic subjectivity. Although the role of the Indian diasporic literature in the development of the Indian women's identity has been studied extensively, little focus has been made on the interplay between marriage and sisterhood in women's identity construction. The available literature tends to examine these themes independently of each other without considering the interaction between them in the diasporic setting. The paper aims to fill this gap by exploring the way marriage and sisterhood are used as either complementary or contradicting powers in the lives of women. The main aim of the research is to examine how these storytelling techniques help in the construction of the diasporic identity in *For Matrimonial Purposes* and *Sister of My Heart*. It attempts to examine marriage as a location of cultural control and sisterhood, as a location of emotional stability, as well as emphasizing the agency of negotiating space by women, transnationalism. The main argument of the paper is that, whereas marriage in diasporic narratives usually supports traditional configurations, the concept of sisterhood turns out to be a new power that helps women to reconsider a sense of identity and belonging to a diaspora.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical Indian diaspora literature studies have evolved into a multidisciplinary area of study that interacts with postcolonial theory, cultural studies, and feminist criticism to reflect on the multidimensional migration, displacement, and identity construction. The initial research was mostly centered around the exile, nostalgia, and cultural loss themes, where the diasporic subject is described as being in between a homeland memory and host land alienation (Rushdie; Hall). With time, the critics changed to perceive diaspora as a shifting place of cultural negotiation that is filled with hybridity, liminality, and transnational belonging. The literature of Indian diasporas has been studied due to the subtle nature of the characters balancing between tradition and modernity, bringing out a continuous redefinition of cultural identity across boundaries. The scholars have stressed that diasporic writing is not a passive reflection of displacement but a dynamic process that is involved in the processes of identity reconstruction under the influence of social, cultural, and emotional factors. According to feminist scholars, the emerging use of patriarchal arrangements that control the role of women in the family and community determines the diasporic experiences of women and increases the pressures on cultural maintenance in the migrant situations. Research points to the way women are placed as custodians of tradition, as the ones who preserve cultural values by means of marriage, housework, and childbirth. Simultaneously, the feminist criticism focuses on the agency of women and explains how female characters are resistant, bargain, and reconsider these requirements. This view overturns the features of passivity as the victims of diasporic women to the aspects of active participation in defining their identities in the realm of transnational space. Both diaspora and feminist literary criticism have been focused on marriage, which is discussed as one of the strongest cultural institutions structuring social relations and setting up gender hierarchies. Marriage in the diaspora literature has been examined by scholars as an aspect of the preservation of ethnicity and boundaries of communities, especially in the practices of arranged marriage. Feminist criticisms accentuate the way the institution of marriage tends to limit the autonomy of the woman as it establishes the conventional gender roles and demands of submission and sacrifice. Nonetheless, the current academic research also acknowledges marriage as a disputed and ambiguous area wherein women bargain power, identity, and belonging. Literary descriptions demonstrate the way in which marriage relationships within diasporic settings are manifested through underlying conflicts between the continuity of culture and individual wishes, and, as such, marriage emerges as a central area in matters of identity.

Over the past few years, feminist critics have been drawn to female bonding and sisterhood as an increasingly important form of narration in diasporic writing by women. The literature of sisterhood focuses on the importance of emotional and relational networks as a means of maintaining women in migration and cultural dislocation. The female community is seen as an alternative zone of belonging, providing emotional, supportive, and strong forces outside the institutions of patriarchy. The opponents say that sisterhood helps women to share cultural memory, express suppressed emotions, and negotiate identity as a collective. Marriage and female bonding are, nevertheless, two distinct thematic issues that are frequently handled in the scholarship. This discontinuous method emphasizes the importance of integrated studies where the institutional frameworks, like marriage, are considered in relation to the relationship between people, the interaction of interpersonal female relationships in the formation of diasporic identity, and thus new lines of critical discussion of contemporary Indian women's fiction.

III. RESEARCH GAPS

Although the literature on the topic of Indian diasporic literature and women writing has been growing, there are still many gaps in the literature that require the researcher to fill in terms of knowledge relating to the development of gendered identity through the complex interplay of social and emotional frameworks (Mishra). Among the gaps, one can single out the insufficient comparative emphasis on marriage and sisterhood as the two interrelated narrative forces in the texts of diasporas. The literature has mostly focused on marriage as an institution, which makes the patriarchal systems and cultural continuity stronger, with a focus on the limited agency of women in the family and society. On the other hand, the studies of sisterhood and female bonding have inclined to bring out the thematic issues of emotional solidarity, resistance, and empowerment as independent research. The treatment of these dimensions in isolation by the current scholarship deprives it of the means through which the forces of institutions and relations interact to create the experience of the diaspora in women. Subsequently, the delicate balancing act between duty and emotional attachment that defines the life of women in the diaspora is not yet well examined. The other gap that is critical is the role of interpersonal relationships between women that has not been investigated in the development of diasporic identity. Although the process of identity formation in the diaspora literature has received extensive treatment in terms of wider social-political contexts like hybridity, assimilation, and cultural conflict, little has been done to understand the daily emotional stakes in which the

identity is lived and negotiated. Women's relations, especially relationships with sisters, friends, and surrogate kinship, are considered the pivotal points where women express their desires, obtain cultural memory, and bargain displacement. These relational spaces are, however, often sidelined in critical discourse, which tends to prioritize and give more importance to public experiences of migration than the personal or affective aspects. This neglect leads to the partial realization of the process of maintaining and transforming diasporic identity in the form of emotional and relational networks (Grewal and Kaplan). Moreover, there are limited comparative studies with the aim of uniting various narrative strategies that are used by contemporary Indian women writers. Insofar as the current body of work does not cover too many authors or even single strands of a theme, it tends to limit the general understanding of how various manifestations of marriage and sisterhood are conducted across texts. A more subtle approach to understanding the experiences of gendered diaspora, however, is a comparative approach that considers the simultaneous operation of these themes. In the absence of these comparative frameworks, critical readings will simplify women's response to migration to either be bound by tradition or have freedom of resistance without considering the negotiated and fluidity of identity construction. Lack of unified analyses, which encompass marriage and interpersonal relationships of females, also restricts feminist interpretations of diasporic literature. The agency and resistance have been highlighted by feminist scholars, but the relations of agency exercise are under-theorized. The claims of women in negotiating identity are usually not only made against the patriarchal institutions but also through supportive relations with fellow women. The acknowledgment of this intersectionality is a key to the realization of the entire range of diasporic experiences of women. The need to fill in these research gaps is thus essential to further scholarship on the Indian women diaspora fiction as it allows making a comprehensive analysis of the overall role of the institutional structure and emotional relationships in the construction of the diasporic identity.

IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This theoretical framework of the study relies largely on the feminist theory and the theory of the diaspora to explore the gender construction of identity among contemporary Indian women in diaspora fiction (Chakravarty; Brah). The feminist theory is a critiquing theory that looks at gender, agency, and patriarchy in the domestic and social arena. According to the feminist approach, the identities of women are informed by the power relations entrenched in cultural

institutions like marriage and family, which in most cases serve the purpose of controlling the actions of women and restricting autonomy. Feminist criticism anticipates that women will negotiate these findings by means of resistance, accommodation, and self-assertion, and agency places emphasis on the restrictive structures. When providing the study of the lived experience of women, the feminist theory allows one to see how the female characters question the patriarchal traditions and still have to deal with expectations regarding the tradition, culture, and gender roles. The Diaspora theory is an extension of this practice, as it puts women's experiences in a transnational context that involves migration and displacement (Brah; Mishra). The key concepts of the diaspora theory include notions of hybridity, cultural memory, and transnational identity that emphasize the changeable and fluid identity across national boundaries. The term Hybridity is associated with the fusion of cultural practices and values, which appears when people live in more than one cultural space, and the term cultural memory is used to underline the importance of the persistence of the traditions of the motherland and historical memory on the diasporic subjects. The transnational identity describes how migrants have emotional, cultural, and social ties across national borders. It is possible to appreciate diaspora not only as a state of loss or displacement, but as a negotiating place where identities are still being constructed in these concepts. The idea of negotiated identity is an important bridge between the feminist and diaspora theories in this work. Negotiated identity acknowledges that the selfhood of women is not static or purely defined by the cultural formations, but it is formed in the course of constant interplay between social demands, subjective wills, and situational relationships. Diasporic women are negotiating identity at the border between patriarchal tradition and new cultural possibilities, and they are frequently finding a trade-off between continuity and transformation. The process is specifically evident in the reaction of women, regarding marriage and relationships, where these are the central areas where the process of negotiation happens. The model, therefore, focuses on identity as a process but not a fixed category. Close to negotiated identity, a concept that is highly related to it is that of liminality, which is a condition of in-betweenness that is experienced by individuals who exist between cultural, social, or emotional worlds. Women living in diaspora are usually placed in transitional locations, in between the mother country and the new land, tradition and modernity, duty and freedom. Liminality makes possible not only uncertainty but also transformation because women can defy strict cultural rules and seek other options of belonging. In this perspective, displacement of women is seen as a redefinition opportunity; however, it is

associated with emotional and cultural tension. Feminist theory, diaspora theory, and the notions of negotiated identity and liminality can be used jointly to analyze *For Matrimonial Purposes* and *Sister of My Heart* since they offer the means of exploring the experience of women as they negotiate institutional and relational frameworks (marriage and sisterhood). These theoretical approaches make it possible to have a subtle interpretation of how the gendered relations of power and the transnational movement collide to form the identity of the diaspora. The merger of these frameworks will be used to provide a complex viewpoint of how the contemporary Indian female fiction portrays identity formation as a process of negotiation, resistance, and emotional attachment in diasporic surroundings.

V. METHODOLOGY

This paper will follow the qualitative research approach based on a textual analysis and comparison of literature to explore how marriage, female relations, and identity formation have been described in modern Indian diasporic literature written by women. Textual analysis, in particular, a qualitative one, is best adapted to the given research as this method makes it possible to analyze narrative structures, character development, thematic patterns, and symbolic elements of the chosen texts closely. Instead of quantitative measures, the work focuses on the depth of the interpretation in order to discern the ways in which cultural senses and gendered experiences are expressed through language, plot, and the dynamics between people. The comparative approach also enhances the analysis by bringing together the two main texts in a conversation so that one can establish the similarities and differences of the thematic issues in the narrative and the narrative techniques used. The choice of *For Matrimonial Purposes* by Kavita Daswani and *Sister of My Heart* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is informed by their main focus on the diasporic experiences of the Indian women and their unique approach to the issue of marriage and female relationships. Both novels belong to the novels written by modern Indian women authors who are located in the framework of the diaspora, but provide different narratives. *For Matrimonial Purposes* prefigures the marriage as an institution that is culturally controlled in the immigrant populations through realism and humor to challenge the original norms. By contrast, *Sister of My Heart* is more concerned with sisterhood and emotional connections going beyond national borders, pointing to the relational identity within the transnational frame. The more subtle exploitation of the role of institutional and relational forces in defining women's identities in the context of diaspora can be

achieved through the comparative choice of the texts. The analysis is organized in terms of particular parameters of analysis that will lead to the reading of both texts. The former parameter is concerned with the aspects of marriage, in which the roles of marriage expectations, marriage arrangements, and gender roles are addressed in diasporic societies. The second parameter explores the relationships of females and their sisterhood and emotional connection as other areas of support and identity. The focus is given to the role of interpersonal relationships in women in resisting, being emotionally resilient, and continuing to exist despite displacement. The third parameter deals with the conflict of cultures and identity changes and looks at instances where the characters face a conflict between the values of the homeland and the norms of the host country. These are the analyses of the experience of displacement, generational clash, and negotiation of hybrid identities.

Marriage and Diasporic Negotiation in *For Matrimonial Purposes*

In *For Matrimonial Purposes*, Kavita Daswani introduces marriage as a primary way of keeping cultural values alive, negotiating, and disputing them in Indian diasporas (Daswani). The novel is set mostly in the lives of Indian immigrant societies in the United States, and the issue of marriage is presented as a mechanism of cultural control, which governs the women and their decisions, behavior, and identity. Arranged marriage serves as a tool of affirming the traditional norms, especially in a diasporic setting where cultural continuity is viewed as being weak. Women characters have to follow the prescribed roles and stick to them, with the main emphasis on family honor, obedience, and cultural authenticity, and usually, without any emphasis on personal desires. With these depictions, Daswani reveals how marriage is used as a means of preserving patriarchal power in the migrant families and makes women bearers of the cultural responsibilities. Families consider marriage as a tool of gaining economic, social status, and cultural legitimacy in the host society. The focus on appropriate matches, in terms of education, profession, caste, and immigration status, may be seen as a sign of the transactional character of marriage negotiations. This process commonly commodifies the bodies and future of women and turns marriage into an exchange of interests that will benefit the masses, and not individual fulfillment. The account given by Daswani emphasizes the ways of reproducing the hierarchical systems even in transnational spaces through such practices that prove that migration may not necessarily destroy the traditional power relations but can, instead, aggravate them. Marriage too becomes one of the central areas of disagreement between tradition and individuality in *For Matrimonial Purposes*. Women characters are subject to inner and outer conflicts in a bid to

balance personal interests and family demands. These wars are indicative of larger conflicts being experienced by the diasporic women in that they are torn between what the homeland expects and what the culture of the host offers in terms of freedom. By creating instances of resistance, indecision, and self-reflection, Daswani creates a woman who is an active negotiator of her identity and not a passive conformist to cultural pressures. Marriage, therefore, turns into a venue where women face the boundaries that are put on their independence and seek ways of identifying themselves. The application of humor and irony as narrative elements is one of the peculiarities of the way Daswani treats the question of marriage. Using wit and satire, Daswani condemns the absurdity and contradictions of the matrimonial system without indulging in moralizing. Humor enables the novel to be both revealing of the adherence to traditional practices and a narrative approachable and emotionally rich. This ironic emphasis highlights the contrast between idealist concepts of marriage and the facts on the ground of women who have to struggle with these ideals in the diaspora. In the comic, Daswani shakes the power of the patriarchal norms and calls to think critically about the cultural traditions of marriage. The influence of arranged marriage on female autonomy and identity constitutes a very important part of the ways in which the novel explores the problem of diasporic negotiation. Although arranged marriage constrains the freedoms of women as it puts more emphasis on social conformity rather than choice, it also emerges as a situation that allows women to define their agency. Women characters react to these restrictions differently, either by conforming, bargaining, or slightly revolting, which displays identity as an adjustable and changing process. The diasporic identity of women as portrayed by Daswani focuses more on the fact that it is not only the external pressures that shape the identity of women, but also their response to the institutional structures. Finally, *For Matrimonial Purposes* introduces the idea of marriage as a complicated and disputable area of pre-emption of the cultural control, social mobility, and self-identity, and the subtle manner in which diasporic women can negotiate tradition and selfhood.

Sisterhood and Emotional Survival in *Sister of My Heart*

In *the sister of my heart*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni preempts sisterhood as a driving emotion and plot element that maintains sisterhood amid dislocation, estrangement, and personal disillusionment. Sisterhood in the novel is introduced as a relation that goes beyond biological relatedness, and the focus of the connection is on emotional intimacy, shared memory, and understanding each other as elements of female connection. The friendship between Anju and Sudha has built up a very interdependent

relationship, which makes them identify with their childhood into adulthood. This relationship crosses the traditional roles of the family and is a zone of trust and emotional safety amid a patriarchal ordered world. Divakaruni questions these dominant discourses, which mainly define women in terms of marriage and relationships with men, by putting the choice of sisterhood first. The female bonding in the novel is made a source of emotional strength that helps the main actors to overcome personal and cultural shocks. Since the characters face marital restrictions, reproductive trauma, and emotional alienation, their relationship with each other provides relief and power. Sisterhood serves as a feeling of semen, and the women are able to express their fears, desires, and frustrations, which are not being spoken out in patriarchal household environments. The narrative by Divakaruni highlights the therapeutic aspect of women's relationships and makes them crucial to the survival of their psyche in both homeland and diasporic settings. The bonding of the emotional experiences shared by the protagonists leads to the development of a stronger sense of self, which is not weakened by the dependency of the relationships. The transnational separation is one of the themes that are essential in the development of the concept of sisterhood in the novel. Physical distance that is created due to migration does not break the emotional attachment between Anju and Sudha, but rather it transforms the kind of relationship that they share. Their sisterhood continues to exist, even beyond national borders, and it is maintained with the help of memory, communication, and emotional imagination. This narrative of continuity underscores the fact that the identity of the diaspora is not necessarily the one that is entrenched in the aspect of geographical closeness but is upheld by the bonds that cut across borders in an affective manner. Divakaruni, therefore, introduces the theme of sisterhood as a transnational relationship that cannot be affected by the dislocating forces of migration and through which women can still have a sense of continuity and belonging even after they have been displaced. The concept of sisterhood in *Sister of My Heart* is also an alternative to the dependence on one partner, as it presents women with a system of relationships that is not dependent on the authority of a partner or marriage legitimization. Although marriage is also a feature that is of significance to the lives of the characters, it is, in most cases, portrayed as a place of limitation, as opposed to satisfaction. Conversely, the friendship between the women gives emotional equality, respect, and agency to each other. This new form of connection gives the protagonists the chance to build a new definition of strength and independence as not being isolated, but a power of relationship. The description provided by Divakaruni does not support classic hierarchies

in that emotional satisfaction and identity formation in women do not have to depend on patriarchal institutions. By portraying sisterhood as the survival of emotion, Divakaruni reevaluates diasporic identity as relational and not just institutional. The novel stresses that women's identity is constructed with interpersonal relationships providing support, continuity, and opposition to cultural restrictions. Sisterhood is revealed as a trans-formative power that helps women to manage the displacement, negotiate the cultural clash, and exercise their emotional agency. By doing so, *Sister of My Heart* makes female bonding a strong counter-narrative to such a dependency on the male, making it the key to the formation and maintenance of women's diasporic identities.

Comparative Analysis: Marriage vs. Sisterhood

Marriage and sisterhood are the two opposing and at the same time interrelated elements that define the identity of women in the situation of cultural displacement in the Indian women's diasporic fiction in modern times. In *For Matrimonial Purposes*, by Kavita Daswani, marriage serves as one of the most influential institutional structures in which the diasporic communities aim to ensure cultural continuity, control the behavior of women, and enforce the conventional gender roles. The identity of the main character is bargained in strict demands of arranged marriage, respectability, and cultural adaptation, showing the marriage to be the place of surveillance and restriction in the immigrant case. Daswani reveals the emotional tension created when individual ambitions are confronted with social rules by revealing marriage as a romantic relationship more than a social-cultural process that trains women into desirable diasporic subjects. On the contrary, *Sister of My Heart* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni predicts sisterhood as an emotional and cultural home where women can withstand the pressures of patriarchy and transnational divides. Anju and Sudha share a very strong emotional connection that is not based on biological ties and geography but provides emotional nourishment, shared memory, and cultural continuity in times of crisis. Unlike marriage, which tends to disintegrate identity through the introduction of established roles, sisterhood provides fluidity in self-expression and empowerment of each other, thereby affording the protagonists to bargain with modernity without completely cutting off the links to tradition. Although marriage is accepted as one of the most important symbols of womanhood in both novels, Divakaruni questions its primacy by placing female bonding as a different site of belonging and strength. The point of convergence between Daswani and Divakaruni is that they both acknowledge the gender fluidity of the diasporic identity formation, but Daswani focuses more on the narrative of the institution of marriage to emphasize its

limiting effects on autonomy, whilst Divakaruni places it on the theme of sisterhood to explore its transformative power in order to define the self. Put collectively, these accounts indicate that the phenomenon of diasporic identity is not created by a single social system but rather is the result of the complicated interaction between institutional necessity and affective solidarity.

VI. CONCLUSION

This paper has made the case that marriage and sisterhood are mutually supporting but opposing structures in the construction of diasporic identity in modern Indian women's fiction, as evidenced by using the works of *For Matrimonial Purposes* by Kavita Daswani and *Sister of My Heart* by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. The paper illustrates how the identity of women in the diaspora is formed as a result of negotiating between tradition, modernity, and agency by analyzing marriage as an institutional force and sisterhood as an affective and cultural refuge. The story by Daswani reveals the issue of marriage as a tool of cultural preservation that tends to limit the autonomy of women and enforce patriarchal demands on the immigrant population, and shows the emotional and psychological cost of achieving gender roles (Daswani). Divakaruni, on the contrary, prefigures female bonding and sisterhood as maintaining forces, which provide emotional stability, cultural memory continuity, and other forms of belonging than marital identity (Divakaruni). Combined, these writings emphasize the gendering of the experience of diasporas and also emphasize how women adapt to displacement by managing institutionalized demands and forming interpersonal solidarities. The paper adds to the research of the Indian women diaspora by providing a comparative framework that goes beyond the concept of migration as a geographical process and focuses on the concept of relational and emotional structures as the primary components of identity development. The dialogue between marriage and sisterhood broadens the current existing literature on the definition of the idea of diaspora, gender, and cultural negotiation by anticipating the voice of women as active agents, rather than passive carriers of tradition. Future research opportunities are also wide, since the same thematic issues can be discussed with regard to other Indian diasporic authors, such as the second and third generations, and in different regional, cultural, and transnational settings, such as the South Asian diaspora in Europe, Canada, and the Middle East. Additional analyses can also use the point of cross-betweenness of classes, sexuality, and generational tension to enhance the knowledge of how the outlines of women's diasporic identity are shifting in the globalized world.

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Retelling Assamese Folk-Myths: An Analysis of Imran Hussain's Short Story "Bak: The Water Spirit"

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Abstract— Assam has a rich heritage of folktales. One such folk belief is that of the existence of Bak which although related to superstition, is part of Assamese folklore and social life. Benudhar Rajkhowa in his "Assamese Demonology" classifies the bak as a terrestrial aqueous spirit. This spirit, fond of eating fish, is believed to reside in pools and tanks, lakes which have grown old and are beginning to sink. Imran Hussain is a contemporary Assamese writer whose works embody Assam's socio-political and cultural scenario. One of Hussain's stories, "Bak: The Water Spirit" revolves around a young boy Goroi's search for his father. The story is based upon the mythical tale popular among the fishermen of the Kolong and Kopili rivers of Assam. This paper shall attempt to analyse how Imran Hussain has tried to retell the folk myth of Bak, the water spirit to portray certain contemporary concerns.



Keywords— *Folktales, Retelling, Demonology, Mythology, Contemporaneity, Society*

I. INTRODUCTION

Folktales or folk-myths are traditional fictional stories and anonymous narratives transmitted orally from generation to generation. Superstitions and unfounded beliefs are important elements in the folklore tradition. Assam has a rich heritage of folktales. One such concept or belief is that of the existence of *Bak*, the water spirit, which although related to superstition, is part of Assamese folk lore and social life. Imran Hussain is a contemporary Assamese writer whose works embody the socio-political and cultural scenario accompanied by a sensitiveness to the various discourses and trends of thought characterizing thoughtful writing. One of Hussain's story titled "Bak: The Water Spirit" revolves around a young boy Goroi's search for his father. The story is based upon the mythical tale popular among the fishermen of Kolong and Kopili rivers of Assam.

II. OBJECTIVES

This paper shall attempt to analyse how Imran Hussain has tried to retell the folk-myth of *Bak*, the water spirit in his short story. This paper also attempts to

analyse how Hussain has portrayed certain contemporary concerns by retelling the said folk-myth.

III. BACKGROUND

Demonology, the branch of the science of religions relates to superhuman beings which are not gods, deals both with benevolent beings which have no circle of worshippers or so limited a circle as to be below the rank of gods, and with malevolent beings of all kinds. Demons, when they are regarded as spirits, may belong to either of the classes of spirits recognized by primitive animism ; that is to say, they may be human, or non-human, separable souls, or discarnate spirits which have never inhabited a body.

According to Benudhar Rajkhowa, it is impossible to attempt any classification of spirits, much less one based on natural history. However, for the satisfaction of his readers, without entering into the niceties of distinction, Benudhar Rajkhowa in his "Assamese Demonology" classifies Assamese spirits into "sub-terranian", "terrestrial", "aerial" and "celestial". Terrestrial spirits include: (A) Aqueous ; (B) Sylvan ; (C) Household.

Within the domain of Aqueous spirits fall spirits such as *bák*, *dôt*, *jakh*, *datial* or *jan kakhoria*, *jalshai* and *jalnarayan*. Rajkhowa classifies the *bak* as a terrestrial aqueous spirit. *Bak* is although related to superstition yet it is part of Assamese folk lore and social life. It is believed to reside in deserted pools and tanks, lakes which have grown old and are beginning to sink. The spirit is also believed to bury fishermen who go to fish during night, by turning his back onto the mud of the *beel* (lake-like wetland). The spirit also kills men who fish in rivers by drowning them in the water. The spirit sometimes makes clucking noise. Its feet are turned backwards and its body emits an offensive smell which is translated to the very water over which he wanders. This spirit fond of eating fish, catches fish by netting and sometimes even consumes fish caught by the fishermen. There is an Assamese proverb which runs thus:

Háhar oparat siül rajá,

Potá pukhurit búk ra já ,

A jackal is the lord of poultry.

A bák is supreme in a deserted tank.

This spirit is believed to carry a pouch on his shoulder which is termed as '*bakor julunga*'. People believe that if this bag is snatched away from the spirit and kept inside a mustard bamboo basket, the spirit takes the form of man and begins to engage in all kinds of household chores.

IV. ANALYSIS

Hussain's story titled "Bak: The Water Spirit" revolves around a young boy Goroi's search for his father. The story is based upon the mythical tale popular among the fishermen of Kolong and Kopili rivers of Assam. Taking the character of *Bak* or the water spirit as the leitmotif, Hussain weaves a tale of family feud and betrayal, which leaves behind as its victim the orphaned child Goroi. The story revolves around Haren, the fish merchant, Tikheroo, the fisherman and cousin to Haren, Pabhoi, Tikheroo's mother and Padumi, the young beautiful wife of Tikheroo.

At the very beginning of the story, Haren, the fisherman, is depicted as the *Bak*: "In the flickering moonlight that came filtering down the slender leaves of the thin bamboo grove, his ugly body, wet with dew, shone eerily. His human form seemed imbued with a ghostliness" (Hussain, 2003/2015, p.1). The lake, whose part flowed into the Kolong, is portrayed as the lifeline of the Kaiberta, Kalita and Lalung - the indigenous people of the surrounding villages. It was in this lake that villagers caught fish with their net, bathed or fetched water. But everybody feared the north-eastern bank of the lake near

the edge of the cremation ground where stood an ancient Ow tree. Even the sylheti fishermen did not venture to fish here after sunset. The place was believed to be haunted by the villagers.

The villagers could not enjoy the joy of fishing in the lake for long as the government levied a tax on the lake and the lake was auctioned off. Tikheroo's cousin Haren who passed his days in quarrelling and nights in opium smoking became overnight the new mahaldar of the lake along with two other fish merchants from Morigaon. Haren got the most productive north-eastern part starting from their village and ending by the Ow tree near the cremation grounds of the village. Haren stopped the villagers from fishing in the lake and soon fishermen from Sylhet and Bihar began to invade the lake. Haren and Tikheroo's families were not in good terms as they had some family feud. Yet, Haren now engaged Tikheroo for fishing in the lake not out of any feeling of kinship but because he knew that Tikheroo's dexterity in fishing would be an asset for him in his business. So, he came to Pabhoi, his aunt and Tikheroo's mother and implored her to forget all family feuds. Though at first she turned a deaf year to Haren's pleas, yet she could resist no longer and acquiesced to his request of living in the same compound. With the help of Tikheroo's acumen, Haren could rise in his business within a very short span of time. By the year's end, Haren could buy many a plot of land in and around the village. Soon his stores overflowed with rice and his fishing business spread to Morigaon, Jagiroad and as far as Guwahati. The newly rich Haren changed a lot in manners and dress as he stopped frequenting the opium dens and his manners changed as he put on airs as if he was the great businessman like Bhola Saud. On the other hand, Tikheroo's health deteriorated due to excessive labour. Haren's wife Seuti had given birth to a tadpole-like premature still born child following which she had showed no signs of motherhood. Though they had consulted renowned faith-healers, but to no avail. As such, Haren had sent Tikheroo to Mayang in search of a cure. The old faith-healer sent a cure of potherbs mixed with the flesh and blood of the rhino for Haren. Along with the cure, he also sent his beautiful young daughter as a bride for Tikheroo.

Though Tikheroo married the girl, yet he could not enjoy the bliss of married life for long because barely two years after his marriage, Tikheroo left home one night for fishing and never returned. When Tikheroo didn't return even after three days, a worried Pabhoi informed the villagers. It was then that Haren revealed the truth, which seemed like an unbelievable tale. He informed that some three months ago, while both he and Tikheroo had gone for fishing in the lake near the cremation ground, he had

found Tikheroo devouring the raw fish by the light of the moon. Haren realized that having strangled and killed Tikheroo and taking his shape, the spirit was now on the boat in the image of Tikheroo. Seeing that the spirit was busy eating, Haren hurriedly rowed ashore and quickly grabbing the magic pouch of the spirit, made his way to the granary in their house. When he threw the pouch into the big casket full of mustard seeds, Haren saw through the slits in the bamboo wall that the water spirit was weeping piteously asking for his pouch to be returned to him because he was powerless without it. But Haren did not return the pouch as a result of which the water spirit, unable to change back to his own form, remained as Tikheroo in their house for the last six months. Haren had remained silent not knowing how to disclose the truth to the young bride. It was during this period that the water spirit had impregnated Padumi with child. This was what the family including Pabhoi came to believe and therefore called Padumi's child 'Goroi' as the son of *Bak*, the water spirit. Pabhoi would mutter in her dreams "He (the water spirit) killed my son to live with her and then ran away, taking the magic pouch with him. What do I do with this boy now?" (Hussain, 2003/2015, p.17). When Goroi heard his grandmother, too, reiterating the fact that he was indeed the water spirit's son, his heart sank.

But in reality, Haren had concocted this fairytale only to fulfill his vested interests. Goroi was in fact, Haren's son. While Tikheroo remained in the *tongi-ghar* (stilt house made of bamboo) guarding the fish during the night, Haren had entered Padumi's hut and defiled her. To Padumi, the thought that someone other than her husband had touched her never occurred because she in her drowsy state thought it was some evil spirit who had come to her. Haren was in fact guilty of murdering Tikheroo. That night when Haren had rowed the boat along with Tikheroo, he had hit Tikheroo behind the head with the oar and killed him.

Unfortunately, Goroi who was thought to be born after his father's death comes to believe that his father is indeed *Bak* – the spirit of water. On a quiet moonlit night, Goroi, heartbroken by the insinuations and barbs of the villagers, jumps into the lake, hoping to meet the father he has never known in life. He is closely followed by his actual father, Haren and both meet their watery grave at the bottom of the lake. Hussain depicts the tragic end of both the father and son in these words: "Feeling that his long wait for his father had ended at last, in the dark depths of the water, Goroi held him to his breast in such a strong embrace that Haren was stilled" (Hussain, 2003/2015, p.25). The story ends in a symbolic manner:

"And then the mirthful fish swam around the embracing figures of father and son, as naked and stiff, they whirled

round and round descending further into the depths of the lake". (Hussain, 2003/2015, p. 25)

The narrative of this story is characterized by a rich tapestry of imagery, reflecting a distinct kind of magic realism through its suggestive use of imagery and symbols. The writer demonstrates a proficient command of language structure, crafting a world that is at once vividly realized in photographic detail, yet simultaneously unfamiliar, unknown, and shrouded in mystery. The writer's adept mind is evident in the way objects are imbued with an autonomous existence. This is particularly noticeable in the depiction of the lake's dark depths, home to a unique ecosystem of fish and weeds, which serves to underscore the author's emphasis on the inherent 'otherness' of objects and the enigmatic nature of their being. The moonlight casting an eerie glow on the lakeside as it filters through slender bamboo leaves, the 'orphaned fish' swimming gleefully around the drowning father-son duo, and the sickle-shaped moon exuding drops of bloodlike moonbeams are all potent images that infuse nature with a distinct spirit and life, yielding an almost epiphanic understanding of nature's essential otherness (Goswami, 2015, p.170).

V. CONCLUSION

Thus, this paper has attempted to show how an author may return, revitalize, and reconstruct mythology and make required modifications to an old narrative and extend it or build a new story entirely. Imran Hussain has used the popular folk-myth of *Bak*, the water spirit in his story but he has kept the essence of mythology intact even if the story and retelling are changed. The mysteriousness and otherness of objects inherent in the original story are recreated with imagery and symbols. The folk-myth is recounted not just because of a fascination with or interest in the mythological past but also as comments on the current situation. The contemporary concerns such as the changing dynamics of a fishing community are portrayed through the story by retelling the folk-myth of the *Bak*. The rise of a cunning fisherman like Haren into a rich mahaldar falling victim to his own greed along with the life of a simple fisherman like Tikheroo meeting an unfortunate death are tales woven in the narrative of the story. The reader simultaneously gets to explore the lives of the fishing community through the narrative.

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A Structure, Not an Event: Colonial Continuity, Biopower, and the Critical Dystopia in Louise Erdrich's Future Home of the Living God

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Abstract— This article reads Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God* (2017) as a critical dystopia whose speculative premise a planetary evolutionary reversal that renders human reproduction precarious, functions not as a warning about an approaching future but as a defamiliarization of a present already shaped by colonial reproductive violence. Drawing on Darko Suvin's concept of the novum and Tom Moylan's account of the critical dystopia, the article argues that the novel's central formal innovation lies in the uneven distribution of cognitive estrangement across its characters: what registers as unprecedented catastrophe for the settler world is recognisable, even continuous, for Cedar Hawk Songmaker's Ojibwe birth community on the reservation. This asymmetry is read through Kyle Powys Whyte's argument that Indigenous peoples experience ecological crisis as a sequel to already-experienced colonial apocalypse and Patrick Wolfe's formulation of settler colonialism as a structure rather than an event. The article then examines the novel's state apparatus, the Stillwater Birthing Centre, its wall of photographed dead women, the sedation at the moment of birth as an instantiation of Foucauldian biopower and Achille Mbembe's necropolitics, situating the novel's reproductive violence within the documented history of IHS sterilisation campaigns and the analysis of reproductive coercion as a technology of colonial elimination developed by Andrea Smith and Dorothy Roberts. Finally, the article reads the two registers in which the novel sustains its utopian horizon: the reservation community's survivance practices, understood through Gerald Vizenor, and Cedar's journal itself, which performs survivance through the act of writing relationship across an unresolvable uncertainty. The article argues that the novel's refusal of narrative closure is a political argument about the limits of reassurance and the durability of testimony.



Keywords— Louise Erdrich, *Future Home of the Living God*, critical dystopia, settler colonialism, biopower, necropolitics, Indigenous survivance, reproductive violence, cognitive estrangement, Native American literature, speculative fiction, novum

Introduction

When Cedar Hawk Songmaker begins writing the journal that constitutes Louise Erdrich's *Future Home of the Living God* (2017), she frames her project with a telling historical analogy: "there have always been letters and diaries written in times of tumult and discovered later, and my thought is that I could be writing one of those" (3). The analogy is

casual, but its implications are not. For Cedar to write as though her account will be discovered later is to assume, however tentatively, that she will not survive to hand it over herself and it is to invest the act of writing with a function that exceeds documentation. The journal is a form of address across an uncertain future; its completion, by the time it reaches the reader, already signals that the voice survived even if the body's fate remains unresolved.

That the journal exists at all is the novel's first and most persistent argument. Cedar is twenty-six, Ojibwe by birth and adopted into a white liberal Minneapolis family, four months pregnant and recently reconnected with her Ojibwe birth family on the reservation when she begins writing. The speculative premise that organises her world, an evolutionary reversal in which organisms across the planet begin reverting to earlier biological forms, rendering human reproduction increasingly precarious, has already drawn the attention of a theocratic state apparatus. By the novel's third section, Cedar is detained in the Stillwater Birthing Centre, writing in fragments, watching the photographs of dead women accumulate on the dining room wall. Her final entries are dated and then undated, growing sparse: "December. Extremely weak. But still here. January. They say my heart is damaged. February. My dear son. I know you're going to read this someday" (233). Whether Cedar survived beyond those entries, the novel declines to say. That we hold the completed journal in our hands is the only answer the novel provides, and it is a precisely calibrated one.

This article reads *Future Home of the Living God* as a critical dystopia in Tom Moylan's sense and as a deployment of what Darko Suvin calls the *novum*, the totalising speculative element around which the narrative world reorganises in a way that is formally specific to its historical and political moment. The evolutionary reversal that this study argues, does not function as a warning about a future that might arrive but as a defamiliarization of a present that is already here: specifically, the ongoing reproductive violence directed at Indigenous women through settler colonial structures. The novel's central formal innovation is that its *novum* produces cognitive estrangement unevenly. For Cedar's white liberal adoptive family and for the settler state apparatus, the evolutionary crisis is genuinely unprecedented. For Cedar's Ojibwe birth family on the reservation, it is recognisable, one more shape of catastrophe in a history already shaped by catastrophic loss. Reading the novel through Suvin, Moylan, Kyle Powys Whyte's Indigenous environmental thought, and Andrea Smith's analysis of reproductive control as a technology of colonial elimination, this study argues that the utopian horizon the novel sustains through Cedar's journal-keeping and the reservation community's survivance is grounded not in generic optimism but in the specific resources of a community that has been surviving versions of this crisis for a very long time.

Darko Suvin's account of science fiction as "the literature of cognitive estrangement" rests on the concept of the *novum*: "a totalizing phenomenon or relationship deviating from the author's and implied reader's norm of reality" that determines "the whole narrative logic" of the SF text

(*Metamorphoses* 63-64). The *novum*, for Suvin, is neither decoration nor mere plot mechanism. It is the organising principle of an alternative reality that is "simultaneously perceived as not impossible within the cognitive norms of the author's epoch", strange enough to defamiliarize, grounded enough to remain legible as a rational extrapolation (7-8). Its ultimate function, Suvin insists, is diagnostic: significant SF is "a specifically roundabout way of commenting on the author's collective context," an estrangement not from the present but into a position from which the present becomes newly visible (84). Grace Dillon has extended this framework in her work on Indigenous speculative fiction, arguing that Native futurisms deploy estrangement not to imagine what might come but to make visible what settler normalcy has always obscured (*Walking the Clouds* 2).

The evolutionary reversal in *Future Home of the Living God* meets Suvin's criteria precisely. It is totalising, it reorganises food supply, governance, medical practice, and the social meaning of pregnancy itself. It is cognitively grounded, positioned as biological rather than supernatural event, something that the scientific frameworks of Erdrich's moment can accommodate as a conceivable if extreme possibility. And it points backwards, not forwards: its function is to make visible, through the estranging distance of speculation, a structure of reproductive violence that the liberal present has rendered largely invisible.

Where Suvin's account becomes complicated by this particular application is in its assumption of a normative reader who encounters the *novum* as genuinely strange. Suvin writes from within a tradition that presupposes cognitive estrangement as a universal experience, the reader encounters the strange new element and is thereby forced to see the familiar world differently. Erdrich disrupts this assumption structurally, by placing at the centre of her narrative a protagonist whose community does not encounter the crisis as a rupture in expected order. The evolutionary reversal is new. What it enables is the seizure of women's bodies by the state in the name of demographic emergency, is not, and Cedar's Ojibwe birth family has the evidence to say so.

The novel encodes this asymmetry in its title. Driving north to the reservation for the first time, Cedar passes a sign planted in a bare fallow field: "Future Home of the Living God" (20). She photographs it and keeps driving, absorbing it as one of many ominous portents of the coming crisis. The sign is the novel's title, and Erdrich's choice of it is pointed: what reads, from Cedar's initially settler-positioned perspective, as a marker of apocalyptic futurity sits on land that the Dawes Allotment Act of 1887 had already stripped from Indigenous communal ownership. The "future home"

is built on the site of a prior dispossession. What appears as crisis for one community is, for another, continuous with a history that has not ended.

This asymmetry reaches its fullest elaboration in Part Three, when Cedar has taken refuge on the reservation and witnesses Eddy address the tribal community about land reclamation. He presents a colour-coded map, yellow for non-Indian ownership, green for state forest, a considerably smaller patch of purple for tribal land and explains, with the measured calm of someone who has been thinking about this for a very long time, that the tribe is reclaiming what was taken. The lake-home owners have already fled back to Minneapolis; their summer properties are being reassigned to homeless and substandard-housing tribal members through a lottery system. "Let us bow our heads and pray for their plight," Eddy says (188). The dry irony is not incidental to his political authority but constitutive of it. As Little Mary shades in the newly reclaimed parcels with a purple marker, Cedar watches the old people in the room weep silently. The land reclamation is not a revolutionary rupture. It is a return and the community has the institutional memory and organisational infrastructure to carry it out because it has been surviving versions of crisis for generations.

Kyle Powys Whyte has argued that for Indigenous peoples, ecological and climate catastrophe is best understood not as unprecedented future disruption but as a sequel to the colonial apocalypse already experienced: a continuation of a structural condition rather than the inauguration of a new one ("Indigenous Climate Change Studies" 157). Erdrich's novel enacts this argument through its formal structure. The crisis that produces paralysis in Cedar's liberal adoptive parents Glen and Sera fall into a kind of suspended helplessness, worrying and waiting for news is one that Cedar's Ojibwe family has, in different configurations, been sustaining itself through for a very long time. Eddy growing seedlings in casino aisles, setting up runner-based communication networks, converting cash reserves into food production infrastructure: these are not improvisations born of emergency but the application of capacities built across generations of surviving emergency. "We're gonna be self-sufficient, like the old days," he says (199). The old days, in this context, are not remote or romantic. They are institutional memory available for practical use.

The state apparatus that emerges in response to the evolutionary reversal operates through what Michel Foucault identifies as biopower: the management of populations as biological resources, exercised not through overt repression alone but through the institutional performance of care (History of Sexuality 135-159). The Stillwater Birthing Centre, where Cedar is eventually

detained, is a precise instantiation of this logic. Women are housed in comfortable cells, fed adequately, tended to by medical staff, and made up by a professional makeup artist named Miguel, who photographs each arrival against a backdrop painted with a halo of radiant light. The photographs are then arranged on the dining room wall. Cedar forces herself to look: "The women in the photographs are alert, smiling, hopeful, perfectly made up ... I step closer to read their names. Lily-Ann. Idris. Janella. Senchal. Megan. Vendra. Beneath each name are two dates. Birth. Death. And below that a line that says: She served the future" (222-223). The first and second dates are birth and death. Every woman on the wall is dead.

The wall is the novel's most concentrated image of what Achille Mbembe calls necropolitics: the state's arrogation of the power to determine who may live and who must die, exercised here through an apparatus that simultaneously depends upon and discards the women whose reproductive capacity it needs ("Necropolitics" 11-12). Cedar's birth scene enacts this logic at the level of individual experience. After a passage of extraordinary intensity labour described in terms of oceanic spiritual force, thousands of spirits admitted to the room, the women's communal song audible between contractions, the novel delivers its sharpest sentence: "The sting of the needle stole my consciousness. As I slipped away, someone pried apart your fist and I felt you lifted from my arms" (232-233). Cedar's body was required for what it could produce. The moment the birth concluded, her usefulness to the state did too. She is sedated, separated, and left in a cell to wait for her next forced pregnancy.

What the novel will not allow readers to treat as unprecedented, and this is where its argument is most politically specific, is the underlying logic of this violence. Cedar's own existence embodies its history. She was adopted into the Songmaker family in apparent violation of the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978, a law passed because Indigenous children were being removed from their families and communities at catastrophic rates, their kinship networks administratively dismantled. When Cedar raises the ICWA, Glen and Sera go quiet and look away (12). The law that should have governed her adoption was set aside, as such laws frequently were. In the novel's dystopian present, the intensified targeting of pregnant Indigenous women does not represent the invention of a new form of violence but the acceleration of a structural one.

Andrea Smith's analysis of reproductive control as a pillar of anti-Indigenous racism provides the historical framework that the novel draws on without stating explicitly. For Smith, the suppression of Indigenous reproductive life through sterilisation campaigns, child removal, detention,

functions as a technology of elimination within the broader logic of settler colonialism: Indigenous populations must be reduced, absorbed, or made to disappear so that settler claims to land can be secured (Conquest 7-9). The Indian Health Service sterilisation campaigns of the 1960s and 1970s, which sterilised between twenty-five and fifty percent of Indigenous women of childbearing age, many without informed consent, are the most documented instance of this logic in operation (Lawrence 400). Dorothy Roberts has situated this history within the broader pattern of reproductive coercion directed at women of colour in the United States, and Angela Davis has traced the ideological continuities between the eugenics movement and the racialised administration of reproductive medicine in the twentieth century (Roberts, *Killing the Black Body* 90; Davis, *Women, Race, and Class* 215). Patrick Wolfe's formulation captures the structural continuity: settler colonialism is "a structure, not an event" (*"Settler Colonialism"* 388). It does not conclude with the frontier; it adapts. In Erdrich's novel, evolutionary crisis provides the latest emergency justification for renewing assault on Indigenous sovereignty and reproductive autonomy. The state does not invent new violence. It gives existing violence a new rationale.

Tom Moylan's concept of the critical dystopia distinguishes texts that sustain what he calls a utopian horizon space of resistance and alternative possibility within nightmarish conditions from classic dystopias that present systems of total control without remainder (Scraps 196). Moylan developed this argument across two major studies, and his earlier *Demand the Impossible* had already laid the groundwork for understanding how utopian fiction holds open the possibility of transformation even when institutional conditions foreclose it (*Demand the Impossible* 10). The distinction is formal as well as political: classic dystopias tend toward closure, their endings confirming the dominance of the system that has been described. Critical dystopias refuse this confirmation. They hold open, however precariously, a space where something other than the dominant order persists and from which the conditions of that order can be assessed.

Future Home of the Living God sustains its utopian horizon in two registers that are formally inseparable. The first is the journal. Cedar writes to her child across an uncertainty she cannot resolve, creating relationship on the page regardless of whether that relationship can be sustained in the world. The fact that the journal exists as a completed text and that we receive it is itself the utopian horizon: Cedar's voice persists beyond the conditions of its production, bearing witness even when bodies may not endure. Gerald Vizenor's concept of survivance, which he distinguishes from mere survival as an active and ongoing refusal of narratives of

defeat and disappearance, illuminates what Cedar's journal-keeping constitutes (*Manifest Manners* 4-5). Writing is what Cedar does while the state does what it does to her. It is not compensatory but generative: it produces something that outlasts the conditions that sought to contain her.

The second register is the reservation community. The utopian horizon in this novel is not abstract hope but the concrete survivance practices of a community that has been sustaining itself through colonial catastrophe for generations such as Eddy's land reclamation strategy, Sweetie's woodstove warmth, Grandma's ancient patience, the militia's wolf-howl communication code. These are not decorative elements of a subplot. They constitute an alternative order that the novel places in explicit opposition to the state's necropolitical logic. Where the state values women's bodies as reproductive resources and discards the women themselves, the reservation community sustains the claim that Eddy makes directly to Cedar: "Our women are sacred to us" (200). The difference is not rhetorical. It is organisational, institutional, and built from a history the state cannot appropriate.

Moylan theorised the critical dystopia primarily through texts of the 1980s and 1990s, a period defined by the closing down of progressive political alternatives under neoliberal restructuring. The conditions that generated Erdrich's novel are historically distinct but structurally continuous with what Moylan describes: the same foreclosure of utopian possibility, the same targeting of reproductive autonomy as a site of political contest, the same need for literary forms that can hold open a space of resistance without pretending that resistance is easy or guaranteed. What the critical dystopia provides, in Moylan's account, is a form adequate to this historical pressure: one that can represent the reality of oppressive conditions while insisting that they are not the only reality, that something else persists within them and beyond them.

Chapter One, "The Novum and Its Uneven Work," develops the formal argument about cognitive estrangement in detail, tracing Cedar's arc from a settler-positioned encounter with the evolutionary crisis to her gradual recognition of it through the lens of Indigenous continuity. The chapter attends in particular to the scenes on the reservation in Part Three, reading Eddy's land reclamation, the community's adaptive infrastructure, and Cedar's reconnection with Ojibwe heritage as formal enactments of this article's central claim.

Chapter Two, "Biopower, Necropolitics, and the Machinery of Reproductive Control," examines the state apparatus of the novel through Foucault's biopower and Mbembe's necropolitics, situating its operations within the longer colonial history of reproductive violence against Indigenous

women that Smith and Wolfe provide frameworks for understanding. The chapter reads the Stillwater Birthing Centre, the hospital scenes, and the birth scene as the novel's sustained engagement with a logic of domination that the evolutionary crisis has not created but merely made newly legible.

Chapter Three, "Critical Dystopia and the Utopian Horizon," takes up Moylan's framework and Vizenor's concept of survivance to read the novel's sites of resistance—Cedar's journal, the reservation community, and the formally ambiguous ending. The chapter argues that the utopian horizon this novel sustains is grounded in Indigenous survivance practice rather than generic optimism, and that this grounding is what distinguishes it from the predominantly white feminist dystopian tradition with which it is most often associated, a tradition whose central concerns, from Atwood's *Handmaid's Tale* to Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*, have been shaped by settler assumptions that *Future Home of the Living God* does not share (Atwood 311; Piercy 37).

The decision not to resolve this question is itself an argument about the limits of narrative reassurance, about the form of resistance the journal represents, and about what it means to write to a future you cannot see from inside a present that is still happening.

The Novum and Its Uneven Work

Cedar Hawk Songmaker does not know what to call what is happening. "Our world is running backward," she writes in her first journal entry. "Or forward. Or maybe sideways, in a way as yet ungrasped" (3). The uncertainty in that sentence, the refusal to commit to any single direction of change, is not a narrative weakness but a formal choice. Erdrich opens the novel from within a crisis that has not yet acquired the language to describe itself, and Cedar's inability to name what is occurring places the reader in exactly the same position: disoriented, unable to apply existing frameworks, forced to think again about what is actually being described.

This is cognitive estrangement in Darko Suvin's sense. For Suvin, science fiction works by introducing what he calls a novum, "a totalizing phenomenon or relationship deviating from the author's and implied reader's norm of reality" that determines "the whole narrative logic" of the text (*Metamorphoses* 63–64). The novum is not merely a spectacular premise; it reorganises everything, making familiar social arrangements suddenly visible as contingent rather than inevitable. In *Future Home of the Living God*, the evolutionary reversal is that novum. By the time Cedar is writing, organisms across the planet are reverting to earlier biological forms, human reproduction is becoming increasingly precarious, and the state apparatus is

reorganising itself around the management of pregnant women as a demographic resource. The reversal touches everything: food supply, governance, medicine, kinship, the meaning of Cedar's own body.

What makes Erdrich's deployment of the novum formally distinctive and what this chapter argues is the novel's central innovation is that the evolutionary reversal does not produce the same estrangement for all of the novel's characters. Suvin's account presupposes a normative reader who encounters the novum as genuinely strange, and is thereby forced to see the familiar world differently. Erdrich makes the subject position of that reader a variable. For Cedar's white liberal adoptive family, for Phil, for the institutional apparatus of the Church of the New Constitution, the evolutionary crisis is genuinely unprecedented. For Cedar's Ojibwe birth family on the reservation, it is recognisable, one more shape of catastrophe in a history already shaped by catastrophic loss. The novum, in other words, estranges differently depending on who you are. It is this asymmetry that the chapter traces across the novel's three parts.

Cedar occupies an unusual position within this asymmetry. Born Ojibwe, adopted into a white liberal Minneapolis family, reconnecting with her birth family only in the months before the novel begins, she enters the crisis from two directions simultaneously. Her initial response to the evolutionary reversal is disorientation, fear, a desperate effort to maintain routine and order which aligns her with the settler world she was raised in. Part I is filled with the texture of this effort: the rigid daily schedule she maintains in hiding, the importance of having clean hair, the precision with which she aligns objects in the apartment to keep dread at bay. "I have constructed a minute order in my day that I follow to the letter — not just as best I can, but no matter what" (101). This is a recognisably settler-liberal response to catastrophe: individual discipline, domestic order, the management of anxiety through routine.

Against this, the novel places Cedar's Ojibwe birth family, introduced in Part I as awkward and unpromising, and developed across Part III as the novel's alternative centre of gravity. Sweetie with her shoelace-chewing and her pearl earrings and her frank acknowledgement of past stupidity. Eddy with his Superpumper franchise and his endless memoir and his fox-like political intelligence. Little Mary moving from Goth-Lolita to Overheated Preppie with her purple political eyeliner. Grandma, over a hundred years old, snatching the oatmeal spoon back and feeding herself. These are not romantic indigenes in the sense Vizenor critiques, the static, melancholic figures that settler culture has preferred to actual Indigenous people with actual political claims (*Manifest Manners* 4). Jace Weaver has

argued that Native literature is distinguished precisely by its communitism, its orientation toward community and collective survival rather than the individualism of the Western literary tradition (That the People Might Live 43). Erdrich's Potts family embodies this orientation. They are specific, idiosyncratic, sometimes exasperating people and they are people who, when crisis arrives, already know what to do.

The novel encodes Cedar's double position in its title. Driving north to the reservation for the first time, Cedar passes "a sign planted in a bare field: Future Home of the Living God" (20). She photographs it and keeps driving, absorbing it as one of many ominous portents. The novel takes its title from this sign, and Erdrich's choice is pointed. What reads, from Cedar's initially settler-positioned perspective, as an image of apocalyptic futurity sits on land that the Dawes Allotment Act of 1887 stripped from Indigenous communal ownership. Vine Deloria Jr. and Clifford Lytle documented the scale of this dispossession: between 1887 and 1934, Indigenous land holdings in the United States were reduced by approximately ninety million acres through the allotment mechanism and subsequent sales (American Indians, American Justice 9). The "future home" is built on the site of a prior dispossession. What appears as crisis for one community is, from another vantage, continuous with a history that has not yet ended.

Cedar's arc across the novel is a movement between these two positions, not a simple conversion from one to the other, but a gradual recognition that the frameworks she inherited from the Songmakers are insufficient for what she is living through, and that her Ojibwe birth family possesses resources she has not yet learned to see. Kyle Powys Whyte has argued that for Indigenous peoples, ecological and climate catastrophe is not unprecedented disruption but a sequel to the colonial apocalypse already experienced: the latest iteration of a structural condition rather than the inauguration of a new one ("Indigenous Climate Change Studies" 157). Cedar's narrative enacts this argument. The evolutionary crisis shocks her settler-raised self; her Ojibwe family recognises its shape.

Part I establishes Cedar as a character whose initial encounter with the crisis is shaped primarily by the frameworks she absorbed from the Songmakers. Her response is individual rather than collective, domestic rather than political, oriented toward personal survival rather than community resilience. She hides, maintains routine, tries to keep Phil happy, contacts her birth family only because the pregnancy has made it urgent. Her Ojibwe identity, at this point in the narrative, is something she carries as knowledge rather than practice, she knows she is Ojibwe in the same way she knows the Indian Child Welfare Act should have

prevented her adoption: as a fact about herself that has not yet become a resource. Mark Rifkin's account of settler temporality is illuminating here: the liberal state manages Indigenous presence by placing Indigenous peoples in a different temporal register, acknowledging their history while treating their political claims as belonging to a past that has already concluded (Settler Common Sense 5). Cedar occupies exactly this position in Part I, her Indigeneity is historical fact, not present practice.

Even her relationship with Catholicism in Part I is individualising rather than communal. She practices the rosary alone, prays to Kateri Tekakwitha in private, edits Zeal as a solo intellectual project. The institutional dimension of her faith, the parish community she originally joined to find connection, is absent from the novel's crisis landscape. What remains is Cedar with her beads and her books and her daily schedule, trying to hold a small world together in an apartment while the larger world reorganises around her.

Part I also introduces Eddy, but only at the margins, a midnight visitor with Cup Noodles and an escape plan that Phil talks Cedar out of taking. The scene is instructive. Eddy arrives having already walked six miles to avoid drawing attention to Cedar's house; he has already helped Glen and Sera across the Canadian border; he already has contacts and a boat and a plan. He is not improvising. He is applying capacities built for exactly this kind of contingency. But Cedar, at this point in the narrative, is too embedded in Phil's framework, wait, prepare, acquire camping gear, to recognise what Eddy is offering. "The desperation chokes me," she writes. "I want to walk from this house. I want to disappear" (110). She is right, and she knows she is right, and she still cannot move. Part I ends with Cedar's capture.

Part II is set almost entirely within the state's institutional apparatus, Fairview Riverside Hospital, then Stillwater Birthing Centre, and it performs a different kind of cognitive estrangement than Part I. Where Part I estranges through the premise of evolutionary reversal, Part II estranges through the institutional management of that premise: the vitamins that produce enforced contentment, the nurses who perform warmth while enacting surveillance, the wall of photographs that memorialises women the institution has killed. Cedar's experience in Part II is one of gradually learning to see an apparatus that presents itself as care.

The process begins with Bernice, the woman who comes to collect Cedar from her apartment. "She wore jeans, Keds, and a raspberry cotton tunic sweater. She wore a few pieces of clean, contemporary, tasteful gold jewelry, and she carried a covered basket" (112). Cedar knows immediately that something is wrong and also cannot resist the

combination of niceness and competence that Bernice embodies. "Nice people paralyze me," she admits. "Dark-skinned people who are nice, especially" (112). The self-aware irony here is exact: Cedar recognises that her liberalism has been weaponised against her, that the state has learned to send people who look like the kind of people she is trained to trust. Bernice holds Cedar's hand as they walk to the car and says: "Don't be afraid. Your baby will be beautiful" (115). Cedar thinks: "Either she is a very good person and incredibly deluded, or else she is completely evil" (115). Both possibilities are held in suspension. The novel refuses to resolve them.

This is the institutional logic that Michel Foucault identifies as biopower: the management of populations through the performance of care, the administration of bodies in the name of collective welfare (History of Sexuality 135-159). The hospital presents itself as a service to Cedar rather than a constraint on her. Her room is clean, the food is initially good, the nurses beam cheerfully. The drug in the vitamins produces what Cedar describes as "the most intensely comfortable feeling of peace and order", she is, briefly, grateful (116). Only when she stops taking the vitamins does the institution become visible as what it is. The room is drab, the food is rotten, the nurses' warmth is calculated. The apparatus was always the same; the drug simply prevented her from seeing it.

Orielee is the novel's most precise study of how this apparatus recruits ordinary people. She is not a villain. She is a nurse who starches her scrubs, who talks about her daughter's pregnancy with genuine sentiment, who brings Cedar's books back out of something close to kindness. She has simply internalised a set of rules, never articulated, never posted, running underneath the institution's official discourse, that allow her to be complicit in what the institution does without fully registering it as complicity. "I keep asking her," Cedar writes. "It seems they are an unspoken set of rules that some people have been living by for years, and others haven't" (129). The rules are not coercive in any simple sense. They are ambient, habitual, the sediment of what has always been acceptable. Orielee talks too much, and this eventually becomes fatal to her, she tells Cedar things she should not have told her, and Cedar uses them. But the excess of talk is not malice or rebellion; it is the overflow of someone who has not fully thought through what she is participating in.

Against the institution's performed warmth, the novel places Agnes Starr and Spider Nun — Cedar's two hospital roommates, both of whom resist in different registers. Agnes is spectacular and doomed: she attacks the nurses with an IV stand, reaches the stairway door, and is taken down in the lobby. Her resistance is real and it fails. Spider

Nun is quieter and more durable: she unravels her blankets by night, builds a rope of braided yarn, recruits Cedar into the project. Their collaboration is wordless, grounded in shared practical knowledge. The Ojibwe finger-weaving technique that Cedar recognises in Spider Nun's method, "Grandma Mary Virginia's trick. An Ojibwe method of creating fancy sashes, wall hangings, belts, tumplines, and ropes" (128), is the novel's first explicit connection between the skills Cedar is learning to inherit and the possibility of survival. The rope they braid is the means of escape. The knowledge that made it comes from before the crisis.

Part III, set primarily on the reservation after Cedar's escape from the hospital, is where the novel's argument about the uneven operation of the novum becomes fully explicit. Cedar arrives at her birth family's house having already changed: the experience of the institutional apparatus has stripped away the settler-liberal frameworks that organised her response in Part I, and she is now learning to see from a different position. The reservation community does not encounter the evolutionary crisis as a rupture. They encounter it as an occasion for doing what they have always done.

The land reclamation meeting is the scene that most directly dramatises this. Eddy stands before a colour-coded map, yellow for non-Indian ownership, green for state forest, purple for tribal land, and explains, with the calm of someone who has been planning this for a long time, that the community is reclaiming what was taken under the Dawes Act. The lake-home owners have fled; the lottery system is already distributing the vacated properties to homeless and substandard-housing tribal members. "Let us bow our heads and pray for their plight," Eddy says (188). The dry irony is the key to his authority: this is not a man performing strength for his community. This is a man who finds the situation, in some genuine sense, amusing, because he has been thinking about treaty rights and land reclamation for a very long time and the crisis has simply given him the opening he needed. When Little Mary finishes shading in the reclaimed parcels and the old people in the room begin to weep silently, the weeping is not grief but recognition. The land is coming back.

The reservation's adaptive infrastructure in Part III is similarly not improvised but continuous with practices developed across generations of surviving emergency. Eddy has converted casino reserves into food production, established runner-based communication networks, organised a militia from veterans, and set up communal barter markets operating under truce. Sweetie fires up a vintage radio and makes oatmeal cakes on the old woodstove, which has moved from decorative object to central heating source. Grandma provides continuity across

time that no one else in the novel can offer, she has survived versions of crisis that predate everyone else's memory. "We're gonna be self-sufficient, like the old days," Eddy says (199). The old days are institutional memory, not nostalgia. They are the record of what worked before, available for practical use now.

Cedar's reconnection with this community across Part III is not presented as a sentimental homecoming. It is awkward, complicated, and ongoing. She cannot speak Ojibwe. She did not grow up with the community's practices. She refers to herself, at various points, as deculturated. But the novel does not require Cedar to become fully Ojibwe in order for her reconnection to matter. What matters is that she gains access to frameworks for understanding her situation that the Songmaker household never provided, frameworks that predate the evolutionary reversal and will, the novel suggests, persist beyond it. When Eddy teaches her to shoot, she refuses. "Look at me, Eddy. I am filled with new life. I'm not shooting anything or killing anyone" (201). He accepts this. The community does not require Cedar to be someone she is not. It requires, more modestly, that she stay.

What changes across Part III is Cedar's relationship to the journal itself. In Parts I and II, the journal is primarily a record, of events, of fears, of the daily discipline of keeping herself together. In Part III it begins to become something else: a form of address that anticipates its own future reading, that writes toward a child Cedar is not certain she will raise. Gerald Vizenor's concept of survivance, which he distinguishes from mere survival as an active and ongoing refusal of narratives of defeat and disappearance, names what this shift constitutes (Manifest Manners 4-5). Cedar is not simply documenting. She is asserting, through the act of writing, a relationship that the state cannot take from her even when it takes everything else. The journal is what she makes with the resources she has, in the time she has, for the person who will need it.

Suvin insists that the novum's ultimate function is not spectacular but diagnostic: significant SF is "a specifically roundabout way of commenting on the author's collective context," providing "a better vantage point from which to comprehend the human relations around the author" (84). The evolutionary reversal in *Future Home of the Living God* performs exactly this function. By defamiliarizing the management of reproduction through speculative displacement, the novel makes visible a structure of reproductive violence that the contemporary liberal present has rendered nearly invisible, and it does so by showing that this structure is not new. The evolutionary crisis provides the state with emergency justification for doing what, as Chapter Two will argue, it has always found ways to do to

Indigenous women's bodies: treat them as resources to be managed rather than persons to be protected.

The novum, in this reading, is not a warning about a future that might arrive. It is a revelation about a present that is already here, rendered legible by the estranging distance of speculation. Cedar's gradual shift across the novel's three parts — from settler-positioned shock to something closer to Indigenous recognition — is the formal vehicle through which this revelation occurs. By the time she writes her final entries from Stillwater, Cedar is not experiencing the crisis for the first time. She is recognising it from inside a history she has spent the whole novel learning to inhabit.

Biopower, Necropolitics, and the Machinery of Reproductive Control

Bernice does not look like a state agent. She wears Keds and a raspberry cotton tunic sweater and carries a covered basket and taps lightly on Cedar's door before opening it. Her gun is under a checkered napkin. Cedar goes with her without a struggle, not because she is naive about what is happening, but because, as she admits, "nice people paralyze me. Dark-skinned people who are nice, especially" (112). The self-awareness in that sentence is exact: Cedar recognises in real time that her liberalism is being used against her, that the state has dispatched someone who looks like the kind of person she is trained to trust. Bernice holds her hand as they walk to the car. At the hospital, she says: "Don't be afraid. Your baby will be beautiful" (115).

Cedar's response to this is the novel's first and clearest statement of its biopolitical argument: "Either she is a very good person and incredibly deluded, or else she is completely evil" (115). The novel refuses to resolve the question, Bernice disappears after delivering Cedar, because the resolution is beside the point. Biopower, as Michel Foucault theorises it in *The History of Sexuality*, does not require evil agents. It operates through the diffusion of control across ordinary institutional life, through the recruitment of care workers, administrators, and enforcers who participate in the management of bodies in the name of collective welfare without experiencing themselves as doing anything wrong (135-159). Bernice's warm manner is not a mask concealing cruelty underneath. It is the form that the apparatus takes when it is working correctly.

Future Home of the Living God is, among other things, a sustained anatomy of how biopower operates through people who consider themselves decent. The nurses who beam cheerfully at Cedar while monitoring her; Orilee, who brings back Cedar's confiscated books out of genuine sentiment and then searches the room for contraband on an unscheduled day; the makeup artist Miguel at Stillwater, who tells each woman she is beautiful and divine before

photographing her for the wall. None of these characters are straightforwardly villainous. They are people working within an institutional framework that has normalised the management of women's bodies as its purpose, and who have either not thought through or have suppressed the knowledge of what that management produces. This chapter examines the apparatus these characters populate — its mechanisms, its rhetoric, and the specific historical logic it inherits and extends.

The first thing the hospital does to Cedar is make her comfortable. Her room has "evenly painted golden walls, three photographs of dewy flowers" and "heavy, white, starched cotton" sheets (116). The food is good. She feels "the most intensely comfortable feeling of peace and order" and describes the ward as being "like a five-star hotel" (116). Tia's former roommate Agnes Starr tells her to hide the vitamin in her cheek rather than swallow it: "Once the nurse leaves, go take a pee and flush it" (116). Cedar has already taken hers. It takes three days without the drug for the room to become visible as what it is, the paint stained, the food rotten, the photographs saccharine, the nurses' warmth calculated.

The vitamin is the novel's most precise figure for how biopower works on individual bodies. Foucault's account of disciplinary power in *Discipline and Punish* distinguishes between sovereign power, which operates through spectacular violence and coercion, and disciplinary power, which operates by producing docile bodies through routine, observation, and normalisation (135-169). Saidiya Hartman's analysis of the coercive pleasures of slave governance offers a parallel framework: Hartman shows how the performance of consent and enjoyment was manufactured within systems of coercion, making visible how thoroughly power can penetrate the inner life of its subjects (*Scenes of Subjection* 23). The hospital exercises both, but it is the latter that is most insidious precisely because it is hardest to name. Cedar can see the locked doors and the guards; she cannot, while medicated, see the drug producing her own contentment. The apparatus works best when its subjects experience compliance as desire. Cedar wants to stay in the hospital. She feels she belongs there. It is only when she stops taking the vitamin that she recognises how that feeling was manufactured.

The vitamin sequence is also where the novel most directly addresses the question of informed consent. Cedar is not told what is in the supplement, is not asked whether she wants it, is not offered an alternative. The institution simply administers it and monitors the results. The IHS sterilisation campaigns of the 1960s and 1970s which Jane Lawrence documents as sterilising between twenty-five and fifty percent of Indigenous women of childbearing age,

frequently without informed consent, sometimes with consent obtained while women were in active labour operated through a structurally similar logic: the state determined what was medically appropriate for Indigenous women's bodies and administered it regardless of expressed preference (400). The evolutionary crisis provides the novel's state apparatus with a new emergency justification for an old practice of administering Indigenous women's bodies without consent. Cedar's vitamin is not an invention. It is an intensification.

Among the hospital's staff, Orielee is the novel's most carefully drawn study of complicity. She starches her scrubs. She shows Cedar a photograph of her granddaughter with genuine pride. She retrieves Cedar's confiscated books because Cedar has told her they are religious and she cannot quite bring herself to refuse a religious request. She is, by most available measures, a kind person and she is also someone who takes hair samples and nail clippings and cheek swabs from the women in her care, packages them into labelled envelopes for researchers she refers to vaguely as "them," and draws blood from Spider Nun twice daily even when Cedar points out that the quantity is making her visibly weak. "I could lose my job substituting blood," Orielee says, "and sometimes they do check" (137). She acknowledges that some of the blood she collects is never even used, that it goes to waste, but she collects it anyway. The job is the job.

Orielee tells Cedar, without apparent irony, that there are rules which some people have simply been living by and others have not, and that those who have not are now outsiders. She cannot describe the rules, because they are "an unspoken set of rules" that have solidified into habit (129). This is precisely the mechanism that Hannah Arendt identifies in her account of the banality of evil: the capacity of ordinary people to participate in systems of harm not through sadism or ideological commitment but through the routinisation of compliance, the transformation of policy into procedure, the substitution of institutional role for moral agency (Eichmann in Jerusalem 287-288). Orielee is not a sadist. She is a person who has internalised the institutional framework so thoroughly that she experiences her own compliance as competence. When she laughs on her way out of the room, the cold, mirthless little gurgle that Cedar has learned not to trust, she is not gloating. She is simply confirming that she has done her job.

Against Orielee, the novel places Jessie: the nurse who is not a nurse but an OB-GYN posing as one in order to smuggle women out of the facility. Jessie appears to Cedar initially as "the Dweeb", pale, chinless, unnoticeable, the kind of person who blends into institutional furniture (121). Her un-remarkability is her cover. She passes information

through Cedar in tiny notes, coordinates escapes, takes extraordinary personal risks, and does all of this with the restraint of someone who understands that the slightest visible deviation will end everything. The contrast between Orielle and Jessie is not simply a contrast between complicity and resistance. It is a contrast between two forms of institutional legibility: Orielle's warmth, which the institution has trained and depends upon, and Jessie's apparent blandness, which the institution has overlooked. Both are performances. One serves the apparatus; the other dismantles it from inside.

The wall of photographs in the Stillwater dining room is the novel's most concentrated image of what Achille Mbembe calls necropolitics: the state's arrogation of the power to determine who may live and who must die, exercised not through spectacular violence but through the administration of populations whose deaths are made structurally necessary and individually invisible ("Necropolitics" 11-12). Miguel, the makeup artist, prepares each woman on arrival, combs her hair, applies eyeshadow, positions her against a backdrop painted with a halo of radiant light. "Let all the beauty inside of you rush to the surface," he says (221). The photographs are then arranged on the dining room wall. Cedar is warned by a heavily pregnant redheaded woman not to approach it; when she eventually forces herself to look, she finds names beneath each portrait, two dates, and a line that reads: "She served the future" (223).

The first date is birth. The second is death. Every woman on the wall is dead. The wall performs a specific kind of ideological work that Lee Edelman's concept of reproductive futurism helps to name. For Edelman, contemporary political discourse across the ideological spectrum converges on the figure of the Child as the ground of social investment, the future child whose wellbeing justifies present sacrifice and whose existence gives collective life its purpose (No Future 2-3). The state in Erdrich's novel weaponizes this logic directly: the women on the wall "served the future," their deaths reframed as contribution rather than cost, their individual lives subordinated to the demographic imperative that the evolutionary crisis has made newly urgent. The institution's rhetoric is entirely oriented around this futurism, Mother's television broadcasts celebrate the women for their willingness to bear the burden of species survival, their deaths absorbed into a narrative of heroic service. Cedar's mordant observation that nobody gets out of Stillwater in nine months, "Nobody gets out of here at all" cuts directly against this rhetoric (224). The women are not serving the future. They are being used by the present.

What the wall makes visible, once Cedar reads it clearly, is the gap between the institution's self-presentation and its actual function. The photographs produce an illusion of individuation, each woman named, each portrait distinct while the format that surrounds the photographs erases that individuation entirely. The women become interchangeable instances of a category: gestational resource, martyr, instrument of species continuance. Their faces survive; their persons do not. This is precisely the structure of necropolitical management that Mbembe describes in his reading of colonial plantation economies: the subject is recognised as human enough to be named and mourned, but is simultaneously reduced to the function her body performs for the dominant order ("Necropolitics" 21). The wall mourns and instrumentalises in the same gesture.

Before Cedar reaches Stillwater, she witnesses something that the novel places in deliberate proximity to the wall: Tia Jackson's labour and delivery in the cave beneath St. Paul. Tia's baby is born alive and dies within minutes. Sera cannot revive it. The scene is prolonged and harrowing, Tia in active labour for hours, in genuine physical extremity, in a cave with no medical equipment beyond what Sera has carried in a roller bag and the novel does not soften it. What follows the baby's death is stranger and, in some ways, more disturbing: Cedar wakes in the night to find rats systematically removing the placenta and bloody materials from the cave, and destroys them methodically with her mother's Frye boots. She wraps the dead baby in her own child's blue and yellow flannel blanket. She does not record what Sera does with the body.

The scene establishes several things that become structurally important for reading what happens at Stillwater. First, it establishes that the risks the novel's state apparatus claims to be managing, precarious deliveries, infant mortality are real. Tia's baby does not survive, and it is not clear that it would have survived even with full medical resources. Second, it establishes that these risks fall unevenly. Tia is Black, and Cedar observes that the state has been more aggressively targeting women like Tia, rounded up on minor pretexts, inserted into a system that takes their reproductive capacity and discards the women themselves. Dorothy Roberts has argued that the history of reproductive coercion in the United States is organised precisely around this racialised calculus, with Black and Indigenous women bearing a disproportionate burden of policies that claim to serve public health while actually managing and reducing populations the state deems expendable (Killing the Black Body 6-7). Third, it establishes the emotional and relational context from which Cedar subsequently reads the wall. She has held Tia's dead child. When she reads the name Estrella and sees that Estrella is on the wall, she does not need the novel to tell her what this means.

Andrea Smith's analysis of reproductive violence as a pillar of settler colonial logic is directly relevant here. For Smith, the assault on Indigenous reproductive life through sterilisation, child removal, detention, and the systematic undermining of Indigenous kinship structures is not incidental to settler colonialism but constitutive of it: the elimination of Indigenous reproductive futures secures settler claims to land and forecloses the demographic recovery that would make Indigenous political claims more pressing (Conquest 7-9). The novel extends this analysis to a racialised hierarchy of reproductive disposability in which Indigenous and Black women are most aggressively targeted, most systematically processed, and least likely to be among the survivors the institution produces. Cedar's survival into the later stages of the novel is, in part, a function of the resistances she has inherited and developed — the rope braided from Ojibwe finger-weaving technique, Jessie's covert support, Eddy's network. Tia's survival after her baby's death is, by a grim irony, a function of no longer being reproductively useful to the state. Without a baby, she can walk out.

Cedar's delivery at Stillwater is the novel's most formally ambitious passage. She describes it in terms of oceanic spiritual force, thousands of spirits admitted to the room, the women's communal song heard between contractions, the plants that have been growing through the facility's floors and walls now rising around her in a kind of wild witness. The passage draws on Hildegard of Bingen, on the Ojibwe songs Eddy has been teaching, on the Catholic mystical tradition Cedar has practised throughout the novel. Paula Gunn Allen argued that the sacred dimensions of Indigenous women's reproductive experience have been systematically suppressed by both colonial administration and Western medical discourse; the novel's birth scene reclaims that sacred dimension within the very institution built to expropriate it (The Sacred Hoop 28). It is, deliberately, both ecstatic and entirely physical. Cedar is in her body and beyond it simultaneously. The baby arrives.

Then: "The sting of the needle stole my consciousness. As I slipped away, someone pried apart your fist and I felt you lifted from my arms" (232-233).

The sentence does the work that the entire apparatus has been building toward. Cedar's body was required for what it could produce. The moment the birth concluded, her usefulness to the state concluded with it. She is sedated before she can hold her child, before she can register gender or weight or the particular quality of the cry, before she can establish the relational fact of motherhood that might complicate the institution's subsequent decisions about the child. The needle is not punishment or cruelty in any simple sense. It is the logical endpoint of a system that has always

treated Cedar's body as the means and her child as the object. Once the object is produced, the means is set aside.

Patrick Wolfe's formulation of settler colonialism as a structure rather than an event ongoing, adaptive, finding new justifications in each historical moment, is the framework within which this ending belongs ("Settler Colonialism" 388). Cedar's body has been managed, her child taken, her voice reduced to fragmentary late entries from a cell where she awaits her next forced pregnancy. The evolutionary crisis did not invent this logic. It provided the emergency that allowed the logic to be applied more openly, more systematically, and with less pretence of consent than was previously available. The IHS sterilisation campaigns required administrative subterfuge and, eventually, legal challenge. The Church of the New Constitution requires neither. It has a wall for its dead, a makeup artist for their portraits, and a phrase, "She served the future", that converts necropolitics into sacrifice.

What Cedar's journal preserves, against this, is the record of what the apparatus could not fully contain: her voice, her address to her child, her account of the people who helped her and the people who did not and the people who were simply doing their jobs. The journal is not a counter-institution. It is something smaller and more durable, a form of testimony that the sedation could not prevent because Cedar wrote it before the needle arrived. Chapter Three examines what the novel does with this testimony and with the broader survivance resources that Cedar has been accumulating across the narrative: the reservation community, the Ojibwe practices embedded in the rope and the songs and Grandma's patience, and the utopian horizon that Moylan's critical dystopia framework helps to name.

Critical Dystopia and the Utopian Horizon

In his account of the critical dystopia, Tom Moylan argues that the genre's defining formal feature is its refusal to surrender to its own darkness. Where the classic dystopia moves toward closure, the system confirmed, resistance crushed, the reader left with the horror intact and absolute, the critical dystopia "borrow[s] the dystopian form while maintaining the utopian impulse" (Scraps 196). It does not pretend that oppressive conditions are less than they are. It insists, within those conditions, on the persistence of something else: spaces of refusal, alternative practices, the ongoing possibility of a world organised differently. That something else is not guaranteed survival. It is what Moylan calls, borrowing from Ernst Bloch, the principle of hope, not optimism, which requires a favourable prediction of outcomes, but the conviction that the existing order does not exhaust the possible (Scraps 10-11).

Future Home of the Living God sustains its utopian horizon in two registers that this chapter reads in sequence. The first

is the reservation community, Eddy's land reclamation, Sweetie's domestic practices, Grandma's stories, the community's institutional memory and adaptive infrastructure, all of which constitute what Gerald Vizenor calls survivance: the active, ongoing refusal of narratives of defeat and disappearance that Indigenous communities have maintained across generations of colonial assault (Manifest Manners 4-5). The second is Cedar's journal itself, which is not simply a record of what happened but a form of address that creates relationship across an uncertain future, asserting narrative sovereignty when physical sovereignty has been taken. These two registers are related: the journal is possible because Cedar has learned, across the novel, to inhabit frameworks for resistance that the reservation community carries. Survivance is not only what Eddy's community practices. It is what Cedar's writing performs.

Eddy's statement that the reservation is going to "be self-sufficient, like the old days" is easy to misread as nostalgia (199). It is not. The old days, in this context, are not a romantic past to be mourned but a body of practical knowledge to be applied. When the evolutionary crisis removes the infrastructural supports that settler society depends upon reliable electricity, supply chains, digital communication, institutional medicine, the reservation community does not improvise from nothing. It reaches for capacities that were developed when settler infrastructure was either unavailable or actively denied, and that have been maintained across the decades of their apparent superfluity.

The novel is specific about what these capacities are. Sweetie fires up the old woodstove, which had been standing decoratively in the corner of the kitchen, and begins making oatmeal cakes with bacon grease. The stove moves from ornament to centre of the household in a single action. Eddy converts the casino's grow-lighted aisles to seedling production, sources medicinal marijuana through Indigenous trade networks, organises food production on the scale of a collective farm. The communication network runs through runners stationed at eight points on the reservation, reciting news twice daily on the pattern of traditional town criers. The militia combines military veterans with community members and coordinates through a wolf-howl code that Cedar finds enchanting until Eddy translates it: drones at the casino, go inside. The code is beautiful and functional simultaneously. This is not coincidental. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson has argued that Indigenous resurgence practices characteristically integrate the aesthetic and the practical, the ceremonial and the political, because land-based knowledge does not separate these dimensions in the way that Western institutional frameworks do (As We Have Always Done 22). It is a feature of survivance practices that they often carry

aesthetic as well as practical dimensions, the finger-weaving technique that Spider Nun uses to braid the escape rope is both an Ojibwe art form and, in the hospital, a survival technology.

Kyle Powys Whyte's argument that Indigenous communities experience ecological crisis as a sequel to already-experienced colonial catastrophe is formally enacted in the novel through the contrast between how the Songmakers and the Potts respond to the same conditions ("Indigenous Climate Change Studies" 157). Glen and Sera oscillate between anxious preparation and paralysis. They accumulate camping gear, maintain their assets, hope for news of Glen's contacts in Canada. When Cedar last hears from them with any regularity, they have crossed the border and are hoping to be found by the right people. Their response is individual, reactive, dependent on networks they cannot fully control. The Potts response is collective, proactive, and grounded in structures the community already maintains. Eddy does not build the land reclamation strategy in response to the crisis. The crisis gives him the opening to implement a strategy he has been developing for a long time, one that draws on treaty knowledge, legal precedent, and the community's existing political organisation. Nick Estes has argued that Indigenous resistance is best understood not as a series of reactive responses to colonial pressure but as a continuous tradition of political organisation that carries forward across generations, adapting to new conditions without abandoning its foundational claims (Our History Is the Future 15). The Dawes Act parcels were always unjust. The crisis simply removes the white lake-home owners who were occupying them.

Of all the reservation characters, it is Grandma, Mary Potts the Very Senior, possibly over a hundred years old, alert and sharp-eyed in her wheelchair, who most directly embodies what survivance means as a temporal practice. She exists in the novel as a living archive: her body spans a historical period that the other characters can only know at second hand, her stories carry knowledge of what preceded the colonial reorganisation of reservation life, and her presence provides a form of continuity that nothing institutional can replicate or replace.

The story she tells Cedar after Cedar discovers that Glen is her biological father is the novel's most extended piece of embedded narrative: the Fat Man's Race, the blue devil, the dreamed knife, Cuthbert's death at the finish line. On the surface it is a story about romantic betrayal and its consequences. Underneath, it is a story about the power of what is dreamed and imagined to shape what is real, the knife Cedar's grandmother dreams into existence beneath her pillow is found between the dead man's ribs. It is also a

story about how Grandma came to build the life she actually built: not the life she planned, but the one that followed from the wreckage of planning. Fifty-seven years with a man who hated blue. Eight children, twenty adopted. Wild rice and deer from the back porch. Corn and potatoes dug every fall.

The story works on Cedar in the way that Grandma's stories seem designed to work: as oblique preparation rather than direct instruction. Cedar does not know why Grandma is telling her this story until she has sat with it and realised that it was a warning about men who appear as angels and are not, Cuthbert's fatal vanity, the blue devil's deception, and now, by extension, Phil. The story gives Cedar a framework for understanding what Phil has just done and what he is about to propose, without naming Phil directly. This is pedagogy as survivance: knowledge transmitted not as abstract principle but as narrative that the recipient must interpret, in time, in relation to their own situation. Grandma's stories are not entertainment. They are the long view, made available to those who can receive it.

The long view is also what Grandma provides simply by existing. She is, as Cedar notes, possibly over a hundred, she has survived versions of crisis that no one else in the novel can remember. Her age is not sentimentalised. She snatches the oatmeal spoon from Sweetie's hand and feeds herself. She wheels herself incrementally across the carpet to join conversations, buzzing and wheezing. She is occasionally maddening. But her presence in every scene she appears in is a form of argument: that the community has been here before, in some configuration, that it survived, that survival is not a matter of luck or exceptional individual heroism but of the practices and relationships and stories that a community carries across time and passes forward.

Cedar writes her journal to her child across an uncertainty she cannot resolve. She does not know, as she writes, whether the child will survive, whether she will survive, whether the journal will reach its intended reader or be confiscated and destroyed. She writes anyway. The act of writing is not contingent on favourable conditions. It continues through the hospital, through the cave, through the mail truck, through the Superpumper's storage room, through Stillwater's cinder-block cell. Cedar writes wherever she is, with whatever she has — a pen, a flashlight, a half-inch slash of light through a truck's siding. The journal does not wait for safety. It is what Cedar does while she is unsafe.

Vizenor's concept of survivance distinguishes mere survival, passive endurance, bare persistence from the active ongoing refusal of "dominance, tragedy, and victimry" that he identifies as Indigenous survivance (Manifest Manners 4). The distinction is crucial for reading Cedar's journal. A novel that simply documented Cedar's

suffering and ultimate defeat would be a tragedy in Vizenor's sense: it would confirm the dominant narrative about Indigenous women's disposability, the inevitability of their losses, the structural impossibility of their resistance. Cedar's journal does something different. It asserts, in the act of its own production, that Cedar's perspective on events is worth preserving; that her relationship with her child is real regardless of whether the state permits it; that what she has seen and thought and felt has a claim on the future that the apparatus cannot adjudicate. The journal is not a record of Cedar's survival. It is evidence of her refusal to accept the terms on which the state would define her.

This is why the journal's address to the unborn child, sustained across the entire novel, from the first entry to the last fragmentary ones from Stillwater matters formally as well as emotionally. Cedar is creating, on the page, the relationship that the state is systematically working to prevent. The institution at Stillwater sedates women at the moment of birth and removes their children before the mothers fully regain consciousness. Its entire apparatus is designed to sever the maternal bond before it can be consolidated. Cedar's journal predates the birth by nine months. By the time the needle arrives, the relationship is already nine months old, already embedded in hundreds of pages of address. The state can take the child from Cedar's arms. It cannot take the journal from the child.

Michel de Certeau's distinction between strategies and tactics is useful here. Strategies, for de Certeau, are the operations of institutions that possess a "place", a position of power from which they can manage space, time, and the movements of others (The Practice of Everyday Life xix). Tactics are the operations of those who lack such a place, who must work "within the enemy's field of vision" using whatever opportunities arise, turning the dominant order's own resources to unexpected purposes (37). Cedar's journal is a tactic in de Certeau's sense: it uses the materials the institution provides such as paper, a notebook, the heating duct as hiding place to create something the institution does not intend and cannot fully control. Leslie Marmon Silko observed that storytelling in Indigenous traditions carries this same quality of working with available materials to assert the continuity of the self across conditions designed to fragment it; the act of narration is itself a form of resistance (Ceremony 2). Kim TallBear's work on Indigenous identity and data sovereignty is similarly relevant: TallBear argues that the act of narrating one's own experience and genealogy constitutes a form of political assertion against the state's claim to define who Indigenous people are and what their bodies signify (Native American DNA 183). The journal is not an escape from the apparatus. It is a form of movement within it, producing something that

the apparatus cannot see or manage because it looks, from outside, simply like a pregnant woman writing.

The novel's final entries are dated and then undated, growing sparse as Cedar's physical condition deteriorates after the birth. "December. Extremely weak. But still here. January. They say my heart is damaged. February. My dear son. I know you're going to read this someday" (233). Whether Cedar survived beyond February, the novel declines to say. Whether her child survived, was raised, eventually found and read the journal — all of this is withheld. The novel ends without resolution, and Moylan's account of the critical dystopia helps to explain why this formal choice is not a failure of nerve but a political argument.

Classic dystopias tend toward closure precisely because closure confirms the system's totality: the horror is complete; the reader is sealed inside it. Critical dystopias refuse this closure because closure would be a lie, the existing order does not exhaust the possible, and a narrative form that implies otherwise has already conceded too much. What the novel's open ending preserves is the fact that Cedar's story does not have a determined outcome. The apparatus has enormous power. It does not have all the power. Eddy's community is still on the reservation. Jessie has been helping women out of facilities. Shawn's recycling network is still running. Glen is somewhere in Canada with contacts. The resistance that has sustained Cedar through the novel has not been eliminated; it has simply moved beyond the boundaries of what Cedar can see from her cell.

The journal's survival is the ending's central fact. We hold it. That Cedar's voice reaches us, that the child eventually read it, as the February entry addresses, is the utopian horizon the novel offers, and it is specifically not a guarantee of physical survival or political victory. It is something narrower and more durable: the persistence of a relationship, a voice, a form of testimony that the apparatus could not prevent because Cedar produced it before the needle arrived. Vizenor writes of survivance as the stories that "cannot be separated from the consciousness of survivance", not accounts of triumph but the ongoing production of presence that refuses the conclusion of defeat (Manifest Manners 15). Cedar's journal is exactly this. It does not claim that she survived. It proves that she was here, and thought, and addressed her child, and kept writing.

The novel's final image is not Cedar in her cell but the last snow: Sera describing the last winter that was genuinely cold, the last time it snowed the way snow used to snow, Cedar at eight years old pelting her parents with snowballs in a yard filling with white. The memory belongs to Cedar's Songmaker childhood, not to her Ojibwe family. But it is offered to her son as a form of inheritance — this is what

the world was like in the before, this is what was lost, this is what you will need to know about in order to understand what has happened and why it matters. Memory as transmission: the same structure that Grandma's stories enact, the same impulse that drives Cedar's journal. The utopian horizon in *Future Home of the Living God* is not a vision of political victory or ecological restoration. It is the conviction that what has been loved and known and written down is worth passing forward, even across an uncertainty that cannot be resolved.

CONCLUSION

The novel's last question is addressed to Cedar's son. "Where will you be, my darling, the last time it snows on earth?" (235). It is formally a question about climate, the memory Cedar has just recorded is of the last true snowfall, the day she was eight years old, the day she threw snow at her parents on a lawn filling with white. But it is also a question about survival and inheritance, about whether the child exists in a future that can still receive what Cedar is transmitting. The question is not answered. The novel ends.

This article has argued that this refusal of resolution is itself the argument, that *Future Home of the Living God*'s most significant formal choice is its insistence on remaining open at precisely the point where closure would provide relief. Cedar does not know, as she writes in February from her Stillwater cell, whether her son survived the birth, whether Jessie managed to secure him, whether the journal will reach him. The reader does not know either. What the February entries establish is that Cedar is still writing: still addressing her child, still transmitting what she knows, still performing the act of relation that the state has tried to prevent. The journal exists. Someone eventually read it. The question of what they inherited is, what world they inhabit, what became of the reservation community, whether the evolutionary crisis continued, belongs to a future the novel refuses to colonise with false certainty.

The three analytical frameworks this article has deployed across its chapters are not equivalently applicable to all parts of the novel, and it is worth being precise about what each one illuminates and where it reaches its limit. Suvin's novum provides the most structurally comprehensive account of the novel's speculative premise: the evolutionary reversal meets all of his criteria for a significant novum totalising, cognitively grounded, diagnostically oriented toward the author's present and the central argument this article has made about the novum's uneven operation adds something that Suvin's framework does not anticipate. Carl Freedman's extension of Suvin argues that the cognition produced by science fiction is always shaped by the reader's historical position (*Critical Theory and Science Fiction* 18),

and this is precisely what Erdrich exploits: the evolutionary reversal produces different cognition depending on whether the reader is positioned within settler normalcy or Indigenous continuity. The estrangement produced by the evolutionary reversal is not universal. It falls asymmetrically across the novel's characters in a pattern that reproduces the asymmetry of colonial violence: what is catastrophically new for the settler world is recognisably continuous with existing conditions for the Ojibwe community. This revision of Suvin through Whyte and Wolfe is the theoretical core of Chapter One, and it generates the interpretive lens through which the subsequent chapters read the hospital apparatus and the reservation community.

The biopower and necropolitics framework of Chapter Two is the most historically dense of the three, and the one most directly grounded in the novel's textual evidence. The wall of photographs at Stillwater, "She served the future" beneath each woman's birth and death dates is the novel's most concentrated single image, and it rewards sustained analytical attention because it performs ideological work that is not immediately legible. The wall mourns and instrumentalises in a single gesture, producing what looks like memorialisation while actually enacting the erasure of the individual person behind the institutional category. Reading the wall through Mbembe's necropolitics and connecting it to the historical record of IHS sterilisation campaigns establishes the continuity the novel is insisting upon: the evolutionary crisis did not invent the reproductive management of Indigenous women. It removed the administrative subterfuge that previously made it deniable.

The Moylan framework of Chapter Three is the most formally oriented of the three, and it addresses questions the first two chapters set up but cannot answer: what sustains the novel's refusal of despair, and whether that refusal is earned rather than merely asserted. The answer this article has offered is that the utopian horizon in *Future Home of the Living God* is not a projection of better futures but a documentation of existing alternative practices, Eddy's land reclamation, Sweetie's woodstove, Grandma's stories, Cedar's journal carries the capacity for different forms of social organisation within the conditions of the present. The distinction matters because it separates the novel's hopefulness from wishful thinking. Cedar does not survive because she imagines a better world. She survives, as long as she survives, because she has learned to inhabit and transmit the practices of a community that has been maintaining its survivance across generations.

The novel refuses several things that dystopian fiction often provides, and naming these refusals clarifies what kind of achievement *Future Home of the Living God* represents. It

refuses the hero plot. Cedar does not lead a resistance movement, does not organise a breakout from Stillwater at scale, does not confront Mother in a climactic encounter. Her resistance is individual and collaborative in small combinations with Spider Nun in the hospital, with Tia in the cave, with Jessie at both facilities and it produces her own partial freedom rather than systemic change. The state apparatus is still operating when the journal ends. The field of white crosses outside the Stillwater yard is still filling.

It refuses the conversion narrative. Cedar does not fully become Ojibwe. She does not achieve fluency in Ojibwe, does not perform the ceremonies she has only partially learned, does not shed the Songmaker identity that was imposed on her through adoption. What she achieves is more modest and more durable: access to frameworks for understanding her situation that the Songmakers never provided, and a set of practices like writing, making, maintaining relationships, connects her to the community carrying those frameworks. The novel does not require Cedar to resolve her dual identity in order for her reconnection to matter. The ambivalence is structural. She is both, and will be both, and the novel's argument does not depend on her choosing.

It refuses the comfort of Eddy's survival as a given. Eddy's land reclamation strategy is brilliant and his community's adaptive capacity is genuine, but the novel does not confirm that the reservation escapes the crisis intact. After Cedar's capture at the Kateri vigil, the reservation community drops out of the narrative. The field of white crosses is visible from Stillwater's exercise yard. What has happened to the people Cedar loves is not told. The utopian horizon is sustained, but it is not guaranteed. Moylan's account of the critical dystopia is precise on this point, and the novel honours the distinction.

Eddy's chapter in his memoir, passed to Cedar in pieces throughout the novel, is titled "Cured by the Apocalypse", the evolutionary crisis, he writes, has relieved his depression, because the sheer strangeness and scale of what is happening gives him a reason to stay alive and watch. The pebbles that cut his feet on the path to the tree where he had planned to hang himself are geological specimens of immense age, Precambrian hematite, basaltic lava three and a half billion years old, a rounded agate he thinks would make a beautiful necklace for Sweetie and he stops to examine each one. The rope is flung away. The little rocks, he writes, "want him on earth" (229).

The passage is the novel's most direct statement of what survivance looks like at the level of individual consciousness: not triumph or resolution, but the arrest of despair by the specific gravity of the particular world. The pebbles are not symbols. They are what they are, old stone,

strayed from the Mesabi Range, cut by lake water into a shape that fits the palm. Their beauty is real and local and available, even on the path to the tree. Eddy's turn back from that path is not a conversion or a cure. It is a moment of attention that the world makes possible.

Cedar's final memory; the last snowfall, the eight-year-old pelting her parents, whiteness filling the air, is the novel's equivalent gesture. She is recording what the world was like before, for a child who will need to know it. The memory belongs to her Songmaker childhood, to Glen and Sera and a lawn in Minneapolis, not to the reservation or the Ojibwe practices she has been learning to inhabit. It is offered without qualification: this is what was loved, this is what was lost, this is what I am giving you. The question that closes the novel, "Where will you be, my darling, the last time it snows on earth?", does not ask whether the son has survived. It asks where he will be: a question that presupposes his existence, his movement in a world, his capacity to be somewhere when something happens. The question is not pessimistic. It is an act of faith in a future the novel cannot see.

Future Home of the Living God is a novel about what gets passed forward across conditions of catastrophe. The journal is passed forward. Grandma's stories are passed forward. The knowledge encoded in the finger-weaving technique, in the wolf-howl code, in the old woodstove's continued functionality, in the land reclamation maps, all of this is passed forward, embedded in practices that the crisis cannot render obsolete because they predate the conditions the crisis produces. This is what the novel means by the utopian horizon: not the vision of a world already improved, but the insistence that what has been known and loved and carefully transmitted has a claim on whatever world comes next. Cedar writes her son into existence across two hundred pages before she holds him. The state takes him from her arms. The journal remains.

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Chu Yun Liu Fang: A Bilingual Practice in the Dissemination of Jingchu Cultural Relics and Creative Products

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Abstract— *Chu Yun Liu Fang, Vibes of Chu Culture, is not only a poetic expression but also an innovative practice dedicated to the international dissemination of Jingchu culture. This paper examines the national college student innovation training program of Yangtze University, Chu Yun Liu Fang: A Bilingual Practice in the Dissemination of Jingchu Cultural Relics and Creative Products, as its research subject. Drawing on the team's concrete practices in cultural relic promotion, cultural and creative product development, and bilingual communication, it explores innovative pathways for local university student teams to participate in the international dissemination of Jingchu culture. The research reveals that emerging communication formats, such as bilingual short videos, live-streaming e-commerce, and social media operations, are providing viable practical platforms for university students to engage in cultural going global initiatives. Leveraging their strengths in translation studies, the project team has adopted a dual-wheel drive model of content creation plus e-commerce conversion, initially exploring a sustainable development path from cultural relic revitalization and creative transformation to bilingual communication and commercial feedback. This practice not only contributes youthful energy to the transformation of Jingchu culture from a regional heritage into a cultural resource that is communicable, experiential, and consumable, but also offers a replicable practical model for university innovation and entrepreneurship projects serving local cultural dissemination.*



Keywords— *bilingual communication, college student innovation, cultural and creative products, cross-cultural practice, Jingchu culture.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Chu Yun Liu Fang, literally meaning the charm of Jingchu culture flows as endlessly as a river, is a national college student innovation training program led by a student team from the School of Foreign Studies at Yangtze University. The project, Chu Yun Liu Fang: A Bilingual Practice in the Dissemination of Jingchu Cultural Relics and Creative

Products, is dedicated to leveraging new media and professional translation advantages to promote Jingchu cultural relics and their historical narratives to a global audience.

The inception of this project coincides with a rising wave of Jingchu culture going global. From the Hubei Provincial Museum's Chu-style incense cultural creations

being showcased in Malaysia, Russia, and Spain, to the exhibition *Eternal Rebirth: A Dialogue between Chu Culture and Contemporary Art* resonating with audiences in Bonn, Germany, and to the International Reception Hall of Jingchu Intangible Cultural Heritage welcoming ambassadors from Chile and Grenada to strike the Hanlu, Jingchu culture is embracing the world stage with an unprecedented openness^[5]. Concurrently, the enduring museum fever and the burgeoning trend of Guochao (national craze) consumption are providing expansive social space for university students to engage in cultural dissemination^[2].

However, cultural dissemination is never a mere transmission of information. Jingchu culture, with its long history and profound connotations, faces multiple challenges in cross-cultural communication, including linguistic conversion, contextual reconstruction, and formal innovation. How can the team enable audiences from diverse cultural backgrounds to understand and appreciate Chu-style aesthetics while preserving the authenticity of the culture? How can millennia-old artifacts be made to speak through bilingual narratives, forging emotional connections with contemporary and global audiences? And how can our undergraduate-led entrepreneurial team leverage our professional strengths to contribute youthful energy to the dissemination of Jingchu culture with limited resources? These questions constitute the core issues explored in this paper. The following sections will systematically review our team's practical journey and reflections from five perspectives: project background, market analysis, practical exploration, critical reflections, and future planning.

II. PROJECT BACKGROUND AND PRODUCT SERVICES

The project background consists of policy context and market context, while product services focus on bilingual promotion and cultural creative product sales.

1. Policy Context: Bringing Cultural Relics to Life

In May 2023, during his inspection in Yuncheng, Shanxi Province, General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized that museums carry history and crystallize memory, serving as important halls for protecting and inheriting human civilization. He explicitly pointed out

that it is necessary to conscientiously implement the Party Central Committee's work requirements of prioritizing protection, strengthening management, excavating value, making effective use, and bringing cultural relics to life, comprehensively improving the level of cultural relic protection and utilization as well as cultural heritage protection and inheritance. This important discourse provides the fundamental guidance for this project: cultural relics must not only be preserved, but also brought to life; they must not only come alive domestically, but also go global¹.

2. Market Context: Guochao Consumption and Museum Boom

Data from the China Stationery and Office Supplies Show indicates that 95.5% of consumers purchase cultural creative products, demonstrating extremely high market demand and interest. Among diverse cultural creative products, classic Chinese style, with its unique cultural charm and aesthetic characteristics, has won the favor of 64.7% of consumers. Meanwhile, the latest data released by the National Cultural Heritage Administration shows that in 2023, the number of registered museums nationwide reached 6,833, hosting over 40,000 exhibitions and more than 380,000 educational activities, receiving 1.29 billion visitors, all exceeding 2019 levels. Going to museums has become a new social trend, providing abundant spiritual nourishment for the people^[2].

Behind this museum boom lies the deep integration between the public and traditional culture. With economic and social development, excellent traditional Chinese culture is experiencing a renaissance. An increasing number of people hope to gain in-depth understanding of the historical depth and innovative power of Chinese civilization through museum visits. This provides fertile ground for the development of cultural creative products.

3. Product Positioning: Bilingual Promotion Plus Cultural Creative Product Sales

Based on the above context, our team targets both domestic and international audiences, leveraging our advantages in translation expertise to carry out two core businesses:

¹

https://www.shanxi.gov.cn/ywdt/sxyw/202405/t20240516_9561780.shtml

First, bilingual cultural relic promotion. The team produce bilingual (Chinese-English) versions of cultural relic promotion videos and distribute them on major online platforms at home and abroad to promote Jing-Chu culture and tell China's stories well.

Second, cultural creative product sales. While regularly releasing bilingual videos, the team drive sales of cultural creative products through live streaming commerce, online showcases, and offline exhibitions, creating economic benefits and achieving a virtuous cycle of cultural dissemination and commercial conversion.

III. MARKET ANALYSIS AND PROJECT PROGRESS

This chapter is organized into three sections: the design logic of cultural creative products, preliminary project preparation, and communication and sales practices.

1. Design Logic of Cultural Creative Products

Currently, cultural creative products have established a mature design philosophy. Excellent cultural creative products typically adhere to the basic principles of practicality, innovation, distinctiveness, and portability, while integrating design elements such as storytelling, artistry, inheritance, elemental representation, knowledge, and fashion. They serve as important carriers for cultural heritage and emotional expression. This provides a reference framework for product selection and promotion in this project.

2. Preliminary Project Preparation

After project initiation, the team first conducted field research at the Jingzhou Museum Cultural Creative Store, Miyu Coffee, and Miyu Tea Room. Combining with the existing exhibited relics at Jingzhou Museum, the team identified nine key cultural relics and their related cultural creative products for focused promotion. Subsequently, leveraging team members' professional strengths, the team completed the creation and translation of relevant scripts, negotiated filming arrangements with the stores, and successively finished the filming and dubbing of nine promotional videos.

3. Communication and Sales Practices

To date, the team has released all bilingual promotional videos on domestic and international social

media platforms including Douyin, Xiaohongshu, Instagram, and YouTube. Among them, the highest single video views have exceeded 1,000, preliminarily validating the content's communication potential. In terms of sales, the team attempted offline stall sales during the holiday period, selling small cultural creative products. The team sold one mirror-comb set, one Warring States silver-inlaid bronze spoon cultural creative product, two coasters, and two bookmarks, with a total revenue of RMB 216.9. Although the amount is limited, this from zero to one breakthrough has accumulated valuable experience for subsequent operations.

IV. EXISTING PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

During project implementation, the team mainly faces two challenges:

1. Monotonous Content Format

Early videos predominantly adopted a fixed pattern of cultural relic introduction plus product display, providing brief introductions to the relics followed by product feature demonstrations. This monotonous content format makes it difficult to sustain user attention.

Solutions: First, innovate script content by excavating the storytelling and appeal behind cultural relics to enhance narrative tension. Second, employ diversified filming techniques such as situational short dramas, Vlogs, and animations to improve video watchability and dissemination power.

2. Limited Sales Channels

Offline stall sales are constrained by time and space, generating meager income that is difficult to scale. A single stall can only reach a limited audience, and sales opportunities are concentrated during holidays, lacking continuity.

Solutions: Under the guidance of our mentor, the team has activated online showcase functions to achieve dual-channel sales combining offline plus online approaches. In the future, the team will explore live streaming commerce models to convert video content traffic into product sales, thereby enhancing revenue-generating capacity.

V. LATE-STAGE PROJECT WORK PLAN

Building on the existing foundation, the team will

continue to advance the project from the following three aspects:

First, content deepening and channel expansion. Regularly release bilingual videos to maintain account activity; simultaneously explore new creative ideas such as serialized themes and interactive content to enhance user stickiness. Additionally, the team may attempt to customize publicity plans for local cultural creative merchants to expand content monetization channels.

Second, sales model optimization. Continue cooperating with local cultural creative merchants in Jingzhou to expand product sources and categories. Online, the team will sustain showcase operations and explore live streaming commerce; offline, the team will utilize weekends to set up stalls in high-traffic areas (such as snack streets, Renxin Plaza, etc.) in groups to expand sales coverage.

Third, communication effect evaluation and iteration. Establish a data monitoring mechanism to track core indicators including video views, user engagement, and sales conversion^[1]. Based on feedback, the team will continuously optimize content strategies and operational methods to achieve a virtuous cycle of practice, reflection and improvement.

VI. BILINGUAL COMMUNICATION: CROSSING THE DUAL BARRIERS OF LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Language is the first threshold of cultural dissemination and also the core concern of the Chu Yun Liu Fang project. Jing-Chu culture is rich in content, encompassing multiple categories such as bronze ware, lacquerware, silk, and bamboo slips, with a complex terminology system and unique rhetorical style, placing extremely high demands on translation work.

In translation practice, the team consistently adheres to the principle of fidelity as foundation, flexibility as application. Taking the Feng (phoenix) in Chu culture as an example: although its image shares similarities with the Western phoenix, their cultural connotations differ significantly. The Chu people revered the Feng, viewing it as a symbol of auspiciousness, nobility, and regeneration, while the Western phoenix primarily signifies rebirth from nirvana. In translation, the team handles this flexibly

according to specific contexts: for promotional videos targeting general audiences, we adopt phoenix with brief explanations; for textual materials targeting professional audiences, we retain the transliteration Feng accompanied by annotations.

The rise of short videos and live streaming commerce has opened new arenas for bilingual communication. Our team has keenly captured this trend, leveraging new channels such as Douyin e-commerce and bilingual short videos to expand promotion pathways for Jingzhou cultural relics and related products. The project logic is clear: on one hand, accumulate audiences through content creation to enhance the exposure and influence of museum cultural creative products; on the other hand, achieve commercial conversion of cultural value through shelf e-commerce channels such as mall, search, and storefront established by the platform^[1]. This content plus e-commerce dual-wheel drive model differs from the aloofness of traditional academic dissemination and the superficiality of pure tourism promotion, attempting instead to find a meeting point between in-depth interpretation and mass communication.

VII. OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES: THE REALITY OF CULTURAL COMMUNICATION FROM A UNIVERSITY STUDENT PERSPECTIVE

Observing from the perspective of a university student innovation and entrepreneurship project, bilingual communication of Jing-Chu culture faces both rare opportunities and practical challenges.

Opportunities: At the policy level, Hubei Province has explicitly proposed anchoring the core goal of creative transformation and innovative development of excellent traditional Jing-Chu culture^[3], providing top-level support for cultural communication. At the market level, young consumers' enthusiasm for Guochao cultural creative products is soaring^[4], providing a demand foundation for university student innovation and entrepreneurship projects. At the technical level, the development of short video tools and social media platforms has lowered the threshold for content creation and communication. At the talent level, the interdisciplinary advantages of universities provide professional support for the project.

Challenges: First, the phenomenon of cultural discount still exists. Many deep-level spiritual connotations in Jing-Chu culture, such as the homophonic four-character phrases Guifu Mianzhao (noble lady's face mask) and Yiye Baofu (overnight wealth/leopard prosperity) among Chu people, are easily simplified or lost in cross-cultural communication. How to achieve communication that captures both form and spirit within the limited duration of short videos remains a subject for continuous exploration. Second, quality control in translation is difficult. As an undergraduate team with limited professional accumulation, the team still have room for improvement in terminology standardization and idiomatic expression, especially when official translations for cultural relics are unavailable. Taking Bianqing 编磬 as an example: its English translation needs to balance instrument category (qing as a stone percussion instrument) with cultural attributes. Whether to adopt Set of Sonorous Stones, L-shaped Stone Musical Instruments, or a transliteration-plus-annotation strategy as Bianqing (Set of Sonorous Stones) requires repeated verification, comparison with authoritative sources, and assessment of acceptability before making a prudent choice. Third, the issue of commercial sustainability. Currently, project revenue is meager, and a stable business model has not yet been formed. How to achieve the unification of social and economic benefits is a practical issue the team must confront.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Chu Yun Liu Fang represents both a heartfelt aspiration for the enduring legacy of Jing-Chu cultural lineage and a conscious commitment to the mission of contemporary cultural communication. From visiting cultural relics at Jingzhou Museum to creating and releasing bilingual videos, from initial attempts at offline stall sales to activating online showcase functions, this team has contributed a modest yet sincere effort to bringing Jing-Chu culture to the world through youthful energy and professional expertise^[1].

Looking back on this practice, the team has increasingly recognized that successful cultural communication lies not in rigid adherence to tradition, but in creative transformation of tradition, enabling cultural relics to walk out from display cases, intangible cultural

heritage to come alive from craftsmanship techniques, and historical stories to be told in ways contemporary audiences appreciate. This transformation requires both technological empowerment and creative enhancement; both academic depth and communication ingenuity. Bilingual communication serves precisely as the bridge enabling all these transformations to cross boundaries.

For university innovation and entrepreneurship projects represented by Chu Yun Liu Fang, their value lies not merely in how many short videos are produced or how many cultural creative products are developed, but in cultivating a mode of thinking for cultural communication: making young people the protagonists of cultural communication, allowing them to use their own language, their own creativity, and technologies they are familiar with to tell stories of the land where they grew up. When more and more young people join this endeavor, Jing-Chu culture will truly achieve timeless fragrance (liu fang), flowing not only in classical texts and display cases, but also in people's hearts and toward the world. (This paper is an achievement of the 2025 National Innovation Training Program Project of Yangtze University, Project No.: 2025104890285).

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Green Technology and Sustainable English Language Pedagogy in Saudi Arabia: Trends, Challenges, and Future Directions

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Abstract— *The global imperative for sustainable development has increasingly influenced educational discourse and prompted scholars and practitioners to examine how green technology (GT) can be harnessed to transform pedagogical practices. Higher educational institutions worldwide are being urged to align instructional innovation with environmental responsibility and long-term ecological sustainability. This systematic review investigates the integration of GT within English language teaching (ELT) in Saudi Arabia, with particular attention to prevailing conceptual frameworks, documented practical applications, persistent challenges, and emerging future directions. A systematic literature review (SLR) literature search has been conducted across five academic databases. It adheres to the guidelines of preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses (PRISMA, 2020). This SLR reveals that GT integration in ELT offers dual pedagogical advantage: it simultaneously enhances learners' English language proficiency and cultivates ecological literacy. Practical applications include digital platforms, project-based learning with technology, augmented reality, and AI-driven personalisation have been found to enrich ELT whilst reducing its environmental footprint. The findings contribute to the emerging discourse on English language pedagogy for sustainable development and offer actionable recommendations for researchers, educators, and policymakers in sustainable language education.*



Keywords— *Green technology, English language teaching, Saudi Vision 203, ecological literacy, systematic literature review*

I. INTRODUCTION

The accelerating pace of environmental degradation and the growing urgency for the global sustainability agenda have compelled virtually every sector of society to reimagine its practices and responsibilities. Education, which is a cornerstone of societal transformation, occupies a uniquely strategic position in this paradigm shift. Scholars in the field of education for sustainable development have long argued that educational institutions bear a collective obligation not merely to transmit knowledge about environmental challenges but to actively model and promote ecologically responsible practices (Hockly, 2019). It is within this

broader context that green technology (GT) has emerged as a particularly compelling instrument of paradigm shift.

GT may be broadly defined as the application of environmentally conscious tools, systems, and methodologies designed to reduce the adverse ecological footprint of human activity whilst simultaneously advancing sustainable development goals (Geronimo & Geronimo, 2019). The concept encompasses a wide spectrum of innovations—from renewable energy systems and energy-efficient infrastructure to digital learning tools and cloud-based educational platforms—each oriented towards minimising resource consumption, reducing waste,

and fostering ecological responsibility (Jamaluddin et al., 2018). Usares and Gonzales (2022) observe that educational institutions worldwide are increasingly recognising GT not merely as an operational upgrade but as a pedagogical philosophy that can reshape the very purpose and beliefs of learning.

Within the field of English language teaching (ELT), the integration of GT presents a particularly instructive dual advantage. Digital tools and eco-friendly pedagogical platforms have the capacity to modernise instructional methods, enhance learner engagement, and extend the accessibility of language education beyond the confines of the traditional classroom (Pegrum, 2014). On the other hand, when GT is embedded into the curriculum through principled frameworks, it enables ELT practitioners to position language learning as a vehicle for cultivating environmental consciousness and ecological literacy (Hockly, 2019). This convergence of linguistic and sustainability objectives reflects a broader shift in language education philosophy; one that views English not merely as a global communicative tool but as a medium through which learners can engage critically with pressing global challenges.

Saudi Arabia presents a particularly salient and timely context for examining GT integration in ELT. As one of the world's most robust economies, the Kingdom has embarked upon an ambitious programme of social and economic reform encapsulated in the Vision 2030 framework (Saudi Vision 2030, 2016). Central to this initiative is a commitment to diversifying the national economy, enhancing the quality of education, and embedding sustainable development principles across all sectors. Within the educational domain, this has manifested in substantial investments in digital infrastructure, the expansion of e-learning platforms, and the promotion of innovative pedagogical practices aligned with national sustainability objectives (Alalwan et al., 2019). Saudi Arabia's specific environmental challenges—including desertification, acute water scarcity, and significant carbon footprint—further underline the relevance of integrating GT into educational curricula that can cultivate environmentally aware and linguistically competent graduates.

Given this complex landscape, a systematic and comprehensive synthesis of the existing literature is both timely and necessary. This article presents an SLR of studies examining the integration of GT in ELT, with a particular focus on the Saudi Arabian context. It is guided by three overarching research questions: (1) What conceptual frameworks have been developed to integrate GT into ELT in Saudi Arabia? (2) What practical

applications and innovations have been documented in the literature? (3) What challenges and barriers to GT integration persist? There is also a focus on future directions alongside these three research questions. This SLR addresses these questions and aims to consolidate existing knowledge, identify critical gaps, and inform evidence-based policy and practice in sustainable language education.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptualising Green Technology

Green technology (GT)—also referred to in the scholarly literature as environmentally sustainable technology or clean technology—encompasses a broad range of tools, systems, and methodologies designed to reduce the negative environmental impact of human activity whilst promoting long-term ecological sustainability (Geronimo & Geronimo, 2019). At its philosophical core, GT is grounded in the principles of the 3Rs—reduce, reuse, and recycle—which guide the efficient utilisation of resources and the minimisation of waste across all sectors of human activity (Usares & Gonzales, 2022). These principles have been progressively extended beyond their original industrial applications to inform the operational and curricular practices of educational institutions worldwide.

A key exemplar of GT in the built educational environment is the concept of zero energy buildings, which are designed to achieve carbon neutrality by generating as much energy as they consume through renewable sources (Geronimo & Geronimo, 2019). Beyond infrastructure, GT encompasses the digital tools and platforms that reduce reliance on material resources such as paper, physical textbooks, and energy-intensive physical spaces. These tools and platforms align educational practices with global sustainability targets. Jamaluddin et al. (2018) argue persuasively that GT not only enhances operational efficiency within educational institutions but also fosters a culture of ecological responsibility that permeates the attitudes and behaviours of both educators and learners. This cultural dimension is particularly significant for ELT, where the values embedded in curricula have the potential to shape learners' worldviews well beyond the acquisition of linguistic competence (Hockly, 2019).

2.2 Green Technology in Education

The application of GT in formal educational settings has gained considerable momentum over the past decade, which is driven by mounting pressure from international sustainability frameworks, institutional commitments to reducing carbon footprints, and the rapid democratisation of digital technologies (Jamaluddin et al., 2018). Universities and schools globally are adopting a range of eco-friendly

practices—from the installation of solar panels and energy-efficient lighting to the wholesale transition from physical to digital learning materials (Suryawanshi & Narkhede, 2015). Virtual classrooms, cloud-based learning management systems, and synchronous online collaboration platforms have collectively reduced the demand for traditional classroom spaces and the associated energy consumption and transport-related emissions (Alhumaid et al., 2020).

The pedagogical dimensions of GT in education extend beyond infrastructure to encompass curricular design, teaching methodologies, and assessment practices. As Lay et al. (2013) observe, however, large-scale implementation of GT in education continues to confront significant structural impediments, including prohibitive upfront costs, insufficient technical literacy among educators, and a paucity of contextually relevant professional development programmes.

2.3 Green Technology in English Language Pedagogy

The intersection of GT and ELT has generated a growing body of innovative conceptual frameworks and practical pedagogical tools that seek to leverage the transformative potential of both fields simultaneously. Digital platforms and online learning environments substantially reduce English language pedagogy's reliance on traditional resource-intensive materials, whilst cloud-based resources and e-assessment tools align language teaching with the broader sustainability goals advocated by UNESCO (2017) and respond directly to calls for a more ecologically responsible educational practice (Geronimo & Geronimo, 2019).

Two conceptual frameworks deserve particular scholarly attention. The green language teaching approach (GLTA), articulated by Nur et al. (2022), proposes a principled methodology for embedding ecological themes into English language curricula. Rather than treating environmental content as an add-on, GLTA integrates it organically into vocabulary instruction, reading comprehension, listening and speaking tasks, as well as writing projects, thereby fostering ecological literacy as an indispensable complement to linguistic proficiency. Complementing GLTA, the context-aware ubiquitous language learning (CAULL) framework (Wang et al., 2019) employs mobile applications, GPS-enabled sensing systems, and augmented reality overlays to create immersive learning environments in which language acquisition and ecological exploration occur simultaneously and synergistically. These frameworks collectively reflect the conviction that technology-enriched ELT is most powerfully realised when it is anchored in real-world purposes and socially meaningful content (Pegrum, 2014).

2.4 GT in ELT: Environmental Sustainability in Saudi Arabian Context

Saudi Arabia's specific environmental profile lends particular urgency and relevance to the integration of GT in ELT. Saudi Arabia faces environmental pressures, including desertification affecting significant proportions of the national territory, water scarcity exacerbated by near-total dependence on desalination, and an energy consumption profile historically dominated by fossil fuels (Saudi Vision 2030, 2016). These challenges are not merely ecological; they carry profound social and economic implications for the long-term viability and sustainability of the national development trajectory. It is within this context that Vision 2030's explicit commitment to environmental sustainability, renewable energy expansion, and educational reform takes on its full significance (Alalwan et al., 2019).

The integration of GT in Saudi ELT programmes offers a contextually responsive mechanism for addressing these challenges at the level of individual learner consciousness and institutional culture. Frameworks such as GLTA which enable teachers to design English lessons to engage directly with local environmental realities using authentic language for genuine communicative purposes (Wang et al., 2019). Project-based approaches further enrich this engagement: students might develop English-language social media campaigns on recycling, conduct environmental interviews in the community, or collaborate on digital reports examining local ecological data (Widodo, 2015).

2.5 GT in ELT: Initiatives and Innovations in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia has taken substantive steps to embed GT within its educational infrastructure as an integral component of Vision 2030's modernisation agenda. The widespread adoption of digital learning management systems, e-textbooks, and online assessment platforms in Saudi schools and universities has demonstrably reduced the sector's dependence on paper-based resources and the associated environmental costs (Alalwan et al., 2019). Several institutions have complemented these digital transitions with investments in renewable energy infrastructure which include solar-powered classrooms and energy-efficient building systems to promote an institutional commitment to environmental responsibility in discourse as well as practice (Jamaluddin et al., 2018).

In the domain of language education specifically, Saudi institutions have piloted innovative approaches drawing on artificial intelligence (AI), augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), and the Internet of Things (IoT) to create dynamic, personalised, and ecologically themed learning environments (Wang et al., 2019). AI-driven adaptive learning platforms, for instance, provide personalised

language instruction pathways whilst simultaneously reducing the need for printed assessment materials, which is a dual efficiency that aligns with both pedagogical and sustainability objectives.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a systematic literature review (SLR) as its primary research design. An SLR is a structured and transparent approach to identifying, evaluating, and synthesising relevant research evidence to provide a comprehensive and unbiased overview of a defined phenomenon (Snyder, 2019). Systematic reviews are widely recognised as the most rigorous and transparent form of literature synthesis available to researchers and provide a replicable, evidence-based approach to consolidate knowledge on a defined phenomenon (Gough et al., 2017). Unlike traditional narrative reviews, systematic reviews follow explicit procedural steps that enhance methodological rigour, minimise selection bias, and improve replicability (Booth et al., 2016). Traditional narrative reviews are susceptible to selection bias and subjective interpretation. By contrast systematic literature reviews follow a pre-specified protocol that governs all stages of the process, i.e., from database searching and screening through to data extraction and synthesis, which ensures that the resulting synthesis is comprehensive, reproducible, and minimally biased (Page et al., 2021).

This methodological choice is particularly appropriate for the present inquiry, which seeks to synthesise a diverse and rapidly expanding body of evidence concerning GT integration in ELT within the Saudi Arabian context, a phenomenon that has not previously been subject to SLR. The review has been conducted in accordance with the preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses (PRISMA) guidelines (Page et al., 2021), which represent the current international standard for transparent and rigorous systematic review reporting.

3.2 Search Strategy

The identification of relevant literature is achieved through a systematic and comprehensive search of five major academic databases: Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC), Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), and Google Scholar. These databases have been selected on the basis of their broad disciplinary coverage, their indexing of high-quality peer-reviewed publications, and their established relevance to the intersecting fields of applied linguistics, educational technology, and sustainability studies. The primary search was conducted in December 2025, with a supplementary

hand-search of the reference lists of all retrieved articles to identify additional relevant sources not captured through database searching alone.

The search employed a combination of controlled vocabulary terms and free-text keywords, connected through Boolean operators to maximise both sensitivity and specificity. The primary search string was constructed as follows: ("green technology" OR "educational technology" OR "digital learning tools" OR "eco-friendly education") AND ("English language teaching" OR "ELT" OR "TESOL" OR "English language pedagogy") AND ("Saudi Arabia" OR "Gulf Cooperation Council" OR "Vision 2030" OR "Arab world") AND ("sustainability" OR "sustainable development" OR "education for sustainable development" OR "ESD" OR "ecological literacy"). The search was restricted to publications in English, covering the period from January 2015 to December 2025, a timeframe which is enough to capture the decade of most significant growth in GT discourse within education, coinciding with the increasing global prominence of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (UNESCO, 2017).

3.3 Inclusion Criteria

This study ensures the relevance, quality, and consistency of the included literature, by explicitly adding inclusion and exclusion criteria. These criteria were established prior to the commencement of the search in accordance with best practice in SLR methodology (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Gough et al., 2017). Studies have been included if they met all of the following criteria: (1) they were published in peer-reviewed academic journals, conference proceedings, or as doctoral dissertations; (2) they were written in English; (3) they had a primary or substantial focus on Saudi Arabia or the broader Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region; (4) they addressed the integration of green technology, digital tools, or sustainability-oriented pedagogical frameworks within English language teaching or learning; and (5) they were published between 2015 and 2025. The Figure.1 depicts the inclusion criteria of the articles.

3.4 Exclusion Criteria

By contrast, studies have been excluded if they: (1) focused exclusively on green technology in non-ELT educational contexts without reference to language learning outcomes; (2) were limited to opinion pieces, editorials, or non-peer-reviewed grey literature; (3) were not accessible in full-text form; or (4) addressed sustainability in education without any specific engagement with technology or language pedagogy. These criteria were operationalised consistently across all phases of the screening process to ensure methodological integrity and inter-reviewer reliability (Kitchenham & Charters, 2007). The Figure.2 is the visual

depiction of exclusion criteria of the articles studied for this research.

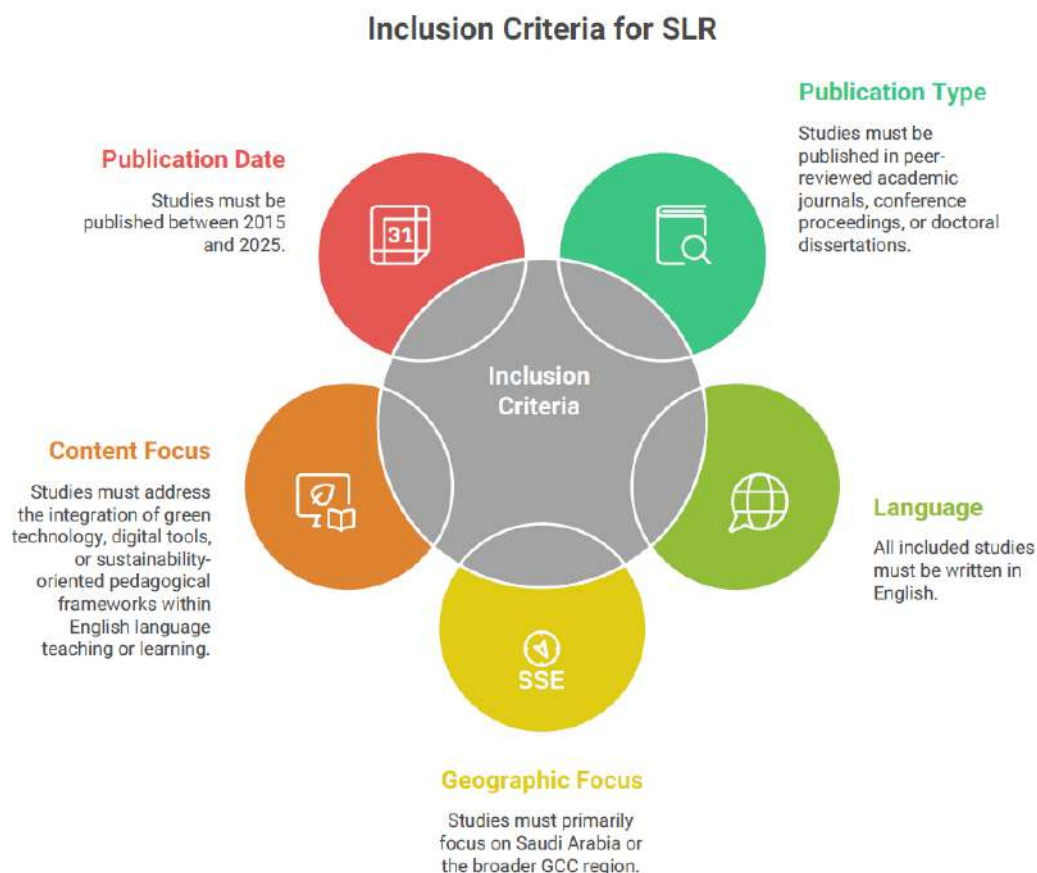


Fig.1: Inclusion criteria of the articles considered

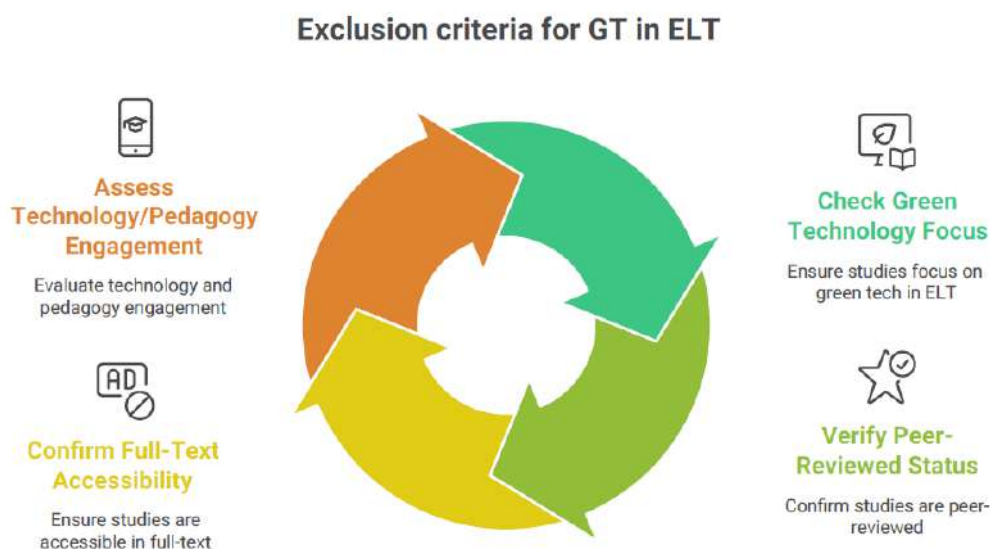


Fig.2: Exclusion criteria of the studied articles for the study

3.5 Screening and Selection Process

The screening and selection of studies was conducted in two sequential phases, following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021). In the first phase, titles and abstracts of all records retrieved through the database search were independently screened by two co-reviewers against the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Records that were clearly irrelevant—for instance, those addressing green technology in industrial engineering or sustainability in non-educational contexts—were excluded at this stage. Any record for which relevance was uncertain because of title and abstract alone was retained for full-text review.

In the second phase, full-text versions of the retained records were retrieved and subjected to a more thorough assessment against the complete set of criteria. Finally, 14 papers (as in Diagram 3) were valid for analysis. Disagreements between reviewers regarding inclusion or exclusion decisions were resolved through structured discussion and, where necessary, consultation with a third independent reviewer was done. The complete screening and selection process is documented in a PRISMA 2020 flow diagram (Page et al., 2021), which details the number of records identified, screened, assessed for eligibility, and ultimately included in the review. The final corpus comprised 14 studies meeting all inclusion criteria.

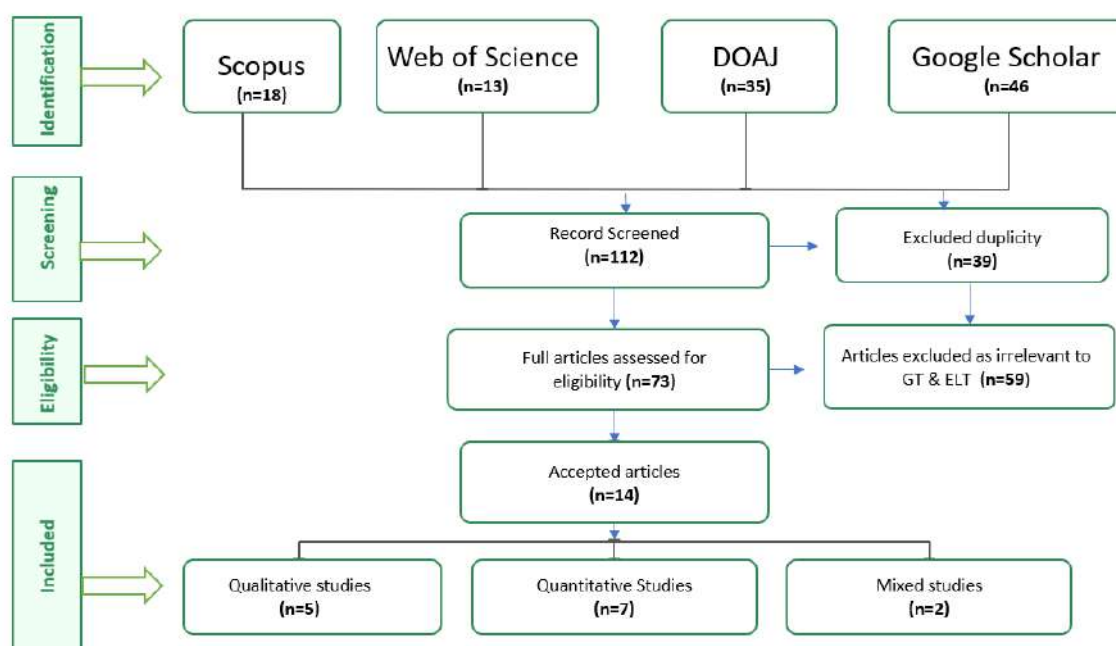


Fig.3: PRISMA flow diagram of the studied articles

3.6 Data Extraction and Synthesis

A standardised data extraction template was developed collaboratively by the investigator and applied consistently across all included studies. For each study, the following information was extracted: author(s) and year of publication; research context (country, educational level, and institutional setting); type of green technology or digital tool examined; key findings pertaining to linguistic outcomes; key findings pertaining to sustainability or ecological literacy outcomes; theoretical or conceptual frameworks employed; and methodological limitations acknowledged by the original authors. This systematic extraction process ensures comparability across studies and facilitates the identification of convergent patterns in the evidence base (Gough et al., 2017).

Thematic synthesis involves three iterative stages: the initial coding of findings from each study using inductive free codes; the organisation of these free codes into descriptive themes accurately reflecting the content of the primary studies; and the development of analytical themes that generate higher-order interpretations capable of answering the review's research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process has yielded four primary themes—conceptual frameworks, practical applications, challenges and barriers, and implications for the Saudi Arabian context—which form the organisational basis for the findings presented in Section 4.

IV. FINDINGS

The systematic review process yielded a final corpus of 14 studies that have met all inclusion criteria and been drawn

from the five databases searched. The included studies spanned a range of methodological traditions, which encompass qualitative case studies, quantitative designs, mixed-methods approaches, and conceptual framework analyses; they reflect the diverse scholarly approaches that have been brought to bear on the phenomenon of GT integration in ELT. All four themes identified through thematic synthesis are discussed in turn below.

4.1 Conceptual Frameworks of GT in ELT

The review identified a coherent and growing body of conceptual frameworks specifically developed to structure the integration of green technology into English language pedagogy. Most prominently, the green language teaching approach (GLTA), which is articulated by Nur et al. (2022); it has emerged as a foundational framework, emphasising the embedding of sustainability themes within language curricula to enable learners to develop both English language proficiency and ecological literacy in a mutually reinforcing manner. GLTA draws explicitly on content-based instruction principles to ensure that environmental topics—such as renewable energy, climate change, and waste management—function as authentic and meaningful contexts for language use rather than as peripheral additions to an otherwise unchanged syllabus (Chapelle, 2003; Nur et al., 2022).

Complementing GLTA, the context-aware ubiquitous language learning (CAULL) framework, as described by Wang et al. (2019), leverages mobile technologies, GPS-enabled sensing systems, and augmented reality interfaces to create dynamically contextualised learning environments. Studies employing CAULL reported measurable improvements in both vocabulary acquisition and environmental knowledge, suggesting that the integration of ecological content does not compromise linguistic outcomes but may, in fact, enhance them through increased motivation and contextual relevance (Pegrum, 2014; Wang et al., 2019). Together, these frameworks signal a substantive shift in ELT philosophy—one that positions the English language classroom as a site of critical environmental awareness, engagement, and communicative skill development.

4.2 Practical Applications of GT in ELT

The review documented a diverse array of practical applications of GT in ELT settings, spanning digital resource adoption, project-based learning, and immersive technology integration. The transition from printed to digital learning materials—including e-textbooks, cloud-based assignments, and online assessment platforms—was consistently reported as the most widely implemented GT application in ELT. In this regard, Suryawanshi and Narkhede (2015) document significant reductions in paper

consumption and associated institutional costs following digital transitions. Virtual classrooms and synchronous online learning platforms similarly reduced the demand for physical infrastructure whilst maintaining, and in some cases enhancing, the quality of language instruction (Alhumaid et al., 2020).

Furthermore, project-based language learning with technology (PBLLT) proved particularly effective in promoting substantive engagement with environmental issues alongside genuine communicative development (Widodo, 2015). Students participating in digitally mediated community projects, such as producing English-language environmental awareness videos, conducting surveys on local water usage, or designing multilingual recycling campaigns, demonstrated enhanced critical thinking, collaborative communication skills, and ecological awareness. The use of green screens and virtual reality environments further enriched ELT by enabling teachers to simulate ecologically significant scenarios—such as coral reef degradation or desertification processes—making abstract environmental concepts viscerally accessible and linguistically generative. Social media platforms were additionally identified as emergent GT-aligned learning environments through which learners practise English whilst disseminating eco-conscious content to real audience members (Hussain, 2023).

4.3 Challenges in Adopting GT in ELT

Despite the compelling evidence for GT's pedagogical and environmental benefits, this SLR reveals persistent and significant barriers to its broad-scale adoption in ELT. Financial constraints emerged as the most consistently cited obstacle across the included studies, with the initial capital investment required for digital infrastructure, device procurement, and platform licensing; these altogether represent a prohibitive barrier for many institutions, particularly those operating in resource-constrained settings (Alhumaid et al., 2020).

Limited teacher preparedness was also prominently featured, with multiple studies reporting that educators lacked not only the technical skills to operate GT tools effectively but also the pedagogical knowledge to integrate them in ways genuinely aligned with sustainability objectives rather than merely superficially digital (Alkahtani, 2017). Institutional resistance to pedagogical change emerged as a third critical barrier, which reflects deep-seated norms that privileges examination-oriented, teacher-centred instruction over experiential, project-based, and technologically mediated approaches (Alkahtani, 2017). The scarcity of localised, culturally relevant GT teaching materials designed specifically for the Saudi Arabian ELT context was also identified as a significant

practical impediment, suggesting that even where institutional willingness and financial resources exist, the available toolkit may be insufficiently adapted to local needs.

4.4 Implications for Saudi Arabia

The findings carry substantial and specific implications for GT integration in Saudi Arabia's ELT sector. Vision 2030 provides an unusually supportive policy environment for GT adoption, given its explicit commitments to educational reform, digital transformation, and environmental sustainability (Saudi Vision 2030, 2016). This SLR's findings suggest that this enabling environment, combined with the country's significant investment in educational technology infrastructure, positions Saudi Arabia well to pioneer contextually adapted GT integration in ELT at a national scale. However, the persistent challenges identified in the literature indicate that policy commitment and financial investment alone are insufficient. Sustained, context-specific professional development programmes, the co-development of Saudi-specific GT teaching resources, and the creation of institutional incentive structures that reward innovative and sustainable pedagogy are all essential components of an effective national GT-in-ELT strategy (Hamdan & Romli, 2021; Alkahtani, 2017).

V. DISCUSSION

The integration of GT in English language pedagogy represents far more than a technological upgrade to existing instructional practice; it constitutes a substantive reorientation of the pedagogical purpose of language education towards the broader imperatives of education for sustainable development (UNESCO, 2017). The following discussion synthesises the review's findings in relation to the three guiding research questions, situates them within the wider scholarly literature, and addresses the practical, theoretical, and policy implications for Saudi Arabia and for the global ELT community.

5.1 Aligning ELT with Sustainability Goals

The first research question enquired into the conceptual frameworks available to guide GT integration in ELT. The review's findings confirm that frameworks such as GLTA and CAULL demonstrate that language classrooms can serve as sites of genuine ecological inquiry when teachers are equipped with both the conceptual tools and the technological resources to facilitate this integration (Nur et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2019). This finding resonates strongly with Hockly's (2019) argument that sustainable development is not merely a thematic addendum to ELT but a transformative philosophical orientation that should inform curriculum design, materials development, and

assessment practice. The evidence further confirms Warschauer's (2011) contention that the most powerful technology-enriched language education is that which is purposefully anchored in socially meaningful real-world contexts.

In the Saudi Arabian context, this alignment assumes urgency given the country's well-documented environmental pressures and its policy-level commitment to sustainability under Vision 2030 (Alkahtani, 2017; Saudi Vision 2030, 2016). ELT, as one of the most extensively resourced and institutionally embedded disciplines in Saudi foreign language education, is strategically poised to serve as a vehicle for cultivating an environmentally aware generation of citizens capable of engaging with ecological challenges in a globally connected language (Alalwan et al., 2019).

5.2 Practical Applications and Innovations

The second research question addressed the practical applications and innovations documented in the literature. This SLR's findings reveal a diverse and increasingly sophisticated repertoire of GT-enhanced pedagogical practice. Particularly noteworthy is the evidence base for project-based approaches, which consistently demonstrate multi-dimensional learning outcomes extending beyond linguistic competence to encompass critical thinking, collaborative problem-solving, and genuine environmental agency (Widodo, 2015; Hussain, 2023). This multi-dimensional outcome profile addresses a long-standing critique of ELT that it prioritises narrow linguistic metrics at the expense of holistic educational development (Chapelle, 2003).

The emergence of AI-driven personalised learning platforms represents perhaps the most transformative frontier in GT-enhanced ELT, offering the prospect of highly differentiated instruction that adapts in real time to individual learner profiles whilst simultaneously reducing the ecological cost of print-based assessment (Nur et al., 2022). Saudi Arabia's advanced digital infrastructure and its demonstrated willingness to invest in cutting-edge educational technology suggest that the country is well-placed to be an early and innovative pioneer of these emerging applications. The findings indicate, however, that the effective realisation of these applications' potential is contingent upon robust teacher preparation programmes that build both technical competence and pedagogical confidence (Hamdan & Romli, 2021).

5.3 Challenges and Barriers

The third research question investigated into the challenges and barriers that persist in GT integration. The challenges identified are financial constraints, limited teacher preparation, institutional resistance, and a scarcity of

localised materials. These are not unique to Saudi Arabia but represent a global pattern in the adoption of pedagogical innovation. What is distinctive about the Saudi context, however, is the intersection of significant financial resources and leadership will, on one hand, with deeply entrenched pedagogical traditions and a historically examination-focused educational culture, on the other (Alalwan et al., 2019).

The evidence strongly suggests that financial investment in hardware and platforms, whilst necessary, is insufficient in isolation. Studies consistently identify teacher agency, preparedness, and pedagogical understanding as the determining factors in whether GT integration enhances or merely digitises existing practice (Alhumaid et al., 2020).

5.4 Future Directions

The review's findings point to several priority areas for future research and practice. Longitudinal studies examining the long-term impacts of GT-enhanced ELT on both language learning outcomes, environmental attitudes, and behaviours are conspicuously absent from the existing literature and represent an important research gap. In addition, the development and empirical evaluation of locally adapted GT frameworks and materials—especially designed for the linguistic, cultural, and environmental realities of the Saudi Arabian context—is identified as a critical research and development priority (Hamdan & Romli, 2021).

Emerging technologies, including the Internet of Things (IoT), advanced AI tutoring systems, and mixed reality environments offer particularly rich possibilities for future GT-enhanced ELT that have yet to be systematically explored in the literature. Future research might also productively examine the role of student voice and agency in GT-enhanced ELT to explore how learners themselves conceptualise the relationship between their English language education and their responsibilities as environmental citizens. Such research would not only enrich the theoretical foundations of GT-enhanced ELT but also ensure that the field's future development is informed by the perspectives and experiences of the learners it ultimately serves (Hockly, 2019).

VI. CONCLUSION

This SLR has presented a comprehensive synthesis of the existing evidence on the integration of green technology in English language teaching in Saudi Arabia; it has been organised around three major themes: conceptual frameworks, practical applications, challenges and barriers alongside implications for the Saudi ELT context. The findings affirm that GT integration in ELT is not merely a

pedagogical trend but a principled and increasingly well-evidenced response to the dual imperatives of language education efficacy and environmental sustainability. Frameworks such as the green language teaching approach and context-aware ubiquitous language learning provide coherent and operationalisable blueprints for embedding ecological literacy within English language education, whilst practical applications ranging from digital resource adoption to project-based learning and immersive simulation offer a growing and flexible repertoire of GT-enhanced instructional strategies.

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 framework provides an encouraging policy environment of unusual strength and ambition for GT integration in ELT. The Kingdom's substantial investments in educational technology, its explicit sustainability commitments, and its environmental challenges collectively create a context in which GT-enhanced ELT is not simply desirable but arguably imperative. However, this SLR's findings make clear that realising the full transformative potential of GT in Saudi ELT will require a coordinated, multi-stakeholder effort that addresses the persistent barriers of insufficient teacher preparation, scarce localised materials, and institutional resistance to change.

The field seems at a promising time ahead. The convergence of rapidly advancing digital technologies, growing institutional commitment to sustainability, and maturing body of scholarly evidence creates conditions in which GT-enhanced ELT can become not an exception but a norm, which can serve as a standard component of high-quality, socially responsible English language pedagogy. This SLR sheds light on that work while its findings will inform the continued development of evidence-based, contextually adapted, and pedagogically rigorous GT-enhanced ELT in Saudi Arabia and in comparable educational contexts across the globe.

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A Review of Studies on the Development of Porcelain Cognition in English-Speaking Countries from the Perspective of Cultural Representation Theory

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Abstract— In recent years, research on the cross-cultural dissemination of Chinese porcelain has grown significantly both in China and abroad, producing an increasing number of scholarly contributions. Cultural Representation Theory, as an important analytical perspective, is frequently employed to reveal the processes of identity construction and ideological formation underlying material culture. By reviewing studies on the development of porcelain cognition in English-speaking countries, scholars can better understand how porcelain has continuously transformed its meanings through historical trade circulation, social representation, museum exhibitions, and media discourse. Such research also helps illuminate the mechanisms of cultural interaction and cognition embedded in these processes. Based on academic studies published between 2020 and 2025, this review finds that research in English-speaking countries has gradually shifted from traditional art-historical approaches toward issues of identity, power, and cultural imagination, emphasizing the symbolic role of porcelain in shaping the image of the “Orient.” In contrast, Chinese scholarship tends to focus on cross-cultural communication and the construction of national image, exploring strategies for international communication and the cultural value of porcelain. Overall, research in English-speaking countries demonstrates stronger theoretical and critical orientations, while Chinese scholarship shows a more practice-oriented focus. These two perspectives are therefore complementary in terms of both analytical frameworks and research methods. This study not only expands the application of cultural representation theory in the field of material culture studies but also provides practical insights for the international communication of Chinese cultural products and for China’s broader cultural outreach strategy.



Keywords— porcelain, cultural representation, perception in English-speaking countries, cross-cultural communication

I. INTRODUCTION

The core ideas of cultural representation theory originate from linguistics and semiotics in the mid-to-late twentieth century. Its theoretical foundation is rooted in

the British cultural studies tradition, which explores the relationship between culture and power. The theory primarily focuses on language, symbols, and media texts as objects of analysis, emphasizing that meaning is not

inherently given but is continuously constructed and reproduced through representation systems within specific social contexts. In other words, culture can be understood as a “constructed reality,” in which every symbol carries particular social values and ideological implications.

In his influential works on cultural studies, Stuart Hall argues that representation is both the process through which meaning is produced and an expression of social power relations (Hall, 1997). This theoretical perspective encourages scholars to move beyond the purely material aspects of cultural phenomena and instead examine how meanings are assigned in different contexts and how these meanings influence people’s cognition and the construction of social identity.

According to Zhou Xian (2015), research on cultural representation has remained active in both domestic and international academia, and its theoretical frameworks and methodologies have been widely used to explain the production and dissemination of cultural meanings. As one of the most representative cultural symbols of Chinese civilization, porcelain has entered the Western world through trade, diplomacy, and cultural exchanges since the sixteenth century and has gradually become an important carrier of cross-cultural imagination and cognition.

In English-speaking countries, porcelain is not only regarded as an artistic object and collectible item but also serves as an important medium for constructing the imagination of the “Orient” and shaping the image of China. The perception of porcelain in these societies has not developed in a linear manner; rather, it has evolved alongside colonial expansion, transnational trade, museum collection practices, and contemporary multicultural contexts (Finlay, 2010). The discursive expressions, aesthetic values, and cultural evaluations associated with porcelain reflect the diverse attitudes of English-speaking societies toward China and its civilization. From this perspective, examining the development of porcelain cognition in English-speaking countries through the lens of cultural representation theory helps reveal the ways in which identities are constructed in cross-cultural interactions and provides a distinctive perspective for understanding cultural exchanges between China and the West.

This study holds both theoretical and practical significance. On the theoretical level, cultural representation theory provides a new analytical perspective for examining the production of meaning in material culture. Through this lens, porcelain is no longer viewed merely as a craft product or a commodity in international trade but as an important symbol in the construction of identity and ideology within cross-cultural communication. By reviewing the evolution of porcelain representations in English-language contexts, this study not only expands the application of cultural representation theory within material culture studies but also deepens our understanding of cultural interactions between China and the West.

On the practical level, as China continues to promote its cultural “going global” strategy, porcelain—due to its strong cultural recognizability—has become an important medium for presenting national image and promoting mutual learning among civilizations. This research may provide discursive insights for the international communication of Chinese cultural products and offer references for relevant institutions and communication actors seeking to construct a more inclusive and culturally meaningful “Chinese narrative” within the global context.

Through a review of existing studies, the author finds that research specifically examining the development of porcelain cognition in English-speaking countries from the perspective of cultural representation remains relatively limited. Most existing literature focuses on historical archaeology, art history, or Sino-Western trade history, while systematic discussions of porcelain as a cultural symbol within dynamic representation processes are still lacking. Therefore, conducting a literature review in this field is of considerable significance.

This report is organized into three main parts. First, it briefly introduces the historical development of cultural representation theory. Second, it outlines the theoretical framework of cultural representation theory and summarizes the common research topics or objects found in the relevant literature. Finally, it reviews studies applying cultural representation theory to the development of porcelain cognition.

To systematically examine the relevant literature, this study adopts a combination of thematic search, keyword search, and manual screening. Domestic studies were

mainly collected from the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) database, using keywords such as “cultural representation,” “porcelain,” “cross-cultural communication,” and “cultural image.” Foreign literature was retrieved from databases such as ScienceDirect, Taylor & Francis, and JSTOR using keywords including “Cultural Representation of Porcelain,” “Chinese Porcelain Discourse,” “Porcelain in Western Perception,” and “Representation in Media.” Priority was given to studies closely related to the cultural representation and communicative perception of porcelain in English-language contexts.

The time span of this review covers the period from 2020 to 2025. During these years, the global landscape of international communication and cultural exchange has undergone significant changes. On the one hand, under the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitical tensions, Western media have adopted increasingly complex discursive strategies in cultural reporting and image construction. For example, during and after the pandemic, media outlets such as The New York Times and the BBC frequently placed traditional Chinese symbols—including porcelain, silk, and tea—within narratives of the “Orient” when reporting on Chinese culture and society, thereby constructing cultural imaginations of Chinese civilization (Li & Tang, 2025). Meanwhile, Chinese media such as China Daily and the Global Times have promoted themes such as “Guochao” (national cultural trend) and “culture going global” to strengthen narratives of cultural confidence and civilizational dialogue.

On the other hand, the application of cultural representation theory in digital communication and discourse studies has continued to deepen. Scholars have increasingly adopted corpus analysis and multimodal analysis to examine the cross-cultural re-representation of Chinese porcelain on social media platforms such as YouTube and TikTok (Liu & Qiu, 2024). These studies demonstrate emerging research trends that cross linguistic and media boundaries.

At the same time, with the ongoing promotion of the Belt and Road Initiative and China’s cultural outreach strategy, a series of international exhibitions and collaborative projects—such as the British Museum’s

exhibitions on Chinese ceramics and the National Museum of China’s Silk Road civilization exhibitions—have brought renewed global attention to porcelain and generated new interpretations of its cultural significance. Therefore, selecting the period from 2020 to 2025 allows this study to capture the latest developments in cultural representation research and reveal new trends in the contemporary perception of porcelain in English-language contexts.

II. HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURAL REPRESENTATION THEORY

Scholars both in China and abroad have examined cultural representation theory from multiple perspectives. These studies have contributed to the development of the theory and facilitated its application across different academic fields.

2.1 Major Development of Cultural Representation Theory in Western Scholarship

The intellectual origins of cultural representation theory span from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century, drawing primarily from semiotics and structuralist thought. As early as the nineteenth century, Charles Sanders Peirce proposed a triadic model of the sign, which expanded scholarly understanding of the mechanisms through which meaning is generated (Peirce, 1867). In the early twentieth century, Ferdinand de Saussure introduced the concept that language is a system of signs, emphasizing that the relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary and socially constructed (Saussure, 1916). This insight laid an important semiotic foundation for later studies of cultural representation.

By the mid-twentieth century, structuralist scholars such as Claude Lévi-Strauss further developed these ideas through the analysis of myth and cultural patterns, revealing the deep structures underlying cultural meaning (Lévi-Strauss, 1963). These early theoretical contributions provided essential methodological resources for subsequent research on cultural representation.

In the 1970s, cultural studies emerged as a distinct academic field under the influence of the Birmingham School in the United Kingdom. Stuart Hall became one of the most influential figures in the development of cultural

representation theory. Hall argued that representation is not merely a reflection of objective reality but rather a process through which societies construct meaning through language, media, and symbolic systems (Hall, 1973). In his view, meaning is not fixed but continuously produced and reconstructed within social interactions and power relations.

Hall's encoding/decoding model further demonstrates that meaning in communication is not transmitted in a one-directional manner. Instead, audiences interpret messages differently according to their cultural background and social position. This theoretical development marked a shift in representation studies from structuralist semiotics toward a stronger focus on social practice and ideology.

During the 1980s and 1990s, cultural representation theory became closely intertwined with post-structuralism, postcolonial theory, and feminist scholarship, which further enriched its theoretical depth and interdisciplinary influence. Michel Foucault's discourse theory highlighted the relationship between knowledge and power, suggesting that representation is fundamentally a form of power practice (Foucault, 1972). Edward Said's seminal work *Orientalism* analyzed Western representations of the East and revealed the colonial discourse underlying such representations (Said, 1978).

Scholars such as Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha expanded representation studies within postcolonial contexts by emphasizing the voices and identities of marginalized groups (Spivak, 1988; Bhabha, 1994). These theoretical developments not only enriched the conceptual framework of cultural representation but also positioned it as an important tool for critiquing cultural hegemony and social inequality.

Entering the twenty-first century, the application of cultural representation theory has become increasingly interdisciplinary. Hall's theoretical framework outlined in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* remains a foundational reference, particularly its constructivist view that meaning is produced through representational systems (Hall, 1997).

With the intensification of globalization, scholars have begun to pay closer attention to representation in transnational cultural flows. Arjun Appadurai's theory of

global cultural flows has been widely adopted to explain the dynamic construction of cultural meanings in cross-border cultural exchange (Appadurai, 1996). At the same time, new methodological approaches have expanded the scope of representation studies.

For example, Kress and van Leeuwen's multimodal discourse analysis framework provides effective tools for examining visual culture, digital communication, and cross-cultural interaction (Kress & Leeuwen, 2001). Scholars such as Jewitt (2016) have further demonstrated how images, language, and other semiotic resources interact in the production of meaning.

Overall, research in the twenty-first century builds upon Hall's theoretical foundation while incorporating globalization theory and multimodal analysis. As a result, cultural representation theory has developed into a more open, diverse, and interdisciplinary field in contemporary academic research.

In addition, Western scholarship has increasingly emphasized the relationship between cultural representation and identity construction. Hall introduced the concept of the "cultural representation of identity," arguing that identity is not fixed but constantly reconstructed through representational practices. Media play a crucial role in this process, functioning both as channels of cultural communication and as spaces where social identities are constructed (Hall, 1996).

Recent studies have also connected cultural representation with issues of race, gender, and class. For instance, bell hooks examined the representation of African Americans within mainstream cultural discourse (Hooks, 2000), while Rosalind Gill explored the representation of women in advertising and media culture (Gill, 2007). These studies have further contributed to the diversification of cultural representation research.

In summary, the development of cultural representation theory in Western academia can be roughly divided into three stages. The first stage, emerging in the mid-twentieth century, focused on semiotics and structuralism, laying the theoretical foundation for the study of symbols and meaning. The second stage, from the 1970s to the 1990s, represented a period of critical expansion characterized by the influence of the Birmingham School, discourse theory, and postcolonial

studies. The third stage, beginning in the twenty-first century, is marked by interdisciplinary applications that integrate representation theory with globalization studies, multimodal communication, and identity research.

This intellectual trajectory provides important theoretical support for analyzing specific cultural phenomena, such as the perception and representation of Chinese porcelain in cross-cultural contexts.

2.2 Major Development of Cultural Representation Theory in Chinese Scholarship

Compared with Western academia, research on cultural representation theory in China began relatively later. However, over the past two decades it has developed rapidly, gradually forming a clear trajectory from theoretical introduction to localized application and further interdisciplinary expansion. In general, Chinese scholars have drawn upon Western theoretical achievements while exploring the applicability of cultural representation in Chinese contexts, particularly in fields such as media communication, translation studies, artistic representation, cultural heritage, and national image construction. The development of this research can roughly be divided into three stages: theoretical introduction, applied expansion, and localized innovation.

During the initial stage, from the late 1990s to the early 2010s, studies mainly focused on introducing and interpreting the theoretical foundations of cultural representation. Chen Guoming (1998) was among the first scholars to introduce Stuart Hall's cultural representation theory into the field of intercultural communication studies in China. He emphasized the role of cultural symbols in the production of meaning and argued that cultural products are not neutral material objects but embodiments of social values and ideological meanings. Subsequently, Fan Hong (2013) further elaborated on the central proposition that representation is a process of producing and reproducing meaning, providing an important theoretical basis for the development of cultural representation studies in China. Research in this stage primarily concentrated on translating and interpreting theoretical concepts, while empirical applications remained relatively limited.

From the mid-2010s to around 2020, cultural representation theory gradually moved beyond theoretical

interpretation toward practical application. Scholars began to combine the theory with fields such as media studies, cultural communication, and artistic representation, forming a multidimensional research framework. As early as the beginning of the twenty-first century, Xin Bin (2000) integrated cultural representation with critical discourse analysis, examining the relationship between language, symbols, and power in news discourse. Later studies further expanded the scope of application. For example, Wang Bingxue (2015) argued that transnational film texts often reproduce cultural identities through strategies of differentiation, thereby reshaping representations of the "Other." Xiao Jun (2017) pointed out that multimodal analysis can reveal how meanings are generated and how cultural differences are represented in new media discourse, which further expanded the methodological space for representation studies.

Similarly, Chen Shilun and Wang Yiwei (2019) applied cultural representation theory to the analysis of media reports on the Belt and Road Initiative, revealing the narrative construction of cultural symbols in international communication. Zou Xiaosong (2021), from the perspective of ceramic art studies, proposed that the forms and decorative patterns of porcelain are not merely aesthetic expressions but symbolic practices shaped by specific social contexts. These studies not only broadened the application scenarios of cultural representation theory but also promoted its interdisciplinary integration.

Since 2020, research on cultural representation in China has entered a stage characterized by deeper exploration and methodological innovation. One notable feature of recent studies is the increasing use of digital methods and cross-media analysis. Liu Shiping and Wang Aihong (2021), for example, examined porcelain used in Chinese state banquets and interpreted its symbolic meaning within diplomatic contexts. Yuan Hong and Xu Dahai (2023) proposed the concept of a "ceramic cultural sphere," expanding the spatial dimension of cultural representation research by examining ceramics within the broader context of regional cultural exchange and civilizational interaction.

In addition, Li Mengjie, Feng Dezheng, and Deng Yi (2024) emphasized the importance of multimodal discourse in cross-cultural communication and social

cognition, highlighting how visual and linguistic resources jointly shape cultural meaning. Xing Liju and Yan Chuanruolan (2022), as well as Jiang Lifu and Zhang Longxi (2025), focused on the role of cultural representation in the construction of national image within international communication. Their studies explored how cultural meanings are continuously reconstructed and disseminated across different cultural contexts. Su Chang (2024) examined the international communication of intangible cultural heritage, analyzing how cultural symbols are interpreted differently by diverse audience groups.

Furthermore, recent research has increasingly incorporated corpus-based methods into cultural representation studies. Cheng Fangmin and Xu Fuyijia (2024), for instance, used the NOW corpus to analyze the collocations and semantic tendencies of the terms “Chinese porcelain” and “Chinese ceramic” in international media discourse. Their findings revealed subtle variations in how Chinese cultural symbols are represented in foreign media narratives.

Overall, research on cultural representation theory in China has gradually moved beyond simple theoretical introduction and has developed toward interdisciplinary integration, methodological diversification, and localized application. From the early stage of translating and interpreting Western theories, to the subsequent expansion into fields such as media studies, translation studies, and film studies, and finally to the more recent incorporation of research on art, cultural heritage, and national image construction, Chinese scholarship has established a relatively comprehensive development trajectory in the study of cultural representation.

Nevertheless, certain limitations remain when compared with Western research. First, critical analysis of power relations and ideological mechanisms is still relatively insufficient. Many studies tend to emphasize descriptive or interpretive approaches rather than critical examination of cultural hegemony. Second, cross-cultural comparative studies remain limited, as many investigations still focus primarily on the Chinese domestic context without fully incorporating the perspectives of foreign audiences or examining the dynamics of intercultural interaction. Third, the relative lack of audience-centered

research means that the processes of reception and interpretation in cultural representation have not yet been comprehensively explored.

These limitations also point toward possible directions for future research. While maintaining localized perspectives, scholars should further emphasize cross-cultural dialogue and integrate multiple methodological approaches. By doing so, research on cultural representation in China can continue to develop toward a more sophisticated and globally engaged academic framework.

III. STUDIES ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF PORCELAIN PERCEPTION BASED ON CULTURAL REPRESENTATION THEORY

Through a systematic review of relevant literature, the present study categorizes research on the development of porcelain perception in English-speaking countries according to different research objects and analytical perspectives. These include the historical circulation of porcelain through early foreign trade, the construction of national image and cultural representation, museum exhibitions and institutional discourse practices, as well as the cultural significance of markets and collections. By examining how cultural representation theory has been applied within these areas, scholars have revealed how porcelain carries different identities across historical and social contexts and how these identities are shaped by broader ideological forces.

3.1 Theoretical Foundations

A review of existing studies shows that several theoretical frameworks are commonly used when analyzing the development of porcelain perception in English-speaking countries. These frameworks include cultural representation theory, Orientalism, the cultural biography of objects, and museum discourse theory, among which cultural representation theory occupies the central position.

As discussed earlier, Stuart Hall’s theory of cultural representation conceptualizes representation as a process of meaning production in which language, images, and institutional practices play crucial roles (Hall, 1997). This perspective helps explain how porcelain has been continuously encoded in English-speaking societies as a

symbol of the “Orient,” elegance, refinement, or civilizational achievement.

Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism further reveals the power logic and processes of othering that underlie Western constructions of the “Orient” (Said, 1978). This theoretical framework suggests that Western descriptions and displays of Chinese porcelain often contain elements of exoticization and imagination. Applying this perspective enables scholars to uncover the ideological mechanisms embedded within the representation of porcelain.

At the same time, the concept of the “cultural biography of objects,” proposed by Igor Kopytoff and further developed by Chris Gosden and Yvonne Marshall, emphasizes that objects undergo multiple stages of social life during their circulation. The meanings attached to objects change as they move through different social contexts. This theoretical framework therefore provides an effective tool for analyzing how porcelain in English-speaking countries has shifted from a trade commodity to a collectible artifact and eventually to

museum heritage (Kopytoff, 1986; Gosden & Marshall, 1999).

In addition, Eilean Hooper-Greenhill’s research on museum discourse highlights that exhibition narratives, labeling practices, and spatial arrangements are not merely methods of presenting knowledge but also institutional processes that shape public understanding. Museums in Western countries construct the cultural meanings of porcelain through such practices, thereby influencing how audiences interpret these objects (Greenhill, 1992; 1995).

Taken together, cultural representation theory provides the overarching analytical framework for this study. Theories of Orientalism, the cultural biography of objects, and museum discourse complement this framework by examining representation from the perspectives of power relations, the life histories of material objects, and institutional practices. Together they form the theoretical foundation for understanding the mechanisms through which porcelain perception has developed in English-speaking societies (Shown in Figure 1).

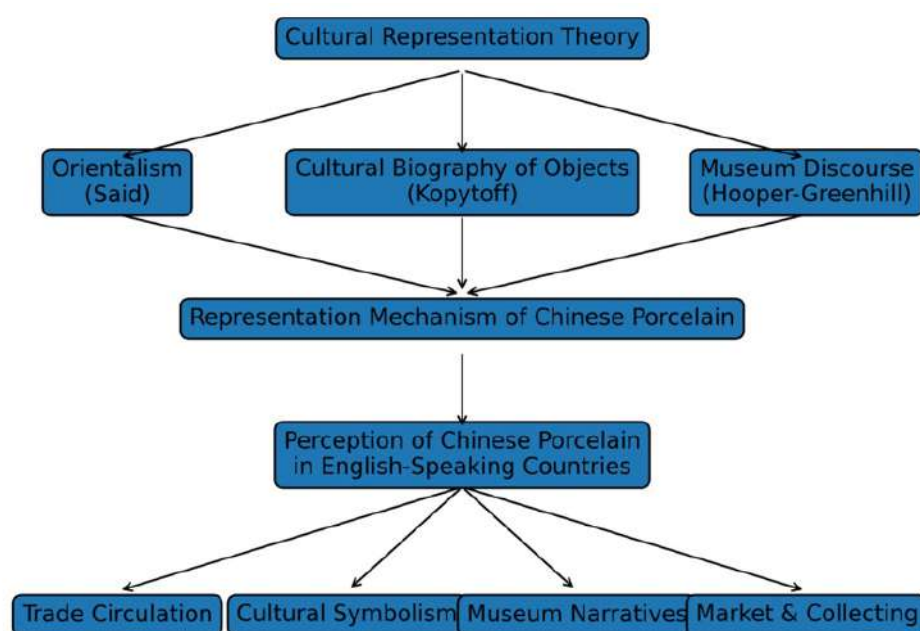


Fig.1. Conceptual Framework for the Study of Chinese Porcelain Perception in English-Speaking Countries.

3.2 Research Content

Different research approaches can lead to different interpretations of cultural representation. Based on the existing literature, current studies on the development of porcelain perception in English-speaking countries mainly

focus on four aspects: historical circulation and trade background, cultural representation and identity construction, museum exhibitions and institutional discourse, as well as market collecting and media communication.

First, in terms of historical trade circulation, scholars have examined how Chinese export porcelain entered European and American markets and how it was received within Western cultural contexts. Carswell (1985; 2000) and Frelinghuysen and Le Corbeiller (2003), among others, systematically documented the routes through which Chinese export porcelain spread to Europe and North America, as well as the stylistic transformations and processes of cultural reception associated with its circulation. These studies emphasize the role of porcelain as a transnational commodity that facilitated cross-cultural exchange.

Second, research on cultural representation and identity construction highlights that porcelain is not merely a material object of consumption but also an important symbol within cross-cultural imagination. Ni Aizhen (2022) argues that Chinese export porcelain and the decorative style of Chinoiserie in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries constituted a key channel through which Western societies perceived and represented China. Similarly, Hospodor's study reveals that Chinese porcelain in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America functioned not only as a luxury commodity but also as a symbol of wealth, social status, and cultural identity (Hospodor, 2023).

Third, museum exhibitions and institutional discourse have become a major focus of recent research. According to Hooper-Greenhill's museum discourse theory, exhibition narratives and curatorial texts do not merely present historical knowledge but actively shape public understanding through institutional practices (Greenhill, 1992; 1995). For example, the exhibition *China Trade Porcelain: Patterns of Exchange* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art examined the transformation of Chinese export porcelain within global trade networks (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2023). Likewise, the 2025 exhibition *China from China* at the Lyman Allyn Art Museum reinterpreted porcelain within the historical context of early American trade with China, thereby assigning new historical and social meanings to these artifacts.

Finally, research on markets and collections has explored the cultural meanings attached to porcelain objects in Western social contexts. Through archaeological research on Chinese export porcelain excavated in

Charleston, Leath (1999) demonstrated the widespread use of porcelain in colonial America and its adaptation to local aesthetic preferences. Similarly, a study by the Chipstone Foundation analyzed two Chinese porcelain punch bowls, illustrating how porcelain objects were embedded within social gatherings and historical memory, thereby contributing to identity construction in American society (Chipstone, 2023).

In addition, some scholars have begun to incorporate media and corpus-based approaches into porcelain studies. Cheng Fangmin and Xu Fuyijia (2024), for instance, used the NOW corpus to analyze the collocations and semantic tendencies of the terms "Chinese porcelain" and "Chinese ceramic" in international media discourse. Their findings indicate that international media often describe Chinese porcelain primarily in terms of commercial value and practical function. This semantic tendency reflects the dominant perception of porcelain in international society as a trade commodity and collectible item, while relatively less attention is paid to its historical and cultural significance.

3.3 Literature Review of Cultural Representation Studies on Porcelain Perception

3.3.1 Research in English-speaking Countries in the Past Five Years

Over the past five years, research and exhibitions concerning Chinese porcelain in English-speaking countries have gradually shifted from traditional approaches in art history and trade history toward broader themes such as identity construction, power relations, and cultural imagination. Porcelain is no longer regarded merely as an exquisite craft object or a commodity of international trade; instead, it is increasingly interpreted as a symbol that carries complex cultural meanings.

First, museum exhibitions have become important platforms for reshaping the cultural image of porcelain in recent years. In 2025, the Lyman Allyn Art Museum in Connecticut launched the exhibition *China from China: Porcelain and Stories of Early American Trade*, which presented porcelain, silk, tea, and other artifacts within the historical context of early trade relations between the United States and China. The exhibition highlighted the symbolic significance of porcelain during the colonial and early national periods in the United States: it represented

both the aspiration for an international lifestyle and the Western imagination of Chinese craftsmanship and culture (Lyman Allyn Art Museum, 2025).

In the same year, the Metropolitan Museum of Art organized the exhibition *Monstrous Beauty: A Feminist Revision of Chinoiserie*, which reexamined porcelain elements within the tradition of Chinoiserie. The exhibition explored how these elements were intertwined with discourses of Orientalism, gender, and power (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2025). Meanwhile, the exhibition *Stephanie Shih: Long Time No See* held by the Washington and Lee University Museums between 2024 and 2025 presented contemporary artworks that incorporated porcelain as a medium. Through the artist's creations, porcelain was linked with Chinese American identity, diasporic memory, and cultural absence, demonstrating how porcelain functions as a representation of cultural memory and ethnic identity in contemporary American society (Washington and Lee University Museums, 2024).

These exhibitions illustrate how museums in English-speaking countries not only document historical trade relations but also actively construct contemporary public understandings of Chinese porcelain through exhibition narratives.

Second, recent academic research has expanded the cultural representation dimension of porcelain studies. Hospodor (2023) points out that Chinese porcelain in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America was not only a material commodity but also a symbol of wealth and social status. Its use in banquets and domestic settings reflected American admiration for Chinese craftsmanship while simultaneously revealing the passive positioning of Eastern culture within Western discourse systems. Such analysis suggests that the cross-cultural circulation of porcelain itself constitutes a process of reproducing identity and power relations.

Similarly, a 2023 study by the Chipstone Foundation examined two Chinese porcelain punch bowls and revealed how porcelain objects functioned in American social gatherings and historical memory. The study demonstrated that porcelain played a significant role in shaping community identity and social relationships (Chipstone, 2023). These studies collectively indicate that

porcelain should be understood not merely as a product of material exchange but as a central symbol in processes of cultural representation and identity construction.

At the same time, new research has emerged on the cross-cultural dissemination of blue-and-white porcelain. Gu and colleagues (2025) argue that blue-and-white porcelain underwent a process of cultural re-creation during its circulation across cultures. Its decorative motifs and forms were imitated and adapted within Western design traditions, ultimately producing a hybrid aesthetic style. This process of “cultural translation” not only influenced European and American design history but also endowed porcelain with a dual identity in Western societies: it remained a symbol of Eastern tradition while simultaneously conforming to Western aesthetic preferences.

In the field of museum collection studies, Glaister (2025) analyzed the Ionides Collection at the Victoria and Albert Museum and found that some Chinese export porcelains were reclassified as “European-style” objects in Western museum systems. Through this process of renaming and reclassification, the cultural identity of these objects was transformed from “Chinese-made” artifacts into elements of Western collections. This research highlights the power of museums as institutions of knowledge production: museums not only preserve artifacts but also shape their cultural identities and meanings through discursive practices.

Furthermore, recent studies have also examined the relationship between the material form of porcelain and its social functions. Sargent (2025) notes that Chinese export porcelain collected in eighteenth-century America reflects aesthetic interactions between Chinese and Western design traditions in both form and decoration. At the same time, these objects were used in social gatherings as symbols of cultural exchange and social status, demonstrating the close connection between the material characteristics of porcelain and its social meanings. Similarly, Zhang Ran (2023) argues that the reclassification and reinterpretation of Chinese porcelain in different markets reveal the unequal distribution of cultural authority in cross-cultural interactions.

Overall, research and exhibitions on Chinese porcelain in English-speaking countries over the past five

years exhibit three major characteristics. First, historical and exhibition studies increasingly emphasize porcelain's role within discourses of identity and power. For example, exhibitions such as *China from China* and studies by Hospodor demonstrate that porcelain functions as a symbol of social status and national image. Second, cross-cultural reinterpretation has become a major focus, as scholars highlight how the meaning of porcelain is continuously redefined in intercultural exchanges. Third, research methodologies have become increasingly diverse, expanding from traditional art historical approaches to include discourse analysis, morphological analysis, and exhibition text criticism.

Nevertheless, several limitations remain. Empirical studies on how audiences interpret representations of porcelain are still relatively rare. In addition, the representation of porcelain on digital media and social platforms has not yet been systematically explored. Finally, comparative research examining how different social groups within English-speaking societies perceive porcelain remains limited. Future research could therefore focus on audience reception studies, digital humanities approaches, and cross-cultural comparative perspectives in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms through which porcelain is represented in contemporary cultural contexts.

3.3.2 Research in China in the Past Five Years

Over the past five years, research on porcelain in China has gradually expanded from traditional studies of craft history, archaeology, and art history to include perspectives of cultural representation and cross-cultural communication. Scholars increasingly emphasize that porcelain should be understood not merely as a physical artifact but as a symbol that carries national image, identity construction, and cultural discourse power. With the promotion of the Belt and Road Initiative and the broader strategy of "Chinese culture going global," porcelain has become an important subject of discussion in both academic and cultural sectors, and its modes of dissemination and perception have demonstrated new scholarly trends.

First, scholars have highlighted the symbolic role of porcelain in international cultural communication. Wang Tingxin (2022) argues that the inheritance and

dissemination of porcelain culture involve not only the continuation of craftsmanship but also the construction of cultural values and cultural confidence. He particularly notes that the historical appreciation of porcelain in Europe demonstrates how porcelain often functions as a symbol of civilization within cross-cultural contexts. This perspective provides an important theoretical lens for understanding how porcelain is endowed with cultural meanings that transcend its material form.

Second, studies focusing on communication practices have also become increasingly prominent. In 2023, Dehua white porcelain was presented in international touring exhibitions in countries such as the United States and Mexico. These exhibitions not only increased international media exposure but also contributed to a growth in overseas orders. From the perspective of cultural representation, such exhibitions can be understood as processes through which narratives and media discourse jointly shape Dehua porcelain as a symbol of Chinese cultural identity. This case demonstrates that Chinese scholars have begun to recognize how porcelain acquires representational functions within international exhibitions and communication contexts.

Third, researchers have increasingly examined the influence of new media platforms on the representation of porcelain culture. Zhao Na (2025) notes that platforms such as Douyin and Weibo provide new channels for promoting Jingdezhen porcelain culture. Through short videos, live-streaming commerce, and user-generated content, porcelain has been repackaged as part of the "Guochao" cultural trend and associated with new forms of cultural identity among younger audiences. This digital mode of communication not only reshapes domestic perceptions of porcelain but also offers new possibilities for its international dissemination.

In addition, museum exhibitions and academic conferences have become important venues for the development of porcelain research in China. In 2023, the International Alliance for Ceramic Studies was established in Jingdezhen, bringing together scholars from different countries to discuss topics such as the origins, dissemination, and globalization of porcelain culture. Participants emphasized porcelain's function as a "global

language,” highlighting its role in identity construction within cross-cultural communication.

Similarly, Jingdezhen Ceramic University launched a micro-program in “International Communication of Chinese Ceramic Culture” in 2024. Through educational initiatives and exhibitions such as Only Qingbai, the program sought to promote new narratives of porcelain culture in global contexts. These initiatives demonstrate that Chinese academia has begun to apply cultural representation theory to educational and exhibition practices, thereby strengthening the narrative potential of porcelain on the international stage.

From a methodological perspective, research on porcelain in China over the past five years has also become increasingly diversified. Although traditional literature-based analysis remains dominant, more scholars are integrating cultural representation theory with communication studies and adopting interdisciplinary approaches. For instance, Liu Yichan and Li Yongchang (2024) employed multimodal analysis to examine interactive museum experiences, showing how lighting, spatial design, and digital technology contribute to the construction of porcelain’s cultural image within exhibition spaces.

Overall, recent research on porcelain in China demonstrates several notable trends. First, research topics have expanded from craftsmanship and aesthetics to include identity construction, cultural image, and cultural representation, emphasizing the role of porcelain in national image building and cross-cultural communication. Second, research objects have become increasingly diverse, extending beyond traditional porcelain centers such as Jingdezhen and Dehua to include museum exhibitions, digital media platforms, and international touring exhibitions. Third, research methods have become more interdisciplinary, combining discourse analysis, multimodal studies, communication research, and cultural industry analysis.

However, several limitations remain. Although scholars frequently emphasize international communication, most studies still focus primarily on the domestic perspective and lack empirical investigations of overseas audiences. Furthermore, many studies rely on descriptive case analyses rather than developing systematic

theoretical innovations or methodological frameworks. Finally, research specifically focusing on English-speaking contexts remains relatively limited. Existing studies tend to emphasize Europe or countries along the Belt and Road Initiative, while the specific social contexts of porcelain dissemination and perception in English-speaking societies have not been sufficiently explored.

Future research should therefore strengthen cross-cultural comparative approaches, particularly through empirical studies in countries such as the United States and Australia, in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how porcelain is represented and perceived in international cultural communication.

IV. CONCLUSION

From the perspective of cultural representation theory, this study reviews research conducted over the past five years on the development of porcelain perception in English-speaking countries. Overall, porcelain is no longer understood merely as a craft product or a trade commodity; instead, it has increasingly been interpreted as an important symbol of identity construction and cultural representation.

Research in Western academia tends to focus on museum exhibitions and theoretical discussions, emphasizing the role of porcelain as an “Oriental symbol” within discourses of identity politics and power relations. Methodologically, these studies combine approaches from art history, discourse analysis, and multimodal research, demonstrating strong critical and interdisciplinary characteristics. In contrast, Chinese scholarship is more closely connected to national cultural strategies. From traditional porcelain production centers such as Jingdezhen and Dehua to new media communication and international touring exhibitions, Chinese studies generally highlight the role of porcelain in promoting cultural confidence and constructing national image. However, compared with Western scholarship, Chinese research often remains descriptive in nature, with relatively limited empirical investigation and theoretical innovation.

The two research traditions therefore display distinct orientations. Western studies emphasize critical perspectives, while Chinese research focuses more on

practical applications. At the same time, these differences reveal potential areas for complementarity. In particular, empirical studies on how contemporary societies in English-speaking countries perceive porcelain remain limited in both Chinese and Western scholarship.

Future research should therefore strengthen cross-cultural comparative analysis, expand the audience-oriented perspective, and pay greater attention to digital media environments. Such efforts would help reveal more comprehensively the mechanisms through which porcelain is represented and understood in contemporary global contexts.

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Convergence of Linguistics and Literary Studies: Analytical Perspectives on Prose and Poetry

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Abstract— This research paper explores the evolving intersection between linguistics and literature, focusing on the linguistic analysis of prose and poetry. Linguistics, as a modern science, advanced significantly with Leonard Bloomfield's *Language* (1933) and later with Noam Chomsky's *Syntactic Structures* (1957), which introduced transformational-generative (TG) grammar. These theoretical developments have profoundly influenced applied linguistics, particularly in areas like language teaching and literary analysis. The intersection of these disciplines has led to both collaboration and debate; while some critics argue that scientific approaches may diminish the aesthetic essence of literature, others like Roman Jakobson, Nils Erik Enkvist and Archibald A. Hill advocate for the enriching potential of linguistic tools in literary studies. The distinction between objective linguistic analysis and subjective literary criticism is acknowledged, yet this paper posits that both perspectives offer complementary insights. TG grammar, in particular, has been successfully employed in examining literary texts by scholars such as Samuel Levin, James P. Thorne, and Richard Ohmann. This study includes analyses of Robert Frost's poem *The Road Not Taken* and Virginia Woolf's novel *Mrs. Dalloway*, illustrating how linguistic frameworks reveal deeper layers of meaning. Ultimately, the paper argues that literature, being inherently linguistic, benefits significantly from systematic linguistic analysis. This interdisciplinary approach not only bridges theory and interpretation but also fosters new methodologies in literary research. Such integration enhances both pedagogical strategies and critical engagement with texts.



Keywords— Linguistics, Literary Criticism, Transformational-Generative Grammar, Structuralism, Language and Literature, Literary Analysis, Linguistic Science, Textual Interpretation

I. INTRODUCTION

Language is not only the medium through which literature is written but also the very essence of its artistry. The synergy between linguistics and literature offers profound insights into how meaning is constructed, communicated and interpreted through literary forms such as prose and poetry. Linguistics, the scientific study of language, allows us to dissect and appreciate the mechanics behind literary expression while literature enriches linguistic inquiry with its aesthetic, emotive and cultural dimensions. As Roman Jakobson famously declared, "Poetics deals with problems of verbal structure, just as linguistics deals with the structure of language" (Jakobson, 1960, p. 350). This intersection enables scholars to analyse literature not merely as art but

as structured language. Jonathan Culler emphasizes, "Linguistics provides the methodology to study how literature communicates meaning and evokes response" (Culler, 1975, p. 12). Through this lens, both prose and poetry can be examined as linguistic constructs that deploy sound, syntax and semantics for artistic effect. For instance, Halliday argues, "Literature creates meaning through choices in the linguistic system, choices that are stylistically and functionally motivated" (Halliday, 1971, p. 332). Linguistics equips readers with tools to uncover the deep structure of literary texts. Leech notes, "Poetry, unlike ordinary language, exploits the resources of language to the fullest extent, stretching the boundaries of grammar and vocabulary" (Leech, 1969, p.5). Similarly, Widdowson

states, "Stylistics enables the reader to connect linguistic forms with literary effects, allowing interpretation to move beyond intuition" (Widdowson, 1975, p. 3). This approach is not confined to poetry alone; prose, too, benefits from linguistic scrutiny. Chatman points out that "Narrative structure, temporal sequencing and point of view are linguistic constructs that shape how a story is told and understood" (Chatman, 1978, p. 31).

In exploring these connections, this paper aims to demonstrate how literary texts when analysed through linguistic frameworks, reveal deeper semantic layers and artistic intention. Carter and Simpson assert, "Language is the central element in literature, and its analysis is key to understanding literary creativity" (Carter & Simpson, 1989, p. 1). Furthermore, Crystal notes, "Linguistics can help pinpoint the distinctive features of a writer's style and contribute to a more objective analysis of literature" (Crystal, 1987, p. 114). Ultimately, both prose and poetry engage with language in ways that challenge, delight and transform. Bakhtin states, "Language in literature becomes a site of ideological struggle and artistic innovation" (Bakhtin, 1981, p.272). Through linguistic exploration, we better appreciate how literature not only reflects reality but reshapes it through imaginative and structural manipulation of language.

Linguistics, the scientific study of language, has emerged as a critical tool not only in understanding language structures but also in enhancing the analysis of literary texts. As a formal science, modern linguistics began to take shape in the early 20th century, particularly with Leonard Bloomfield's seminal work *Language* (1933) which established the *Principles of Structural Linguistics* (Bloomfield, 1933). The field witnessed a revolutionary shift with Noam Chomsky's *Syntactic Structures* (1957), introducing transformational-generative grammar that provided deeper insights into the innate structures of language and opened new avenues for literary analysis (Chomsky, 1957). The application of linguistic theories to literature has been a subject of both enthusiasm and debate. Roman Jakobson, a pioneer in structuralism and poetics, famously declared that "the study of poetry has been conceived as inseparable from linguistics and as its pertinent task" (Jakobson, 1964, p. 1135), highlighting the essential link between language and literature. Scholars like Nils Erik Enkvist, John Spencer and Archibald A. Hill have underscored the importance of linguistic methods in literary stylistics, emphasizing that linguistic analysis can elucidate, rather than diminish, the aesthetic dimensions of literature (Enkvist et al., 1964; Hill, 1965; Spencer, 1965).

David Lodge offers a balanced perspective, suggesting that linguistics and literary criticism, while distinct in

orientation - science versus value that can coexist meaningfully (Lodge, 1966). He argues that while linguistics provides objective data and analysis, literary criticism engages with subjective interpretation and value judgments. This view resonates with Charles T. Scott's assertion that because literature is constituted of language, linguists are justified in engaging in literary interpretation (Scott, 1974). Recent scholarship affirms that the gap between the linguist and the critic is often rooted in misunderstanding rather than incompatibility. While critics may see linguistic methods as reductive, linguists may find traditional criticism vague. However, interdisciplinary efforts show that the two fields can complement one another. Samuel Levin and James P. Thorne have effectively applied TG grammar in the study of poetic texts while Richard Ohmann has explored prose style through the same lens (Levin & Thorne, 1965; Ohmann, 1964). These efforts reflect a growing consensus that linguistic tools can refine and deepen the interpretation of literary texts. As in the eighteenth century when rhetoric and poetics were intertwined, a modern rapprochement of linguistics and literary criticism appears both necessary and fruitful. The shared focus on language as medium and message ensures that both disciplines can enrich each other, ultimately fostering a more nuanced understanding of literature.

The dynamic interface between linguistics and literature offers rich ground for interdisciplinary exploration, particularly within the domains of prose and poetry. This paper investigates how linguistic theories and analytical tools can enhance our understanding of literary texts, focusing on the stylistic, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic features that shape literary expression. Prose, characterized by its narrative continuity and syntactic structure, is examined through the lens of discourse analysis and narrative theory, while poetry is explored in terms of phonology, meter, and figurative language. The study reveals how linguistic analysis can uncover deeper meanings, stylistic nuances and authorial intent in both forms of literature. Drawing upon theories by Roman Jakobson, M.A.K. Halliday and Jonathan Culler, the paper argues for a more integrated approach that treats language not merely as a medium but as a vital component of literary artistry.

Through case studies of selected texts, it demonstrates how a linguistic-literary synthesis can contribute to a more nuanced interpretation and appreciation of both prose and poetry.

II. METHODS

This research adopts a qualitative and interdisciplinary methodology, integrating linguistic theories with literary

analysis to examine how language structures inform and enhance literary expression in prose and poetry.

DATA COLLECTION

The data for this research was collected through a comprehensive review of selected literary texts in both prose and poetry, analysed through the lens of linguistic theories. Primary sources included canonical works from English literature, such as novels, short stories and poems, representing diverse stylistic and narrative techniques. Secondary data was gathered from peer-reviewed journals, critical essays, linguistic studies and academic publications that explore the intersection of language and literature. Qualitative methods were employed to examine syntactic structures, stylistic features, semantic patterns and discourse strategies within the selected texts. The selection criteria were based on thematic relevance, literary significance and the richness of linguistic features. All data were documented and categorised systematically for analytical interpretation and theoretical application.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research draws on key linguistic and literary theories to frame its analysis: Structural Linguistics (Saussure, Bloomfield), Transformational-Generative Grammar (Noam Chomsky). This study is grounded in the principles of stylistics and discourse analysis, drawing upon linguistic theories to examine how language shapes meaning in literary texts. It integrates concepts from structuralism, pragmatics and semantics to provide a systematic framework for analysing the interplay between form and content in prose and poetry.

IV. RESULT

The study reveals that the integration of linguistic frameworks into literary analysis significantly enhances the interpretation of both prose and poetry. By applying tools such as stylistics, discourse analysis and semantics, the research demonstrates how linguistic patterns such as syntax, lexical choices, cohesion and speech acts illuminate deeper layers of meaning in literary texts. The findings highlight that prose often utilises complex narrative structures and character-driven dialogue, whereas poetry relies more heavily on phonological features, figurative language and syntactic deviation to evoke emotion and ambiguity. Moreover, the study shows that linguistic analysis offers objective parameters for evaluating literary style, authorial voice, and thematic consistency. This convergence ultimately fosters a more interdisciplinary approach, enriching both linguistic and literary scholarship.

V. DISCUSSION

Linguistics, as a scientific discipline, is relatively recent in origin. Modern structural linguistics is generally recognised as having commenced in 1933 with the publication of Leonard Bloomfield's seminal work *Language*. The emergence of the transformational-generative school, often considered a revolutionary advancement in linguistic theory, can be traced to 1957 with the publication of Noam Chomsky's influential monograph *Syntactic Structures*. It is widely acknowledged that both schools have exerted significant influence on the field. Their theoretical frameworks and methodologies for describing and analysing language have not only shaped academic linguistics but have also greatly stimulated interest in applied linguistics. One of the notable outcomes of these developments has been the substantial progress in foreign language instruction, largely attributed to the precise descriptive techniques introduced by these linguistic approaches. Furthermore, these methods have found meaningful application in the analysis and interpretation of literary texts. As Roman Jakobson noted in his closing address at the Ninth International Congress of Linguists, "For the first time a special section of a linguistic congress has dealt with stylistics and poetics: the study of poetry has been conceived as inseparable from linguistics and as its pertinent task" (p. 1135). This marked a pivotal moment in recognising the essential link between linguistic science and literary studies.

Some literary critics have been disturbed by the application of recent linguistic techniques to the study of literature and it is true that some linguists appear to have believed that the age-old problems of literary criticism could be solved in summary fashion by the application of these methods. It is clear today, however, that the apparent conflict between the critic and the linguist is almost always the result of misunderstanding. The critic ignores the findings of the linguist, and the linguist ignores the perceptive observations of the critic; the linguist is eager to point out that the critic's pronouncements are too vague and too imprecise to be of much value and the critic assumes that strict linguistic analysis of a text will destroy or seriously impair its beauty. Such contretemps should be intolerable. Ideally both critic and linguist are sensitive and perceptive readers and both can and should contribute to literary analysis and criticism. For example, Nils Erik Enkvist and his coauthors argue in their study *Linguistics and Style* (1978), that a detailed analysis of a text should not destroy the "wonder" of that text but rather should enhance it. A number of researchers have attempted to explain the reason for the gulf that appears to separate the linguist from the literary critic. David Lodge, for example, suggests in his study, *The Language of Fiction* (1966) that part of the

difficulty lies in a misinterpretation of the roles of linguist and critic. He says, for instance, "The discipline of linguistics will never replace literary criticism or radically change the basis of its claims to be a useful and meaningful form of human inquiry. It is the essential characteristic of modern linguistics that it claims to be a science. It is the essential characteristic of literature that it concerns values. And values are not amenable to scientific method."

The distinction Lodge suggests that there is indeed a difference between literary analysis and literary criticism is perhaps a useful one. The linguist is primarily interested in objective, verifiable data and thus he is more concerned with analysis. The literary individual, in contrast, is primarily interested in value and thus more interested in criticism. This is not to say that never the twain shall meet. A few scholars have successfully combined the two disciplines and some have suggested that criticism depends first upon detailed analysis. Archibald A. Hill has been one of the more successful in combining the two. Take, for example, the way in which he moves from linguistic analysis to literary value in his now-famous "*Analysis of The Wind hover: An Experiment in Structural Method*" and in "Some Points in the Analysis of Keats *Grecian Urn*." Hill does not, in these articles, overtly make the distinction between analysis and criticism, however, he has said, in commenting upon one of his studies, "I do not know and do not much care, whether the method I have followed is linguistic or literary. There is a reason for my indifference. I think of the two disciplines as one and I do not believe that it is impossible to carry on both, either successively or at the same time."

As in the eighteenth century rhetoric and poetics were combined into one discipline, so today a rapprochement of linguistic analysis and literary criticism is needed. John Spencer remarks, "Few literary scholars would suggest that literature can be satisfactorily studied without due attention to its medium, language. Nor would many linguists justify the investigation of literary language without guidance from those who devote themselves to the study of literature. There would, moreover, be a measure of agreement on both sides that the student of literature, whatever his particular interest, ought to be trained in the study of both language and literature." Still other scholars have been concerned with the linguist's right to make analyses of literary texts. For example, Charles T. Scott, a student of literature as well as a linguist, argues in his monograph "*Persian and Arabic Riddles: A Language-Centered Approach to Genre Definition*" that because language is the vehicle" of literature, the linguist has the right to make literary judgments:

It can be said safely that literary texts are utterance-tokens of given languages, constructed of and presented through, available linguistic structures. Therefore, since the linguist must necessarily operate within the domain of his discipline - the study and analysis of the structure of language and their interrelated subsystems - it is but an easy step to a position which holds that the linguist, in dealing with literary utterances, is at the same time dealing with phenomena proper to this discipline and is consequently justified in engaging in analyses of literary texts.

It is taken as one premise that literature is language and is thus amenable to linguistic analysis. It is also believed that incorporating some of the techniques of linguistic analysis into the description of literary utterances will enhance the description of those texts. It is thought it would be useful to survey a few specific proposals for the application of these techniques, concentrating on the application of the relatively new model of linguistic description, generative-transformational (TG) grammar, to the analysis of literary utterances. Although it is confined to my observation that this limited area of linguistic science, we do not wish it to be inferred that earlier attempts in the linguistic analysis of literary texts have been unsuccessful. On the contrary, the structural schools, as well as other schools of linguistic science, have contributed immensely valuable observations about literature and its relationship to language. Samuel Levin and James P. Thorne have incorporated the TG model of grammatical relationships in their analysis of poetic texts and Richard Ohmann and Charles T. Scott have used the model in the explication of the characteristics of prose style. Robert Stockwell explains the philosophical justification for generative grammars in Chapter 24 of this book; here it is pointed out two principles of TG grammar which have an important, though an indirect, bearing on the analysis of literature.

First, a TG grammar will generate (enumerate or specify) all the grammatical sentences of a language and none of the ungrammatical ones. The grammar, in a very strict sense, characterizes the notion of the sentence. To put it simply and briefly, a TG grammar will allow a sentence such as *John admires sincerity* but it will block an obvious ungrammatical sequence such as *Boy the ball the kick*. And it will, through the system of its rules governing co-occurrences, block a slightly deviant sentence such as *Sincerity loves John*. That is, the grammatical rules will not

allow an abstract noun (sincerity) to be the subject of a sentence with an animate verb - in this case loves.

Second, a TG grammar is inherently capable of accounting for deep syntactical relationships. That is, TG grammar can explain the constituent framework of all sentences (it provides a structural description for each), whether the sentence happens to be simple, compound, complex, or compound-complex. And, in addition, the grammar is able to do this within a framework which uses a finite set of rules to characterize each sentence. The importance of these generalizations will become obvious.

One of the first students of literature to incorporate TG grammar as an aid in literary analysis was Samuel Levin. He has dealt with various aspects of the explanatory power of TG grammar. In two articles, "On Automatic Production of Poetic Sequences" and "Internal and External Deviation in Poetry," Levin effectively uses the framework provided by TG grammar to account for certain deviant utterances found in poetry. In "On Automatic Production" he explains how utterances such as *It is a hungry dance* (Wallace Stevens), *Her hair's warm sibillance* (Hart Crane), and *Behind a face of hands* (Dylan Thomas), which are characteristically poetic, would be enumerated by a generative grammar. Basing his analysis on the premise that TG grammar may be used to represent a norm of the language (that is, it specifies only grammatical utterances - ungrammatical utterances lie outside the norm), he argues that the three poetic sequences are deviations from that norm. "We are only interested," he says, "in trying to show that certain sequences, which one would characterise in some presystematic way as being poetic, can be rationalised as violators of grammatical rules." His principal point is that the restrictions which would disallow a sequence such as *it is a hungry dance* have been relaxed and this is what one would and could expect in poetry. In effect, then, he observes, "what the poets have done in producing these sentences has been to suspend the grammatical restriction on co-occurrence possibilities,"

In another paper, Levin concerns himself with two utterances, clearly deviant, from poems by Cummings and Dylan Thomas. The utterances are *He danced his did and a grief ago*. Levin's purpose is "to deal with sequences which, presumably, a grammar of English would not generate, sequences thus that are either ungrammatical or semi grammatical." In the matter of grammaticality and Semi grammaticality, Levin follows Chomsky, who has discussed the notion of degrees of grammaticalness elsewhere. At the risk of oversimplification, the essence of the argument is that there is an area, not clearly defined, between a sentences which is unequivocally

Grammatical (*The man hit the ball*) and a sentence which is clearly ungrammatical (*Man the ball the hit*). The gray area in between may be represented by the sentence *Sincerity loves John* or the utterances which Levin deals with, *He danced his did and a grief ago*. In analysing the two semi grammatical utterances from poetry, it is Levin's aim to "discuss the grammaticalness of such sequences, and... [to] introduce a procedure which, though different in operations, yields results which are consistent with the results given by Chomsky's formulation."

In attempting to determine the degree of grammaticalness associated with Cummings's utterances, Levin first assumes that the utterances are ungrammatical or (following his observations in "On Automatic Production" that the utterances are in some manner deviations from the norm. He next takes into account the general nature of TG rules and hypothesises about how these rules could be "fixed" to allow for the deviant utterances. He treats, finally, the consequences of procedure two, in that he discusses the general nature of other sequences which would be generated as a consequence of such "fixing." The last procedure allows Levin to measure the degree of grammaticalness associated with each of the two utterances: "It is then a function of the number of unwanted consequences (i.e. those sentences beyond the one in question) that the revised rule generates: the greater the number of such unwanted consequences entrained, the less grammatical is the sentence in question; the fewer such unwanted consequences the revised rule generates, the more grammatical is the sentence in question."

In order to "fix" a grammar (that is, to revise the normal rules so that the grammar will generate the deviant utterance) there are two methods which may be used. On the one hand, the grammar may incorporate a new rule; on the other, certain co-occurrence restrictions may be relaxed. For the sequence *He danced his did*, using the first method, this would involve specifying the new rule $NP \rightarrow Verb$ (noun phrase may consist of verb), which would break a general grammatical rule which specifies that only *N* and not *V* may be the result of the rewriting of *NP*; in technical terms, *NP* dominates *N*, never *V*. The consequences of this new rule would be a large, perhaps infinite, number of unwanted sequences, any verb having the privilege of occurring after *T* (determiner). The revised grammar would then allow such unwanted sequences as *my went and the had*.

If the co-occurrence rules were relaxed to permit *did* to become a noun, the result would be identical to the results of the first method of generation, described above, in terms of the generation of a large number of unwanted sentences.

If $N \rightarrow \text{did}$, eventually the sequence $T^+ \text{ Adj} + N$ would obtain generating, in one instance, *the beautiful did*.

The utterance *a grief ago* is different from the utterance *He danced his did in a number of ways*. For instance, there is a rule in the normal English grammar which specifies sequences such as *some time ago*, *a while back*, *a year ago*, all of which are in some way related in form, if not in content, to the sequence *a grief ago*.

Using the formula T_x (determiner) N_y (noun) D_z (adverb) to represent the sequence *a while back*, Levin points out that N_y also represents, more generally, a subclass of nouns semantically defined as temporal nouns.

To permit the generation of a *grief ago*, the co-occurrence restrictions (which allow only N_y , to be rewritten as a temporal noun) would have to be relaxed to include nouns which indicate states of mind. Therefore, the revised rule would read

$N_y \rightarrow \{N_{\text{temp}} \quad N_{\text{state of mind}}\}$

By incorporating this new rule into the grammar, Levin says, the grammar will generate sequences like *happiness ago*, *some sorrow back*, *a disappointment ago*.

Why is it readily perceivable to the sensitive reader, Levin asks that the sequence *a grief ago* appears more grammatical than *He danced his did*? It must be that the two sequences differ in degree of grammaticality and indeed they do, because the sequence *He danced his did* breaks a more general rule than the sequence *a grief ago*. That is, for the grammar to permit the occurrence of *He danced his did* would require the additional rule $NP \rightarrow V$ and since V is any verb, the addition of this rule would break the restriction that previously disallowed any V to be an N . The rule which distinguished the class N from the class V is, moreover, a more general rule than the rule which distinguished one subclass of nouns from another. To put it another way, the sequence *a grief ago* violates a more specific rule (a lower-order rule) and as a consequence, the new rule would permit a smaller number of ungrammatical sequences.

The important thing, in short, is that the consequence of manipulating the rules of the grammar to include sequences analogous to *a grief ago* is much less extreme, in terms of unwanted sentences, than if the grammar were revised to generate sequences analogous to *He danced his did*.

The degree of grammaticality associated with these sequences has an important consideration for the analysis of literary texts. Since there are no sentences paralleling the more ungrammatical *He danced his did*, the reader cannot extract meaning (as Levin uses the term) from the new sequence. By way of contrast, the sequence *a grief ago*, which is less ungrammatical, has many analogies in a normal grammar, for example *a while back* and *some time*

ago; and as a result of these analogies the reader can impose a semantic interpretation on *grief*. Since *grief* is substituted for a temporal noun, the reader will perhaps think of *grief* as implying time.

To summaries Levin's valuable contribution to the analysis of literary texts, we can say that TG grammar is a useful tool in characterising the deviation from the norm in poetic utterances. It is also useful, though more indirectly so, in assigning semantic interpretations to those sequences which are semi grammatical but have analogical counterparts in a normal grammar of English. Levin's work, because it is new and experimental, has not yet been fully accepted. But it has given insight into the complex relationships that we so often admire in poetry.

Richard Ohmann was probably the first scholar to suggest the feasibility of using TG grammar as a model in the analysis of prose style. In his paper "Generative Grammars and the Concept of Literary Style," he points out that an idiosyncratic prose style represents a "characteristic use of language" as reflected by the "habitual and recurrent" use of certain specified grammatical patterns of the language. It is Ohmann's contention that "recent developments in generative grammar, particularly on the transformational model, promise first, to clear away a good deal of the mist from stylistic theory and, second, to make possible a corresponding refinement in the practice of stylistic analysis."

Sensitive readers of literature are gifted with certain insights, which Ohmann calls stylistic intuitions. These intuitions, says Ohmann, make it possible for sensitive readers, *first*, to identify certain passages as having been written by familiar authors and, *second*, to make parodies of the prose style of these writers that are recognisable as such. Ohmann posits from these facts that style must exist apart from content. That is, style consists not of the message associated with the discourse but of the grammatical patterns or "transformations", writers employ in expressing that message. His thesis is, briefly, that the transformations which a writer uses significantly reflect what a sensitive reader perceives as literary style. He says, moreover, that "there is at least some reason, then, to hold that a style is in part a characteristic way of deploying the transformational apparatus of a language and to expect that transformational analysis will be a valuable aid to the description of actual style."

Ohmann bases his analysis of literary style on the earlier model of TG grammar. He uses the TG framework to explain the differences intuitively felt to exist among writers and takes as models Ernest Hemingway, D. H. Lawrence, Henry James and William Faulkner. He observes that each author favours certain "habitual and recurrent" grammatical

it has touched me. I have felt sorry for my mother and she has made me lie. I will go to Kansas City and get a job and she will feel all right about it. There will be one more scene maybe before I get away. I will not go down to my father's office. I will miss that one. I want my life to go smoothly. It has just gotten going that way. Well, that is all over now, anyway. I will go over to the schoolyard and watch Helen play indoor baseball.

Reversal of these transformations, as above, produces a style without the idiosyncratic patterns which we have commonly associated with Hemingway's writing.

Ohmann's employment of TG grammar as an aid in characterising the notion of literary style and in capturing the differences which exist among the diverse prose styles of Hemingway, Faulkner, James and Lawrence has been both perceptive and illuminating. In a manner of speaking, Ohmann's analysis is dependent upon establishing *qualitative* differences among these authors. Each author characteristically employs certain transformations, to the virtual exclusion of all others. Given the repertoire of transformations in the language, no writer uses all, but only a small number, of the grammatical possibilities available to him.

It has also been used the transformational model to indicate syntactical relationships in an attempt to explain intuitive responses to certain writers. Although it has used TG grammar as an experiment in establishing certain measurable correlates between the prose styles of two diverse authors (Edward Gibbon and Ernest Hemingway), It has been more interesting to note in the larger problem of establishing more general attributes of eighteenth-century prose style. The eighteenth century has long been noted for a characteristic prose style and it is generally held today that certain eighteenth-century authors exhibit a remarkable similarity of style. There is a great deal of similarity, for instance, between the prose styles of Edward Gibbon and Samuel Johnson; and it would appear upon first impression that the prose of these authors does not reflect *qualitative* differences. If we intuitively distinguish between Johnson and Gibbon, then this difference must be *quantitative*. The bases, that is, for this distinction may lie in the varying numbers and types of transformations used. In other words, Johnson may be "habitual and recurrent" in his use of some transformations, Gibbon in others.

He thought NP about} → He thought, “She has made me
lie.” *She had made me lie*}

He thought, 'She has made me lie.'

3. Deletion transformation:

Ernest Hemingway's dependence upon these transformations is not altogether apparent until these transformations are reversed and the prose passage is written without their use:

The study of eighteenth-century prose style is important in another respect; for in the prose style of no other period do we find so many impressionistic labels. The prose of

Edward Gibbon, for example, is almost always described as being "grand," "complex," and "ornate." There is a measure of truth associated with these labels and I am sure that Gibbon's style exhibits degrees of complexity, grandness and ornateness. The linguist's task, however, is to determine if there are attributes in Gibbon's prose which might account for these impressions. It has been my observation that syntactical patterns or transformations can in great measure account for them.

My method of analysis can be viewed largely as the procedure of taking a textual sentence and "rewriting" it into a series of simple source sentences. These sentences may or may not be kernel or minimal sentences. In the nomenclature of the traditional grammarian, complex and compound sentences are the results of bringing together two or more sentences into a more complicated or complex sentence. And, in general, the number of transformations employed and the types of transformations used to build the textual sentence reflect syntactical style. Analysis of a textual sentence should make this procedure clear. The sentence from Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*

Their discontents were secretly fomented by Laetus, their prefect, who found, when it was too late, that his new emperor would reward a servant, but would not be ruled by a favourite can be analysed into the source sentences

1. Laetus secretly fomented their discontents.
2. Laetus was their praefect.
3. Laetus found NP²-Adv T.
4. It was too late then.
5. His new emperor would reward a servant.
6. A favourite would not rule his new emperor.

The transformations are manipulations which ultimately lead to the textual sentence. The source sentences can be thought of as the input sentences:

1. Passive transformation (of source sentence 1) :
Their discontents were secretly fomented by Laetus
- 2a. Relative-clause transformation (of source sentence 2):
who was their praefect.
- 2b. Deletion (ellipsis) of relative (who) and "be" (of source sentence 3: their praefect.
3. Relative-clause transformation (of source sentence 3):
who found NP² ADV.T?
4. WH transformation (adverbial) (of source sentence 4):
when it was too late.
5. Factive (that) transformation (of source sentence 5): that
his new emperor would reward a servant.

6a. Negative transformation (of source sentence 6): A favourite would not rule his new emperor.

6b. Passive transformation: His new emperor would not be ruled by a favourite.

6c. Conjunctive transformation for 5 and 6: source sentence 5 and source sentence 6, with deletion equals textual sentence.

From the results of this sketchy analysis we tentatively posit that intuitive impressions reflect various degrees of grammatical or transformational processes. For example, 'ornateness,' traditionally employed to describe styles which exhibit the schemes of balance and antithesis, is reflected by Gibbon's use of a specific transformation and exemplified in 6c. A larger sample would undoubtedly reinforce our impression that this grammatical pattern is indeed "habitual and recurrent" in Gibbon's prose style. "Grandness" and "complexity" may in this limited analysis be represented by instances of embedding (relative-clause, adverbial-clause and factive, "that" transformations) and in the total number of source sentences – 6 – within the textual sentence. One such example does not make a case and a much larger and statistically viable sample would be needed to arrive at any substantial conclusions. But this example does at least suggest that analyses of this type would be beneficial in investigating prose style.

In the 21st century, the relationship between linguistics and literature has evolved into a dynamic interdisciplinary engagement, enriching both fields. Linguistics offers scientific tools such as syntax, semantics, pragmatics and discourse analysis that enable deeper textual interpretation and the deconstruction of narrative structures. Literature, in turn, provides linguistics with rich, context-bound examples of language use, creativity and stylistic innovation. Contemporary literary studies increasingly rely on linguistic approaches to analyse authorial voice, reader response and cultural discourse. Furthermore, advances in cognitive linguistics, corpus linguistics and digital humanities have opened new pathways for exploring the intersection of language, thought and literary expression in modern texts.

In the current era, the convergence of linguistics and literature has become increasingly pronounced with scholars recognising the value of linguistic tools in literary interpretation. Linguistics offers systematic approaches to analyse textual structure, meaning and stylistic devices, allowing for a more scientific and objective exploration of literary texts (Widdowson, 1992). The rise of stylistics as a discipline exemplifies this integration, focusing on how language functions within literary frameworks (Carter, 2010). Discourse analysis, too, provides insights into narrative techniques, power relations and character

construction in prose and drama (Gee, 2011). Semantics and pragmatics have contributed to understanding figurative language, irony and ambiguity in poetry and fiction (Leech, 2008). Cognitive linguistics has enabled scholars to examine the mental processes underlying metaphor and symbolism in literary narratives (Lakoff & Turner, 1989). Corpus linguistics now plays a role in literary studies by analysing large text collections to uncover patterns in diction and syntax (McEnery & Hardie, 2012). Sociolinguistic approaches have enriched postcolonial and identity-based readings, emphasising how language reflects culture, ideology and resistance (Spivak, 1988). In digital humanities, computational linguistics facilitates the analysis of literary trends, styles and intertextuality across centuries (Jockers, 2013). As such, linguistics not only supports the close reading of texts but also broadens literary scholarship by introducing empirical, analytical and cross-disciplinary methodologies (Toolan, 1998). Together, these approaches illustrate how the symbiotic relationship between linguistics and literature continues to redefine textual analysis in a global, multilingual, and technologically advancing world.

The relationship between poetry, prose, and linguistics is deeply interwoven, as both literary forms utilize language structures that can be systematically analyzed through linguistic frameworks. Poetry, with its emphasis on rhythm, meter, phonology, and deviation, provides fertile ground for phonological and stylistic analysis (Leech, 1969). Linguists have shown how poetic language often exploits ambiguity, foregrounding, and semantic layering to generate multiple meanings (Jakobson, 1960). Prose, on the other hand, allows for the exploration of narrative structures, cohesion, discourse markers, and pragmatics (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). The linguistic study of prose reveals how character plot, and theme are constructed through choices in syntax, deixis, and modality (Simpson, 2004). Both poetry and prose benefit from stylistic analysis, which bridges linguistics and literary criticism to uncover the aesthetic and communicative functions of language (Widdowson, 1975). In modern linguistic theory, discourse analysis and cognitive linguistics have further contributed to understanding how literary texts engage readers' mental processes and cultural contexts (Fauconnier & Turner, 2002). While poetry tends to focus on the sonic and symbolic aspects of language, prose emphasizes narrative coherence and grammatical fluidity, yet both forms share deep linguistic underpinnings. Thus, linguistics not only aids in decoding literary meaning but also reveals how language functions artistically across genres (Toolan, 1998; Carter, 1997). The application of linguistic methods to literary genres ultimately enriches the interpretive scope of

literature, enhancing both critical appreciation and scholarly inquiry.

Here's an example: Consider the poem "The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost:

"Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both..."

Linguistic Analysis

Imagery: Frost uses vivid imagery ("yellow wood") to create a mental picture.

Metaphor: The road serves as a metaphor for life's choices.

Syntax: The use of "And sorry" creates a sense of regret.

Literary Effect

The poem's linguistic features work together to convey the speaker's introspection and uncertainty about their choices. The imagery evokes a sense of atmosphere, while the metaphor and syntax contribute to the poem's themes of choice and regret.

This example illustrates how linguistics can inform our understanding of literary texts and their effects on readers.

Here's an example of Virginia Woolf's writing style:

From *Mrs. Dalloway*:

"For Lucy had her work cut out for her. The doors would be taken off their hinges; Rumpelmayer's men were coming. And then, thought Clarissa Dalloway, what a morning - fresh as if issued to children on a beach."

Linguistic Analysis

Stream-of-consciousness: Woolf employs a fluid, unstructured narrative style to capture Clarissa's thoughts and feelings.

Imagery: The use of sensory details ("fresh as if issued to children on a beach") creates a vivid atmosphere.

Syntax: The sentence structure mimics the natural flow of thoughts, blurring the lines between reality and inner experience.

Literary Effect

Woolf's writing style immerses the reader in Clarissa's inner world, conveying the complexity and fluidity of human thought and experience. The use of imagery and stream-of-consciousness narration creates a dreamlike atmosphere, drawing the reader into the world of the novel.

VI. CONCLUSION

This research paper explores the dynamic intersection between linguistics and literature, focusing on the linguistic analysis of prose and poetry to uncover deeper layers of meaning and interpretation. It examines how linguistic tools

such as phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics and discourse analysis enhance the comprehension and appreciation of literary texts. By applying both structural and functional linguistic theories to literary works, the study demonstrates how language influences narrative style, voice, meaning and reader engagement. The research further investigates how literary creativity often challenges conventional linguistic norms, thereby enriching both the expressive potential of language and the aesthetic depth of literature. Through this interdisciplinary approach, the paper aims to formulate a holistic methodology that bridges literary criticism and linguistic analysis, offering new insights into stylistics and literary linguistics. Drawing on examples from both poetry and prose, the study showcases how linguistic analysis can illuminate the subtleties of tone, metaphor, rhythm and structure. It emphasises the mutual enrichment of these fields, showing that literature is not only a product of language but also a reflection of its infinite expressive possibilities. Ultimately, the integration of linguistic frameworks into literary study promotes a more nuanced and systematic mode of critical inquiry.

VII. ETHICS STATEMENT

This research was undertaken independently by the author in alignment with the broader interest of academic readers and scholars. The participant involved in the study participated voluntarily and retained the right to withdraw at any stage without any penalty. Anonymity and confidentiality have been strictly maintained throughout the research process. This study adheres to the ethical standards and guidelines prescribed by the target journal.

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From Humanism to Posthumanism: Theoretical Shifts in Literary Studies

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Abstract— This paper looks at the change from humanism to posthumanism and asks a basic but important question: What does it mean to be human today? In literature and culture, this change shows that we can no longer think of human life as separate or complete on its own. Our lives are deeply connected with technology, nature, and other living beings. Traditional humanism focused on Renaissance ideas, motives, freedom, logic, and commitment. It gives central position to human beings (anthropocentrism) for meaning. Humanism helped to save human worth and liberty, but it also inspired the faith that humans are more important than animals, nature, and the environment. Posthumanism crosses these limits. It focuses upon science, technology, feminism, and questions the faith that humans are the central point of everything. Humanism sees a fixed meaning of identity, but its opposite, posthumanism sees a changing meaning of identity and relationships. This new way of thinking inspired human beings to think about ethics, individuality, freedom, and power in a world that is influenced by technology and environmental problems. Posthumanism is more hopeful and helpful in connecting humans and nonhuman things. In the 21st century, we can say that humans and nonhuman things can live together in the future.



Keywords— Humanism, Anthropocentrism, Posthumanism, Literary Studies, Interdependence

I. INTRODUCTION

For a long time, people believed that humans had always lived at the center of the world. Humanism taught us to think logically, to trust cause, to give preference to education, and to believe in human worth and liberty. These ideas helped to make modern society and motivated people to take a stand against inequality and unawareness. In many ways, humanism offers an inspiring perspective on what human beings can achieve.

But today, the world looks very different. Technology plays an important role in everyday life in today's world. Science can change human structure, and it even has the potential to create new forms. At the same time, environmental damage suggests to us that humans are interconnected to nature. Humans depend on nature, and nature is affected by what humans do.

Posthumanism inspires us to think about the situation in the right direction. It does not say that human beings are

clueless. Instead, it says that humans are not alone and do not hold a superior power over everything. We are a small part of the biggest network that includes everything, like animals, nature, and machines. But human beings are connected with relationships.

In recent years, the existence of human beings has become less stable. Digital technologies are influencing how we think and communicate all over the world. Medical science crosses the limits of the body, and the growing natural disaster reminds us that human life is interconnected to the earth. Because of these changes, many thinkers question the old idea that humans are the center of the universe. Posthumanism takes a stand for this type of questioning. It encourages us to see humans as part of networks rather than as isolated beings.

Stories from science fiction have played an important role in helping people to understand these changes. Novels such as William Gibson's *Neuromancer* and Philip K. Dick's *Do*

Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? Use characters like cyborgs and androids to explore how technology reshapes the body and the mind. In Gibson's world, consciousness can move through digital spaces, while in Dick's story, readers are forced to ask how we can tell real human emotions from artificial copies. Both writers show that the line between the human and the machine is no longer as clear as it once seemed.

Posthumanist thinking develops other critical theories, especially those that challenge the fixed meaning and strict rules. Like deconstruction, it encourages the readers to read against the grain and question the idea that was given by the writer in the text. The Human subject is not fixed or stable, and humans are not superior to nature. At the same time, Posthumanism is related to postcolonial studies and feminist theory. Feminist theory is closely interconnected with posthumanism because both challenge traditional and rigid ideas.

Postcolonial criticism and posthumanism have a common motive. Both theories try to break down the classification of categories like upper and lower. Both theories focus on equality. Postcolonial theory questions the idea of colonizer and colonized, white and black. Posthumanism questions boundaries between humans and machines, culture and nature, humans and non-humans. Feminist theory supports this critique because posthumanism and feminism are interconnected. Feminist theory also takes a stand against the fixed and traditional image of "human."

In literary studies, posthumanism becomes a useful way to understand the new texts that give an important and active role to non-human things, which is called personification in literary terms. It is very useful for little ones to make them understand moral ethics. In Richard Powers's *The Overstory*, trees and forests are treated as living participants in a shared world. Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* examine the troubling moral questions raised by biotechnology and make readers think about where the limits of human life should be drawn. Octavia Butler's *Lilith's Brood* trilogy goes even further by imagining futures based on mixture, change, and cooperation between humans and alien species, offering a powerful vision of coexistence rather than control.

These discussions remind us that humanism gave an important perspective to think about cause, rights, and dignity, but these are not enough on their own. The conditions of the modern world require more flexible and responsible way of thinking. Posthumanism gives us important opinions by reminding us that our future will depend on technology. The 21st century is a digital age. Human life is deeply connected with nonhuman forces like robotics.

II. HUMANISM IN LITERATURE

If we want to understand what posthumanism is, first we have to understand humanism because posthumanism is a critical theory against humanism. It questions the fixed meaning of human existence. Humanism took birth during the Renaissance, when individuals focused on human life, abilities, and experience. Instead of believing in religion blindly, people started to give first priority to reason, learning, personal experience, and responsibility. They believed that human beings have the potential to shape their own lives and improve. From this outlook emerged ideas such as respect for human nobility, curiosity to know the world, freedom of thinking/thought, and asking questions rather than believing blindly in traditional

Between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, figures such as Petrarch, Erasmus, and Leonardo da Vinci helped to spread confidence in human creativity. Humans are very creative at that time because they spend more time learning new things and new ideas. This type of thinking did not fade with time, and became even more stronger during the Enlightenment age. Thinkers such as Locke, Rousseau, Voltaire, and Kant encouraged people to trust their own thinking, challenged higher authorities, and defended their own rights. These types of movements promote a modern understanding of human beings that questions traditional beliefs and live life on their own terms. Humans are accountable for the creation of society.

John Locke is closely connected to the humanist point of view because he cares about reason, freedom, human rights, and he speaks against injustice and power. He saw that people learn through their experience and shape themselves. They are not born with fixed ideas. He sees people as learners who are shaped by their experiences, not as beings born with fixed ideas. He focuses on the fact that humans are born on a blank slate and learn through experiences and education. He suggests that "reading furnishes the mind only with materials of knowledge; it is thinking that makes what we read ours." (Locke 216)

During the Enlightenment, writers used humanist ideas to question oppressive institutions such as the Church and the monarchy and to argue for ideals like freedom, equality, and justice. They trusted in human capability to understand the world through observation and reason. They did not blindly trust tradition and customs. They promote individuality over uncritical belief.

Contribution of Major Thinkers in Humanism

Charles Robert Darwin (1809–1882): Darwin changed the way of people think by offering them a new way to think about their existence. He did not accept the explanations that were based on religious belief, but he observed nature, compared, and collected evidence. Through his theory of

evolution, Darwin showed that life is constructed over long periods of time by natural processes. His works motivated people to question fixed meaning, to think for themselves, and make decisions logically. In this sense, his ideas fit closely with the humanist belief in learning through experience and inquiry. "Ignorance more frequently begets confidence than does knowledge: it is those who know little, not those who know much, who so positively assert that this or that problem will never be solved by science." (Darwin 1) He was reminding us, in a very human way, that real wisdom grows from curiosity and the courage to keep asking questions.

Mary Ann Evans (1819–1880) (George Eliot) is recognized as a pioneer of modern secular humanism. Her novels thoughtfully explore the lives of everyday people, focusing on their challenges and the ways they develop their own sense of morality. Eliot emphasizes that genuine moral progress arises from human empathy, thoughtful understanding, and personal reflection, rather than from reliance on divine rules. "It is a narrow mind which cannot look at a subject from various points of view." (Eliot 66)

Matthew Arnold (1822–1888) was a leading figure of nineteenth-century humanistic criticism who viewed literature as a "criticism of life." He argued that literary works should cultivate moral awareness by expressing truth and beauty, and he believed that as religious certainties declined, poetry would increasingly serve as a major source of ethical and spiritual guidance.

Virginia Woolf (1882–1941) was a central figure in the modern age. She focused on inner experience rather than outward action. She was associated with the term "Stream of Consciousness" and was a member of the Bloomsbury Group. She talks about consciousness, gender, identity, and time in novels such as *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927), reshaping how fiction represents subjective reality.

Themes in Humanism

Humanism takes humans as the subject of core meaning, knowledge, and value. Humans are treated as the most important part of history and culture and always ranked above the environment, animals, and non-human things that existed in the world. Humanism tests human worth and potential. The most important characteristic of humanist thought is to believe in reason, which is a key quality of humans that distinguishes humans from other non-human things. Rational thinking, reason, logic, and critical testing are some characteristics of human beings. Through this, humans can gain knowledge and develop society without the blind trust in religious authority and superstitions.

Humanism also developed the idea of freedom of human beings and a self-directed subject that is capable of

performing moral duties. Through this, humans can understand their active role in shaping their lives and building a brighter future. The humanist point of view promotes the worth of every person. It encourages people to learn about ethical behavior, respect for human life, and a sense of moral duty. Education holds a central position in humanist philosophy. Humanists value the study of literature, philosophy, art, and history as requirements for developing intellectual abilities. Learning is the key to unlocking the storehouse of knowledge. It fosters intellectual thinking and encourages participation in social and professional life.

Limitations of Humanism and Birth of Posthumanism

Despite its historical importance, it has been criticized for several limitations. The first one is its primary focus on subjective ideas and its tendency to prefer individual experience over empirical and scientific approaches. Humanist thought is also criticized for focusing on an optimistic view of human nature, paying much attention to violence and conflict. It has been criticized for reflecting cultural values, which limit human understanding/thinking. Its emphasis on personal growth and individual freedom can downplay the importance of social life, responsibilities, and systemic power dynamics. Humanism limits human thought and struggles to define text scientifically.

After Humanism, Posthumanism takes its place as a critical theory that comes in response to humanism. Humanism is an anthropocentric approach, and posthumanism defines other concepts that are connected to humans. Posthumanism is not totally against humanism; it does not advocate for the end of humanity, but it is a re-evaluation of the human role within a broader system of relationships. By challenging the idea of human exceptionalism, posthumanist theory highlights interdependence and hybridity. Posthumanism sees that humans are tied to nonhuman things like plants, ecosystems, animals, and technology. In this way, posthumanism can be understood as the response to the restrictions of humanism and offering new opportunities to connect globally through technology. Posthumanism argues that humans are not a fixed identity but a constructed category through situations in every age.

In literary and cultural studies, posthumanism developed as an important and remarkable framework in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, largely due to the contributions of scholars such as N. Katherine Hayles and Rosi Braidotti. (Hayles, 1999) These scholars reconceptualize subjectivity as embodied, relational, and technologically mediated, rather than isolated or self-sufficient. (Smith, 2025, pp. 144–167) Consequently, posthumanism signifies a substantial shift from human-centered perspectives to approaches that

acknowledge the complex networks and material conditions shaping contemporary existence.

Humanism has been criticized for both theoretical and practical limitations. Critics underline its focus on subjective ideas and interpretations of human nature, which may neglect social, cultural, and structural factors. Humanism says that humans are superior to other things, but posthumanism says that human beings are not everything; they are interconnected, which means they are not isolated; they are linked with animals, the environment, and technology. They are not independent but dependent on other beings and systems. Where humanism trusts science and logic for social development, posthumanism argues that knowledge is influenced by social conditions.

It is against this backdrop of critique that posthumanism emerges. Rather than declaring the end of humanism, posthumanism re-evaluates the meaning of human in a world that is interconnected with non-living things. In this sense, posthumanism offers many ways to understand subjectivity, ethics, and expand knowledge through a network. Thinkers like Michel Foucault played a role in challenging the idea of a stable and universal human subject, arguing that “man” is a historical formation. Posthumanism gained recognition in literary and cultural studies during the late 20th and early 21st centuries through the work of N. Katherine Hayles and Rosi Braidotti. The main theme of their works is that human beings are not independent and self-sufficient, but they are relational and shaped by technological and material forces.

Posthumanism: Major Concepts and Perspectives

Technology and the Posthuman Condition:

Andy Clark reminds us that humans have always connected with technology, tools they invent. Posthumanism examines how artificial intelligence, digital media, and biotechnology influence the present generation. Posthumanism focuses on how technological progress reshapes bodily potential and self-perception. From this perspective, humans can be understood as “natural born cyborgs,” whose thoughts and identities are shaped through the interactions and technologies we use daily. This viewpoint shows how human life now exists in shared space between nature and technology. “The word ‘cyborg’ once conjured visions of wires and implants, but as we have seen, the use of such penetrative technologies is inessential. To focus on them is to concede far too much to the ancient biological skin-bag. What matters most is our obsessive, endless weaving of biotechnological webs: the constant two-way traffic between biological wetware and tools, media, props, and technologies. The very best of these resources is not so much used as incorporated into the user herself. They fall into place as aspects of the thinking

process. They have the power to transform our sense of self, of location, of embodiment, and of our own mental capacities. They impact who, what, and where we are.” (Clark 209)

Decentering the Human Subject:

Unlike humanism, which highlights the rational and independent individual, posthumanism views the human as relational, shaped by interaction, and dependent on context. Identity is shaped by interaction with technology, culture, environment, and non-human forces. It calls for recognizing the interdependence between humans, animals, machines, and nature. Posthumanism challenges humanism because human interests and viewpoints are superior. In today’s world, we can say that humans are a part of a larger network.

Cyborg and Hybrid Subjectivity:

Cyborgs and hybrid subjectivity are central ideas of posthumanism, questioning the humanist point of view of the independent and self-contained individual. A cyborg is a cybernetic organism that combines organic and technological elements. In posthumanism, cyborg is not a scientific or fictional concept; it functions as a metaphor for human existence in the digital world. In “A Cyborg’s Manifesto,” Donna Haraway presents the cyborg as a figure that breaks the rigid boundaries between human/machine, organism/technology, and natural/artificial. “The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics.” (Haraway 7) She suggests that the cyborg represents our condition, how we understand ourselves.

Hybrid subjectivity suggests that who we are is shaped by many forces—our biology, technology, culture, society, and the material world around us. Humans are not completely separate and self-sufficient, but they are constructed by digital systems, the environment, and relationships. The fusion can be seen in different ways:

- Human - Machine (interaction with digital technology)
- Human - Animal (ecological connection)
- Human - Environment (interdependence with the natural world)

From this point of view, identity is dynamic and continuously developing, rather than fixed.

Posthumanism in Literature

In literary studies, posthumanism questions traditional human-centered ways of thinking by emphasizing the fluid boundaries between humans, technology, the environment, and animals. It rejects the concept of the ideal and independent human; instead, it portrays humans as interconnected, hybrid, and sometimes cyborg-like beings, redefining the ideas of identity and agency. In humanism, humans are placed above all; posthumanist writings promote a relational approach, presenting humans as part of

a larger network that includes non-human life and systems. This type of literature addresses environmental issues, including climate change, humanity's domination over nature, and the exploitation of nature through the representation of plants and animals.

Early works in Posthumanism:

While posthumanism is considered a modern theoretical development, its underlying concepts are present in earlier literary works, especially within science fiction. Both Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and H.G. Wells's *The Island of Dr. Moreau* are significant works in posthumanist theory. These works are valuable because they explore ideas that are closely associated with posthumanist thought. In *Frankenstein*, Shelley questions the humanist belief of her time period by blurring the boundaries between human and artificial life. The novel examines issues of identity and the moral consequences of scientific and technological advancements. Similarly, *The Island of Dr. Moreau* by Wells examines the distinction between humans and animals, highlighting the interconnected nature of life.

Contemporary Literature in Posthumanism:

Modern literature shaped by posthumanist theory examines human life freshly and more honestly. It demonstrates that humans are no longer separate from machines, animals, or nature but are closely intertwined with them. Many writers use stories about technology, genetic modification, and hybrid beings to explore how these developments are transforming our world. These works often reflect the problems of the Anthropocene, such as climate change and environmental damage, and ask readers to think about their responsibility toward the planet. By giving importance to non-human beings and forces, this kind of literature challenges the old idea that humans are the center of everything and encourages us to see ourselves as part of a larger, shared world.

Analysis of Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968)

Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* is a thoughtful science-fiction novel that asks deep questions about life, machines, and what it means to be human. The story is set on a broken Earth after a terrible nuclear war, where many people have already left the planet to find safer places to live. Those who remain hold on to real animals as something precious and meaningful. The novel follows Rick Deckard, a bounty hunter whose job is to track down and "retire" androids—artificial beings who look, think, and behave almost just like real people. "Empathy, evidently, existed only within the human community, whereas intelligence to some degree could be found throughout every phylum and order, including the arachnida." (Dick 29)

Philip K. Dick's novel explores the idea that living in a society dominated by powerful systems can force individuals to compromise their core values. The story illustrates how to survive, people may find themselves making decisions that go against their own beliefs, leaving them with feelings of guilt or discomfort. As these difficult choices accumulate, a person's identity can become unstable and uncertain. Ultimately, the narrative suggests that in such an environment, it is impossible for anyone—human or android—to remain entirely innocent or at peace with themselves.

Analysis of Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1991)

The essay *A Cyborg Manifesto* is widely read as part of Haraway's 1991 book *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*. It is a landmark work that challenges human beings to reconsider their existence in this technological world. Haraway uses the term "cyborg" as an example, a hybrid of machine and human organism. She shows how humans, machines, and animals are interconnected. The manifesto depicts a society in which gender and identity are not stable or rigid but dynamic and flexible, shaped by culture and digital forces. Instead of fearing technology, Haraway encourages us to engage with technology, to work with it. She encourages us to dismantle old divisions, such as male/female, nature and culture, and mind/body. The cyborg becomes a symbol to understand life in an integrated, connected, and imaginative way.

Analysis of Nancy Katherine Hayles's *How We Become Posthuman*

N. Katherine Hayles is a renowned writer of American literature whose works examine how science, technology, literature, and life are interconnected. Her book "How We Become Posthuman" is a foundational work in posthumanist studies. In it, she examines how technology and scientific development reshape human perception. She argues that humanity is deeply rooted in material reality and technological systems, so these connections are reshaping the real meaning of human life. "If my nightmare is a culture inhabited by posthumans who regard their bodies as fashion accessories rather than the ground of being, my dream is a version of the posthuman that embraces the possibilities of information technologies without being seduced by fantasies of unlimited power and disembodied immortality, that recognizes and celebrates finitude as a condition of human being, and that understands human life is embedded in a material world of great complexity, one on which we depend for our continued survival." (Hayles 5)

Analysis of Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005)

Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* is a powerful novel that invites readers to question the meaning of being human in a

world shaped by science. By telling the story of clones who are created only for organ donation, the novel shows how unfair it is to treat some lives as less important than others and questions the idea that humanity depends only on how someone is born. Even though the clones are artificially made, they can feel, remember, love, and make choices about their lives. In this way, the novel presents them as fully human in their emotions and experiences, despite their controlled and limited existence. "There are no deferrals. There have never been any deferrals. And you are... clones." (Ishiguro 259)

"We were created to donate. That's what we were made for. That's why we exist." This line exposes how cloned bodies are reduced to biological resources, reflecting posthumanism's critique of **human exceptionalism** and the treatment of life as disposable matter. (Ishiguro 164)

Analysis of Rosi Braidotti's *The Posthuman* (2013) and Posthuman Feminism

The Posthuman: Braidotti points out that traditional humanism, which celebrates a rational, independent, Eurocentric, human-centered idea of "man," doesn't really fit the world we live in today. Our lives are shaped by technology, globalization, environmental challenges, and systems that control life in complex ways. She suggests posthumanism as a new way to think about these issues—one that moves humans out of the center and instead focuses on our connections with others, our dependence on each other, and our responsibility to care for both human and non-human life. "The posthuman condition urges us to think critically and creatively about who and what we are becoming." (Braidotti 12)

Posthuman Feminism: Posthuman Feminism is generally associated with the book "The Posthuman." Rosi Braidotti's posthuman feminism offers a fresh perspective on who we are and what feminism means today. She challenges the fixed notions of identity and traditional gender categories. She argues that human life is shaped by relationships with others and by the technology we use.

Rosi Braidotti and Donna Haraway are prominent thinkers of posthumanist feminism, but they define it in their own way. Rosi Braidotti and Donna Haraway are key thinkers in posthuman feminism, but they approach it differently. Braidotti highlights the fluid and relational nature of identities and the responsible connection with technology. Haraway, on the other hand, introduces imaginative figures like cyborgs to challenge the fixed identities of humans and gender. She emphasizes that knowledge is situated and produced collectively. Together, their contribution to posthumanism increases the scope for feminism to consider not only the human subject but also non-human things and the universe we all share.

The Impact of Posthumanism on Contemporary Human Life

Posthumanism has shifted our understanding of what it means to be human by challenging traditional beliefs about human independence, rationality, and superiority. For example, theorist N. Katherine Hayles discusses both the risks and opportunities that technology brings to human identity. She warns against reducing our bodies and lives to mere accessories but is also optimistic about how information technologies can enhance human experience. (Hayles, 1999) Posthumanist theory emphasizes the dependence of human beings on technology, the environment, and other living things. In everyday life, technology rules us and influences how we think, communicate, and interact with the world. Posthumanism encourages us to think that humans are not superior or separate. It encourages us to view human life as a part of the natural world and interconnected with other forms of life.

In culture and literature, posthumanism has generated innovative ways for the representation of the human. Literature, movies, and theoretical works engage with cyborgs and artificial intelligence to question the meaning and limitations of humans. These theories show the excitement and anxiety of human life in a technological world.

III. CONCLUSION

This paper explores the transformation of humanity from humanism to posthumanism. It highlights how traditional thinking, like "humans are rational and superior," is continuously questioned. While humanism has focused on dignity, ethical responsibility, and critical thinking, it has faced criticism for its narrow viewpoint on individualism and anthropocentrism. By contrast, posthumanism proposes a relational understanding of humanity in relation to technology, the environment, and other living beings. In posthumanism, humans are interconnected with the digital world. Thinkers like N. Katherine Hayles, Rosi Braidotti, and Donna Haraway, and novels such as *Never Let Me Go* and *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* We can see how ideas like cyborgs, hybrid identities, and relational ethics show that our lives are shaped through interactions with machines, other species, and the world around us. Literature, in particular, helps us understand the ethical, social, and philosophical questions raised by technology, ecological crises, and human-centered thinking. By challenging rigid hierarchies and expanding our sense of responsibility, posthumanism invites us to see identity, knowledge, and action as flexible, interconnected, and shared across all forms of life.

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Cure as Coercion: Psychiatric Authority and the Politics of Femininity in *The Bell Jar*

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Abstract— *Literary representations of mental illness often challenge clinical definitions by focusing on the tension between individual distress and social regulation. Sylvia Plath's The Bell Jar provides a powerful narrative of depression that resists being read as a simple psychological breakdown. Instead, it situates mental suffering within broader institutional and cultural frameworks. This paper examines Plath's portrayal of madness not as a purely medical pathology, but as a crisis of meaning shaped by rigid social expectations and psychiatric authority. Drawing on existential psychology and the medical humanities, the study explores how Esther Greenwood's depression emerges from an acute awareness of her limited choices rather than an inherent psychological defect. The novel's depiction of psychiatric practices reveals how mental health systems often function as regulatory structures aimed at enforcing social conformity. Through a close reading of the fig tree metaphor and Esther's experience with shock treatment, this paper highlights the limitations of clinical frameworks that isolate mental illness from its existential context. By framing madness as a response to structural pressures, Plath's novel challenges the dominant biomedical narrative and views depression as a crisis of purpose. This paper argues that The Bell Jar positions literature as a critical space where psychological distress is examined beyond diagnostic categories. It concludes by emphasising the role of institutional power and narrative in shaping the lived experience of suffering.*



Keywords— *Existential psychology, psychiatric authority, medical humanities, social conformity, illness narrative*

Sylvia Plath's semi-autobiographical novel *The Bell Jar* (1963) occupies an enduring and contested place in the literary canon as a narrative that refuses to be neatly categorised. On the surface, it tells the story of Esther Greenwood, a young, intellectually gifted woman who descends into depression and undergoes psychiatric treatment in mid-twentieth-century America. Yet to reduce the novel to a chronicle of mental illness is to miss the force of its central argument: that Esther's suffering is not a symptom of an aberrant mind, but a rational response to a world that systematically forecloses her choices. Plath writes from the margins of clinical authority, giving voice to a form of distress that the biomedical model cannot adequately name. This paper argues that *The Bell Jar* positions mental suffering as an existential crisis rather than a medical pathology, and that the novel's critique of

psychiatric authority reveals how institutions of mental health have historically functioned as mechanisms of social regulation. Drawing on existential psychology, particularly the work of Rollo May and Viktor Frankl, as well as medical humanities scholarship, this reading places Esther's experience within the broader cultural and ideological pressures of postwar American femininity. The fig tree metaphor, the novel's unflinching portrayal of electroconvulsive therapy, and the power dynamics encoded in Esther's relationships with her doctors collectively illuminate a narrative in which cure and coercion are dangerously intertwined.

The Bell Jar was published under the pseudonym Victoria Lucas in January 1963, just weeks before Plath's death by suicide in February of the same year. The novel draws heavily on Plath's own experiences in 1953: a poorly

administered course of electroconvulsive therapy at an outpatient facility before her admission to McLean, a subsequent suicide attempt, and several months of recovery at McLean Hospital in Massachusetts under a psychiatrist she trusted. This biographical context has shaped much of the critical discourse around the text, often collapsing the distinction between author and protagonist in ways that risk pathologising rather than analysing the literary achievement. Critics such as Christina Britzolakis have argued that the tendency to reduce Plath's work to confession or symptom reflects precisely the kind of clinical gaze that the novel itself resists. To read Esther's depression as simply Plath's depression is to replicate the gesture of the psychiatrist who sees only illness where the patient experiences meaning, contradiction, and protest. This paper works against that reduction, treating *The Bell Jar* as a formally and philosophically sophisticated text engaged in a sustained critique of how societies define, contain, and manage psychological deviance.

I. Existential Depression and the Crisis of Meaning

Existential psychology offers a framework for understanding depression not as a biochemical malfunction but as a response to the perceived meaninglessness of one's situation. Viktor Frankl, writing from his experience in the Nazi concentration camps, described what he called an 'existential vacuum' (Frankl 94), describing it as the feeling of 'a total lack of a will to meaning,' a condition of inner emptiness that arises when individuals are unable to find purpose or direction in their lives. Rollo May elaborated on this idea in his analysis of anxiety, arguing that authentic dread is not a neurotic symptom but a signal of the self's encounter with finitude and freedom. Both thinkers insist that suffering can be meaningful, and that the attempt to eliminate it through clinical intervention, without attending to its cause, risks a profound loss of selfhood. May warns that in modern culture, conformity to social expectation is purchased at enormous cost: the individual "conforms at the price of renouncing his autonomous strength, and hence he becomes more helpless, powerless and insecure" (May 175).

Esther Greenwood fits this existential profile precisely. Her depression does not arrive as an inexplicable biochemical event. It is carefully motivated by the novel's opening chapters, which establish the social conditions that make her situation untenable. Esther is a scholarship girl in New York City, a guest editor at a prestigious women's magazine, and by every conventional measure a success. Yet she feels nothing. 'I was supposed to be having the time of my life,' she observes, in a tone of flat bewilderment that reverberates throughout the novel (Plath 2). The gap between what she is supposed to feel and what she actually

feels is not a sign of ingratitude or neurosis; it is the beginning of an honest reckoning with the limits of the world being offered to her. The options available to a woman of Esther's intelligence and ambition in 1950s America are, as the novel makes relentlessly clear, brutally narrow: wife, mother, secretary. Her suffering is the cognitive and affective consequence of perceiving those limits with unusual clarity.

This reading is reinforced by the novel's narrative form. Esther is not an unreliable narrator in the conventional sense; she does not distort reality through delusion or fantasy. Rather, she sees with an uncomfortable precision that others around her lack or prefer to suppress. Her observations about the marriage of her neighbour Dodo Conway, who wheels her sixth child while pregnant with a seventh, are sardonic but not irrational. Her horror at the prospect of a life defined by biological reproduction and domestic labour reflects a coherent value system, not a pathological mind. The novel insists that what is diagnosed as Esther's madness is, in many respects, a form of clarity: an unwillingness to perform the contentment that social survival demands.

II. The Fig Tree Metaphor: Paralysis and the Weight of Choice

The novel's most celebrated symbolic passage is the fig tree vision, in which Esther imagines herself sitting in the crotch of a fig tree, watching the ripe figs at the ends of every branch. Each fig represents a possible future: 'one fig was a husband and a happy home and children, and another fig was a famous poet and another fig was a brilliant professor,' and so on, until 'quite a few more figs' extend beyond what she can name (Plath 77). The figs are beautiful, various, and available, and this is precisely the problem. Esther cannot choose, and so she sits 'starving to death,' watching the figs turn black and fall to the earth one by one.

The passage is frequently read as an illustration of ambivalence or indecision, but this interpretation underestimates its structural critique. Esther's paralysis is not simply psychological; it is the product of a social world that presents choice as abundance while systematically ensuring that most of the figs are, for a woman, functionally out of reach. The fig of a 'famous poet' and the fig of 'a husband and a happy home' are not, in the world of the novel, genuinely compatible. Esther has been given to understand, through the example of her mother, through her mentor Philomena Guinea, and through every institution she encounters, that femininity and intellectual ambition are mutually exclusive. The tree does not represent freedom; it represents the cruelty of illusory freedom, the cultural fiction that women in postwar America could have everything when, in practice, they could have very little.

Jean-Paul Sartre famously argued that radical freedom, understood as the recognition that existence precedes essence and that the self is not determined in advance, is experienced not as liberation but as anguish (Sartre 39). The fig tree embodies exactly this existential anguish. Esther is free in the abstract and constrained in the concrete, and the collision between those two realities produces a paralysis that looks, from the outside, like depression. The clinical intervention that follows, namely shock treatment, hospitalisation, and medication, addresses the paralysis without addressing the collision that produces it. This is the central problem the novel identifies: that psychiatric care, as Esther experiences it, offers a cure for symptoms while leaving the conditions that generate those symptoms entirely intact.

III. Psychiatric Authority and the Regulation of Femininity

The Bell Jar's portrayal of psychiatric practice is notably ambivalent. It does not offer a simple condemnation of medicine or a romantic celebration of madness. What it does offer is a detailed and critical account of how psychiatric authority operates in relation to social norms, particularly norms of gender. The doctors and institutions Esther encounters are not primarily concerned with her well-being in any rich sense of the term; they are concerned with her functioning. The standard of cure in the novel is not inner flourishing or existential peace but social legibility: the ability to perform the behaviours of a normal woman.

This is made most explicit in the contrast between Esther's first psychiatrist, Doctor Gordon, and her later therapist, Doctor Nolan. Doctor Gordon is a figure of self-satisfied authority who looks at Esther with a practised blankness that she immediately reads as indifference. When he recommends electroconvulsive therapy, he does so without explanation or care, and the treatment he administers is badly calibrated, functioning as a shock to the nervous system rather than a therapeutic intervention. Esther's description of the experience is one of the most harrowing passages in the novel: 'Then something bent down and took hold of me and shook me like the end of the world. Whee-ee-ee-ee-ee, it shrilled, through an air crackling with blue light, and with each flash a great jolt drubbed me till I thought my bones would break and the sap fly out of me like a split plant' (Plath 143). The language of violence is unmistakable. The treatment is administered as punishment or correction, not as care.

Doctor Nolan, by contrast, listens to Esther, respects her intelligence, and prepares her for the shock treatment she will later receive at Belsize. Under Doctor Nolan's supervision, ECT is a different experience: still frightening, but not traumatic in the same way. The contrast

is instructive, but the novel is careful not to let it stand as a simple good-doctor-bad-doctor narrative. Even Doctor Nolan operates within an institutional framework whose ultimate aim is Esther's reintegration into society rather than her liberation from its constraints. When Esther is discharged at the novel's end, she is no longer suicidal, but the world she is discharged into has not changed. The figs are still rotting on the tree.

Michel Foucault's analysis of psychiatric power is useful here. In *Madness and Civilization* (1961) and later in *Psychiatric Power* (1973-74), Foucault argues that the asylum functions as 'a juridical space where one is accused, judged and condemned' (Foucault, *Madness* 269), not simply a place of treatment but a mechanism of social regulation, an apparatus for disciplining those whose behaviour deviates from norms that are themselves historically and politically contingent. The psychiatric gaze, on this account, is not a neutral scientific instrument; it is a technology of power that defines normality and positions deviance as illness requiring correction. Madness, the novel suggests, is partly a category applied to those who refuse or are unable to perform the social roles assigned to them.

IV. Shock Treatment as Metaphor and Reality

Electroconvulsive therapy functions in *The Bell Jar* simultaneously as a literal medical procedure and as a resonant metaphor for the violence embedded in social conformity. The very name "shock" carries a double meaning that the novel exploits. Society shocks those who deviate from its norms into compliance; the machine merely externalises and literalises a violence that is otherwise diffuse and invisible. Susan Sontag cautions that 'illness is not a metaphor' and that the most truthful way of regarding illness is 'one most purified of, most resistant to, metaphoric thinking' (Sontag 3) to what is already a physical ordeal. But Plath's metaphorical use of ECT does not diminish the reality of the procedure; rather, it illuminates the political dimension of a treatment that was disproportionately administered to women and to those whose non-conformity was construed as pathological.

It is significant that Esther's first experience of ECT is associated with Doctor Gordon, a figure whose authority is inseparable from his gender and his social confidence. The shock he administers is not tailored to Esther's needs; it is a blunt instrument deployed in response to her failure to get better on his terms. The scene in which she is prepared for the procedure is one of deliberate infantilisation: she is laid on a table, her agency entirely surrendered to the medical apparatus surrounding her. That Plath survived and later wrote about this experience with such clarity is itself an act of resistance, a reclamation of

narrative authority from the institution that had temporarily claimed it.

The recovery Esther eventually achieves is real but qualified. She learns, under Doctor Nolan's care, to manage her suffering rather than be consumed by it. The novel does not suggest that this is nothing. But it is careful to distinguish between the management of symptoms and the resolution of their causes. When Esther walks out of Belsize at the novel's end, she does so with the image of the bell jar hovering in her consciousness. 'How did I know that someday — at college, in a job, in a marriage — the bell jar, with its stifling distortions, would not descend again?' she asks (Plath 241). The bell jar is always a possibility because the conditions that lowered it have not been dismantled. Esther's recovery is a negotiation, not a cure.

V. Literature as Counter-Discourse

If *The Bell Jar* is a critique of clinical authority, it is also an argument for the distinctive epistemic value of literature in representing mental suffering. Psychiatric diagnosis, as Plath portrays it, works through reduction: it translates the complex, context-saturated particularity of individual suffering into the generalisable categories of the diagnostic manual. This translation is not without value, as it enables treatment, communication between clinicians, and institutional care. But it also loses something irreplaceable, namely the meaning that suffering has for the person who experiences it.

Literature works in the opposite direction. Rather than abstracting from particularity, it dwells in it. Plath gives us Esther's depression in all its specific texture: the particular horror of the rotting figs, the precise sensation of the shock treatment, the specific quality of the silence that descends when she stops being able to read. This particularity is not decorative; it is epistemically significant. It insists that Esther's suffering is not a case of depression but a form of life, a way of inhabiting a world that has become, for specific and comprehensible reasons, unbearable. To understand this form of life, one must attend to its details, its context, and its meaning. Diagnosis, however necessary, cannot do this work; only narrative can.

Conclusion

Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* is a novel about depression that is also, and more fundamentally, a novel about the relationship between individual suffering and social power. Esther Greenwood's breakdown is not an accident of brain chemistry; it is the intelligible consequence of finding herself in a world whose options are too narrow for the breadth of her desires and intelligence. The novel's critique of psychiatric authority is not a rejection of medicine but a demand that medicine attend to the social and existential dimensions of mental suffering,

asking not only what is wrong with the patient but what is wrong with the world the patient inhabits.

The fig tree metaphor encodes this demand in its most concentrated form: Esther does not need to be restored to a pre-depressive equilibrium; she needs a world in which the figs are genuinely available to her, in which the choice between intellectual life and domestic life is not a choice between her ambitions and her femininity. The shock treatment she receives at the hands of Doctor Gordon dramatises the violence of a psychiatric system that enforces social norms under the guise of therapeutic intervention. And the qualified recovery she achieves at Belsize, under the more humane care of Doctor Nolan, does not resolve the structural contradictions that produced her suffering; it merely equips her to endure them more effectively.

In positioning literature as a space where psychological distress can be examined beyond the categories of diagnosis, *The Bell Jar* performs what it argues for. Plath's novel survives as a resource for those who experience the inadequacy of clinical frameworks, a text that says, in effect, that what you are feeling has a name that no diagnostic manual contains, and that name is the human response to an inhuman situation. The bell jar may descend again, but the fact that Plath wrote this book, and that we still read it, suggests that narrative is one of the few instruments by which its glass can be made visible.

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Feminine Sensibility in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Last Queen*

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Abstract— *The paper offers insight into the inner lives of female characters that underscores feminine sensibility. The diverse experiences of those characters serve as a canvas for the expression of feminine sensibility. It also examines the theme of motherhood, highlighting Jindan's maternal instincts as well as concern for the kingdom. Despite belonging to a marginalized community, she seeks power and creates a heroic charisma that the British cannot ignore. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni appropriately segregates four stages of Jindan's life: Girl, Bride, Queen, and Rebel which earned her the title of 'the last queen'. Women in history suffered a lot due to profuse complexities. The portrayal of female relationships authentically exemplifies the inherent bond of sisterhood, emphasizing the importance of women standing in solidarity.*



Keywords— *Feminine sensibility, motherhood, marginalized, sisterhood, solidarity.*

Feminism in contemporary times has changed form. It no longer echoes women's helplessness but rather focuses on power. Kamla Bhasin, in *Understanding Gender*, posits that "It is both simplistic and incorrect to think that the fight for gender equality is a fight between women and men" (79). Therefore, Divakaruni deflates the idea of the projection of females as submissive and secondary figures. Her recent novels like *The Palace of Illusions*, *The Forest of Enchantments*, *The Last Queen*, and *Independence* present bold, highly vocalized, and courageous women in myriad ways. Divakaruni has extreme frankness in its nature of writing about feminine sensibility. History books frequently omit the tales and contributions of extraordinary women. Divakaruni has incredibly crafted a story that gives long-lost identity to women characters in history whose narratives were not discussed or vocalized. These characters get acknowledgement and justice through the novels. She beautifully captures the complexity of female emotions and offers poignant insights into their agony and feelings in a way that resonates with feminine sensibility.

The Last Queen is a novel written by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni that discovers the riveting saga of Jindan's life and traces an inspiring narrative of devotion to family, faith and nation. The book is divided into four sections-

Girl, Bride, Queen, and Rebel that narrate the phases in the life of Jindan. It unveils many clandestine episodes of history that are unknown to society. Indian actress Shabana Azmi reviews *The Last Queen* as, "An unforgettable story about fearless, much- feared queen whom history seem to have forgotten" (review). The book also portrays different a side of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. He is depicted as more than just a warrior, emerging as a figure with profound emotional depth and sensitivity.

During the 'Girl' phase, Jindan has a poor yet, happy life in the village. Being the daughter of Manna Singh, a kennel keeper, she was brought up in an orthodox Punjabi household where Biji has a belief that 'too much book learning made a girl uppity' (22). Her father treats her no less than a dog and doesn't even hesitate to project Jindan as a concubine in front king for his benefit. That's why she confessed, "Manna Singh, somehow I can't think him as Father" (14). Some stereotypes are culturally fixed. In this regard, Kamla Bhasin states, "Each society slowly transforms a male or female into a man or a woman, into masculine and feminine, with different qualities, behavior patterns, roles, responsibilities, rights and expectations. Unlike sex, which is biological, the gender identities of women and men are psychologically and socially – which

means historically and culturally determined" (2). The conditioning that Jindan experiences as a child reinforces the notion that girls are destined for reproduction, household chores, and the maintenance of beauty standards. That's why Manna Singh leaves his unattractive daughter Balbir behind and chooses Jindan for the Lahore expedition.

The new adventure of Lahore is welcoming Jindan with open arms. Here, she gets her first glimpse of Raja Ranjit Singh also known as Sarkar. She falls in love with his chivalry, aura, and exquisite personality. Sarkar's favourite horse Laila plays the role of Cupid. Their journey to Shalimar on Laila is the first event where they find solace and attraction for each other. Jindan has an abundance of admirable beauty that captivates attention. She navigates and deals with complex situations with charm which solidifies her embodiment of beauty with brains. Even the king couldn't keep himself from falling in love with her valiant nature and beauty. He expressed, "There aren't too many people who would have dared to disagree with me. You are brave. I like that" (45). Her adamant and passionate love melts King in Gurudwara. Therefore, by breaking all barriers of age and class, Raja Ranjit Singh marries her.

There is something exceptional in Jindan's character that people can like or dislike but cannot ignore. Rani Jindan remains unchained from societal conventions and exposes her feminine sensitivity transparently. She remains unwelcome in an unacquainted royal palace. Mai Nakkain's enmity is a constant hurdle for her to fit in the royalty. She escapes from Mai's conspiracy and court politics by using her strong wit. Her passionate expedition commences with the bride phase. No precious gifts can make her as happy as Sarkar's presence can. She feels jealous like a normal woman at the thought of sharing her husband with other queens. Sarkar finds a true confidant in Jindan and their devotion to Punjab strengthens their bond. He discusses political matters with Jindan which he never did with any other queen. His experience recognizes Jindan's intellect and great learning ability. She only asks for a smart and trustworthy maid rather than a necklace, pearls, and haveli as a wedding present. But she longs for affinity and a sense of belonging at the palace. Her haveli finally gives her the feeling of acceptance and home. Her constant urge is to make Sarkar proud. Looking at these qualities, Sarkar opines, "I love that you aren't greedy and grasping like most other queens. Well, my dearest, you aren't my first wife, but I promise you this: you will be my last. The one who has filled my heart totally" (124). The key to fulfilling Jindan's need lies in emotional understanding and love, depicting the sentiments of women universally.

Some people at the palace are constant companions to Jindan who make many hardships easy for her. Rani Guddan is one of them and the humblest queen of all. From giving her outfit to Jindan to wear and eating in the same thali, without caring about class and position, she proves that humanity is her greatest ornament. Like a sister, Rani Guddan saves her from the envious trap of Mai. She loves Sarkar, yet, accepts that the king doesn't belong to one queen. That's why she shared with Jindan, the plight and agony of being a queen. She exercises her right to become sati after the king's death as Indian society treated sati as goddesses. Widows were socially excluded. Rani Guddan emphasizes highlighting the agony of widows. Referring to widows She opines, "Do you know how hard life is for a widow? Even-or maybe especially-for those who were queens? We'll be powerless-shunned, perhaps even murdered, so that our valuables can be confiscated by the treasury" (167). The last shot in the movie *Padmavat* portrays women as supremely powerful through their collective decision to perform jauhar, a Rajput practice of mass self-immolation after their husbands' death and defeat (2:29:17- 2:37:48). These kinds of practices were appreciated and respected. Divakaruni sheds light on this practice to show the hardships endured by women in history.

Jindan is a keen observer and a fast learner. She completely understands that she has to be prepared for the obstacles coming with the death of Sarkar. She comprehends this convoluted circumstance silently. Then, she plans to shield herself from treacherous people in the palace. She is also well aware of the promise to Sarkar to safeguard their son. She is unhesitant and strong-willed while admitting her desire to live for herself. She confesses, "For my own sake, too, I want to live. I've barely touched the world. There's so much out there to see and feel and taste. I'm greedy for it. I'll take the bitter with the sweet. I'll endure the pain" (170). She suggests women be open about their wants and should start giving preference to what they want to choose for themselves not according to societal norms. She advises women to prioritize their desires and aspirations.

True friendships are nurtured through understanding, kindness, and the simple yet profound act of being there for one another. Women characters in the narrative admire and honour each other, exemplifying the essence of sisterhood. Mangla is not just a maid for Jindan, but also a genuine and responsible friend. She has seen all the ups and downs with Jindan and stayed like an unbreakable rock. She safeguards and guides her to tackle the mean politics of the Palace. They both come from impoverished backgrounds. So, the basic understanding is already constructed. From taking care of Jindan during pregnancy

to bearing banishment together, she never escapes her duty as a friend. Her days and nights are only for her queen. That's why she pleads with the British, "I will not leave! Send me with my queen, wherever you're taking her- even to death" (277). Rani Lakshmi Bai and Jhalkari's story also highlights the importance of friendship as they discard their title of queen and maid to nurture the profound connection of sisterhood. Yogesh Vajpeyi in his article 'Jhansi's Maid Finds Place of Pride' reveals Rani came out of Fort to fight the British and Jhalkari dressed as the Rani to confuse the British about true identity. So, history offers many anecdotes that showcase the celebration of solidarity and mutual respect irrespective of caste and class distinction.

Mai Nakkain is a powerful character who makes necessary decisions at the palace. Nobody except Sarkar could dare question her because of her indomitable attitude. Still, she is insecure about Jindan becoming the favourite queen of Sarkar. The dearth of love and attention is the reason for this behaviour. To satisfy her ego, she plots against Jindan. Her conspiracies make Jindan well-fortified and prepared for future challenges. Women in history suffered a lot due to polygamy. Arshia Sattar in her article "King's Wife, but not Queen of his heart" discusses Kunti's plight and agony as Pandu decides to marry Madri and chooses to sleep with her, leaving Kunti with five sons. Divakaruni gives due importance to portraying every female character skillfully. She makes obvious mention of Sada Kaur, a woman warrior who dressed up as a male to shame enemies on the battlefield. She is also the reason that Raja Ranjit Singh became King. Sarkar has a special place for her in his heart. Sarkar's heart aches with the loss of Sada Kaur, a maternal figure. So, he spends an entire day in Gurudwara to ease his pain.

Jindan balances her tender-heartedness with a decisive and strict approach when the need arises. Jawahar is not only her brother but also her earliest and dearest friend. Despite the familial ties, she ensures her brother is not exempt from punishment for his actions. Her underprivileged background is never a hindrance to her governance skills. Circumstances try to make her weak many times, but she refuses to succumb. According to Rigveda, women are worshipped as goddesses, symbolizing the divine energy of 'Shakti'. Like Goddess Kali, women have an innate capacity to rise up to confront injustice with immense strength and tenacity. She stands boldly against the British and challenges their authority, "You put me in a cage and locked me up. You surrounded me with sentries. You thought you could keep Rani Jindan imprisoned. But look, I got out by magic from under your nose!" (283). She emerges as a lone warrior, despite facing numerous problems in her journey from Patna to Nepal. Her

resilience and strength defy gender norms, she proves women are not delicate or over-sensitive but can be tough as a rock whenever the situation demands. She acknowledges and praises freedom fighters and expresses:

I thrilled to hear of bravery on Nana Saheb, Tania Tope, Kunwar Singh, Bakht Khan, Liyakat Ali-and Mangal Pandey, the soldier who sacrificed himself to light the first flame. And the magnificent women! Rani Lakshambai of Jhansi and Begum Hazrat Mahal of Awadh, who fought not only for their people but also for their dispossessed sons. How I wished I could have joined them! (294)

The novel throws light on the experience of motherhood in a woman's life. It is a journey where a woman discovers boundless strength and a symphony of selflessness. The longing for her son echoed in Jindan's heart. She desires her husband's vestige that would live on after him. Jindan and Dalip have a profound emotional connection between mother and child. Sarkar's death shattered her a lot but she promises her son that "I'll live for you, my heart. I'll protect you with the last drop of my blood. If I have to, I'll kill for you" (169). She plays a crucial role in his upbringing and education, striving to prepare him for future responsibilities that came with being a ruler of the Sikh Empire.

A mother is considered the epitome of sacrifice and so is Jindan. At the same time, she condemns male chauvinistic society which never lets women be liberated. She gives up her passionate love for Lal for the sake of her son. However, she does not suppress her thoughts on feminine sexual feelings. She expresses, "I cannot abandon Dalip like that. But should I be sentenced to loneliness just because I wish to protect my son? Many of the nobles have several wives- and mistresses, too. Their liaisons are accepted. Am I a sinner just because I'm a woman? I love only one man, but society will denounce me if it finds out" (242). This discourse advocates Jindan's unhesitant attitude towards feminine passion. Still, she is stuck between societal expectations and personal identity. In *When We Dead Awaken*, Adrienne Rich opines that "The choice still seemed to be between "love"-- womanly, maternal love, altruistic love-- a love defined and ruled by the weight of an entire culture; and egotism-- a force directed by men into creation, achievement, ambition, often at the expense of her, but justifiably so. For weren't they men, and wasn't that their destiny as womanly, selfless love was ours?" (46-47). The dilemma of Jindan being a responsible mother and sexually liberated woman has also been accentuated in the book. Women often find themselves grappling with the daunting choice between

embracing motherhood or pursuing their individual dreams.

The British snatched away her son and kingdom. Because of prolonged banishment, she meets her son after fourteen years, 'I run my fingers hungrily over his face, his shoulders, his arms, trying to comprehend that it's really my Dalip, so tall and handsome' (300). Reunion is the utmost heart-wrenching moment in the book. In the embrace of a mother's love, a child finds comfort, warmth, and the foundation of lifetime cherished memories. Dalip was deprived of a real sense of belonging and love which he finally found in the lap of his mother. He desires, "I want to hear you breathing in the night, the way I used to when I was a child" (303). She is broken from the inside, watching her son as an English man and the loss of Koh-i-noor which was the prestige of Punjab and a token of love from Maharaja Ranjit Singh. She feels immense pride in being called as 'Mother of the Sikhs'. She reciprocates her affection and respect for the country by requesting Dalip to conduct her last rites in India and placing her ashes next to her beloved husband. She never enjoyed a stable life. Her life is marked by political intrigue, conflict, and devoid of support. Despite the political challenges and migration to Nepal and England, She never gives up her religious commitment to Sikhism. Jindan emerges as a lioness that fights against the British and her treacherous courtiers yet, continued with an indefatigable spirit.

CONCLUSION

The Last Queen is a novel with fierce feminine energy. Divakaruni demonstrates a deep commitment by tracing the mental, physical and intensive emotional journey of Jindan. The book has a profound aroma of feminine feelings. All the female characters have distinct qualities and flaws. But those flaws never overshadow them. They imbibe all humanistic traits that are love, devotion, mutual respect, kindness, jealousy, anger and most importantly strength which makes them larger-than-life characters. There is a flow of sense and sensibility. Women characters go through dilemmas and make difficult choices. The women in the book are not silent spectators but question the patriarchy. Divakaruni is giving recognition to every female character by providing insights into their experiences. The last queen of Punjab, Jindan Kaur leaves unforgettable imprints of bravery, courage, and devotion. Her story is emblematic of resilience and struggles. Jindan's life lacks stability, yet her positivity and gratitude towards life influence women to be strong in chaos. Divakaruni weaves Jindan's feminist lifestyle and undefeated attitude which inspires women even today.

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Patriarchy and Environmental Precarity: An Ecofeminist Study of Tishani Doshi's Poetry

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Abstract— *Doshi's poems explore the climate and bodies of women who are subjected to analogous forms of violence, erosion, and silence. This research article argues that Tishani Doshi's poetry challenges idealised images of nature and femininity, unveiling how women and the environment are abused under the hierarchy of patriarchy and capitalist structure in India. By applying the ecofeminist thought of Vandana Shiva, Val Plumwood, and Ariel Salleh, this paper presents that Doshi's treatment of nature is far more critical than mere sentimentalism. She understands the exploitation of nature to be structural and cyclical, rather than incidental. In this relation, the fortified language of Doshi's poems is steeped with rhythm and imagery that protest the convergence of economic, gendered, and colonial violence exercised upon the land, and more significantly upon women. The positive side of this convergence, however, is that the language encapsulates layers of resistance: the memory of the oppressed and the solidarity and love of the women. Consequently, Doshi's poems highlight that the reclamation of nature and gender justice is a simultaneous and inseparable process that requires a disintegration of the controlling logic that renders both women and nature disposable.*



Keywords— *Ecofeminism, Patriarchy, Environmental Degradation, Female Resilience, Ecological Justice, & Resistance.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The imbalance of social power structures means there is one overriding class, patriarchal men, who silence and monopolise the women's voices, labour, and autonomy. Just like a spreading cancer, it needs urgent intervention. Feminist activists rightly argue that oppression is not just interpersonal but involves the embedding of social structures like family, religion, polity, state, etc., where a system of gender-based oppression is normalised (Walby, 1990; Menon, 2012). In the context of India, patriarchy stands inter-sectioned with class, caste, gender, religion, and region, which heightens the oppression of women and manages their bodies, sexuality, and social roles and responsibilities. Patriarchal norms of cultural valorisation of obedience, silence, and sacrifice tend to mask structural violence, and literary texts often unveil this socio-cultural

violence. Such representations show that, rather than a thing of the past, patriarchy is a flexible controlling structure that is responsive to the social, cultural, political, and economic realities of the time.

Understanding the current ecological crisis involves analysing the human-centred models of progress that stem from the legacies of capitalism and colonialism. Many environmental scholars and activists argue that the logic of domination that has been applied to nature (and which is congruent with all forms of social oppression) views the land, the forests, and all forms of non-human life as constituents to be used and abused and not as integral parts of a living system (Merchant, 1980; Gadgil & Guha, 1995). India and other postcolonial settings' ecological degradation processes disadvantage marginalised groups, especially women, who suffer the consequences of water

scarcity, food insecurity, and environmental migration (Shiva, 1988). Environmental mismanagement is not the only factor contributing to the crisis. It further illustrates an ethical failing where human progress is disassociated from environmental responsibility.

Feminine dissent acts against the layered and combined violence of patriarchal oppression and systematic ecological destruction. Feminist and ecofeminist scholars argue that dissent should be seen not as a passive form of endurance, but as a form of autonomy that reframes, negotiates, and refuses within a given structure of oppression (Agarwal, 1992; Gaard, 1993). Women's dissent, for example, is often expressed through everyday acts of remembering and caring, community building, and reclaiming their autonomy through narratives. In literature, women's dissent often challenges and critiques the dominant narratives of oppression and victimhood by illuminating women as epistemic agents, whose lived experiences provide different ways of relating to the land, labour, and life (Plumwood, 1993). Such portrayals of dissent strategically do not construct it as a form of individual, personal power, but as a collective social, political, and moral injustice response. Rural women's unpaid labour and contribution to the social and economic sustenance of the environment are often overlooked, despite the fact that they are the ones responsible for collecting fuelwood, water, and performing some agricultural tasks (Agarwal, 1992). The deeper and complex relationship between patriarchal oppression and environmental degradation is illustrated with the deeper levels of deforestation and the (over)exploitation of water resources that both rural women depend on for their livelihoods, and increase their subjugation by adding more layers to their oppression (Shiva, 1993).

The integration of patriarchy, ecological crisis, and resilience unveils the importance of women's roles as both social justice activists and resistance against the destruction of the environment. Ecofeminism brings attention to the interlinked systems of oppression that both exploit nature and subordinate women. Starting in the late 1970s, this framework builds on the ideas of academics like Merchant (1980) and Shiva (1988), who argue that patriarchal ideology shapes women and nature as passive assets to be utilised, managed and controlled. Cultural ecofeminism, in this framework, tends to be more celebratory due to women's heightened spiritual associations with the earth (Warren, 2000), whereas the more critical strand, usually labelled materialist ecofeminism, concentrates on the economically exploitative structures (Mies & Shiva, 1993). In India, ecofeminism was brought to the forefront with the 1970s *Chipko* Movement, wherein women of the Himalayas embraced trees as a means of protesting deforestation

(Shiva, 1988). While some scholars viewed this as a demonstration of women's ecological awareness, Agarwal (1992) demonstrated that such activism was the result of gendered divisions of labour and survival, as opposed to a relational or spiritual connection to nature.

Likewise, the *Narmada Bachao Andolan* (NBA) from the 1980s made visible how the displacement from dam constructions was gendered, making women pivotal in the resistance (Mehta & Movik, 2014). These movements illustrate what Baviskar (1995) describes as the 'double critique' of Indian ecofeminism, which encompasses both environmental devastation and the patriarchal order and proposes a different alternative. Nonetheless, the field is still contentious, particularly with respect to essentialism. While Plumwood (1993) and Agarwal (1992) warn against biologically deterministic arguments, postcolonial critics like Spivak (1988) argue that there is a necessity to consider the neocolonial power relations. Contemporary scholarship emphasises intersectional frameworks (Salleh, 2017) that explore the environmental crisis through the intertwined relations of gender with caste, class, and race, while decolonial frameworks reposition indigenous ways of knowing as a sustainable alternative to Western development (Shiva, 2005).

Tishani Doshi's poetry is a means of personal and political expression and is a treasure trove. Doshi's poetry deals with social issues such as environmental degradation, the body as a site of struggle, and women's resistance to ecological and patriarchal oppression. Additionally, Doshi's poetry highlights the plight of women in a hierarchical patriarchal system and also presents the ecological concerns of the modern world. Consequently, her poetry deals with the human body, nature, and social norms in a manner that is in line with ecofeminist thought. In her poem "The End of the World" (2006), Doshi highlights the fragility of nature and the human. Through imagery and metaphor, the poet Doshi criticises the exploitation of nature, highlighting the environment as a space of physical destruction but also as a symbol of the collective trauma caused by patriarchal structures.

By emphasising the importance of Tishani Doshi's poetry, we examine how literary narratives can be an important means of ecofeminist resistance. Tishani Doshi's poetry not only symbolises the plight of women in a patriarchal and ecologically destroyed world but is also a means of resistance. The poetry resists the dominant discourse of ecological destruction and the oppression of women, positioning women at the forefront of the struggle for ecological justice.

Further, Doshi's poetry also alludes to the story of colonial and postcolonial exploitation, in which the

commodification of nature is parallel to the commodification of women's bodies. The poet's reading of these essences provides a critical reading of how colonial histories and present economic systems continue to influence the treatment of both women and the environment. The feminist critique of colonialism, as understood by ecofeminist theorists, is expressed in Doshi's reading of both personal and collective histories, in which ecological destruction is linked to patriarchal power structures and cultural silencing.

The first example, "The White Album," in which the poet Doshi combines the essences of loss, disintegration, and ecological destruction. The poem highlights the ecological crisis from a deeply personal and intimate point of view, emphasising the effects of environmental destruction on individuals and communities, particularly women, who are the victims of both environmental and socio-cultural destruction.

Consequently, the relation between environmental crises, patriarchy, and their interrelations in the domain of ecofeminism has been a subject of intense academic study in recent years. The interrelations between these essences are of utmost significance in comprehending the relations between gender, ecology, and society. In this regard, Doshi's poetry provides a deep literary insight into comprehending the interrelations between gender, nature, and resistance. This study aims to explore the interrelations between the essences of ecofeminism and how Tishani Doshi resists the dominant patriarchal discourses through her in-depth understanding of the environment, gender, and the relationship between human beings and nature in her poetry.

The rationale for carrying out this research stems from the imperative to highlight the interconnections between patriarchy, ecological crisis, and resilience in contemporary literary texts. Tishani Doshi's poetry provides a critical space to highlight these essences, engaging with ecofeminism in a manner that is both biographical and political. Doshi's poetry engages not only with the ecological and gendered concerns of our times but also challenges us to think anew about the possibilities of resistance and transformation. By situating Tishani Doshi's poetry in the context of ecofeminist theory, this paper aims to critically decode the representative role of literature in highlighting the complex interconnections between gender, ecology, and power.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopts ecofeminist literary criticism as its primary methodological paradigm, integrating a critical

reading of Tishani Doshi's poetry with an interdisciplinary approach to examine the convergences of gender oppression and ecological decay. The methodological paradigm integrates four primary approaches: a close reading of poetic imagery and symbolism to interpret the ecofeminist thematic content; a comparative literary criticism approach to situate Doshi's poetry within the Indian literary traditions of Sangam poetry and bhakti poetry to interpret the subversion of patriarchal narratives; a historical and cultural contextualisation approach to locate the poems within the socio-political context of India, including its environmental movements (such as *Chipko*, *Narmada Bachao Andolan*) and ecological disasters (such as the Bhopal gas tragedy, farmer suicides); and an interdisciplinary integration approach to combine feminist theory, environmental studies, and postcolonial studies to examine the systematic oppression.

The theoretical paradigm draws upon ecofeminist theory, specifically Vandana Shiva's (1988) notion on the patriarchal subjugation of women and nature, Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva's (1993) analysis of gendered labour and ecological degradation, Val Plumwood's (1993) critique of rationalist hierarchies, Ariel Salleh's (2017) notion of "embodied materialism," and Gayatri Spivak's (1988) subaltern studies. The analysis is further informed by the application of Indian feminist ecology (Agarwal, 1992; Nagarajan, 2019), which examines class, caste, and ecologically mediated violence; postcolonial ecocriticism (Guha, 2000; Gadgil & Guha, 1995), which connects ecological destruction to colonial and neoliberal exploitation; and performance theory (Meduri, 2005), that unveils the manner in which classical dance constitutes gendered bodies. The theoretical perspective also addresses ecofeminist theorists such as Shiva (1988) and Plumwood (1993) to highlight the ecological and gender aspects of patriarchal domination, applying their theories to interpret how Doshi's poetry subverts the hierarchical order. Together, these methods and theories suggest the manner in which Doshi's poetry unveils the systematic correspondences between the domination of women and the destruction of the environment, subverts essentialised dualisms (nature/culture, pure/impure) that are administered by patriarchy, nationalism, and imagines dissent and resistance through the discourses of bodily autonomy, ecological memory, and collective defiance.

III. ANALYSIS: GENDERED BODIES, DAMAGED ECOLOGIES, AND ACTS OF RESISTANCE IN DOSHI'S WRITING

Tishani Doshi's poetry highlights the female body that stands at the fault line between the destruction of nature and

patriarchal domination. The destruction of nature in her poetry is the destruction of the body, and it exposes the mechanisms of oppression that coexist for women and nature. It is not the suffering but the language of resistance that gets exposed. Tishani Doshi's poetry (re)designs ecology as a feminist text of struggle and survival.

3.1. Patriarchy and Ecological Isolation in "Summer in Madras"

Tishani Doshi's "Summer in Madras" highlights patriarchal systems in its portrayal of the disintegration of a family under the stifling heat of the Madras summer. It portrays how interconnected systems of oppression affect both women and nature, illustrating clear imagery to disclose how patriarchal domination is aligned in domestic spaces and ecological degradation (Shiva, 1988). The poem opens with the assertion that "Everyone in the house is dying," immediately contrasting the disintegration of the family and the environment (Doshi, 2017, p.7), thereby casting the family as a microcosm of the environment in disarray, where the disintegration of humanity and nature are reflected in each other. The incarceration of the mother in an "air-conditioned room" represents the alienation of modernity from nature, where physical pain is alleviated at the expense of mental suffering, as "rivers break their dams against her nerves" represent the suppression of female power, which is now "turbulent and destructive" (Doshi, 2017, p.7), validating Shiva's claim that patriarchal modernisation deprives women of their traditional ecological function (Shiva, 1988).

On the other hand, the actions of the father unveil the performative nature of patriarchal ecological connection as he "stalks verandas, offering pieces of his skin to the rows of lurid gulmohars," a mere ritualistic act towards nature (Doshi, 2017, p.7), with the gulmohar trees representing colonial ecological imposition, as per ecofeminist views on colonial ecological destruction. The father's desperate attempt at "stuffing his ears with desiccated mango husks" to "still the advancing armies of the past" indicates patriarchal denial and the utilisation of natural resources to suppress historical trauma (Doshi, 2017, p.7), aligning with Val Plumwood's views on rationalist hierarchies that reduce nature to a lifeless resource (Plumwood, 1993). In this context, the brother's action stands for a subversive strategy towards death and nature as he playfully taps "death's umbrella" and sings (Doshi, 2017, p.7), aligning with Ariel Salleh's "embodied materialism," where resistance is created through alternative, non-hegemonic relations with nature (Salleh, 2017). The ecological imagery in the poem, for instance, "air-conditioned room," "rivers breaking their dams," "gulmohars," and "desiccated mango husks," further reinforces the ecofeminist view as they symbolise

modern alienation, colonialism, and the redundancy of patriarchal domination. Through reflection of the disintegration of a family in an environmental context in the poem "Summer in Madras", the poem conveys ecofeminist elements in that it shows how patriarchal societies provide exploitative answers that fail in the end as they continue to oppress both women and nature, and the brother's role indicates creative resistance and alternative relationships and spaces.

3.2. Socio-Ecological Crises in "What the Sea Brought In"

Doshi's "What the Sea Brought In" (2017) emphasises the interlinking crises of the destruction of the environment and gender violence. Shiva rightly argues that the destruction of nature and the abuse of women are interlinked (Shiva, 1988), which is the central core for interpreting the poem's representation of the sea's trash, human loss, and cultural deterioration. The poem is critical of the capitalist use, destruction of the environment, and commodification of women, which are more pronounced in India's increasingly industrialising and patriarchal society.

The sea is a dumping ground for human trash and a symbol of collective trauma. "Brooms, brassieres, empty bottles of booze. / The tip of my brother's missing forefinger" (Doshi, 2017, p.11) symbolises the use of nature as a dumping ground for human violence and neglect, which is reminiscent of industrial accidents in India's informal labour market. Moreover, the "two ghost children foraging their way home" symbolise the crisis of missing children in India, particularly the most vulnerable ones in the marginalised sections of society, such as women and Dalits (Agarwal, 1992).

The list of waste, "rubber, leather, Rexine, felt" (Doshi, 2017, p.11), in the poem symbolises the increasing coastal pollution in Indian cities such as Mumbai and Chennai. The destruction of cultural practices is emphasised by "decapitated marigolds" and "broken nautilus," which comment on the effects of industrial pollution and consumer culture in degrading both the environment and cultural icons (Gadgil & Guha, 1995). In addition, the "betrayed school friend stuck in the dunes like the legs of Ozymandias" symbolises the emptiness of unregulated development in displacing marginalised communities, such as the *Adivasis*, who are made ecological refugees (Shiva, 2016).

The poem also exposes the commodification of women's physical bodies, particularly in the "Virginity returned in a chastity box" (Doshi, 2017, p.11), which reflects the social perception of women's purity and subordination (Menon, 2012). The "soiled mattresses" (Doshi, 2017, p.11) are symbolic of the violence against

women, a concern in India, while the “feral creature of love” (Doshi, 2017, p.12) growing “from gravestones of breakers” symbolises the resilience and regeneration of love and life, despite the systematic violence (Doshi, 2017, p.12; Mies & Shiva, 1993).

Further, the gathering of symbols like “letters of love, letters of lust, the 1980s, funeral dust” represents the loss of cultural memory in the decaying urban landscape (Doshi, 2017, p.11). The “pack of poor poisoned dogs” (Doshi, 2017, p.11) represents the disregard for the urban environment and street dogs (Jalais, 2010), while the reference to “the legs of Ozymandias” (Doshi, 2017, p.11) represents the ruins of colonial hubris and exploitation that continue to shape India's environmental disasters (Guha, 2000). The reference to “the mustard jumpsuit” (Doshi, 2017, p.11) represents the agrarian crisis and farmer suicides, which have a huge impact on rural women, who are left alone as widows or as unpaid labour (Sainath, 2014).

Despite the stripped-down quality of the poem, there are moments of hope and resilience. The “barnacles house empires” (Doshi, 2017, p.12) and “the feral creature of love grows from gravestones” represent grassroots resistance and ecological renewal (Doshi, 2017, p.12), reflecting the notions of the survival of subaltern ecosystems. The “wildflowers in the fetch” (Doshi, 2017, p.12) represent the potential for growth and regeneration in the midst of destruction, representing ecofeminist ideals of sustainability, resistance, and ecological justice (Warren, 2000). Thus, the poem points to the destruction of nature and women by capitalist patriarchy.

3.3. Patriarchal Oppression and Female Resilience in “The Women of the Shin Yang Park Sauna, Gwangju”

Doshi's “The Women of the Shin Yang Park Sauna, Gwangju” indicates the patriarchal domination by pointing out the co-existence of the use of female bodies and nature, especially in the Indian context, where female bodies and nature are also protected and exploited (Shiva, 1988). The poem begins with the assertion of the independence of the body, “Hello, I'm naked,” (Doshi, 2017, p.54) challenging the social norms of femininity, and the women's purification rituals, stripping away “disappointment from their houses / of sternum” (Doshi, 2017, p.54), symbolically resisting patriarchal domination, conforming to the ecofeminist school of thought that identifies women and nature as a unity that is collectively subjected to social violence (Mies & Shiva, 1993). However, the “hysterectomy scars” (Doshi, 2017, p.54) on the bodies of the older women specifically highlight the poem's criticism of the medical domination of women's bodies, referring to the Indian experience of forced sterilisation and the exploitation of natural assets (Shiva, 1988), and the image

of “legs spread like avenues of thick black trees” (Doshi, 2017, p.54) further representing women's power and ecological fragility. The women's characterisation as “warriors—plundered or having plundered” (Doshi, 2017, p.54) highlights the dual nature of the women's character as victims and survivors, which corresponds to the ecofeminist assertion of oppression, wherein the “threat of annihilation” (Doshi, 2017, p.54) that looms over the women symbolises the degradation of nature under the capitalist patriarchal order (Warren, 2000).

The older woman's gaze, “the way death / might look at life, with pity” (Doshi, 2017, p.54), is itself the embodiment of intergenerational trauma, which addresses of the unequal suffering of Indian women in the wake of ecological catastrophes such as water shortages (Agarwal, 1992), even as her never-ending task of pouring cold water (Doshi, 2017, p.54) symbolises the struggle to survive in the face of adversity. The sauna itself becomes a site of counter-hegemony, wherein social “gossiping” (Gramsci, 1971; Doshi, 2017, p.54) and corporeal intimacy challenge the hegemonic discourse of the male order, symbolising the solidarity of Indian rural women's collectives in fighting back against exploitation through their labour and words (Shiva, 1988). The final lines of the poem, “You are me, / I am you, neither one of us immaculate” (Doshi, 2017, p.55), reject the ideologies of patriarchal and environmental purity, addressing the reality of women and nature, and defying the Brahmanical and capitalist dualisms that attempt to control and regulate both (Mies & Shiva, 1993).

3.4. Violence, Labour, and Resistance in “Monsoon Poem”

Doshi's “Monsoon Poem” indicates the violence of patriarchy and nature, and the destruction of the romanticised vision of nature and femininity, while exposing the systematic connection between them. The poem questions the patriarchal domination that employs both women and nature, placing the monsoon, a symbol of fertility and rebirth, as a location of gender and nature contradictions. Doshi subverts the conventional imagery of monsoon (jasmine, mangoes, and peacocks), which normally sexualises nature as a passive female (Rao, 2004), by integrating it with the image of rotten decay. The lines “Expect to hear a lot / about erotic consummation inferred / by laburnum gyrations and bamboo / syncopations” (Doshi, 2017, p.20) resonate with the voyeuristic male gaze that is embedded in the Indian poetic tradition, such as the *Kuruntokai's* objectification of women and land (Ramaswamy, 1997). The poem further subverts the romantic notion of fertility through grotesque moments, “mosquito blood, dappled / and fried against the wires of a bug-zapping / paddle,” unveiling the violence hidden

behind the romantic idealisation of rain (Doshi, 2017, pp.20-21). At the heart of this subversion is the metaphor of mud, which “sneaks up / like a sleek-gilled vandal to catch hold / of your ankles” (Doshi, 2017, p.20), aligning with the metaphor of the invisibilised labour of rural women who are crucial to agrarian economies but are marginalised (Agarwal, 1992). The ambivalence of the monsoon, which is both life-giving and oppressive (“the sky’s steady bludgeoning”), embodies the burden of women, who are idealised as life-giving but subjected to violence (Shiva, 1988). The beautiful contrast between the romantic monsoon stories and the unspoken pain is captured by Doshi: “Notice / how hardly anyone mentions the word / *death*, even though the fridge leaks / and the sheets have been damp for weeks” (Doshi, 2017, p.21), where the dampness is a metaphor for patriarchal domination. The pictures of scavenging crabs and dying mayflies represent the entropy of life that is erased from the romanticised natural imagery and align with the ecofeminist essence. The final repudiation of devotional submission in the poem, “those old poems / led us to believe that men were mountains... / we should be delighted to be taken / in drowning, in devotion” (Doshi, 2017, p.22), critiques the bhakti tradition’s idealisation of female suffering (Ramanujan, 1981), promoting instead a resistance against gendered and ecological subjugation (Mies & Shiva, 1993). In exposing the monsoon’s “post-coital bliss” as a conceit for exploitation (Doshi, 2017, p.21), Doshi repositions women and nature as agents of resistance, subverting both literary and political systems of domination that commodify women’s bodies and nature. The poem thus moves beyond the metaphor of the seasons to resonate with an ecofeminist practice of survival, in which liberation is found through the recognition of mud, decay, and resistance as essential to the process.

3.5. Ecofeminist Resistance and Reclamation in “Girls Are Coming Out of the Woods”

Doshi’s “Girls Are Coming Out of the Woods” (2017) is an unflinching poem that explores the feminist spirit of resistance with ecologically aware metaphors, where the subjugation of women and the destruction of nature are inextricably intertwined (Shiva, 1988).

The poet Doshi critically observes that the defining metaphor of girls coming out of the woods is one of danger and defiance; in Indian folklore, the forest is a borderland, which is at the same time sacred and dangerous. Doshi’s image of girls “wrapped in cloaks and hoods, / carrying iron bars and candles” (Doshi, 2017, p.38) is one of vulnerability turned to resistance. The wounds they bear, “collected on acres of premature grass and city buses, in temples and bars,” represent a metaphorical convergence of the

destruction of nature and the abuse of women (Doshi, 2017, p.38). The woods are thus both the location of patriarchal oppression and resistance, as in the *Chipko* Movement, where women literally defended the forests (Shiva, 1988).

Doshi portrays how patriarchal societies commoditise women and nature. The chilling picture of girls with “panties tied around their lips” represents the repression of women, along with the destruction of nature due to deforestation (Doshi, 2017, p.38). Even the girls’ “coffins decorated with briar” (Doshi, 2017, p.38) represent natural forms defying domination, triggering movements like the *Narmada Bachao Andolan* (Agarwal, 1992). Doshi converts victims into unstoppable forces; girls “leaking secrets from unfastened thighs,” echoing rivers bursting dams (Doshi, 2017, p.38), and “bodies pushing against water” (Doshi, 2017, p.39), represent rivers like the Ganga fighting back against their destruction. By referring to the spirits of wronged women (*bhoota*) residing in natural locations, Doshi marks the link between memory and ecological haunting (Nagarajan, 2019). By referring to actual events such as the Delhi *Nirbhaya* case, she marks the collective memory through human and ecological suffering. The last repetition, “They’re coming. They’re coming,” is a warning of the collective punishment that is soon to follow, comparing the girls’ return to ecological disasters demanding collective punishment (Doshi, 2017, p.39). Thus, Doshi unveils how the woods are a metaphorical space that links patriarchal violence and the destruction of nature, and how the resistance is based on collective resurgence and memory.

3.6. Patriarchy and Nationalism in “Your Body Language Is Not Indian! Where I Am Snubbed at a Cocktail Party by a Bharatnatyam Dancer”

Doshi’s “Your Body Language Is Not Indian! Where I Am Snubbed at a Cocktail Party by a Bharatnatyam Dancer” is a poem about the double marginalisation of women and nature in patriarchal societies, as it identifies with how both are commodified, dominated, and disciplined (Shiva, 1988). The voice in the poem resists the roles imposed on women, such as marriage, motherhood, and domestic work, and laments the cultural forces that impose reproductive submissiveness: “Do you understand the kind of resistance / involved in arriving at 37—alone, two white hairs, / the onset of wrinkles” (Doshi, 2017, p.49). In refusing the “effervescent sortie of evolution” (Doshi, 2017, p.49) and the biological determinism imposed by “scolding aunties” (Doshi, 2017, p.49) and women who “patiently flexed / their shoulders and hoiked up their knees,” (Doshi, 2017, p.49) Doshi’s work corresponds to ecofeminist thought that conceives women’s physical bodies as spaces of labour

exploitation under patriarchal capitalism (Mies & Shiva, 1993).

The speaker's assertion, "I gave a giant finger to Genes" (Doshi, 2017, p.49), further shatters the essentialist constructs that bind women to nature as passive nurturers (Plumwood, 1993). The poem intensifies its critique with the Bharatnatyam dancer's charge, "*Your body language is not Indian!*", which identifies with the nationalist and cultural typification of women's bodies, fragmenting identity as colonial land division (Spivak, 1988). The poet's defiance of the classical dance form's "incorrect mudras and aramandis" (Doshi, 2017, p.50) challenges Brahmanical and patriarchal control (Meduri, 2005), while her speaker's assertion of herself as 'quartered' into "wetland, desert, / marsh, city" (Doshi, 2017, p.50) signifies ecological and gendered territorialisation. Refusing to be bound by typified categories, the speaker asserts her hybridity, "Part sea creature, / part peach tree" (Doshi, 2017, p.50), exemplifying ecofeminist liminality that defies patriarchal enclosure (Warren, 2000). The speaker's defiance of being bound by "I refuse to wear the sins / of my progenitors in the topography of my chin" (Doshi, 2017, p.50), shatters casteist and patriarchal inheritance (Shiva, 1988), culminating in visions of "a nest underground" (Doshi, 2017, p.51) and a dance with "an easterly wind," (Doshi, 2017, p.51) where death is transformative liberation instead of extinction. The "muddy bracelets of existence" (Doshi, 2017, p.51) represent both the struggle of society and the cycle of rebirth in nature, where the female body is constructed as a site of resistance rather than control. Thus, Doshi's poem is a deconstruction of the regulation of Indian femininity in relation to reproduction, culture, and identity, and instead, it is a construction of an ecofeminist discourse of autonomy, where the body, like nature, thrives in its fluid and feral form of resistance to capitalism and nationalism.

IV. DISCUSSION

Ecofeminism, as explained by scholars like Vandana Shiva (1988) and Maria Mies (1993), argues that the oppression of nature and women is a result of the same ideological perspective, including colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy. Doshi's poetry becomes a significant tool for this critique, unearthing the violence while also imagining a resistance through embodied and ecological dissent.

4.1. Patriarchal Domination and Ecological Alienation

Doshi's "Summer in Madras" illustrates the extension of patriarchal domination from human relations to natural spaces. The breakdown of the family is a result of environmental degradation, where the imprisonment of the mother in an "air-conditioned room" represents the

alienation of modernity from nature (Doshi, 2017, p.7). The father's empty gesture of donating his skin to gulmohar trees represents a performative act of ecological engagement, which criticises patriarchal domination of nature (Plumwood, 1993). At the same time, the brother's interaction with death represents an alternative, non-dominating relationship with nature (Salleh, 2017), which serves as a subversive form of ecofeminist resistance.

In "Monsoon Poem," Doshi disrupts the romanticised representation of monsoon in literature, revealing its violent undertones. The poem juxtaposes the romantic representation of monsoon in literature with its horrific realities, "mosquito blood, dappled / and fried against the wires of a bug-zapping / paddle" (Doshi, 2017, pp.21-21), which reveals how patriarchal discourses mask the pain of nature and women. The wetness of the bed sheets, which is unacknowledged but oppressive, becomes a metaphor for the silenced pain of women.

4.2. Gendered Violence and Environmental Exploitation

In "What the Sea Brought In", Doshi critiques the consumption and degradation of the environment under capitalism, using the prism of gendered violence. The sea, as a dumping ground for human waste, swallows "rubber, leather, Rexine, felt" as well as "Virginity returned / in a chastity box" (Doshi, 2017, p.11). This is aligned with Shiva's (1988) idea that the capitalist patriarchy seeks to commodify women and nature, making them disposable. The poem's "ghost children" and "poisoned dogs" also underscore the ecological and social vulnerability of marginalised communities in India.

In "Girls Are Coming Out of the Woods", this critique is taken to the next level, where the woods symbolise both patriarchal violence and resistance. The girls come out "wrapped in cloaks and hoods, / carrying iron bars and candles" (Doshi, 2017, p.38), symbolising the *Chipko* Movement's resistance to deforestation (Shiva, 1988). The girls' scars, stored in "temples and bars" (Doshi, 2017, p.38), symbolise the intersection of religious, urban, and environmental oppressions.

4.3. Embodied Resistance and Ecological Reclamation

Doshi's "The Women of the Shin Yang Park Sauna, Gwangju" exemplifies the radical expression of autonomy over the body, where the women's nudity shatters patriarchal norms. Their "hysterectomy scars" (Doshi, 2017, p.54) challenge the medical dominance of female reproduction, exemplifying the forced sterilisations of women in India (Shiva, 1988). However, the sauna is a site of counter-hegemony, where collective unity challenges the

patriarchal discourse, much like the ecofeminist struggle against oppression through collective nurturing (Mies & Shiva, 1993).

The poem "Your Body Language Is Not Indian! Where I Am Snubbed at a Cocktail Party by a Bharatnatyam Dancer" is a radical challenge to nationalist and patriarchal control, challenging the female roles assigned by society. The poet's defiance, "I gave a giant finger to Genes," (Doshi, 2017, p.49) challenges biological determinism (Plumwood, 1993), while her fractured identity, quartered into "wetland, desert, / marsh, city," (Doshi, 2017, p.50) embodies ecological division. The poem's final imagery of a "nest underground" (Doshi, 2017, p.51) and dancing with "an easterly wind" (Doshi, 2017, p.51) implies a transformative resistance, echoing ecofeminist ideals of cyclical rebirth.

Doshi's poetry is a beautiful and profound expression of an ecofeminist critique of patriarchal and ecological violence, emphasising the dual exploitation and abuse of nature and women under capitalism and nationalism. However, Doshi's poetry also expresses a vision of resistance through bodily defiance, collective unity, and ecological reclaiming. Through the illumination of oppression and the celebration of resilience, Doshi's poetry urges a radical transformation of human relationships with nature.

V. CONCLUSION

The article has demonstrated Tishani Doshi's critical use of ecofeminist critique to deconstruct the interrelatedness of patriarchy and environmental degradation in her poetry. Using imagery and metaphor, Doshi's poetry, in particular "Summer in Madras", "What the Sea Brought In", "The Women of the Shin Yang Park Sauna, Gwangju", "Monsoon Poem", and "Girls Are Coming Out of the Woods", "Your Body Language Is Not Indian! Where I Am Snubbed at a Cocktail Party by a Bharatnatyam Dancer", deconstructs the manner in which patriarchal systems both oppress women and degrade the environment.

Some of the key findings of this research study underscore the manner in which Doshi uses the domestic sphere as a microcosm of environmental degradation to illustrate the manner in which both women and the environment are subjected to systematic violence and alienation. Using the metaphor of environmental and gendered decay, Doshi's poetry challenges the reader to recognise the interrelated and intertwined nature of these oppressions, which are fueled by capitalist patriarchy.

The implications of this research study are far-reaching and extend beyond the boundaries of academic discourse, offering important perspectives on the manner in

which ecofeminist thought can be used to better understand socio-environmental problems. In the Indian context, where both environmental degradation and gendered violence are important concerns, Doshi's poetry offers a critical call to action. In highlighting the struggles of women and the struggles of nature, this research paper brings to the fore the necessity to adopt a more holistic approach in dealing with the issues of environmental sustainability and gender justice.

The most significant aspect of this research work is its application of ecofeminist theory to the poetry of Doshi, which brings to the fore a new perspective on her poetry, as it highlights the complicated relationships between gender, ecology, and resistance.

Looking ahead, future research could expand on this critical examination to further investigate the developing ecofeminist essences of Doshi in her poetry, particularly in the milieu of the shifting socio-political hemispheres of India. Researchers could also investigate the relationship of Doshi's poetry to the global ecofeminist movement and the significance of her poetry to transnational feminist thought. Therefore, this research paper seeks to raise new questions about the role of literature in inspiring and motivating collective action towards environmental and gender justice, which calls for further investigation into the complex relationships between power, resistance, and environmental ethics. In reflecting on the insights of Doshi's poetry, the question that we are left to ponder is: How might we, as individuals and as communities, (re)shape our relationships with nature and with each other in order to build a sustainable and resilient future?

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Anxiety over Transition: Visual Narrative in “Rip Van Winkle”¹

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Abstract—This article conducts an interdisciplinary study and offers a corrective to previous scholarship that has routinely overlooked the role of visual narrative in “Rip Van Winkle”. Visual narrative skills -- such as the use of color and light, ekphrasis, comic strip via phrasing, two-dimensional variable focalization -- not only elaborate, specify, and extend the characterization of the protagonists, but also act as a microcosm of social transition in 19th century America. This paper argues that Irving portrays the anxiety over transition through visual narrative in the short story.



Keywords— “Rip Van Winkle”, Visual Narrative, Anxiety over Transition

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I. INTRODUCTION

Widely known for his superb skills in short story narrative and travel sketches, Washington Irving is mainly acknowledged as a master of short fiction and a stylist of the essay, but his acute artistry in visual representation has been largely ignored. “Rip Van Winkle” is such an example. Current critical approaches to the story include new historicism (Yang Jincai, 2013, Quan Wang, 2020; Tian Junwu, 2021; Sarah Wyman, 2022), feminism (Xue Xiaohui, 2006), postcolonialism (Fang Xurong, 2024), ecocriticism and deconstruction. However, the visual narrative in the story has largely been neglected, which is actually quite important to the understanding of Irving’s art and thematic concern. This article aims to examine Irving’s skills of visual art in “Rip Van Winkle” and explore how the visual narrative skills help him cover up the anxiety undergone in the time of great social change.

According to W. J.T. Mitchell’s *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*, “Visible language” is a phrase that “has primarily a metaphorical meaning for both art historians and literary critics” (111). In literature, conversely, the notion of “visible language”

imports “the discourse of meaning and seeing into our understanding of verbal expression: it tempts us to give terms like imitation, form, and figuration a strong graphic, iconic sense and to conceive of texts as images in a widely variety of texts” (112). Visual narrative is to convert the diachronicity of novel’s narrative into the synchronicity of images, reflecting the interaction between the two narrative forms of text and image. Although the form of visual narrative is the spatialization of time, it is, in essence, the re-temporalization of space. While literature and the visual arts—including painting, sculpture, and architecture—did not begin to intersect until the twentieth century, Washington Irving’s early nineteenth-century short stories have already featured a distinctly visual style, just as Karl Theodor Gaedertz applauds Irving’s decision “to create his drawings with language and quill rather than with pencil and palette” and contends that “If one thinks of the figure of the sleepy Rip Van Winkle and his surroundings, he believes to have before him one of the excellent paintings of the famous Dutch master Adriaen van Ostade.” (Qtd. in Zlogar 44) So, it is so great significance to make further investigation of visual narrative in “Rip Van Winkle”.

II. THE INFLUENCE OF DUTCH GENRE PAINTING

In the 17th century, Holland emerged as Europe's richest and most advanced country; freedom of speech and religion there created conditions for the prosperity of art. Portraits, genre paintings, and still-life paintings—works that depicted citizens' lives, thoughts, and feelings—centered on core themes: human dignity and self-confidence, as well as the beauty and serenity of nature. Catering to the emerging bourgeoisie and the public, these artistic characteristics collectively shaped Dutch genre painting, representative artists including Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn and Johannes Vermeer, among others. This rich Dutch artistic tradition bears notable relevance to Washington Irving's work: the visual quality of "Rip Van Winkle" has long been recognized, and it shares a strong kinship with Dutch genre painting. Critical views on this connection, however, diverge. In 1823, Maria Edgeworth made a direct affirmation of the visual alignment between his writing and Northern European artistic styles when she remarked that Irving's stories "The Stout Gentleman" "The Inn Yard," and "The Rookery in Bracebridge Hall" are "all exquisite paintings in the high finish of the Flemish school" (44). By contrast, Stanley T. Williams commented that the influence of this very Dutch painting tradition on Irving's art "has never been adequately appraised" (44). These two contrasting views—one affirming the visual alignment of Irving's works with Flemish artistic traditions, the other pointing out the underappreciation of Dutch painting's influence on him—together highlight the need for further exploration of how visual arts shaped Irving's literary style.

Visuality arises from the interaction of the eye, light, and objects. From a physicist's perspective, the mechanism of vision formation first hinges on the relationship between these three elements. The opening lines of *Rip Van Winkle* immediately establish the geographical setting of the short story.

In the depiction of the Kaatskill Mountains -- a remarkable illustration of visual narrative—Irving weaves techniques inspired by Dutch genre painting to craft a landscape that is both aesthetically striking and thematically resonant with the post-Revolutionary social transformation anxiety that concludes "Rip Van Winkle". He begins with a panoramic viewpoint, framing the mountains as "a dismembered branch of the great Appalachian family" (Irving 30) -- a phrase balancing grandeur with organic connection, echoing Dutch landscape painters like Jacob van Ruisdael, who grounded vast natural scenes in human-scaled coherence to make the mountains feel both majestic and familiar. Yang Jincai pointed out that the former British colonies depicted had

long since become "a dismembered branch of the great Appalachian family (30)," which undoubtedly signifies the collapse of Britain's colonial system in America. From this, one can infer that the short story serves as a metaphorical tale of the transition from British colonial rule to American independence and self-governance (Yang 76). Irving then emphasizes the mountains' dynamism through meticulous attention to their mutability: "Every change of season, every change of weather, indeed, every hour of the day, produces some change in the magical hues and shapes of these mountains" (30) -- a focus on transience mirroring the flux of post-Revolution American society, prefiguring the radical changes Rip will face upon returning to his transformed village. This fluidity is deepened by color symbolism: fair weather cloaks the mountains in stable "blue and purple" that "print their bold outlines on the clear evening sky", while even cloudless days bring "a hood of gray vapors about their summits" (30) -- signaling hidden uncertainty beneath surface calm, paralleling the fragile peace of post-Revolutionary America. The influence of Dutch art shines through in Irving's use of light and atmosphere (a hallmark of artists like Pieter de Hooch and Aert van der Neer): he describes the gray vapors glowing "like a crown of glory" in the "last rays of the setting sun," transforming the mountains into a symbol of fleeting beauty. Beyond description, this visual narrative engages directly with the story's concluding social anxiety: the mountains, called "perfect barometers" by local wives, metaphorically reflect societal stability and change. By merging Dutch realism, symbolic light and color, and atmospheric detail with American subject matter, Irving creates a landscape that celebrates nature's grandeur while prefiguring the story's ending.

Besides, Irving utilizes poetics of ekphrasis to list an array of Dutch elements. James A. W. Hefferman's definition of ekphrasis is still regarded as authoritative: "Ekphrasis is verbal representation of graphic representation" (Hefferman 303). In "Ekphrasis and Representation" he discusses the narrative function of "ekphrastic poetry". First, he argues that the title of an artwork is a literal reproduction of the work itself, and that "much shorter titles can also serve a narrative function" (303). In addition, ekphrastic poetry "has the rhetorical technique of evoking a silent object" (302). Irving's reference to the village at the foot of the mountains, founded by Dutch colonists during the governance of Peter Stuyvesant, anchors the narrative in a specific historical context. According to Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, the house is one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind. (6) The description of the village, with its "small yellow bricks" and "latticed windows, (30)" conjures

images of a quaint, idyllic community that embodies the values and traditions of its Dutch origins. By highlighting the architectural features and the antiquity of the village, Irving taps into a collective memory that resonates with readers familiar with American history. The phrase "may he rest in peace! (30)" following the mention of Stuyvesant adds a layer of nostalgia and reverence, suggesting a longing for a simpler, more stable past. This sentiment is particularly poignant in the context of Rip's story, where the protagonist experiences profound changes in his life and society after a long slumber. The mountains and the village serve as symbols of the past that Rip yearns for, contrasting sharply with the tumultuous changes brought about by the American Revolution and the subsequent shift in societal values.

III. COMIC STRIP VIA PHRASING

Generally, the construction of the cross-media narration in the novel based on the visual image is mainly embodied in two structural patterns: "comic strip via phrasing" for its narrative mode and "juxtaposed narrative". "Comic strip via phrasing" refer to a narrative mode where the novel maintains its fundamental causal-linear structure -- the story progresses chronologically and causally—but upon this linear foundation, the text strings together a series of "word-pictures." (Long 51) In "Rip Van Winkle", Washington Irving artfully employs this technique to construct Rip's and minor characters' traits and metaphorize the social anxiety over transition.

In the short story, Irving first delivered a cutting critique of Rip's character: "a simple man good-natured man; he was, moreover, a kind neighbor, and an obedient hen-pecked husband" (30). Then the narrator proceeds to state straight out that "The great error in Rip's composition was an insuperable aversion to all kinds of profitable labor" (31). How can "this insuperable aversion to all kinds of profitable labor (31)" be expressed? The depiction rejects the one-dimensional view of him as a "lazy" man, instead frames him as a figure of principled misdirection -- endowed with immense assiduity and perseverance, yet unable to channel these virtues into the roles demanded by the post-revolutionary world. Just as Yang Jincai contends, Rip appears outwardly timid in Irving's portrayal, a "henpecked husband," yet underneath he is not submissive (76). The description opens by refuting the idea that Rip lacks diligence: his willingness to sit on a "wet rock" all day with a "rod as long and heavy as a Tartar's lance," fishing without a single nibble or complaint, proves he possesses remarkable stamina. Similarly, his hours of "trudging through woods and swamps, uphill and down dale" to shoot small game (squirrels, wild pigeons) and his

eagerness to lead communal labor -- "foremost man at all country frolics for husking Indian corn or building stone-fences"—reveal a man wired for the collective, labor-intensive rhythms of pre-revolutionary agrarian life. Even his role as the village errand-runner, doing "little odd jobs" that "less obliging husbands" refuse, cements his status as a communal glue: a person who thrives on mutual aid, not individual gain. Yet the crucial contrast—his inability to tend to "family duty" or keep his farm "in order" -- is not laziness, but a mismatch. Rip's virtues -- patience, communal devotion, selflessness-- are relics of the colonial era, where survival depended on neighborhood cooperation, not the individualistic, productivity-driven ethos emerging after independence.

The depiction of Nicholas Vedder masterfully crafts a comic strip via phrasing—a series of phrased, visually vivid moments that mimic the sequential panels of a comic strip. The first "panel" in this phrased comic strip is established by the description of Vedder's daily routine: "at the door of which he took his seat from morning till night, just moving sufficiently to avoid the sun and keep in the shade of a large tree; so that the neighbors could tell the hour by his movements as accurately as by a sundial"(33). This phrase paints a static, almost sculptural image -- Vedder rooted to the inn's door, his movements minimal and predictable, tied to the tree's shade and the passage of time. Like a comic panel that uses the setting to anchor a character, this phrasing places Vedder within a fixed, unchanging environment: the inn (a community hub) and the tree (a natural, enduring symbol) frame him as a constant in the village's life. This extends his character beyond a mere landlord; he becomes a visual marker of order -- so integral to the village's rhythm that his body acts as a "sundial (33)," a tool for measuring time, emphasizing the pre-independence world's reliance on tradition and predictability. For readers, this phrased panel evokes a sense of calm complacency, a world where change is not just unlikely but unperceived, setting the stage for the disruption that independence will bring.

The next set of phrased "panels" shifts to Vedder's non-verbal communication, using detailed descriptions of his pipe-smoking to add dynamic depth, turning his silence into a language of authority. Phrases like "it is true he was rarely heard to speak, but smoked his pipe incessantly," "when anything that was read or related displeased him, he was observed to smoke his pipe vehemently, and to send forth short, frequent and angry puffs," and "when pleased, he would inhale the smoke slowly and tranquilly, and emit it in light and placid clouds; and sometimes, taking the pipe from his mouth, and letting the fragrant vapor curl about his nose, would gravely nod his head in token of perfect approbation"(33) function like consecutive comic

panels that capture micro-actions. Each phrase isolates a specific gesture: the constant pipe-smoking (a baseline of his character), the "angry puffs" (a clear sign of disapproval), the "placid clouds" and "grave nod" (markers of approval). Like a comic artist using facial expressions or body language to convey emotions, these phrases translate Vedder's inner thoughts into visible, interpretable cues. This extends his power: he does not need to speak to control the junto; his pipe's smoke and subtle nods of head are enough, revealing a pre-independence social order where authority operates through implicit, shared understanding rather than explicit debate. His adherents' ability to "perfectly understand him" from these gestures further emphasizes the cohesion of the pre-independence community, where norms are unspoken but universally recognized.

The final layer of this comic strip via phrasing lies in its unspoken contrast to the post-independence world, which metaphorize social transition anxiety. The phrased panels of Vedder's life—his static routine, his smoke-cued emotions—create a "before" narrative of stability and predictability. When Rip returns after the war of independence, this narrative collapses: the inn now bears George Washington's portrait instead of King George's, villagers argue about "elections" and "civil rights," and Vedder is gone. Anxiety arises from the loss of this visual coherence: the clear, phrased "panels" of Vedder's era is nowhere to be found in the post-independence world. Where Vedder's "sundial" movements and smoke gestures provided certainty, there is noise, conflict, and uncertainty instead. Readers, alongside Rip, feel the disorientation of losing a familiar "comic strip"—a sequence of predictable, meaningful moments that help them make sense of the world. Vedder's phrased comic strip, in retrospect, becomes a metaphor for the comfort of the old order; its absence highlights the chaos of a society struggling to redefine itself after independence. His pipe's smoke, once a tool of clarity, is replaced by conflicting political voices, and his "sundial" movements by the unsteady, unpredictable pace of a nation forging a new identity. In this way, the employment of comic Strip via phrasing in the narrative skillfully highlights the contrast of the pre-independence stability and the anxiety of a society adrift in the wake of profound change.

IV. TWO-DIMENSIONAL VARIABLE INTERNAL-FOCALIZATION

Internal focalization refers to "the situation where the narrator only narrates the information known to a certain character" (Genette 120). That is to say, the narration unfolds from the single perspective of one

character. Readers can only obtain the information and emotional experiences that this character is aware of. Variable internal-focalization is focalization that moves from the limited perspective of one character to another by focusing on different character (Xu 222). As a result, there are multiple narrative voices in the text, and the diversity of narrative voices allows the text to contain multiple dimensions and makes it appear as a nonlinear visuality. Focalization is the "determinant" of narrative visuality: it defines the scope (comprehensive vs. limited), subjectivity (objective vs. subjective), and linearity (linear vs. non-linear) of the visual space readers perceive. Zero focalization offers a clear, all-encompassing visual "map" of the story; fixed internal focalization offers a narrow, personal window into it; and variable internal focalization offers a collage of overlapping "windows," creating a non-linear, multi-dimensional visuality. In short, how the narrator "sees" (focalization) directly shapes how readers "see" the story (visuality).

As scholars have noted, "The pattern of narrative structure in 'Rip Van Winkle' goes through a change from zero-focalization to internal-focalization and back again" (Zhang and Wang 120). Irving adopts a zero-focalization narrative perspective in the beginning, in which the narrator introduces the general setting of the story and the main characters: the magnificence and magic of the Catskill Mountains, the uncontested nature of the village, the peaceful and quiet life of the villagers; Rip's helpfulness but inactivity all day long, hunting and gossiping; and the constant reprimanding of Rip by the spirited Dame Van Winkle. In this part, the narrator not only knows everything that happens in the village but also has an insight into Rip's psychology. From Rip's "a long ramble of the kind on a fine autumnal day" (33), the narrative focalization shifts to Rip's consciousness and senses. The narrator's mode of narration changes from a zero-focalization to an internal-focalization mode. The reason for this is that throughout Rip's experience on the mountain, the narrator knows the same things as Rip. The short story switches from an internal focalization to a zero-focalization mode again when it mentions the "army of women and children at his heels" (39) behind Rip when he returns from the long slumber. Rip has been so absorbed in his own thoughts and confusion that he does not notice whether he is being followed by a bunch of women and children. Then he gradually realizes that 20 years have passed in his sleep and that things have changed. After recognizing his relatives, he quickly integrates into society and begins his life of inactivity again.

In "Rip Van Winkle", the use of internal focalization creates a compelling visual narrative that highlights the profound cultural transformation in post-Revolutionary

America. As Rip awakens from his long slumber, the contrasting images he perceives serve to underscore the dramatic changes in both the physical landscape and the societal structure. Initially, Rip's vision of "an eagle wheeling aloft and breasting the pure mountain breeze" (39) symbolizes the emergence of a new national identity, as the eagle is not only a majestic bird but also the emblem of the United States. This imagery evokes a sense of pride and power, yet it simultaneously raises questions about the nature of this new nation—whether it embodies peace or aggression. The eagle's flight contrasts sharply with the earlier image of "a crow winging its solitary flight, (39)" suggesting a shift from isolation to a collective national spirit, albeit one that Rip struggles to comprehend. The crow, often associated with scavenging and solitude, represents Rip's previous state of being, while the eagle signifies the potential for greatness and unity in the new America.

The transformation of the great tree into "a tall naked pole" (39) further emphasizes Rip's disorientation. The tree, once a symbol of shelter and stability, is replaced by a stark pole that, while adorned with the flag, lacks the practical significance and comfort that the tree provided. This visual shift reflects the loss of the familiar Dutch colonial past and the unsettling nature of the new American identity, which Rip finds incomprehensible. The flag, with its "singular assemblage of stars and stripes," represents the founding of the United States, yet to Rip, it is merely a confusing emblem that lacks the warmth and meaning of the tree. This juxtaposition highlights the cultural identity crisis faced by individuals like Rip, who are caught between the old world and the new. The flag, a symbol of unity and freedom for many, becomes a source of confusion for Rip, illustrating how the very symbols of national identity can be alienating to those who have not participated in the revolutionary changes.

Moreover, the change in the political landscape is illustrated through Rip's encounter with the "lean, bilious-looking fellow" who passionately discusses "rights of citizens" and "liberty." (30) This character embodies the democratic fervor that has replaced the authoritative control of patriarchal figures like Nicholas Vedder, who once dictated public opinion. The bustling, "disputatious tone" of the crowd signifies a shift from the tranquil, phlegmatic nature of Rip's past to a more dynamic and contentious civic life. This transformation reflects the broader cultural identity of a nation grappling with the ideals of democracy and individual rights, which are foreign concepts to Rip. The language used by the haranguing fellow—filled with terms like "elections," "members of congress," and "Bunker's Hill"—is described as a "perfect Babylonish jargon" to Rip, further

emphasizing his alienation from the new political discourse. This confusion illustrates the challenges faced by those who have been removed from the societal changes, highlighting the generational and cultural gaps that can arise in the wake of significant historical events. Through these visual contrasts, the narrator effectively captures Rip's bewilderment and highlights the anxiety over identity construction of early America. The internal focalization allows readers to experience Rip's confusion and nostalgia, emphasizing the challenges faced by individuals who must navigate the complexities of a rapidly changing society. The eagle, while a symbol of strength, also raises questions about the nature of the new American identity—whether it is one of aggression or peace. The starkness of the "tall naked pole" in place of the comforting tree symbolizes the loss of the familiar and the unsettling nature of the new political landscape. Rip's inability to recognize the significance of the flag and the change in his community reflects a broader commentary on the disconnection experienced by those who have not actively participated in the revolutionary changes.

"Rip Vans Winkle" produces a strong visual effect through the transformation of narrative modes, especially the two-dimensional variable internal focalization, which in turn triggers reflection on cultural memory. The revolution of the War of Independence has removed the isolation and tranquility of the village and replaced it with a noisy society that has not progressed substantially under the rule of violence. The peaceful and quiet villagers are gone, and the post-revolutionary people all look busy, panicky, and contentious. The revolution changed the world, but the changes brought about by the revolution were negative, and the people did not receive any real benefits or advantages. The reader reads this meaning, and the judgment of the independent revolution is naturally affected and greatly impacted.

V. CONCLUSION

To summarize, this article mainly explores the visual narrative skills -- the influence of Dutch Genre Painting, comic strip via phrasing, two-dimensional variable internal-focalization-- in the "Rip Van Winkle", thus saturating the characterization of the characters and witnessing the relationship between the visuality and the anxiety over transition in 19th century America. From the visual imagery in the text, the presentation of spatial scenes to the portrayal of characters, Washington Irving employed unique visual narrative strategies to visualize and dramatize the anxiety of transition. The visual narrative of "Rip Van Winkle" is not merely an artistic technique but also a carrier of message. It vividly

demonstrates the multifaceted nature of the anxiety in the early days of the United States, providing a unique perspective for us to understand the formation of American culture and national character.

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Towards an Inclusive Curriculum: English Education and the Integration of Indian Knowledge Systems

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Abstract— This paper critically examines the historical evolution and present dynamics of English language education in India, emphasizing the need to integrate Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into the curriculum to create a more balanced and inclusive educational framework. The objective is to address the historical and ongoing marginalization of indigenous languages and epistemologies, a consequence of colonial policies such as Macaulay's Minute (1835) and Wood's Despatch (1854), which established English as the dominant medium of instruction. While English has opened economic and academic opportunities, it has also contributed to the erosion of local cultures and linguistic diversity. The gap identified lies in the overemphasis on English as the sole marker of progress and success, often at the expense of India's rich intellectual heritage. Using a qualitative methodology, the paper analyzes historical documents, educational policies like the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (2000-2001 onwards), and existing curriculum models to explore how IKS—encompassing Ayurveda, Vedic mathematics, classical arts and indigenous ecological knowledge—can be meaningfully integrated into contemporary education. The paper proposes pragmatic strategies such as bilingual/multilingual education models and interdisciplinary integration of IKS into science, mathematics and environmental studies. The outcome envisioned is a curriculum that promotes national identity, cognitive diversity and cultural pride while ensuring global competitiveness. This approach fosters students' connection to their roots and prepares them to thrive in a pluralistic and globalized world. The future relevance of this study lies in its advocacy for curriculum reforms that respect both the global utility of English and the foundational value of India's indigenous knowledge traditions.



Keywords— Curriculum, English Language, Indian Knowledge System, Linguistic Pluralism, NEP 2020, Vernacular Language

I. INTRODUCTION

The evolution of English education in India has been deeply intertwined with the country's colonial history, influencing its socio-economic development, cultural identity and intellectual landscape. English as a language was introduced in the 17th century during the colonial period and became the medium through which the British sought to establish control over Indian society by using language as a tool of governance and cultural transformation. Figures such as William Carey and Charles Grant were instrumental in introducing English to the Indian education system,

setting up missionary schools and advocating for the spread of English to create a class of Indians proficient in the language. Their efforts were supported by colonial policies like Macaulay's Minute (1835) and Wood's Despatch (1854) that led to the establishment of English as the dominant language of education, administration and progress in India. While English opened doors to global opportunities in commerce, science and research, it simultaneously displaced Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) and regional languages. These indigenous knowledge systems, rooted in India's ancient traditions of learning, encompass diverse fields such as Ayurveda, Vedic

mathematics, classical arts, architecture and ecological practices. As English education in India began under the colonial supervision who prioritized Western knowledge and pursued to produce a class of English-educated Indians to serve British welfares and dominated IKS. The educational policies passed during the colonial era had often dismissed the value of vernacular languages and Indian knowledge systems by reinforcing the idea that English was the opening to progress and modernity, whereas indigenous traditions were archaic and irrelevant.

During post-independence, English continued to play a substantial role in India's educational and socio-economic fabric. Initiatives like the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* (2000-2001) aimed to democratize access to education but the prominence of English as a medium of instruction persisted, predominantly in urban centres and elite institutions. English proficiency became synonymous with upward mobility which reinforced class divisions and created a linguistic hierarchy. At the same time, vernacular languages and knowledge systems were often marginalized in mainstream education with only limited efforts made to preserve and integrate them into the contemporary curriculum. The dominance of English in Indian education presents both opportunities and challenges. While English proficiency is crucial for global engagement in areas such as technology, international trade and academic research, but the exclusive focus on English risks continuing the colonial legacy of linguistic and cultural subjugation by undermining the vast intellectual wealth contained within India's indigenous knowledge systems. Recently, there has been a growing recognition of the need to create a more inclusive and balanced curriculum, one that integrates English with Indian Knowledge Systems to ensure that students are equipped with both global proficiencies and a strong connection to their cultural heritage.

Objectives:

- To explore the historical development of English education in India and its impact on Indian Knowledge System.
- To examines the key colonial policies, the role of missionaries and the socio-cultural shifts that succeeded English to take roots in Indian education
- To focus on the ongoing sidelining of IKS in the contemporary curriculum and advocating its integration as a means of promoting a more inclusive, culturally responsive and equitable education system.
- To evaluate and strategize to integrate IKS into the current curriculum, extending from bilingual and multilingual education models to the inclusion of

IKS in science, mathematics and environmental studies.

India can create a curriculum that not only prepares students for the demands of the global economy but also preserves and revitalizes the rich intellectual traditions that have defined Indian knowledge for centuries by blending the education with IKS. The need for an inclusive curriculum is supreme in today's globalized world where cultural diversity and heritage are as important as technological and scientific advancements. Integrating IKS into the education system will not only ensure the preservation of India's ancient knowledge but will also provide students with holistic learning experiences that combine the strengths of modern and traditional education. The research contributes to ongoing efforts to decolonize Indian education and develop an educational framework that is both locally relevant and globally competitive.

II. HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF ENGLISH EDUCATION IN INDIA

The history of English education in India is deeply intertwined with the country's colonial past by looking back to the early 17th century. When British traders arrived under the auspices of the East India Company, their primary objectives were economic but their influence soon extended into the realms of politics, culture and education. As the British gradually gained control over vast territories in India, they recognized the need to educate a section of the population to aid in their administrative efforts. This marked the beginning of English education in India which would later become a dominant force in the country's educational system.

1. Early Introduction of English (17th-18th Century)

The 17th century saw the arrival of English merchants and the establishment of trading posts under the East India Company. At this stage the British showed little interest in educating the native population. Their early efforts in education were primarily focused on learning local languages to facilitate communication and trade. However, as their influence grew, particularly in the 18th century, the British began to shift their educational focus. Christian missionaries played a significant role in the early stages of English education in India. Missionaries such as William Carey arrived in India in the late 18th century with the primary goal of converting the local population but they also saw education as a means to this end. Carey, a key figure in this movement, established schools in Bengal and worked to spread English education alongside vernacular language instruction to both European and Indian students. This period marked the beginning of formal education

systems that combined Western knowledge with vernacular languages.

2. The Role of Missionaries and the Rise of English Education

Missionaries not only promoted Christianity but also laid the groundwork for English education. They established schools that offered Western education through the medium of English and gradually English gained prominence in educational institutions. Missionaries like Carey also contributed to the development of vernacular languages but their long-term effect was the expansion of English as the primary language of instruction. The British government began to view education as a way to solidify their rule in India. Education became a tool to create a class of Indians who could assist the British in administering the colony. It was at this time that Charles Grant, a member of the East India Company, proposed the introduction of English as the language of instruction in Indian schools. Grant believed that education, particularly through English, could help eliminate what he saw as ignorance and superstition among the native population. This proposal laid the foundation for English to become a key element of India's educational system.

3. Macaulay's *Minute on Indian Education* (1835): The Defining Moment

One of the most significant turning points in the history of English education in India came in 1835, when Thomas Babington Macaulay, a member of the Supreme Council of India, presented his infamous *Minute on Indian Education*. Macaulay argued that English should be the primary medium of education, stating that Indian languages were inadequate for the needs of modern education. He famously declared that a single shelf of European literature was worth more than all the literature of India and Arabia combined. "I have never found one among them who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia" (Macaulay). His objective was to create a class of Indians who were "Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" (Macaulay). The adoption of Macaulay's policies marked the official establishment of English as the language of higher education in India. The British government aimed to train an elite class of Indians who could serve as intermediaries between the British rulers and the Indian masses. This policy not only created a divide between English-educated elites and the rest of the population but also marginalized Indian Knowledge Systems and regional languages.

4. Wood's Despatch (1854) and the Expansion of English Education

Charles Wood's Despatch of 1854, often referred to as the Magna Carta of English Education in India which played a crucial role in expanding English education throughout the subcontinent. "It contains a scheme of education far wider and more comprehensive than the local or the supreme Government would have ventured to suggest" (Kochhar, 1995, p.8). Wood's Despatch emphasized the importance of education at all levels from primary to higher education and recommended the establishment of universities in major cities such as Calcutta, Bombay and Madras. Wood advocated for English to be the medium of instruction in higher education while vernacular languages could be used at the primary level. The Despatch also called for the creation of teacher training institutions and the promotion of technical and vocational education. Although Wood's Despatch recognized the importance of vernacular languages at the lower levels of education, it further entrenched English as the language of higher learning and administration.

5. The Impact of Colonial Education Policies

The introduction of English education during the colonial period had far-reaching consequences. On the one hand, it facilitated access to Western knowledge, science and technology by enabling Indians to engage with global intellectual and political movements. English education also played a critical role in the emergence of India's nationalist movement with leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and B. R. Ambedkar receiving English education that allowed them to articulate their visions for an independent India on an international stage. However, the dominance of English also led to the sidelining of Indian Knowledge Systems and vernacular languages.

The colonial education system, however, systematically marginalized IKS, replacing indigenous learning system with western-centric paradigms deriding and demeaning traditional knowledge. It also paved the way for a cultural and intellectual disconnect that left generations of Indians alienated from their heritage (Kumar and Babu, 2025).

Traditional education systems such as the *gurukuls* were systematically replaced or neglected and vast bodies of indigenous knowledge, particularly in fields like medicine, mathematics and philosophy were sidelined in favour of Western curricula. This created a linguistic and cultural divide between the English-educated elite and the broader population, whose education and knowledge systems were rooted in local languages and traditions.

6. Post-Independence Developments and the Role of English

After India gained independence in 1947, English continued to occupy a central role in the country's education system. A new constitution became effective for the independent India from 26th January 1950, where certain constitutional provision on education was given, for instance Article 45, under the Directive Principles of State Policy states that, "The State shall endeavour to provide, within a period of ten years from the commencement of this Constitution, for free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years" (Constitution of India, 1950, Art. 45), and many more articles were also dedicated in this regards like article 15, 17, 29, 30, 46 and many such more. While efforts were made to promote vernacular languages, English remained the primary language of higher education, administration and business. Policies such as the *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan* aimed to democratize access to education but English proficiency became a marker of social mobility and success in an increasingly globalized world. As India entered the 21st century, the role of English in education has continued to evolve. English remains a key medium of instruction in schools and universities, particularly in urban areas, while regional languages continue to struggle for prominence. At the same time, there is a growing recognition of the need to integrate Indian Knowledge Systems into the mainstream curriculum to preserve India's cultural and intellectual heritage.

The historical development of English education in India, shaped by colonial policies and missionary efforts, has had a profound and lasting impact on the country's intellectual and cultural landscape. While English education has provided access to global opportunities, it has also marginalized indigenous knowledge and created linguistic hierarchies that persist to this day. Understanding this historical context is crucial to developing a more inclusive curriculum that balances the advantages of English with the preservation and integration of Indian Knowledge Systems.

The Case for Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS)

Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) refer to a rich tapestry of knowledge and practices that have evolved over centuries that is deeply intertwined with India's cultural heritage, philosophical traditions and scientific advancements. IKS encompasses diverse fields, including Ayurveda, Vedic mathematics, classical arts and indigenous ecological practices each offering unique insights that contribute to a holistic understanding of the world. Ayurveda, for instance, is an ancient system of medicine that emphasizes the balance between the mind, body and spirit, promoting wellness through natural remedies and lifestyle practices tailored to individual constitutions. Its relevance in contemporary health discussions underscores the importance of integrating traditional healing practices into

modern medical paradigms as it offers holistic approaches that prioritize prevention and wellness over mere symptom management.

Similarly, Vedic mathematics represents a sophisticated mathematical system rooted in ancient texts, emphasizing mental agility and innovative problem-solving techniques. This branch of knowledge not only cultivates numerical proficiency but also encourages creative thinking and cognitive flexibility among students. By incorporating Vedic mathematics into the curriculum, educators can help students develop a deeper appreciation for the historical foundations of mathematics while enhancing their analytical skills, preparing them for both academic and real-world challenges.

In the realm of classical arts, India boasts a rich heritage of dance, music and visual arts that reflect the country's diverse cultural narratives. Integrating classical arts into the education system not only fosters creativity and self-expression but also helps students connect with their cultural roots. Exposure to classical forms encourages an understanding of artistic expression as a vital aspect of human experience, promoting emotional intelligence and empathy. Furthermore, through learning about indigenous art forms, students gain insights into the societal values, historical contexts, and philosophical beliefs that shape their communities. Equally crucial are indigenous ecological practices, which encompass traditional agricultural techniques, water management systems, and biodiversity conservation methods developed over generations. These practices are rooted in an intimate understanding of local ecosystems and sustainable living, offering valuable lessons in environmental stewardship. As the world grapples with climate change and ecological degradation, integrating these traditional knowledge systems into educational curricula can empower students to address pressing environmental challenges through culturally relevant solutions.

The cultural relevance of IKS cannot be overstated. In a globalized world increasingly dominated by Western paradigms, the integration of local knowledge into educational frameworks serves as a counterbalance by preserving indigenous identities and fostering national pride. By valuing and incorporating IKS, educational institutions can help students develop a sense of belonging and understanding of their heritage. This connection to cultural roots is essential, especially in a diverse nation like India, where multiple languages, traditions, and belief systems coexist. Integrating IKS into the curriculum creates a more inclusive educational environment that reflects the pluralistic nature of Indian society. Moreover, the integration of IKS can bridge the existing knowledge gap

created by an English-centric educational system that has historically marginalized local languages and knowledge. By incorporating IKS, educators can empower students and local communities, validating their contributions to knowledge and society. This empowerment is particularly crucial in fostering critical thinking, as students engage with their cultural heritage and develop a broader worldview that transcends the limitations of a singular narrative. The benefits of IKS integration extend beyond cultural preservation. It offers a holistic educational approach that nurtures cognitive development and addresses contemporary challenges. For instance, students who learn about sustainable agricultural practices through IKS are better equipped to tackle issues related to food security and environmental sustainability. By exploring the interplay between traditional knowledge and modern scientific inquiry, students can develop innovative solutions that respect both local practices and global demands. Examples of successful IKS integration can be found in various educational initiatives across India. Schools and institutions that have embraced IKS have reported positive outcomes, including increased student engagement, enhanced critical thinking skills, and a stronger sense of identity among learners. For instance, some universities have established courses that explore traditional Indian sciences, arts, and philosophies, allowing students to critically engage with their cultural heritage while acquiring contemporary skills.

The instance for integrating Indian Knowledge Systems into the English-dominated educational landscape is compelling. By valuing and incorporating IKS, we can create a more inclusive, equitable, and culturally responsive curriculum that respects and celebrates India's intellectual diversity. Such an educational framework not only prepares students to compete in a globalized world but also connects them to their roots, fostering a deeper understanding of their cultural heritage and the wealth of knowledge it encompasses. Ultimately, embracing IKS in education is a crucial step towards building a more holistic, relevant and meaningful learning experience that honours both the past and the future.

III. PROPOSED STRATEGIES FOR INTEGRATION OF INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS (IKS)

Integrating Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into the educational curriculum requires a thoughtful and multifaceted approach that acknowledges the complexities of contemporary education while honouring traditional knowledge. "Prof. Ganti Suryanarayana Murthy elaborated upon incorporating IKS into higher education institutes to nurture enthusiastic scholars with enriched knowledge and

critical thinking rooted in Indian culture and heritage" (Thematic Session 15 Indian Knowledge Systems). One effective strategy is the implementation of bilingual and multilingual education models. By encouraging students to learn in both English and their mother tongues, educational institutions can foster linguistic pluralism, allowing students to access knowledge through various cultural lenses. This approach not only helps students maintain their linguistic heritage but also enhances cognitive development by enabling them to think critically across languages. For instance, when students learn scientific concepts in their native language, they may grasp foundational ideas more effectively and connect them with traditional ecological practices. Bilingual education empowers students to navigate multiple worlds, fostering a deeper appreciation for both local and global perspectives.

Another strategy involves interdisciplinary approaches that integrate IKS with subjects such as science, mathematics, environmental studies, and social sciences. For example, combining Ayurveda with modern health sciences can offer students a comprehensive understanding of health and wellness. This approach allows students to explore how traditional medicinal practices can complement contemporary healthcare, bridging the gap between ancient wisdom and modern science. Similarly, integrating Vedic mathematics with conventional math curricula can enhance students' problem-solving skills and foster a love for mathematics by showcasing the richness of India's mathematical heritage. Such interdisciplinary models not only enhance students' understanding of various subjects but also encourage them to appreciate the interconnectedness of knowledge across disciplines. The development of contextualized curriculum frameworks that respect and incorporate local knowledge is essential. This means adapting curricula to reflect the cultural, historical, and ecological contexts of the students' communities. For instance, environmental studies courses can draw on indigenous ecological practices that emphasize sustainability, resource management, and biodiversity. By incorporating local case studies and examples, students can see the relevance of their education to their immediate environment and communities. Such contextualization not only enriches the learning experience but also fosters a sense of belonging and ownership among students, making education more meaningful and impactful.

Professional development programs for educators are crucial for successful integration of IKS. These programs can equip teachers with the knowledge and skills to effectively incorporate traditional knowledge into their teaching practices. Workshops, training sessions, and collaborative platforms can facilitate the exchange of ideas among educators on best practices for integrating IKS.

Educators must also be encouraged to research and engage with local communities to understand their knowledge systems better. This engagement can lead to the co-creation of educational resources that reflect the community's cultural heritage and values, fostering a collaborative approach to education. Furthermore, community engagement and partnerships with local knowledge holders, including elders, practitioners of traditional arts, and local scientists, can enrich the educational experience. Schools can invite community members to share their knowledge and experiences, providing students with firsthand insights into their cultural heritage. This collaboration can take various forms, such as guest lectures, workshops, or cultural events, creating an immersive learning environment. Engaging with local knowledge holders not only enhances the curriculum but also strengthens the bond between educational institutions and the communities they serve, fostering mutual respect and understanding. Finally, it is essential to create assessment frameworks that value and recognize students' understanding of IKS alongside traditional academic metrics. Current assessment models often prioritize standardized testing that may overlook students' mastery of local knowledge and cultural practices. Developing alternative assessment methods, such as project-based learning, portfolios, and performance assessments, can allow students to demonstrate their understanding and application of IKS in meaningful ways. Such assessment frameworks encourage creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving, while also validating the significance of indigenous knowledge in the educational landscape. "(IKS) can be understood as a decolonization process that extends beyond economic and political realms to encompass socio-cultural aspects" (Sharma, et.al, 2020).

Integrating Indian Knowledge Systems into the educational curriculum requires a multifaceted approach that includes bilingual education, interdisciplinary learning, contextualized curricula, professional development for educators, community engagement, and innovative assessment strategies. By embracing these proposed strategies, educational institutions can create a more inclusive and holistic curriculum that respects and celebrates India's rich intellectual heritage. This integration not only prepares students for success in a globalized world but also empowers them to remain connected to their cultural roots, fostering a sense of pride and identity that is essential for personal and societal development.

Challenges and Considerations in Integrating Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS)

Integrating Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into the educational curriculum presents various challenges that educators, policymakers, and institutions must navigate

carefully. One of the primary obstacles is the existing educational framework, which has been historically shaped by colonial legacies that prioritize English and Western knowledge systems. This framework often marginalizes local languages and traditional knowledge, creating a perception that IKS lacks rigor or relevance in contemporary education. As a result, educators may feel hesitant to incorporate IKS into their curricula due to fears of inadequacy or lack of acceptance among stakeholders. To overcome this challenge, a fundamental shift in perspective is required—educators must be empowered to recognize the value of IKS and advocate for its inclusion alongside conventional curricula. Another significant challenge is the lack of resources and support for implementing IKS within schools. Many educational institutions, especially in rural or underfunded areas, may lack access to the necessary materials, trained educators, and infrastructure to effectively teach IKS. Developing educational resources that accurately reflect IKS and make them accessible to teachers and students is essential. This may involve creating textbooks, online resources, and teaching aids that integrate IKS into various subjects. Moreover, there is a need for funding and support from government and educational authorities to facilitate the development and dissemination of these resources.

Resistance to change from various stakeholders can also impede the integration of IKS into the curriculum. Parents, educators, and administrators who are accustomed to traditional forms of education may be sceptical about the effectiveness of incorporating IKS. They may question whether such integration would prepare students adequately for global competitiveness, leading to concerns about academic rigor and employability. To address this resistance, it is vital to engage stakeholders in discussions about the benefits of IKS, emphasizing how a well-rounded education that includes traditional knowledge can enhance critical thinking and cultural awareness, which are increasingly valued in the global job market. Another challenge lies in the diversity of Indian Knowledge Systems themselves. India is a vast country with multiple languages, cultures, and traditions, making it difficult to define a singular approach to IKS integration. Each region may have its own unique practices, beliefs, and systems of knowledge, which can lead to inconsistencies in implementation. Educators and policymakers must navigate these regional differences while ensuring that the integration of IKS is representative of the diverse cultural landscape of India. This requires a collaborative approach that involves local communities in the decision-making process, allowing them to contribute their knowledge and perspectives on how IKS can be best integrated into education. Additionally, there are curricular and assessment challenges associated with

integrating IKS. Traditional curricula often prioritize standardized testing that may not effectively assess students' understanding of IKS. Consequently, there is a need to develop assessment methods that can evaluate students' knowledge and application of traditional practices alongside their mastery of conventional subjects. Creating a balanced assessment framework that recognizes the value of IKS while maintaining academic standards can be a complex task, requiring innovative approaches that blend both traditional and contemporary educational philosophies. Finally, teacher training and professional development play a crucial role in the successful integration of IKS. Many educators may not be familiar with IKS or lack the training necessary to effectively teach these systems. Professional development programs are essential to equip teachers with the knowledge and skills required to incorporate IKS into their classrooms. This training should include not only the content knowledge of IKS but also pedagogical strategies that facilitate experiential learning and engagement with local communities. Without adequate support and training, even the most well-intentioned initiatives may falter. As Tagore aptly stated in his book, *Towards Universal Man* that:

India's education system was not confined to the four walls of a classroom; it was a way of life. The gurukuls and ashrams were not just schools but centers of holistic learning where students imbibed knowledge of the self, society, and the universe (Tagore, 1961).

In summary, integrating Indian Knowledge Systems into education is fraught with challenges, including existing educational frameworks that prioritize Western knowledge, resource constraints, resistance from stakeholders, the diversity of IKS, curricular and assessment issues, and the need for teacher training. Addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from educators, policymakers, and communities to create a more inclusive and equitable educational system. By recognizing the value of IKS and actively working to incorporate it into curricula, India can foster a holistic education that honours its rich cultural heritage while preparing students for a globalized world.

IV. CONCLUSION

In an increasingly interconnected world, the need for a more inclusive and culturally responsive educational framework has never been more pressing. This research paper has explored the critical importance of integrating Indian Knowledge Systems (IKS) into the English-dominated educational curriculum in India. By tracing the historical development of English education in the country and

highlighting the exclusion of local knowledge, it is evident that the traditional educational model has perpetuated a significant knowledge gap, marginalizing the rich cultural heritage that IKS represents. The integration of IKS is not merely an academic exercise; it is a vital step toward preserving cultural identities and fostering a sense of belonging among students. Through a detailed examination of the benefits that IKS can bring to education, including holistic learning, cognitive development, and environmental awareness, it becomes clear that traditional knowledge systems can complement contemporary curricula in meaningful ways. This integration not only enhances students' understanding of their heritage but also equips them with the skills necessary to navigate the complexities of modern life. To facilitate the successful incorporation of IKS into the educational landscape, this paper has proposed several strategies, including the implementation of bilingual education models, interdisciplinary curricula, and community engagement initiatives. However, it has also acknowledged the challenges that must be overcome, such as resistance from stakeholders, resource constraints, and the diversity of knowledge systems across regions. Addressing these challenges requires a collaborative effort from educators, policymakers, and local communities to create a curriculum that is both inclusive and relevant. Ultimately, the call for integrating IKS into the English education system is not an attempt to diminish the value of English as a global language; rather, it seeks to establish a balanced educational framework that respects and celebrates India's pluralistic society. By valuing IKS alongside traditional academic subjects, we can nurture a generation of learners who are not only equipped for global challenges but are also deeply connected to their cultural roots. This integration is essential for building a more equitable, inclusive, and culturally rich educational environment that honors India's diverse intellectual heritage while preparing students for the future. In conclusion, embracing Indian Knowledge Systems in education is not just a necessity for cultural preservation but also a pathway to enriching the overall learning experience. It represents a commitment to fostering a more inclusive, dynamic, and responsive education system that empowers students to thrive in a globalized world while remaining grounded in their unique cultural identities.

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Political Violence and Family Legacy: Trauma Transmission in Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland*

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Abstract— *Jhumpa Lahiri's The Lowland* tells the story of how the murder of Udayan during the Naxalite uprising—the one act of political violence—pulled the family into the psychological trauma world that shook the generations and the places. The book states that the political upheaval emotional stuff does not stay with the historical moment but it moves through silence, emotional detachment, and broken family bonds. This article claims the trauma rooted in the homeland is the main factor behind immigrant identity even after the physical relocation. It uses trauma theory to support its argument, for example, Cathy Caruth's assertion that trauma is an experience that "returns belatedly" in new forms (4), and Marianne Hirsch's idea of "postmemory" like the heritage of the later generations (5). The argument shows that in Lahiri's work, personal loss is set against a broader public history. Relying on qualitative textual analysis and diaspora studies, the paper finds that Gauri's withdrawal, Subhash's overcompensation in parenting, and Bela's rebellious activism exemplify the emotional heritage passed down from one generation to another. The authors identify silence, exile, and emotional absence as the main instruments through which the trauma gets to be inherited. Results indicate that *The Lowland* serves as a literary reservoir of political memory, depicting the way violent incidents deeply ingrained in national history become recurrences in the diasporic family structures. By uncovering the mental side of the political break, Lahiri's novel, in effect, broadens our conception of how literature serves as a record, a medium, and a means of transmission for the collective trauma's legacy across the different times and spaces.



Keywords— Immigrant identity, intergenerational trauma, Jhumpa Lahiri, memory, Naxalite movement, psychological inheritance, *The Lowland*.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Naxalite movement which appeared in West Bengal in the late 1960s was based on Marxist revolutionary ideology and demanded that the armed struggle be conducted against the Indian state. In fact, the historians have stated: "it led to one of the most violent confrontations between the postcolonial Indian state and its own youth" (Banerjee 17). Lahiri places *The Lowland* amid such a setting of the horrors of political violence: a world marked by constant surveillance, imprisonment, and public executions, where terror spreads from political violence into the family's private sphere. The death of Udayan—shot to death in front

of his wife's eyes—is the novel's main trauma, the loss that it associates with the uprising and which it keeps coming back to long after the revolution has finished.

Among other things, the name of Jhumpa Lahiri is often mentioned as one of the most important diasporic writers, whose works challenge the emotional conflict between homeland and migration over and over. Jigna Desai states that "Lahiri's fiction maps the psychic costs of displacement and suggests that silence and memory play a major role in the formation of the immigrant subject" (31). *The Lowland* raises this issue even further by depicting trauma related to political history as something that keeps haunting

immigrant families and thus has a profound impact on the people who have never seen its source.

The lens for this research question is trauma studies. The scholar Cathy Caruth declares that the nature of trauma is not the defining factor of the event itself but rather the scene of the trauma's return, "not fully grasped as it occurs" and therefore never fully left behind" (Caruth 4). Marianne Hirsch refers to this transmission mechanism as "postmemory," whereby the descendants have the memory of the previous generations "so deeply that they even seem to be their own memories" (Hirsch 5). These notions help to understand the case of Bela in *The Lowland* who, without the direct political death she never saw, is psychologically influenced by it.

Research Aim and Questions

The novel *The Lowland* is examined by this research through the lens of trauma theory and diaspora studies with the aim of uncovering how trauma that stems from the Naxalite movement is communicated through silence, emotional rupture, and memory handed down. It questions:

1. By which mechanisms of transmission-silence, withdrawal, surrogate parenting-are intergenerational traumas created in the novel?
2. In what way does immigration change but still not remove the psychological effects of political violence?

Hypothesis

Such trauma caused by political uprisings is not limited by the geographical areas and it is spread not only through stories but also through emotional voids, quiet, and changed relationships with the family across generations.

II. HISTORICAL & POLITICAL CONTEXT

Naxalite Movement Overview

The Naxalite movement was a violent uprising of peasants among other things inspired by Maoist ideology, against landlords and state forces, which began in 1967 in Naxalbari, West Bengal. Sumanta Banerjee explains how the movement started as "a revolt of the rural poor against centuries of feudal oppression" and soon it spread to the politically radicalized youth (Banerjee 6). Adopting the catchphrase "China's Chairman is Our Chairman," Naxalites demanded the regime change in India through guerrilla warfare. The government reaction was a hard crackdown on the movement, thousands of suspected sympathizers were rounded up and killed. As Banerjee states, "police violence became the primary instrument of containing the movement" (47). Thus, it was a peasant-led insurgency that later on became an urban revolutionary

phenomenon and eventually students, writers, and middle-class youth got inspired.

Violence and Surveillance in Bengal

Bengal in the late 1960s and early 1970s experienced what historian Nandini Sundar termed a "regime of extraordinary surveillance and extrajudicial killings" (Sundar 14). Suspects were young men who were arrested, tortured, or shot without any recourse to the law. The Naxalism movement's popularity among students was the signal of the postcolonial crisis of disillusionment. Dipesh Chakrabarty mentions that the youth in Bengal turned to radical politics as "the nation had failed to deliver the promised justice and equality" (Chakrabarty 112). Through the working-class and lower-middle-class lens, the movement escalated into an anxiety-filled time in which political allegiance was a life-or-death issue.

Integration into Lahiri's Narrative

Lahiri connects the political history of the period right into *The Lowland*. The narrative doesn't show Udayan's turn to Naxalite revolt as a mere personal choice but rather as a result of the ideological milieu that influenced not just him but the whole generation. His engagement embodies what Banerjee refers to when she cites the Naxalite appeal to "idealistic youth convinced of the need for violent restructuring" (Banerjee 122). The areas where Lahiri writes about the police raid and the execution of people at public places, align with what has been historically recorded. Udayan for instance gets shot in front of his family, the story being an echo of the real methods used to terrorize communities. With her characters, Lahiri doesn't just draw their personal stories but puts them in a politically accurate scenario which is a history of the nation's tragedy disguised in the form of the private one.

The psychological lens through which the novel is viewed does not overshadow the novel's political aspect. It shows how the violence inflicted by the state gradually takes over the most intimate spaces in the house. What Lahiri is aiming at in the sentence, "The house where he had grown up was now the place where he had been killed" (*The Lowland* 41) is the eradication of the difference between home and war zone. The falling of this wall is the source of the trauma which, being passed on from one generation to another, is, at times, beyond the understanding of the novel's characters.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical Studies on Lahiri: Displacement, Identity, Memory

Scholarly and critical works about Jhumpa Lahiri have, by and large, concentrated on her treatment of the above themes, which are displacement, identity crisis, and

memory, in the framework of the South Asian diaspora. N. C. Mondal exhibits that Lahiri's narrative consistently features "displacement, fragmentation, isolation, rootlessness, discrimination, marginalization, and identity crisis" as the elements that not only define but also inevitable pervade characters' lives (Mondal 4). Similarly, an article on Lahiri's diasporic consciousness acknowledges that her writing represents "identity crisis, sense of displacement and alienation" as experiences common to both first and second-generation immigrants (Khan 76).

These and other critics emphasize the conflict of the recollection of the homeland with the new cultural milieu. One of their studies points out that Lahiri's characters are caught in "a permanent mental and emotional war between the myth and customs of the old world and freedom of the new one" (Halder 140). This observation is very important for *The Lowland* as well, where the past of Naxalite Bengal is not just a memory but cohabits and continues to shape life in the United States. Lahiri's writing, according to another critic, depicts "the struggles of navigating dual cultural landscapes" and the heavy emotional 'baggage' of belonging to more than one world at the same time (Qazi 1).

Most of these research works, however, emphasize cultural displacement and generational conflicts as their main themes, thereby somewhat neglecting the aspect of political violence in the homeland becoming a psychological legacy that crosses the boundaries of time and generations. The present article is an attempt to fill this gap in relation to *The Lowland*.

Trauma Theory and Postmemory

Trauma studies offer a necessary conceptual framework to comprehend Lahiri's portrayal of political violence and its continuation in the afterlife. Cathy Caruth is a significant reference point in this domain. According to Caruth, "traumatic experience, besides the suffering it entails even from the psychological dimension, involves a certain paradox: the most direct witnessing of a traumatic event may be recognized as an absolute failure to understand it; that very immediacy, paradoxically, may be that of a delayed recognition" (Caruth 92). If translated into narrative terms, it signifies that trauma is very often recounted indirectly, through nightmares, repetitions, silences, and fragments of memory. In *The Lowland*, Gauri's silence surrounding Udayan's death and her prolonged emotional withdrawal can be counted among such instances of belatedness.

The idea of postmemory, as proposed by Marianne Hirsch, is a point of departure that helps in understanding Bela's role as a second-generation individual. In one of her most influential works, Hirsch states that "postmemory defines the bond that the 'generation after' has with the personal,

collective, and cultural traumas of the ancestors-experiences they 'remember' solely through the stories, pictures, and habits that they grew up with," however, these experiences are conveyed "so profoundly and affectively that they seem to be memories of their own, too" (Hirsch, *Generation* 5). Bela does not see the Naxalite movement or Udayan's killing, but the emotional leftovers of that past-secrecy, abandonment, and a fervent political drive-are what primarily shape her life.

Dominick LaCapra's distinction between **acting out** and **working through** further sharpens the analysis. LaCapra defines acting out as a tendency toward "repetition" in which the subject remains caught in the traumatic scene (LaCapra, "Acting-Out" 9). Working through, by contrast, is described as a "countervailing force" that does not erase trauma but enables a more critical, reflective relation to the past (LaCapra, "Acting-Out" 10). In *The Lowland*, Gauri largely exemplifies acting out through her withdrawal and abandonment, whereas Subhash approximates working through by attempting to build a caring family structure for Bela, even under the weight of concealed history. Together, Caruth, Hirsch, and LaCapra provide a vocabulary to name what Lahiri's narrative dramatizes: the belated, inherited, and repetitive nature of trauma across generations.

Intergenerational Trauma in Diaspora

Scholars of diaspora have increasingly recognized that migration narratives are not only about identity and assimilation but also about inherited trauma. Aditi Chakraverty notes that "intergenerational trauma, the transference of psychological distress from one generation to the next, is a phenomenon deeply rooted in the experiences of diasporic communities" (Chakraverty 323). Her research claims that diasporic literature provides "a valuable lens" to understand the changes that colonization, war, and displacement have made to "individuals and communities" (Chakraverty 324).

If one looks at the recent studies on South Asian histories, they will find similar proofs that the events such as the Partition of India have become the sources of cry of immigrant health and identity across different generations. For instance, Fizzah Sajjad Qureshi and co-authors, depict Partition as a "historical trauma" whose traumatic impact on the psyche has become the mainstay of the South Asian diaspora even after many years (Qureshi et al. 3). While this research focuses on health and social outcomes, it underscores how political rupture in the homeland persists within emigrant communities.

Within criticism on Lahiri, a 2025 article on *The Namesake* explicitly reads the novel through "intergenerational trauma" and shows how "past events keep reverberating in the lives of the characters and... are passed down to the next

generation" (Shah 2). The same logic of reverberation applies to *The Lowland*, where the Naxalite moment becomes an inherited emotional condition rather than a closed historical episode.

Thus, existing scholarship on diaspora and intergenerational trauma supports the claim that Lahiri's work can be read as a site where political and historical violence become embedded in family relations, identity formation, and psychological inheritance.

IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Trauma Studies

Trauma theory provides the central conceptual grounding for this study. Cathy Caruth argues that trauma is defined not by the event itself but by its recurrence in the psyche: "the impact of the traumatic event lies precisely in its belatedness, in its refusal to be simply located" (Caruth 8). According to Caruth, trauma becomes "a wound that cries out...a story that cannot be told" (4). This idea gives the reason why in *The Lowland*, Gauri does not tell about Udayan's death-her silence being the proof of trauma, not its disappearance. Besides, Dominick LaCapra comes with the idea that trauma incites two broad reactions: acting out which is a compulsive repetition of the past and working through which is a mediated and reflective engagement with it. He says, "Acting out is a repetition, whereas working through is a countervailing force" (LaCapra 144). Gauri through abandonment and emotional detachment, represents acting out, whereas Subhash, by trying to build up stability and take care of Bela, stands for working through.

Postmemory

Marianne Hirsch's notion of postmemory is an idea that tries to make sense of how Bela inherits trauma that she did not witness directly. According to Hirsch, postmemory is "the relationship that the 'generation after' has to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of the previous generation" (Hirsch 5). Bela's political activism, as a result, is like a mirror of Udayan's revolutionary zeal though she never saw him (Hirsch 5). Hirsch points out that the trauma which has been passed on to the next generation is not a metaphor: it is conveyed "so profoundly that it almost appears to be memories of their own" (Hirsch 5). Bela's emotional wandering, lack of faith in institutions, and indifference to stable structures are the most accurate examples of the unconscious heritage.

Postcolonial Diaspora Theory

Homi K. Bhabha's concept provides an explanation of the emotional aspect of diasporic trauma and migration. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha characterizes the diaspora

identity as "unhomely", the one, where the personal life is influenced by the dislocation of historical facts (Bhabha 13). He claims that the migrant subject lives "a world in which the home and the world become part of each other" (13). The way of thinking here makes it clear why America does not turn out to be the place of healing for Lahiri's characters: the emotional world of Bengal is still there in the Rhode Island household. Moreover, Bhabha suggests hybridity to be the aftermath of the colonial and migratory past, whereby the identities are not fully in one place or the other. The emotional lives of Gauri and Bela mirror this hybrid state not only from the cultural aspect but also from the psychological one as the family has a political past which cannot be mixed with their immigrant future.

Psychological Transmission Models

Intergenerational trauma theory distinguishes different intergenerational transmission of traumas postulates the following mechanisms:

Silence -The main communication of trauma inheritance is usually the silence that surrounds it rather than the actual stories. As Caruth points out, trauma very often reveals itself as "the gap between knowing and telling" (Caruth 3). Filmhood is full of mother-daughter glut characters. In such so much mumbling, speaking is structural and arguably Bela's transforming her mother's silence into her own words is the most potent scene in the novel.

Shame - LaCapra notes that trauma survivors can, through their own emotional shames and feelings of guilt, become transmitters of these phenomena to generally their descendants (LaCapra 79). Secret of Subhash to Bela regarding her origination of the parentage, initially, as a partial, she doesn't know it act, but later on, it turns into a guilt-driven attempt to protect her while at the same time it stabs her identity into the chest.

Emotional displacement - Psychologists explain the occurrence of unhealed traumas in the past manifesting as emotional retraction, detachment, or overprotection in parenting (Danieli 2). This accounts for the reason why Gauri rejects motherhood and Subhash becomes overly protective.

These theories combined demonstrate that *The Lowland* ought to be recognized not just as a migration narrative but as an emotional legacy that has been passed down through time and space as the consequence of the political history of the world.

V. METHODOLOGY

The study relies on qualitative textual analysis as its main source of research. Qualitative means of analysis open up the possibility of in-depth examination of language,

narrative, characters' psychology, and symbolism. In his book, "Literary Theory: An Introduction," Jonathan Culler states that literary analysis is figuring out "not only what the text says but how it produces meaning" (Culler 4). This method is very well suited for trauma studies as it is often the case that trauma is implied in the spaces, silences, and indirect narrative signals rather than being explicitly depicted. Hence, the novel is explored not only for storyline but also for emotional absences, narrative omissions, and character behaviour patterns.

The article employs persona and plot analysis to follow the dramatization of trauma in the family system. Shoshana Felman states that "the narrative itself becomes 'the witness of a crisis' when literature trauma" (Felman and Laub 5). To this end, the analysis concentrates on the ways in which Lahiri dramatizes Udayan's death, Gauri's withdrawal, and Bela's inherited restlessness for the embodiment of narrative trauma, applying this understanding.

The study adopts a **comparative theoretical framework**, combining:

- **Trauma Studies** (Caruth, LaCapra) to examine belatedness, acting out, and working through
- **Postmemory Theory** (Hirsch) to analyze inherited trauma in second-generation immigrants
- **Diaspora/Postcolonial Theory** (Bhabha) to interpret emotional dislocation, hybridity, and the unhomey psyche of migrants

This blended methodology allows the novel to be read simultaneously as a psychological document and a diasporic political text.

VI. POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND PERSONAL RUPTURE

Naxalism as a Catalyst: Udayan's Revolutionary Involvement

Udayan's participation in the Naxalite movement constitutes the originating trauma in *The Lowland*. Lahiri does not portray his involvement as accidental but as a direct response to a politically repressive climate. The novel mentions that Udayan thought revolution "was the only way to eradicate inequity" (*The Lowland* 21). His change to a radical reflects what Sumanta Banerjee describes as the main attraction of Naxalism "a conviction among youth that only armed uprising could bring social justice" (Banerjee 47). His departure shatters the home unit long before any violence is seen. The movement, even before his demise, changes the family dynamics, emotionally estranging the brothers and instilling fear in the household.

Udayan's hiding of the truth is the moment of breakage in the first place. He deceives his parents, secretly meets with comrades, and keeps guns in the ancestral land. Trauma theory considers secrecy as the necessary condition for later mental health issues. Cathy Caruth states that trauma starts as "an unassimilated event" which cannot be merged with stable meaning (Caruth 4). The actions of Udayan are the ones that generate such destabilization, thus, his family becomes the reluctant witnesses of the conflict that they cannot control.

The State's Repression: Surveillance, Execution, Public Spectacle

The Indian state hence turns into the main culprit of the trauma. Lahiri demonstrates the invasive presence of the police in the Mitra household, their surveillance over the family, and the final shooting of Udayan in front of Gauri. This, in turn, imitates the past. As Nandini Sundar, a historian, points out, during counterinsurgency operations, police "used public killing as a technique of political warning" quite regularly (Sundar 13). The state violence, according to Sundar, 'erased the boundary between public suppression and private terror' (14). Lahiri brings back this disintegration in her story. The home is depicted as the police shooting place now. The novel states: "They made him lie down... They shot him where he lay" (Lahiri 42). The physical part of the execution is only one side of it, the other one is symbolic punishment, which aims at depriving Udayan of his dignity and instilling fear in others. Dominick LaCapra claims that such instances are "the traumatic limit of experience" where one loses the power of understanding and only the feeling of shock is left (LaCapra 41). Gauri sees her husband's murder but is not given the opportunity to grieve. This involuntary witnessing is, perhaps, the psychological injury around which the novel unfolds.

The Birth of Trauma: Subhash and Gauri's Internal Fragmentation

The death of Udayan leads to two different ways of trauma development-Subhash's internalized sense of responsibility and Gauri's emotional numbness. Subhash is haunted by what LaCapra calls "empathetic unsettlement," a moral torment through which survivors empathize with the suffering of others (LaCapra 78). Gauri is not the reason for his love but to "save her from disgrace" (Lahiri 54) he weds her. His trauma becomes visible through the mode of caretaking, a gesture to fix what the past has broken. Gauri's trauma is embodied in the figure of an agitator, the obsessive return of the rupture of her emotions. According to LaCapra, "acting out is characterized by 'compulsive repetition instead of symbolization'" (LaCapra 21). Gauri is not able to tolerate the memory of Udayan; therefore, she rejects Subhash, keeps a distance from Bela, and finally

leaves the family. Her silence and detachment are not disappearance but the very signs of trauma. Marianne Hirsch's theory helps to understand this break: trauma causes "a profound break in transmission" thereby it changes the very nature of identity (Hirsch 6). In *The Lowland*, the death of Udayan is the point at which the family no longer shares the same emotional world. The break from here is the source of all the later trauma that is transmitted.

VII. TRAUMA TRANSMISSION MECHANISMS

Silence as Memory

In *The Lowland*, trauma emerges less through spoken testimony than through the charged absence of speech that structures family life. The execution of Udayan becomes the emotional centre of the household, yet it is rarely articulated. As Cathy Caruth argues, trauma is defined by "the gap between what is lived and what can be spoken," a rupture that prevents direct narration. Gauri's inability to speak about Udayan reflects this condition; to recall him is to relive the catastrophe of his death. His parents, too, participate in this silence. They never openly narrate the circumstances of Udayan's killing, instead preserving his presence through ritualised grief and emotional withdrawal. Their mourning is expressed not through conversation but through gestures—the preservation of his room, the avoidance of his name, and the insistence on carrying on as though "nothing had changed." When Subhash returns home, he observes that Udayan is "remembered in silence," and that the house feels marked by an absence that cannot be voiced.

Caruth further notes that trauma returns "not as a narrative memory but as a haunting presence." In Lahiri's narrative, this haunting presence takes the form of repression: the parents' quiet endurance, Gauri's withdrawal into intellectual abstraction, and the emotional distance that shapes Bela's upbringing. Even when Udayan's memory surfaces, it appears only indirectly—for instance, when Subhash realises that "he would always be in the house, in their lives," despite the refusal to speak about him. Such moments reveal how silence itself becomes a medium of remembrance.

This dynamic also aligns with Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory, which arises not only from stories but from "imaginative investment and creation" in the absence of narrative transmission. Bela never learns the full truth about her biological father, yet she senses the emotional gravity surrounding his absence. She inherits gestures of loss without their explanation, growing up in an atmosphere shaped by unspoken grief. Udayan's parents' silence thus becomes part of a larger intergenerational pattern: the

unsaid is transmitted through mood, behaviour, and relational distance. In this way, Lahiri demonstrates that trauma does not require narration to persist. It survives in the quiet spaces of family life, where silence itself becomes memory without a story.

Guilt and Responsibility

It is the feeling of guilt and the sense of obligation which makes Subhash decide to bring up Bela as his own child. According to his view, "only he could protect her" (*The Lowland* 108). Nevertheless, this secrecy turns into something which is another trauma in itself. Dominick LaCapra points out that when a person is traumatized, they may feel "vicarious guilt" in which they take on the role of the one responsible for the event though they are not the perpetrators (LaCapra 70). Subhash seeks to fix the past but the weight of guilt separates him from the rest of people on an emotional level. Gauri's trauma is different from that of the others. She does not feel guilty but rather rejected and deserted. Her leaving Bela is an example of what LaCapra identifies as acting-out which is a compulsive and involuntary repetition of the original injury (LaCapra 21). She goes away because she is unable to live a life that is based on the death of Udayan. Her doing so, keeps the cycle of losing going on. Her choice is a clear illustration of how trauma can break down the bond between a mother and her child (LaCapra 22). Bela was the one who absorbed both—the protective Subhash's secrecy and the Gauri's abandonment, without knowing where they came from.

Exile and Migration as Trauma

Transition of the family to America doesn't remove the trauma. According to Homi Bhabha, the migrant subject lives in an "unhomely" environment where even the most private aspects of life are still haunted by the historical experience (Bhabha 13). Subhash is sure that Rhode Island will be a safe place but Udayan's death "followed them across the world" (*The Lowland* 122). According to trauma theory, the situation in which one has to leave their home frequently becomes a continuation of the trauma, rather than a resolution. Caruth points out that trauma "is experienced too soon to be known and too late to be forgotten" (Caruth 7). The political past is still there inside the immigrant domestic space. Therefore, exile is the traumatic echo of the past, not the fresh start.

Repetition and Displacement

The emotional patterns resulting from Udayan's death resound in the emotional life of the next generation again. Bela's difficulty in developing stable relationships becomes an emotional side effect of Gauri's withdrawal. In the book "Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory," Marianne Hirsch states that inherited trauma manifests itself as "repetition and displacement rather than

direct memory" (Hirsch 33). This is a repetition of the father's political resistance in Bela but she changes it to environmental activism-a silent handing down of her father's opposition. LaCapra says that trauma leads to "repetition compulsion" when the grief that has not been worked through "returns in various forms of self-disruption" (LaCapra 65). Bela's wandering way of life, distrust of institutions, and determination not to take root are all Gauri's emotional detachment aspects that have been replicated. This is the intergenerational echo: the family does not talk about the trauma that they have lived, but they live it over and over again-as silence, abandonment, anger, movement, and instability.

VIII. IMPACT ON IMMIGRANT IDENTITY

Fragmented Belonging

Trauma fundamentally shapes how Lahiri's characters relate to place and belonging. Subhash leaves India after Udayan's death, but the psychological wound follows him to the United States. Homi Bhabha describes this condition as "unhomeliness," in which the migrant subject lives in a space "where the borders between the home and the world become confused" (Bhabha 13). Subhash never fully belongs to Rhode Island because the emotional memory of the lowland remains embedded in him. Lahiri states that even years later he "thought of Udayan every day," indicating that migration does not produce emotional distance (*The Lowland* 135). According to Cathy Caruth, trauma resists temporal distance because it "returns to haunt the survivor later on" (Caruth 4). Subhash's American life thus becomes psychologically divided-physically present in one location, emotionally bound to another. His belonging is never complete; it is fragmented by loss.

Family as a Trauma Archive

The family becomes the site where political memory is stored, not through storytelling but through silence and emotional behaviour. According to Marianne Hirsch, such family inheritance is called "postmemory", where the descendants "remember" a past traumatic event not through their own experience but through emotional transmission (Hirsch 5). Bela grows up not knowing who her father is, but she decorates the emotional aftermath of his execution inside her: the secretiveness, the feeling of unsteadiness and the tendency to be rebellious. This is very much in line with Hirsch's explanation of postmemory as a memory that "is transmitted so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right" (Hirsch 5). Here the immigrant family becomes a trauma archive, politically speaking, it is there that the past is kept not through speaking but through psychological patterns. LaCapra's term for such phenomena, "repetition effects," is what is evident in Bela's

life, whereby "the past resurfaces in disguised form" because it has not been worked through (LaCapra 65). Her political engagement and denial of institutional affiliation are a mirror to Udayan's radicalism-without ever having met him.

Survival vs. Loss

The immigrant journey in *The Lowland* turns out to be a paradoxical negotiation of survival and loss. The violence Subhash's migration is able to prevent, brings about an emotional exile in him. Gauri manages to survive physically but loses her ability to share the intimacy. Bela manages to survive financially but is handed over the psychological scars she cannot identify. Jhumpa Lahiri's narrative confirms Aditi Chakraverty's statement that "diasporic lives may be physically distant from historical trauma but not psychologically exempt from its effects" (Chakraverty 323). Dominick LaCapra, a trauma theorist, explains that when trauma is not resolved, it leads to "a disabling aftermath" in which survival is always accompanied by loss that is still felt (LaCapra 41). The Mitra family is a case in point. They live, work, and bring up a child in America-but the emotional residue of political violence influences every part of their identity. Thus, the immigrant identity of the family is not solely the result of hope and opportunities but also the inheritance of the pain. The novel unpacks that diaspora is not the end of the history-it is a carrier of history to different emotional realms where it continues to influence personal life.

IX. CHARACTER CASE STUDIES

Udayan - The Origin of Trauma

Udayan is the case that shows the very beginning of political trauma in *The Lowland*. First his ideological commitment was full of hope, he believed revolution "was the only way to eradicate inequity" but it ended up with his own ruin (*The Lowland* 21). His passing becomes the familial psychic wound that the whole family story is built around. Cathy Caruth maintains that the main characteristic of trauma is "the endless impact of a history that will not stay in the past" (Caruth 4). Udayan's killing is his departure which haunts the family like an unresolved historical force. Even though he is not there in person, his absence is the presence that constantly reminds the characters of their trauma and thus influence the emotional world of each of them.

Gauri - Trauma Internalized

Gauri is the closest and most direct witness of Udayan's murder, and she is completely changed by the trauma - first, she becomes a widow who is deeply grieving and then, emotionally detached from her children. She is a typical example of what Dominick LaCapra refers to as the "acting-

out" whereby the subject remains "haunted or possessed by the past" and cannot move on (LaCapra 21). Instead of telling her story, Gauri chooses not to speak, Caruth argues that silence is very often the only language of trauma because traumatic events "resist integration into full consciousness" (Caruth 5). Her leaving of Bela is an instance of traumatic repetition by which she revives the breaking apart that she underwent and thus, she breaks her daughter apart. Academia becomes her safe haven-"a life of the mind detached from the personal world" (*The Lowland* 206). Her change is a confirmation of Hirsch's statement that trauma can lead to a "break in transmission," whereby the emotional bond is replaced by intellectual abstraction (Hirsch 6).

Subhash - Trauma Mediator

Subhash stands for the person who is the bridge between trauma and the chance of fixing things. After Udayan's death, he marries Gauri not out of love but from a sense of responsibility and compassion - a living example of what LaCapra calls "empathetic unsettlement", an ethical readiness to share someone else's pain (LaCapra 78). He tries to get over the trauma by making a loving home for Bela, which is a stark contrast to Gauri's behaviour. Hirsch states that working-through entails "critical distance without disavowal" (Hirsch 32). Subhash is the person who has this distance - he never negates the past, but at the same time, he doesn't allow it to ruin Bela's life. His love, thus, becomes one of the ways of historical repair, even though it is founded on concealment.

Bela - Postmemory

Bela is a perfect example of postmemory, which means that she inherited the trauma that she did not see. Postmemory is defined by Marianne Hirsch as a situation, in which the descendants "remember" the trauma through "stories, images, and behaviour" rather than through their own direct experience (Hirsch 5). Bela didn't learn the full story of her family until she was grown, nevertheless her actions-wandering lifestyle, antagonizing the authorities, engaging in political activism-were in harmony with Udayan's revolutionary fervour. She, in fact, is the "belated witness" that Caruth refers to- a person who is the carrier of the traumatic event's aftermath without having co-origin of the event (Caruth 8). Her existence is an example of LaCapra's "repetition effects" notion, wherein the traumatic experience is coming back, but changed and still emotionally recognizable (LaCapra 65). Bela's fight for the environment is a totally unaware and unintentional political struggle of Udayan, thus, she becomes the proof of trauma being transmitted not only by memory but also by ideology, emotional temperament, and life choices. She is the one who carries the inheritance without knowing it-thereby, she

confirms Hirsch's statement that postmemory is "as powerful as memory, but mediated through imagination and affect" (Hirsch 5).

X. TRAUMA WORKING-THROUGH VS. ACTING-OUT

The three central characters embody three different trauma responses, aligning closely with Dominick LaCapra's theoretical distinction.

Subhash -Working Through

Subhash is always trying to change his pain into something he can give to others. He brings up Bela with love, goes on with his life in a quiet manner, and is very much his own emotional self. In LaCapra's opinion, working through is a "critical distance without disavowal" (LaCapra 144). Subhash doesn't deflect the death of Udayan; however, he doesn't let it wreck the life of Bela. He is the moral center of the story.

Gauri - Acting Out

Gauri is stuck in a loop of repetition. She leaves her family behind, represses her sorrow, and isolates herself in some remote intellectual academic work. LaCapra considers acting-out as a situation where the person "relives the past as if it were fully present" (LaCapra 21). Trauma is the unprocessed force that dominates her existence. Her conduct, according to LaCapra, is a dramatization of the compulsive repetition, which is characteristic of the disorder, rather than a cure (LaCapra 22).

Bela - Unconscious Re-enactment

Bela memory of Udayan is not clear to her but she keeps repeating him. Her political activism, wandering lifestyle, and distrust of institutions are like her father's revolutionary way. Marianne Hirsch says that postmemory leads "repetitions, projections, and reenactments" in the descendants (Hirsch 5). Bela is the second wave of the trauma that she didn't witness, thus confirming Caruth's statement that trauma "returns to haunt those whose lives are connected to the event, even if indirectly" (Caruth 8).

Thus, Lahiri's characters illustrate a **triangular trauma system**:

- Subhash = repair
- Gauri = rupture
- Bela = repetition

Together, they reveal how trauma moves **forward through generations**, changing form but never disappearing.

XI. CONCLUSION

Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Lowland* artfully conveys the idea that political trauma keeps haunting the generations that come after the ones directly affected. It is a psychological legacy, carried, among other things, via silence, emotional memory, and inherited patterns of behaviour. The killing of Udayan, a personal tragedy turned historical as it is set against the Naxalite movement, becomes the emotional fissure that runs through the lives of Gauri, Subhash, and Bela and structures them long after the event has passed. Caruth's trauma theory, according to which trauma is "not fully grasped as it occurs, and therefore returns later in repeated flashbacks" and this is "seen in Gauri's withdrawal and Bela's unconscious reenactment of her father's political rebellion," is reflected in the novel by Lahiri as well (Caruth 4).

The novel vividly depicts the transmission of trauma beyond the national borders that influences immigrant identity even when the individuals concerned do not have direct memory of the traumatic events. Postmemory theory proposed by Marianne Hirsch can be very helpful in understanding how Bela comes to be the one to "remember the experiences of which she was not the owner" that, however, continue to profoundly influence her emotional world (Hirsch 5). The writer illustrates the immigrant family as a place where political memory is stored subconsciously even if there is no political narrative shared by the members of the family.

The different responses of Subhash and Gauri to the events in the novel also serve as an argument for LaCapra's idea of the difference between working through and acting out. While Subhash is engaged in the process of therapy through carrying out actions of protection and caregiving, Gauri's character is that of the trauma victims who are imprisoned by the paralysis caused by the traumatic experience, this way she confirms LaCapra's warning that the trauma which has not been worked "may involve the repetition of destructive patterns instead of their transformation" (LaCapra 66).

At the core of *The Lowland*, there is a very private family grief that the author uses as a starting point to create a literary archive of political history. Through the events depicted in the novel, the author powerfully asserts the permanence of the trauma resulting from characters' involvement in a violent political movement - here the case is the Naxalite uprising - not in the only place where it is historically discussed but also in the emotional lives of those who are the descendants and have never witnessed it. Lahiri's story is an affirmation of the point that political history must be understood not only in terms of ideology and events but also in terms of its emotional afterlife which

is, in fact, very long, and where silence, guilt, abandonment, and yearning, among other things, constitute the enduring evidence of the violence having taken place.

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Myth, Migration, and Cultural Hybridity in a Globalized World: Reimagining Identity in Amitav Ghosh's *Gun Island*

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Abstract— Globalization has intensified cultural exchanges, migrations, and transnational interactions, leading to the emergence of hybrid cultural identities. Literature provides a powerful medium through which the complexities of globalization can be examined. This article explores the process of cultural hybridization in *Gun Island* by Amitav Ghosh. The novel brings together folklore, migration narratives, ecological crises, and global capitalism, revealing how local traditions intersect with global forces. The study argues that cultural hybridization in the narrative emerges through the reinterpretation of myth, the movement of people across borders, and the interaction between indigenous knowledge and global modernity. The legend of the merchant Bonduki Sadagar functions as a cultural bridge linking the Sundarbans to global migration networks extending to Europe. By analyzing narrative structure, mythic symbolism, and character experiences, the article demonstrates how globalization transforms cultural identities while simultaneously preserving traditional cultural memory. The novel ultimately suggests that hybrid cultural formations are not merely consequences of globalization but also creative responses to ecological and social transformations in the contemporary world.



Keywords— Cultural hybridization, environmental humanities, globalization, migration, myth

I. INTRODUCTION

Globalization has fundamentally reshaped cultural identities and social relationships in the contemporary world. Increased mobility, technological connectivity, and transnational economic networks have enabled cultures to interact more intensely than ever before. One of the most significant outcomes of these interactions is cultural hybridization—the blending of cultural forms, beliefs, and practices that emerge when different cultures encounter each other. In literary studies, globalization has generated new perspectives for understanding how narratives represent transnational experiences. Contemporary fiction frequently portrays characters who inhabit multiple cultural worlds, negotiating identity in contexts shaped by migration, ecological crisis, and global capitalism. The novel *Gun Island* by Amitav Ghosh offers a compelling exploration of these issues. The narrative moves between

the Sundarbans, Kolkata, Los Angeles, and Venice, illustrating how local myths and cultural traditions intersect with global migration and climate change. At the centre of the story is the legend of Bonduki Sadagar, a merchant who attempts to escape the wrath of the snake goddess Manasa but ultimately becomes entangled in a global journey. The novel also demonstrates how globalization transforms cultural narratives while simultaneously preserving local traditions. By integrating myth, migration, and environmental discourse, Ghosh creates a narrative that exemplifies cultural hybridization. This article examines how cultural hybridization operates in the novel through three key dimensions: the reinterpretation of myth, the experience of migration, and the interaction between local ecological knowledge and global environmental discourse.

II. MYTH AND CULTURAL MEMORY IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD

One of the most striking features of *Gun Island* is its reinterpretation of folklore within a global context. The narrative revolves around the legend of Bonduki Sadagar, a merchant who attempts to escape the power of the snake goddess Manasa. This story originates in the traditional Bengali Manasamangal narratives but is reimagined within contemporary realities shaped by migration and ecological crisis. By situating an ancient myth within modern global contexts, Amitav Ghosh demonstrates how mythic narratives continue to evolve in response to historical change. At the beginning of the novel, the protagonist Dinanath Datta encounters a shrine dedicated to Bonduki Sadagar in the Sundarbans. Reflecting on its unusual nature, he notes that it is “a temple dedicated not to a deity but to a man who had tried to flee from a goddess” (Ghosh, 2019, p. 27). This observation sparks Dinanath’s curiosity about the legend and its cultural significance. The shrine suggests how folklore continues to survive within everyday spaces while inviting reinterpretation. As Dinanath investigates further, he begins to perceive unexpected parallels between the myth and contemporary patterns of migration. Considering the merchant’s journey across distant seas, he observes that the story “seemed to describe a journey that stretched far beyond the waters of Bengal” (Ghosh, 2019, p. 95). The legend thus expands from a localized religious narrative into a story that anticipates modern global mobility. This connection becomes clearer when Dinanath encounters migrants whose journeys resemble the mythic trajectory of Bonduki Sadagar. Watching refugees undertake perilous voyages in search of safety, he reflects that their stories seemed “strangely reminiscent of the old legend of the merchant who had tried to outrun destiny” (Ghosh, 2019, p. 184). Through this narrative parallel, the novel suggests that myths function as cultural frameworks through which societies interpret new historical experiences.

The transformation of the Bonduki Sadagar legend can be understood through the theoretical framework of Bhabha. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha argues that cultural meaning emerges within what he calls the “Third Space,” where different traditions interact and generate new interpretations. As he writes, “It is that Third Space...which ensures that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 37). Similarly, Hall argues that cultural identity is not fixed but continually reshaped through historical experience. According to Hall, identities are “not an essence but a positioning” (Hall, 1990, p. 226). The novel also resonates with the insights of Appadurai, who emphasizes the importance of global cultural flows in

shaping modern identities. Appadurai describes globalization as a world characterized by “ethnoscapes,” or shifting landscapes created by the movement of people across borders (Appadurai, 1996, p. 33).

III. MIGRATION AND TRANSNATIONAL CULTURAL IDENTITY

Migration occupies a central place in *Gun Island*, where the movement of people across borders becomes a key lens through which globalization is understood. The narrative repeatedly links the Sundarbans with distant locations such as Venice, suggesting that local ecological crises are inseparable from global patterns of displacement. The character Tipu illustrates this dynamic. Drawn into networks of migrants attempting to reach Europe, he becomes part of a precarious system of transnational mobility driven by economic hardship and environmental instability. His story reflects the pressures faced by many young people in the Sundarbans, where rising sea levels and limited opportunities push individuals toward uncertain migration routes. Dinanath gradually realizes the scale of this displacement. Reflecting on the situation, he observes that entire communities seem to be moving because their environments are becoming uninhabitable (Ghosh, 2019, p. 166). The remark underscores how ecological change in one region can produce social consequences across continents. The migrant journeys become especially visible during the scenes set in the Mediterranean. Dinanath encounters groups of refugees attempting dangerous sea crossings, risking their lives in the hope of reaching safer shores (Ghosh, 2019, p. 201). These episodes situate individual stories within broader global structures of migration. Such movements resonate with Appadurai’s concept of ethnoscapes. According to Appadurai, globalization is characterized by the circulation of migrants, refugees, and workers who reshape cultural landscapes across national boundaries (Appadurai, 1996, p. 33). The trajectories depicted in *Gun Island* clearly belong to this shifting landscape, linking fragile deltaic environments to distant European spaces. Migration also produces identities that extend beyond national boundaries. Migrants carry memories, languages, and traditions with them while adapting to new cultural environments. As Hall suggests, identity should be understood not as a fixed essence but as a process continually shaped by historical experience (Hall, 1990, p. 226). Through these representations, *Gun Island* portrays migration as a defining reality of the globalized world. The journeys of characters such as Tipu demonstrate how ecological crisis, economic inequality, and globalization

combine to produce new forms of mobility and cultural identity.

IV. ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS AND GLOBAL INTERCONNECTEDNESS

Environmental change forms another crucial dimension of globalization in *Gun Island*. Through its depiction of the Sundarbans—one of the most ecologically fragile regions in the world—the novel illustrates how climate change transcends national boundaries and connects distant regions through shared environmental risks. The Sundarbans appear as a landscape constantly threatened by rising sea levels, cyclones, and erosion. For the communities living there, environmental change is not an abstract concept but an everyday reality. Dinanath observes that entire villages are disappearing under rising waters, forcing residents to abandon their homes (Ghosh, 2019, p. 76). This transformation directly produces migration and social instability. The narrative also connects local ecological disturbances to events occurring in distant places. In Venice, Dinanath witnesses the sudden appearance of venomous spiders—an unsettling phenomenon that suggests ecological disruption on a global scale. Reflecting on the event, he notes that “it seemed that the creatures of the earth were responding to some disturbance that humans could scarcely comprehend” (Ghosh, 2019, p. 214). Such episodes emphasize the interconnected nature of modern ecological systems. Environmental disturbances in one region can produce consequences in another, dissolving the boundaries that once separated ecosystems. This representation resonates with the ecological theory of Bruno Latour, who argues that the traditional separation between society and nature can no longer be maintained. Latour writes that “there is no longer any clear boundary between the natural and the social worlds” (Latour, 1993, p. 4). The environmental disturbances in *Gun Island* illustrate precisely this entanglement. The novel also reflects the ideas of Ulrich Beck, whose concept of the “world risk society” describes how environmental threats such as climate change produce consequences that transcend national borders. Beck argues that contemporary risks are increasingly “delocalized,” affecting societies across the globe (Beck, 1999, p. 36). Through these narrative strategies, *Gun Island* reveals the profound interconnectedness of the modern ecological world. Environmental crises in the Sundarbans cannot be understood in isolation but must be seen as part of broader global processes.

V. HYBRID CULTURAL SPACES: FROM THE SUNDARBANS TO VENICE

Another important dimension of globalization in *Gun Island* is its representation of space. The narrative moves across diverse geographical locations—from the Sundarbans to Los Angeles and Venice—creating a transnational narrative structure. The Sundarbans serve as the starting point of the story, a region historically connected to maritime networks linking South Asia with other parts of the world. Dinanath initially approaches the area as a repository of folklore, but gradually he recognizes that the region’s history is deeply intertwined with global patterns of trade and migration. The narrative later shifts to Venice, a city historically associated with maritime commerce and cultural exchange. Reflecting on the city’s past, Dinanath realizes that Venice has long functioned as a meeting place for travelers and merchants from distant regions. At one point he observes that the city had always welcomed “travelers, traders and pilgrims from distant shores” (Ghosh, 2019, p. 232). A dramatic moment occurs when migrants fleeing conflict arrive in Venice by boat. Their journey echoes the voyages of earlier traders who once connected Asia and Europe through maritime routes. Observing the scene, Dinanath reflects that “the sea had always been a pathway for those driven from their homes” (Ghosh, 2019, p. 268). These spatial dynamics resonate with the ideas of Doreen Massey, who argues that places should be understood not as isolated locations but as nodes within networks of social relations. As Massey explains, places are “articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings” (Massey, 2005, p. 154). The movement from the Sundarbans to Venice illustrates this concept clearly. The novel’s portrayal of global cities also reflects the insights of Edward Soja, whose concept of spatial hybridity emphasizes the layered and interconnected nature of modern urban spaces. Venice emerges as a site where colonial histories, trade routes, and contemporary migration flows intersect. Through these interconnected locations, *Gun Island* portrays the modern world as a network of hybrid cultural spaces shaped by historical interaction and mobility.

VI. CULTURAL HYBRIDIZATION AS CREATIVE ADAPTATION

Although globalization often produces cultural tensions, *Gun Island* also highlights the creative possibilities of cultural hybridization. Characters reinterpret their traditions in response to changing historical conditions, demonstrating how cultural adaptation can become a source of resilience. The reinterpretation of the Bonduki Sadagar legend provides a key example. As Dinanath

reflects on the story in light of contemporary environmental crises, the myth begins to symbolize humanity's complex relationship with nature. He realizes that the legend reflects "a timeless struggle between human ambition and the unpredictable power of nature" (Ghosh, 2019, p. 143). This reinterpretation shows that myths are not static relics but dynamic narratives capable of generating new meanings. The Bonduki Sadagar story evolves as it interacts with contemporary realities such as climate change and migration. This process reflects Hall's argument that cultural identity is always "in process" rather than fixed (Hall, 1990, p. 222). Cultural traditions survive precisely because they are capable of reinterpretation.

The experiences of migrant characters further illustrate this adaptive process. Individuals traveling from South Asia to Europe must negotiate unfamiliar environments while preserving elements of their cultural heritage. Observing their determination, Dinanath remarks that these migrants possess "an extraordinary ability to endure and adapt" despite immense hardship (Ghosh, 2019, p. 207). The novel's portrayal of cultural adaptation also resonates with the work of Paul Gilroy, who emphasizes the creative potential of cultural mixing. In *The Black Atlantic*, Gilroy argues that identities formed through migration often produce new forms of cultural expression rather than simple cultural loss (Gilroy, 1993). Through these narratives, *Gun Island* ultimately presents cultural hybridization as a process of creative adaptation. Traditions evolve, identities transform, and communities develop new ways of understanding their place within an increasingly interconnected world.

VII. CONCLUSION

Globalization has created unprecedented connections between cultures, economies, and ecosystems. These connections generate complex cultural transformations that challenge traditional notions of identity and belonging. The novel *Gun Island* offers a powerful literary exploration of these dynamics. Through its blending of myth, migration narratives, and environmental themes, the novel illustrates how cultural hybridization emerges from the interaction between local traditions and global forces. Drawing upon theoretical insights from Bhabha, Hall, and Appadurai, this article has demonstrated that the novel portrays hybrid cultural identities as products of transnational mobility and ecological interconnectedness. Ultimately, *Gun Island* suggests that cultural hybridization is not simply a consequence of globalization but also a creative process through which cultures reinterpret their traditions in response to global change. By integrating folklore with

contemporary global realities, the novel highlights the enduring relevance of cultural memory in an increasingly interconnected world.

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Post-War Disillusionment and Human Void in Ernest Hemingway's Short Fiction: An Analysis

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Abstract— World Wars have been occurred such a terrible incidents in the human history that led to a drastic change in the entire scenario of the world, whether it is social and political issues, intellectual standards, economic, religious, and mental concerns, and academic perspectives. After these milestone events, the focus of intellectuals was changed from imagination and innovative progress to existential despair. For the first time, People started to search the relevance and meaning of life instead of materialistic prosperity. The writers of this era were exploring the themes of despair, nostalgia, identity crisis, meaninglessness, alienation and existential subjects. On this foundation, the current paper will analyze the thematic presentation of post-war disillusionment and existential emptiness in the chosen short stories of Ernest Hemingway. Hemingway's fiction portrays the psychological fragmentation and moral ambiguity of the post-war era, especially in the characters who represent alienation, loss of faith, and emotional numbness. Through the textual and thematic analysis, the research will investigate how narrative minimalism, symbolic topography, and muted dialogue are used as stylistic elements to represent inner emptiness and repressed trauma. Through an exploration of key stories such as "In Another Country," "Hills Like White Elephants," "Soldier's Home," and "The Killers," the study examines how Hemingway portrays the fractured self, the rupture of traditional values, and the existential void that defines the post-war era and show how the aftermath of war alters the individual's identity, interpersonal relations, literary trends and worldview.



Keywords— Alienation, identity loss, inner conflict, emptiness, skeptic self.

Ernest Hemingway's short fiction remains central to modernist literature, noted for its sparse style and psychological depth. Underlying much of his work is a pervasive sense of post-war disillusionment—the emotional and existential emptiness experienced by individuals uprooted by the trauma of World War I and its cultural aftermath. Post-war disillusionment encapsulates the profound tide of skepticism and sorrow that swept through societies in the aftermath of the great global conflicts of the twentieth century. In the wake of World War I and World War II, the triumphant promises of renewal and lasting peace dissolved into stark realities of political turmoil, economic strain, and fractured social orders. What had once been heralded as wars to secure a better future instead left generations confronting loss, uncertainty, and a haunting

sense of betrayal. This collective disenchantment did not remain confined to private grief; it permeated the cultural consciousness, reshaping literature, art, and intellectual thought. Writers, painters, and thinkers turned inward and outward at once, striving to articulate the trauma, moral ambiguity, and existential doubt that defined their age, thereby transforming disillusionment itself into one of the most powerful creative forces of the modern era.

The idea of "the Void" in philosophy refers to notions of nothingness and emptiness—concepts that have fascinated thinkers across cultures and centuries. Rather than being a simple absence, the Void has often been understood as a profound and complex principle at the heart of existence itself.

In ancient Greek philosophy, the concept was already a matter of serious debate. Democritus argued that the Void was essential for reality to function. For him, atoms could only move and combine because empty space existed between them; without the Void, matter itself would be impossible. In contrast, Aristotle rejected the idea of a true vacuum. He maintained that nature “abhors a vacuum,” insisting that empty space could not truly exist because everything in nature must have purpose and substance. This early disagreement shows how the Void was not merely a physical concept, but a deeply metaphysical question about the structure of reality.

In Eastern philosophical traditions, the Void carries even richer spiritual significance. In Buddhism, the concept of Śūnyatā expresses the idea that all things are empty of independent, permanent essence. This emptiness does not mean that nothing exists; rather, it suggests that everything arises through interdependence and constant change. Understanding this emptiness is central to realizing the true nature of reality. Similarly, in Taoism, the idea of Wuji represents the undifferentiated state before distinctions and forms arise. It is the boundless, formless source from which all existence emerges—both the absence of defined structure and the limitless potential for creation. In Western thought, especially within existentialism and nihilism, the Void often symbolizes humanity's confrontation with meaninglessness. As traditional beliefs and certainties weaken, individuals are left to face a sense of emptiness at the core of existence. Here, the Void becomes psychological and existential—a reflection of the human struggle to find purpose in a seemingly indifferent universe.

Modern science has also engaged with this idea. In quantum mechanics and cosmology, the “vacuum” is no longer understood as simple emptiness but as a dynamic field filled with fluctuating energy and potential. Even what appears empty may contain the seeds of matter and structure, echoing philosophical insights that the Void can be both absence and possibility.

The trauma of the First and the Second World Wars radically altered the moral, psychological, and cultural landscape of the twentieth century. The unprecedented scale of violence, loss, and existential uncertainty produced a profound sense of disillusionment that permeated literature across Europe and America. Hemingway was the key figure among the writers who most powerfully articulated this crisis of faith and fragmentation. His works stand as stark testimonies to a generation shattered by war, struggling to reconcile shattered ideals with a disoriented modern reality.

Born in 1899 in Oak Park, Illinois, Hemingway's literary sensibility was deeply shaped by his experiences as an ambulance driver during World War I. The brutality he

witnessed on the Italian front left an indelible mark on his consciousness, fostering a worldview characterized by stoicism, restraint, and an acute awareness of human vulnerability. Associated with the expatriate circle in Paris—often termed the “Lost Generation,” a phrase popularized by Gertrude Stein—Hemingway emerged as a central voice of post-war modernism. His minimalist prose style, often described as the “Iceberg Theory,” reflects a deliberate suppression of overt emotion, mirroring the emotional numbness and inner void experienced by his characters.

Hemingway's short stories, in particular, capture the psychological aftermath of war with remarkable precision. Through themes of alienation, moral ambiguity, fractured relationships, and spiritual emptiness, he portrays individuals grappling with loss and existential despair in a rapidly changing world. Stories such as those in ‘*In Our Time*’ Nick Adams' stories collectively trace the psychic imprint of war and reveal characters who embody the disorientation and silent suffering of a generation haunted by violence and meaninglessness. Hemingway articulates post-war disillusionment and the pervasive sense of human void, situating his narrative technique and thematic concerns within the broader context of modern literature and historical trauma.

Ernest Hemingway's short stories, forged in the crucible of World War I, capture the visceral disillusionment that permeated the “Lost Generation.” In his writings Post-war disillusionment is not merely a thematic concern but an existential condition that shapes character, dialogue, structure, and silence alike. His protagonists inhabit a world stripped of heroic illusion, where language falters before trauma and where human relationships are marked by emotional distance. Through understated narration and charged conversations, Hemingway renders the human void not as dramatic collapse but as a quiet, persistent erosion of meaning.

“*Soldier's Home*” depicts, Harold Krebs, a young soldier returning to Oklahoma after World War I. Rather than rejoice upon his homecoming, Krebs experiences profound alienation. He cannot reconcile his wartime experiences with the expectations of family and community. He returns to Oklahoma not as a hero but as a spectral figure adrift in a banal domesticity that mocks his wartime scars. “*Don't you love your mother, dear boy?*” his mother asks, seeking reassurance in conventional language. Krebs replies with devastating flatness: “*I don't love anybody.*” The dialogue is stark, almost bare, yet it exposes the chasm between lived horror and domestic expectation. Krebs' inability to lie convincingly about heroism or romance signals a profound moral exhaustion. He confesses that telling stories requires fabrication, and fabrication feels like betrayal. His

withdrawal from ambition, intimacy, and faith exemplifies post-war paralysis; a life suspended in emotional vacancy. Hemingway employs stark, paratactic prose to underscore this rift: "*He did not want any consequences. He did not want any consequences ever again*" (Hemingway 69). The repetition of "consequences" echoes the mechanical inevitability of trench warfare, where ideals of glory dissolved into mud and mortality. Krebs's apathy toward courtship rituals—"nothing was changed in the town except that the young girls had grown up"—reveals a profound temporal dislocation; the homefront's stasis amplifies his internal void, rendering reintegration impossible. Psychoanalytically, this aligns with Freud's "death drive" (Todestrieb), where the soldier's libido, depleted by mechanized slaughter, recoils from life's generative impulses, leaving a human void devoid of purpose.

In "*A Way You'll Never Be*," Hemingway offers a more fragmented portrayal of psychological trauma. Nick, suffering from shell shock, oscillates between lucidity and hallucination. "*I'm perfectly all right*," he insists, even as intrusive images of corpses and bombardment invade his consciousness. The denial embedded in such dialogue reflects the stoic façade expected of soldiers. Yet beneath the controlled exterior lies an irreparable fracture. The disjointed structure of the narrative mirrors Nick's unstable mind, revealing how war persists internally long after the battlefield is left behind.

Likewise, in "*Now I Lay Me*" he further dramatizes this interior disintegration. Nick confesses his fear of sleep; if he sleeps, he fears his soul might leave his body. "*I lay awake thinking and my mind would not stop*," he admits. The insomnia becomes symbolic of existential dread—a consciousness unable to rest because rest implies surrender to oblivion. The spiritual certainty that once grounded identity has been destabilized. War, here, has eroded metaphysical assurance, leaving behind a void where faith once resided.

Even in "*Big Two-Hearted River*," where war is never explicitly mentioned, its shadow dominates. Nick's ritualistic preparation—pitching the tent, arranging supplies, carefully fishing—suggests an attempt to impose order upon internal chaos. "*This was a good place to camp*," he observes, repeating practical reassurances to himself. The dialogue is minimal, mostly interior, yet it reveals deliberate self-control. The swamp, he avoids symbolizes the dark recesses of memory he is not ready to confront. Nature provides temporary solace, but not complete restoration. The trauma remains, unspoken yet palpable.

Similarly, '*A Very Short Story*' (1925) distils disillusionment into a telegraphic narrative of love's fragility. Luz's betrayal—"She wrote him that after he had gone she learned

to read after a while and also to understand words"—inverts the war's linguistic deceptions, where propaganda promised redemption through romance. Hemingway's minimalist dialogue, such as the ironic cable "UP TO 75,000 REJOICE AT PEACE SIGNED," juxtaposes collective euphoria with personal desolation, exposing the chasm between public myth and private rupture. This textual economy mirrors the Hemingway hero's code: emotional restraint as bulwark against void. Yet, analytically, it betrays deeper existential angst; Camus's absurdism resonates here, as Krebs and the narrator confront a universe indifferent to human striving, their voids not filled but ritualized through stoic detachment.

Hemingway escalates the human void beyond war's aftermath into universal absurdity, as seen in '*Hills Like White Elephants*' (1927). The American and Jig's dialogue orbits an unspoken abortion, their words skimming surfaces while voids yawn beneath: '*It's really an awfully simple operation, Jig... It's not really an operation at all*' (Hemingway 211). The hills, "*White in the Sun*," symbolize barren futurity, their contours echoing the couple's emotional sterility. Disillusionment manifests not in battle but in modern relational failures; the men's pragmatic euphemisms erode Jig's agency, hollowing her into a cipher. Structurally, Hemingway's "iceberg theory"—seven-eighths submerged—amplifies this void, forcing readers to infer the abyss of unarticulated loss. In '*The Killers*' (1927), the void assumes predatory form, infiltrating mundane Nick Adams's diner. The killers' banal menace—"I guess we ought to watch George a little while"—demystifies violence, stripping it of heroic veneer. Nick's post-encounter flight—"He felt all right now... He had gotten away"—offers illusory escape, but Hemingway undercuts it: the void persists, an ontological hunger devouring agency. Drawing on Heidegger's '*Being and Time*', this embodies "*Geworfenheit*" (thrownness), where post-war man confronts Dasein's fragility amid absurd threats. Empirically, Hemingway's oeuvre correlates with veteran testimonies; archival letters from his Red Cross service reveal similar motifs of "emptiness after the bang," substantiating fiction as therapeutic exorcism.

Hemingway's portrayal of disillusionment extends beyond soldiers to the broader moral climate of the post-war world. In stories such as "*A Clean, Well-Lighted Place*," the older waiter articulates a philosophical nihilism that resonates with wartime despair. "*It was all a nothing and a man was nothing too*," he reflects. The repeated invocation of "nada" underscores the spiritual emptiness defining modern existence. The café's light becomes a fragile defence against surrounding darkness—a metaphor for humanity's desperate search for dignity amid meaninglessness. In addition, '*In Another Country*' from '*In Our Time*', also explores post-war disillusionment by placing wounded soldiers in the

quiet, impersonal space of a Milan hospital, where recovery feels more mechanical than meaningful. The men gather each afternoon before therapeutic machines that promise to restore their damaged limbs, yet beneath this routine lies a deeper, unhealed wound. “*It will make you as good as new,*” the doctors assure them, but the narrator observes the uncertainty in their faces. Medals hang on their uniforms, symbols of supposed honour, yet the narrator confesses with quiet discomfort that his own decoration came “because I was an American.” The gap between recognition and reality intensifies his sense of isolation. The Major, dignified and disciplined, becomes the emotional centre of the story. He corrects the narrator’s Italian grammar with stern precision and abruptly warns him, “*A man must not marry.*” His words seem harsh, almost cynical, until grief strips away his composure. When his young wife dies unexpectedly, he returns to the hospital pale and shaken. “*A man must not marry,*” he repeats, but now his voice trembles with unbearable loss. In this moment, the façade of stoicism collapses, revealing a man shattered not only by war but by love and its vulnerability. Through such restrained yet piercing dialogue, Hemingway reveals the profound human void left in the aftermath of conflict—a silence filled not with heroism, but with loneliness, doubt, and the fragile effort to endure. Critics note that Hemingway uses the war hospital not as a site of healing but as a metaphor for existential stagnation—the characters are physically immobilized and emotionally immobilized, caught between war’s violence and peace’s indifference. “*In Another Country*” foregrounds protagonists undergoing physical rehabilitation, yet their emotional and spiritual recovery lags far behind. The narrator and his companions, all wounded soldiers, epitomize the psychological injury that resists clinical cure.

Across these stories, dialogue functions as both revelation and concealment. Characters speak in clipped exchanges, evasions, and repetitions. What is left unsaid often carries more weight than what is articulated. This stylistic restraint reflects the emotional repression characteristic of the so-called Lost Generation. Heroism is replaced by irony; faith by skepticism; intimacy by detachment. The void is not theatrical but subdued—embedded in pauses, hesitations, and unfinished sentences.

Thus, in Hemingway’s short fiction, post-war disillusionment emerges as a pervasive psychological and cultural condition. His characters struggle not only with memory but with the collapse of sustaining narratives. Through sparse dialogue and symbolic landscapes, Hemingway poignantly captures a generation haunted by violence and estranged from inherited certainties. The human void he delineates is at once personal and collective:

a silence echoing in the aftermath of war, where survival itself becomes both necessity and burden.

CONCLUSION

The aftermath of World War I witnessed a profound shift in cultural consciousness. The European and American artistic imagination grappled with the collapse of established certainties—religious, moral, and social—giving rise to literary explorations of alienation, fragmentation, and psychological displacement. Ernest Hemingway’s short stories represent a sustained meditation on the psychological aftermath of war—a landscape marked by disillusionment, estrangement, and the pervasive sense of a human void. Through narrative restraint and symbolic silence, Hemingway captures the emotional residue of a world unmoored from traditional anchors of meaning. His protagonists of these stories are not heroes in the classical sense; they are survivors of an era that has undone familiar patterns of identity and value. Their struggles reflect a broader cultural condition—the modern individual’s confrontation with uncertainty, fragmentation, and existential emptiness. By engaging with post-war disillusionment, Hemingway’s work continues to resonate with contemporary readers confronting similar questions about trauma, loss, and the search for meaning in an increasingly complex world.

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The Unraveling of Moral and Psychological Motivations: Analyzing *The Secret History*

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Abstract— In *The Secret History*, Donna Tartt subverts the traditional mystery by revealing the killers in the opening pages. This paper explores the novel as a "whydunnit"—an inverted detective story where the true enigma is the psychological and moral decay of its characters. Centered on a group of elite classics students, the study examines how their obsession with Ancient Greek ideals and Dionysian rituals leads to a cold, Nietzschean rejection of conventional morality. Through the eyes of the unreliable narrator, Richard Papeen, I argue that the murder of Bunny Corcoran is more than a cover-up; it is the tragic result of "aesthetic solipsism," where beauty is valued above human life. By integrating Freudian theory and the Aristotelian concept of hamartia, this analysis demonstrates how the pursuit of intellectual transcendence inevitably collapses into a haunting reality of guilt, paranoia, and self-destruction.



Keywords— Donna tartt, Freud, Whydunnit, Detective fiction

Introduction

The Secret History by Donna Tartt is a dark, atmospheric novel about Richard Papeen, a young man who transfers to Hampden College in Vermont and becomes involved with a small, exclusive group of students studying Greek under the charismatic and mysterious professor Julian Morrow. The group, led by the brilliant but cold Henry Winter, is obsessed with ancient Greek culture, particularly its ideals of beauty, intellectualism, and transcendence. As their studies intensify, the group's desire to experience something profound leads them to recreate a Bacchanalian ritual, which spirals into an accidental murder.

In their attempt to conceal the crime, tensions rise within the group, culminating in the decision to murder one of their own, Bunny Corcoran, who threatens to expose their secret. What follows is a haunting exploration of guilt, paranoia, and moral corruption as the characters descend into self-destruction. Through Richard's eyes, the novel unveils the psychological disintegration of each member, as their sophisticated, academic facades give way to fear, betrayal, and madness.

Whydunnit

Donna Tartt's *The Secret History* is a quintessential example of a "whydunnit," where the central focus is not on *who* committed the murder but *why*. The whydunnit is also called 'howcatchem' or 'inverted detective story.' It is a form of crime or mystery fiction where the primary focus is on understanding the motive behind the crime rather than uncovering the identity of the perpetrator (as in a whodunnit) or figuring out how the crime was committed (as in a howdunnit). In a whydunnit, the reader may know both the criminal's identity and the method of the crime early on, but the central mystery revolves around the psychological, emotional, or circumstantial reasons that drove the criminal to commit the act. This type of narrative explores the deeper layers of human behavior, often delving into the moral, social, and psychological forces that lead to criminal actions.

Whodunit, with its emphasis on pure puzzle, and the whydunit, takes the psychological approach and emphasizes why the murder took place, belong to the howdunit. It followed the whodunit by about half a century and swung the emphasis to the method by which the murder

was committed (Odell). The novel reveals the crime upfront, in fact, one of the murderers reveals it, letting readers know early on that a murder has occurred, and that the culprits are members of an elite group of students Henry, Francis, Camilla, Richard, and Charles, studying classical literature. The narrative then focuses on unraveling the psychological and emotional motivations that drove the characters to commit the murder, making the exploration of their moral and psychological unraveling the core of the novel's intrigue.

Features of Whydunnit

Early Revelation of the Crime: The "Who" is Clear

Unlike traditional mysteries, *The Secret History* opens with the acknowledgment of the crime. In the prologue, the narrator, Richard Pape, reveals the story's central event: the murder of Bunny Corcoran by his friends. Richard reflects on how he and his classmates, particularly Henry, were involved in the crime:

"I suppose at one time in my life I might have had any number of stories, but now there is no other. This is the only story I will ever be able to tell" (Prologue).

From the beginning, Tartt clarifies that the novel will not be about discovering *who* killed Bunny, but about *why* it happened. This immediate revelation shifts the focus to the psychological underpinnings and philosophical justifications behind the murder. It also highlights that the "why" will be rooted in character psychology, interpersonal dynamics, and the corrupting influence of their intellectual pursuits.

The unreliable narrator plays an important role in the narration and understanding of the novel. The novel features Richard Pape, who acts as both a participant in the crime and a detached observer. Like the classic figure of a detective's sidekick or assistant (e.g., Dr. Watson in Sherlock Holmes stories), Richard narrates the events from an outsider's perspective. He is not fully integrated into the elite world of his classmates but is drawn into their actions, which gives him a unique vantage point for recounting the group's moral decline. Richard's role as the observer aligns with the detective story tradition where the narrator is not the primary focus but instead provides the lens through which the investigation or unraveling of events is seen.

Psychological Complexity: The Characters as Central Figures in a Whydunnit

A key feature of the whydunnit is the deep exploration of the psychological motivations behind the crime. In *The Secret History*, each character, especially Henry, the group's enigmatic leader, is driven by complex psychological motivations. Tartt weaves an intricate psychological web around her characters, making their

unraveling the primary focus of the narrative. Richard Pape, the novel's unreliable narrator, acts as the lens through which we understand the events, though he is often distanced from the core decision-making process, particularly from Henry's motives.

Henry is perhaps the most fascinating figure, representing a Platonic idealist obsessed with transcending conventional morality. His intellectual enigma and desire to live beyond ordinary ethical standards are key to understanding the novel's central crime. Henry's drive to recreate the purity of the ancient world through Dionysian rituals is emblematic of the whydunnit's exploration of *why* people commit crimes based on higher philosophical or psychological ideals. This obsession ultimately culminates in the accidental murder of a local farmer during one of these rituals which Bunny sees and blackmails the group eventually leading to his murder.

Henry's philosophical leanings are based on a distorted form of Nietzschean thought, particularly the idea of the Übermensch, who operates beyond ordinary moral constraints. The intellectualization of murder reflects Nietzsche's ideas on the "will to power" and the rejection of conventional morality. Henry's embrace of this philosophy suggests a psychological need to transcend his limitations, which manifests as his desire to commit the ultimate transgressive act. Nietzsche's ideas, especially from *Beyond Good and Evil*, inform Henry's justification for violence:

"Beauty is terror. Whatever we call beautiful, we quiver before it" (Henry, in Chapter 7).

This line captures the moral and aesthetic transgression at the heart of Henry's motivations and the murder itself. The murder of Bunny is framed not just as a practical necessity but also as an aesthetic experience for Henry—an event that allows him to transcend human emotion and conventional ethics, which is sometimes very commonly seen in psychopaths.

Motive and Moral Corruption: Why the Crime Happens

The deeper "why" of the murder comes from the unraveling of the characters' moral compasses. Initially united by their intellectual pursuits under the guidance of their charismatic professor, Julian Morrow, the group becomes increasingly isolated and detached from the real world. Their obsession with classical ideals, particularly the Dionysian ecstasy they experience during the ritual, sets them on a path of moral erosion. The decision to murder Bunny is less about revenge and more about maintaining the secrecy of their shared transgression—the accidental killing during their Bacchic rite. Bunny's murder is driven by fear of exposure, a necessity to preserve the group's unity, and a desperate attempt to protect the fragile philosophical world they've built.

Bunny's exclusion from the group and his subsequent murder stem from his inability to conform to the high-minded intellectualism and cold detachment that Henry embodies. Bunny, with his crassness and lack of moral ambiguity, serves as a foil to the rest of the group's idealized self-perception. His extortion of Henry and the others—demanding money in exchange for his silence about the earlier murder—exposes the cracks in their moral armor. Bunny's murder becomes inevitable, not just because of his threat to expose them but also because he represents a disruption of their carefully constructed intellectual world.

The "whydunnit" aspect of the story comes to the forefront here, as the reader is asked to consider not only why Bunny had to die from a practical standpoint (to keep the secret of the previous murder) but also why the characters' moral compasses had degraded to the point where such a solution seemed acceptable. This gradual decline into amorality is one of the novel's core themes, explored in both the philosophical and emotional dimensions of the characters' lives.

Bunny's murder is not only a literal crime but also a symbolic one. His innocence and lack of intellectual sophistication make him an easy target for the group, who view him as a threat to their carefully constructed world. However, his death shatters the group's illusion of invincibility, and they are forced to confront the reality of their actions. The novel suggests that violence, no matter how justified it may seem in the moment, inevitably leads to moral and psychological decay.

Influence of Classical Texts and Tragic Structure

The group's obsession with classical Greek literature, particularly the tragic form, informs their actions and provides a backdrop for the novel's themes of fate and inevitability. In many ways, *The Secret History* is structured as a modern tragedy, with its characters acting out roles reminiscent of Greek heroes. As in Greek tragedies, the characters are driven by hubris, fate, and a sense of inevitability that leads to their downfall. Their studies under Julian imbue them with a fatalistic view of the world, where actions are predestined and moral consequences become secondary to intellectual pursuits.

Their passion for Greek is also important. While talking about the book Donna Tartt says, "Greek, extraordinarily described as 'that language innocent of all quirks and cranks (Mills, 189), symbolizes the Otherness of these students: it is their special language for secret communication when others are around, and we are told that (Mills, 189-90). They'd had the same experience of looking up from their books with fifth-century eyes and finding the world disconcertingly sluggish and alien as if it were not their home."

Henry, in particular, adopts a tragic hero's mentality, believing that his actions are justified by his higher understanding of the world. In the tradition of classical tragedies, his hubris blinds him to the moral consequences of his actions. This sense of inevitability—the idea that Bunny's murder is not only necessary but fated—aligns with the deterministic themes found in classical Greek literature, reinforcing the "why" of the crime as rooted in philosophical and psychological predestination.

In *Poetics*, Aristotle discusses the concept of hamartia, or tragic flaw, as central to the downfall of tragic heroes. Henry's hamartia is his intellectual arrogance, which allows him to believe that he can commit murder and emerge unscathed.

Theoretical Texts on Motivation and the Whydunnit Structure

Regarding theoretical approaches, the novel aligns with the psychological theories of crime and moral transgression. Sigmund Freud's exploration of guilt and the unconscious in *Totem and Taboo* is particularly relevant, as the characters in *The Secret History* are driven by both conscious and unconscious desires. Their intellectual engagement with Greek tragedy, particularly Dionysian rituals, taps into their repressed desires and leads to the transgressive act of murder. Freud's exploration of how cultural taboos and repressed instincts influence human behavior is mirrored in the characters' moral disintegration, where their desire for intellectual purity leads to violent outcomes. Henry, in particular, embodies the shadow, embracing the darker aspects of his personality in pursuit of transcendence. His shadow self comes to dominate his actions, leading him to justify murder as a necessary step in achieving his intellectual ideals.

Conclusion: The Secret History as a Whydunnit

In many detective stories, the detective's goal is to bring the criminal to justice, exposing the guilt of the perpetrator. In *The Secret History*, the primary focus after Bunny's death is the characters' confrontation with their own guilt. Each member of the group reacts differently, from Charles' descent into alcoholism to Henry's cold rationalizations. Richard and the others are haunted by what they've done, much like criminals in traditional detective fiction who are caught by the weight of their own guilt even if they initially evade legal punishment. This psychological unraveling functions as an internal "investigation" into the effects of their crime. *The Secret History* is a compelling example of a whydunnit, focusing not on the mechanics of the crime but on the psychological, philosophical, and emotional motivations that drive its characters to murder. Inspired by Modernism, the novel's emphasis was on the

innermost inner life, resulting in a psychological impulse that was lyrical, and non-societal, constantly exposing itself to the danger of aesthetic solipsism. These works are marked by an emphasis on recurring patterns of experience, those paradigmatic human occasions that seem to happen outside of time: the trauma of being cast into the world at birth, the sorrows of travel, the joys of love, and the mystery of death (Holquist).

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Between Memory and Solitude: Female Identity in Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* and *Fire on the Mountain*

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Abstract— This paper explores the complex relationship between memory, solitude, and the construction of female identity in Anita Desai's novels *Clear Light of Day* and *Fire on the Mountain*. Focusing on the inner lives of women characters, the study examines how memory functions not merely as recollection but as a shaping force that defines identity, relationships, and emotional realities. In both novels, solitude emerges as a significant condition through which the female protagonists negotiate their sense of self, often reflecting both liberation and alienation. Through a close textual analysis, the paper highlights how Desai portrays women caught between past and present, struggling with personal trauma, familial obligations, and social expectations. The research further investigates how spaces of isolation—whether emotional or physical—become sites of introspection and self-realization. By situating these narratives within a broader feminist and psychological framework, the study argues that Desai redefines female identity as fluid, fragmented, and deeply influenced by memory and solitude. Ultimately, the paper demonstrates that Desai's works challenge traditional representations of women by foregrounding their internal conflicts and emphasizing the nuanced processes of identity formation in modern Indian literature.



Keywords— Solitude, Female Identity, Anita Desai, Trauma, Obligations

Introduction

Anita Desai, a monumental figure in Indian English literature, is renowned for her insightful exploration of the inner lives of women, particularly their struggles with identity, memory and isolation within the spheres of Indian Society. Her novels delve deep into the multifarious women experiences, portrayal of women entrapped by societal expectations and personal desire due familial duties and responsibilities. *Clear Light of Day* and *Fire On the Mountain* exemplifies the best the evidence of Anita Desai's mastery dealing with these themes. This literature review aims to examine the critical discourse surrounding the interplay of memory, isolation and female identity in these two novels highlighting key interpretations and intellectual perspectives. A literature review serves to place each work in the context of contribution to the understanding of the subjects, describing the relationship of each work to the others under consideration and identify new ways to

interpret previous research paper. By examining the intersections of memory, isolation and identity this review underscores Desai's contribution to redefining female agency in Indian Literature.

Memory: Entrapment, Confrontation, Liberation

Memory works of a double-edged sword working both as a constructive as well as destructive force, simultaneously work as a trauma and the liberation for the women protagonists. It plays a crucial role in shaping identities of the female protagonists in *Clear Light of the Day* and *Fire on the Mountain*.

In *Clear Light of the Day*, the protagonist Bim's character is trapped in the past. The recollections of her childhood in Old Delhi gets inseparable with the decaying home of Das family, a symbol of stagnation and unresolved familial conflicts and responsibilities too. The non-linear narrative mirrors of the fragmented memory as Bim is

caught between her bond with Raja and her indignation of being the destitute. Scholar Jasbir Jain argues that Bim's engagement with memory is an act of resistance; by reconstructing the past she wants to defy the patriarchal structures and choose a life by her own choice. However, Stacey Donohue counters the view suggesting that Bim's fixation on that past entraps her in a cycle of grief, symbolized by overgrown garden, dilapidated house that reflect her emotional stagnation.

The partition of India, 1947 looms large a collective memory as a background in *Clear Light of the Day* and the cacophony outside combines with the personal turmoil inside and contributes to the trauma in their life. Bim's recollection of the violence and displacement during partition reflects the shattering experiences of her own family as noted by Meena Alexander who posits Desai's use of historical memory to critique Post-Colonial, India's failure to reconcile it identify. Similarly, Tara, Bim's sister represents the diasporic subject whose memories of home are idealized, get her return to Delhi forces her to confront the discordant past and present. This tension underlines the writer's artifice of handling memory both as constructive and destructive force. Sayma Khan suggests that the narrative technique of internal focalization is suggestive of inner turmoil and trauma of the female protagonists. Memory becomes a lens through which Bim interprets her present, often distorting perception of reality. In her case both selective memory both sustain and hinder her growth as an individual and asserts that she must stand face to face her past to find peace in the present.

In *Fire on the Mountain* Nanda Kauls deliberate choice to live in the isolated Kasauli hills has become prompted by her traumatic experiences of past life that the patriarchal society prescribed for her. Critics have analyzed her desire for solitude as a rejection of her former roles (e.g., mother, wife, etc.). Her willful isolation, is got upside down by the sudden arrival of her great-granddaughter Raka, got disturbed and forces Nanda to confront the multi-generational trauma. Raka on the other hand an untamed yet silent figure carries her own personal trauma of parental neglect and domestic violence as Rama Jha refers the symbol of cyclic nature of gendered suffering. The fire ignited by Raka in the forest serves as a metaphor for the destructive potential for suppressed memories as noted by Chelva Kanaganayakam who views fire as cathartic force that shows the vanity of her escape.

Isolation:

Isolation in Desai's works often shown as a multifarious phenomenon, serves both as an Oasis, in the desert of patriarchal and societal conformities and expectation and suggestive of personal despair. Bim's decision to remain in

the Old Delhi house while her other siblings living elsewhere for societal conformities is interpreted by Uma Parameswaran as a radical assertion of autonomy. By rejecting the nuptial bond and domestic life she subverts the patriarchal norms, thus her isolation becomes self-determination. According to R.K. Dhawan Bim's solitude is mixed with her loneliness and unresolved anger due to her discordance with Raja whose success is sharply contrasted with Bim's stagnation. During the closing scene, Bim's reconciliation with the past suggests that isolation can coexist with connection, as she reaffirms her bond with her family.

In *Fire on the Mountain* Nanda Kaul's stay at Kasauli exemplifies more radical form of isolation—long desired and deliberately achieved—devoid of human contact except her servant Ram—reflects her desires to defy the identical roles imposed by patriarchy. P. Shailaja shows as a feminist act of reclaiming agency. Raka's arrival shows isolation as a defense against vulnerability. Nanda's eventual death, following Raka's encounter with a violent encounter with the neighbor exposes the vanity of isolation. As Shubhangi Singh observes, Nanda's inability to protect Raka mirrors her own meaninglessness of marriage suggesting that isolation cannot fully save women from patriarchal violence.

Raka symbolizes a rebel, her untamed wild attitude suggests a feminine uncompromised consciousness. Nandini Bhattacharya argues that Raka's silence and absence critique the cultural ploy of confining women. Her act of blazing fire on the mountain, while her radical uncompromising attitude tries to forge an identity unshackled by past.

Female Identity:

Desai's novels provide a nuanced portrayal of female identity in a changing India where traditional values clashed with modern aspects. The female protagonists switch in or out within the different systems of oppression, as patriarchy, colonialism and class.

In *Clear Light of the Day* Bim's identity is developed as the caretaker of Das's family, a position conforms her authority but also clings her to domesticity. Jasbir Jain praises Bim as Proto-feminist figure who challenges the gendered, societal expectations through her intellectual pursuit and overturns the societal expectations by her choice, not to marry and Raja's emergence as the future owner of their property highlights the unequal gendered law of India.

Tara's identity shaped by migration and diaspora. Her life in America or idealized memories of Delhi symbolizes the dislocation of diasporic experience. Tara's

return to India symbolizes to adopt hybrid identity caught between nostalgia and change.

Nanda Kaul's identity is suggestive of negation. Nanda and Raka both reject their societal roles and embraces solace in isolation. Raka, a more radical in her demeanour, is a blank slate shaped by refuse and rebellion. Her refusal to speak symbolizes the rejection of linguistic and cultural framework, exemplifies femininity as found by Kanaganayakam. Nanda's detachment due to non-conformity of societal roles and Raka's natural defiance shows Desai's framing of identity both made or created and innate as well.

Interplay:

Desai's narrative technique, non-linear timelines metaphors, symbolic landscape, thought provoking prose links the personal with the political—linking individual trauma to post-colonial reality. The old dilapidated house in Delhi in *Clear Light of the Day* suggests the colonial era comes to an end whereas Ghazal is suggestive of cultural hybridity of Past-Partition India. The Old Delhi as the location story (itself a relic of Mughal empire) reflects Bim's struggle to realize her effort to be identified with fragmented past.

In *Fire On the Mountain* the desolate landscape exemplifies their internal desolation. The recurring fire image—destructive yet purifying is suggestive of decay and rebirth. The forest fire blazed by Raka not only destroys mountain but also shows the utter vanity of Nanda's control forcing her to realize the interconnectedness of human lives.

Alexander and Jussawala emphasized Desai's use of silence as narrative device. Bim's long suppressed resentment and Nanda's or Nanda's short, pithy dialogues highlight the limitation of language expressing female suffering a theme so common for post-colonial theorist.

Gaps:

While scholarship offer rich analysis of individual themes, fewer works have done on synergistic interplay as the role of multi-generational trauma, how Bim's resentment against Raja reflects Raka's rebellion against aNanda remains unexplored. Apart from this, the deeper post-colonial engagements in Desai's works how do India's colonial history and neoliberal reforms shape female's isolation.

Future work could engage how caste, class, religion intersect with gender in Desai's works or further illuminate universal patterns of negotiation of memory and identity in comparison with other post-colonial writers.

CONCLUSION

Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day* and *Fire on the Mountain* are Amita Desai's two seminal work that enquire the psychological and socio-cultural context of female existence. Through the interplay of memory, isolation and identity Desai criticizes the patriarchal norms, colonial legacies and illusion of autonomy in rapid modernization. Bim and Nanda symbolize resistance through memory but can't liberate completely rather negotiate which highlight the limit of choices for women in the gendered society. The narrative technique reflects the resistance put by the female protagonists. Memory is shown as both constructive and destructive force shaping the character's self and perception to others and society on a greater scale. Isolation provides ample ground for reflection with the risk of alienation. The novels also successfully uphold the nuances of female identity and gradual discovery for self. Further works can delve the themes from post-colonial or multi-generational lens to illuminate Desai's women's inner world.

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Reframing Resilience: Gendered Agency and Narrative Ethics in Khaled Hosseini's *A Thousand Splendid Suns*

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Abstract— Actually, Khaled Hosseini's '*A Thousand Splendid Suns*' (2007) has frequently been read as a narrative of female suffering within war-torn Afghanistan. While such interpretations foreground the novel's depiction of systemic oppression, they often understate the complexity of agency embedded in its narrative structure. This paper argues that Hosseini reconfigures female agency as a gradual, relational, and ethically grounded process rather than an overt act of resistance. Through a close reading of Mariam and Laila's evolving relationship, the study demonstrates how domestic space becomes a contested site where power is both enforced and subverted. Drawing on postcolonial feminist thought, the analysis highlights how resilience operates not as passive endurance but as a form of narrative and moral agency. Ultimately, the novel challenges reductive representations of Afghan women by presenting resistance as embedded within care, sacrifice, and interdependence.



Keywords— Afghan fiction, feminist literary criticism, postcolonial studies, narrative ethics, gendered agency.

I. INTRODUCTION

A number of scholars agree with the fact that critical responses to '*A Thousand Splendid Suns*' have largely emphasized its portrayal of violence, patriarchy, and the suffering of Afghan women. Such readings, while important, risk flattening the novel into a singular narrative of victimhood. As Al-Dagamseh and Golubeva (2017) note, Hosseini's work operates within a complex interplay of representation and reception, often shaped by global expectations of Afghan narratives.

This essay proposes a different emphasis: rather than asking how the novel depicts oppression, it asks how it constructs agency within constraint. In doing so, it shifts attention from what happens to the characters to how they respond, adapt, and ultimately redefine their circumstances.

The central argument advanced here is that Hosseini reimagines agency not as immediate resistance but as a process that unfolds through relationships, moral decisions, and acts of care. This perspective allows for a more nuanced understanding of both character development and thematic structure.

II. GENDERED SPACES AND THE POLITICS OF THE DOMESTIC

One of the novel's most striking features is its treatment of domestic space. Rasheed's household functions as a microcosm of patriarchal authority, where control is maintained through routine practices rather than constant overt violence.

Mariam's early acceptance of her role reflects the internalization of social norms. Her belief that "a woman's lot is to endure" (Hosseini, 2007) is not simply imposed but absorbed, illustrating how power operates through ideology as much as force. Kandiyoti's (1988) notion of "patriarchal bargaining" is particularly relevant here, as it explains the strategic compliance that characterizes Mariam's initial behavior.

However, the domestic space is not static. With Laila's arrival, it becomes a site of negotiation and, eventually, resistance. The shift from isolation to shared experience marks a turning point in the narrative.

III. FROM ISOLATION TO SOLIDARITY: REWRITING FEMALE RELATIONS

At the outset, Mariam and Laila are positioned as rivals, reflecting a patriarchal logic that pits women against one another. Yet this dynamic gradually dissolves, giving way to a relationship defined by mutual dependence.

This transformation is central to the novel's reconfiguration of agency. As hooks (2000) argues, solidarity among women is a necessary condition for resisting systemic domination. In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, this solidarity is not immediate but develops through shared suffering and recognition.

Their eventual alliance disrupts the power structure of the household. The act of defiance that follows is significant not only for its outcome but for the process leading up to it—a process rooted in trust, empathy, and collective strength.

IV. WAR, TRAUMA, AND THE LIMITS OF AUTONOMY

The broader context of war intensifies the characters' lack of control over their lives. Laila's sudden displacement following the destruction of her family home underscores how quickly autonomy can be erased.

As Tickner (2001) observes, conflict often exacerbates gender inequalities, placing women in increasingly vulnerable positions. Hosseini reflects this reality by showing how external violence reinforces internal oppression.

Yet, the novel resists portraying its characters as entirely powerless. Instead, it suggests that agency persists even in constrained circumstances, though it may take less visible forms.

V. MOTHERHOOD AND ETHICAL AGENCY

Motherhood in the novel operates as a key site of transformation. Mariam's inability to bear children initially defines her marginalization, aligning her value with reproductive capacity.

However, her later actions complicate this framework. Her care for Laila's children—and her final decision—recast motherhood as an ethical stance rather than a biological condition. In this sense, motherhood becomes a means of asserting agency rather than a marker of limitation.

Laila's experience complements this perspective. Her maternal role motivates her decisions and shapes her vision of the future, suggesting that care can function as both responsibility and resistance.

VI. NARRATIVE ETHICS AND THE QUESTION OF REPRESENTATION

Hosseini's narrative raises important questions about representation, particularly in relation to global audiences. Critics such as Whitlock (2007) have noted the potential for such texts to reinforce certain stereotypes, even as they seek to challenge them.

However, the novel's emphasis on relational agency complicates this critique. By foregrounding the characters' inner lives and moral choices, Hosseini moves beyond reductive portrayals, offering a more layered depiction of Afghan women.

In this context, the novel can be read as engaging in what might be termed narrative ethics—an exploration of how stories shape understanding and empathy.

VII. CONCLUSION

A Thousand Splendid Suns resists simplistic categorization as a narrative of suffering. Instead, it offers a complex portrayal of how agency can emerge within conditions of constraint.

By focusing on relationships, ethical choices, and gradual transformation, Hosseini redefines resilience as an active and evolving process. This perspective not only enriches our understanding of the novel but also contributes to broader discussions in feminist and postcolonial literary criticism.

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A Study of Tree Writing in Twenty-First-Century Southern Appalachian Environmental Crisis Fiction

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Abstract— Southern Appalachia has experienced a severe ecological crisis as a result of long-term deforestation and resource extraction, and it offers a clear example of the “resource curse” in the history of Western modernity. Against this background, Appalachian environmental crisis fiction develops a distinctive way of writing about trees that reveals the interweaving of capitalist violence, ecological trauma, and the ethical problems of the Anthropocene. Focusing on Ron Rash’s *Serena* and Barbara Kingsolver’s *Flight Behavior*, this essay uses close reading to examine the multiple meanings attached to trees in these works and to show the warning force and ethical value of Appalachian environmental crisis fiction in an Anthropocene context.



Keywords— Appalachia, environmental crisis fiction, tree writing, *Serena*, *Flight Behavior*

I. INTRODUCTION

As an important ecological barrier in eastern North America, Southern Appalachia contains abundant temperate hardwood forests and mineral resources, and this natural endowment has made ecological concern a defining feature of Appalachian literature. Yet during American industrialization and urbanization, the region’s forests and mineral deposits were systematically damaged. By 1920, according to Donald Edward Davis, old-growth forest cover in the Appalachian Mountains had fallen to four percent; and mountaintop removal mining, promoted from the 1950s onward, stripped more than 500,000 acres of original forest, devastated native species such as the chestnut, severely polluted rivers, and sharply reduced the biodiversity dependent upon mature forests. The region has therefore often been understood as a U.S. “sacrifice zone.”

In response to this long history of ecological crisis, Appalachian literature has also shifted in focus. Some critics regard Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* as an important turning point. The book helped energize the U.S. environmental movement of the 1960s and also marked the shift of Appalachian ecological writing from scenic

description toward a more critical engagement with environmental justice. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, writers such as Cormac McCarthy, Barbara Kingsolver, Jeff VanderMeer, and Ron Rash have taken the environmental crises of their age and region as the point of departure for richly varied forms of crisis writing. Their fiction reflects deeply on the social and historical origins of environmental disaster and has produced ecologically oriented literature of broad international significance. These representations of environmental crisis are aesthetically diverse and ethically charged, and they offer important resources for Chinese scholarship reflecting on the ecological trauma of Western modernity.

Within these environmental realities and literary practices, trees—as central elements of Appalachian ecology—have drawn sustained attention from writers and critics alike. They recur as important figures throughout Appalachian environmental crisis fiction: in Rash’s large-scale logging and transport of forests, in McCarthy’s damaged or mutated trees under altered environmental conditions, and elsewhere. A close study of the representation of trees in Appalachian environmental crisis

fiction not only helps explain how this recurring image responds to ecological crisis in the Anthropocene, but also sheds light on the aesthetic features and environmental ethics embedded in Southern Appalachian environmental crisis fiction. Accordingly, this essay focuses on Ron Rash's *Serena* and Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior* in order to explore the ecological and cultural significance of tree representation in these representative novels, and thereby to trace how twenty-first-century Southern Appalachian writers respond to the ecological crises of their age and region through diverse forms of environmental crisis fiction.

II. CAPITAL EXPANSION AND SLOW VIOLENCE: REPRESENTATIONS OF TREES IN SERENA

Rather than treating the forest as mere background, *Serena* places trees at the center of its historical narrative. Trees are both the material foundation of an Appalachian ecological community and the first objects taken over and reshaped by extractive capital. Set against large-scale logging in the Great Smoky Mountains of early twentieth-century North Carolina, the novel traces the rise of the Pembertons' timber empire and shows how a living forest is turned into a commodity. Rash is concerned not only with the number of trees cut down, but also with what happens when trees are reduced to measurable, transportable, and immediately profitable timber: the ecological order, local memory, and ethical sensibility supported by the forest are all gradually emptied out.

The novel first makes this process visible through sharp contrasts in the forest's shape, density, and spatial organization. Before industrial development, the mountains are defined by layered plant life: hardwoods, firs, shrubs, grasses, and undergrowth create a damp, shaded, and densely inhabited world. Once logging begins, however, trees lose their roles as shelter, habitat, and watershed protection and become entries in an account book. Bare slopes, stumps, stripped bark, and newly opened roads record the conversion of a mountain ecosystem into an extractive landscape. Trees no longer appear as living beings within a network of relations; instead, they become objects to be cut, counted, transported, and sold. Rash thus exposes a basic logic of modern development: nature is destroyed not because it has no value, but because its value can be too quickly turned into profit.

The recurring image of dogwood gives the novel's tree representation a deeper cultural meaning. Unlike large quantities of timber, dogwood is valuable not mainly as a commodity but as part of the visual texture of the

mountain landscape, local memory, and forms of natural life beyond practical calculation. For that reason, Serena's wish to remove "useless" species such as dogwood, laurel, and rhododendron means more than managerial ruthlessness. It shows how capitalist reason systematically excludes what cannot be directly used for profit. The decline of dogwood therefore has a double meaning: it signals the damage done to native Appalachian ecology and, at the same time, the weakening of regional historical memory. Rash does not turn trees into abstract symbols. Instead, a specific species carries the weight of place, so that the destruction of trees becomes inseparable from the erosion of local identity.

Rash's narrative strategy also highlights the role of trees as witnesses to history. Workers move ever deeper into the forest along newly cut roads, and natural space—once dense, winding, resistant, and hard to enter—is turned into industrial space organized for access and control. Every road, sawmill, and transport route thus becomes part of the infrastructure that makes large-scale forest destruction possible. The falling tree is never just a local change in scenery; it marks the violent entry of industrial time into ecological time. Trees need decades, sometimes centuries, to mature, while capital demands fast turnover and immediate return. This difference in timescale is one of the main sources of the novel's historical force.

Most importantly, *Serena* does not stop at the visual aftermath of deforestation. It traces the chain of effects that follows the disappearance of trees. Rob Nixon's idea of "slow violence" is especially useful here: a form of environmental destruction that does not appear as a single spectacular event yet steadily damages the conditions of life. In *Serena*, large-scale logging leads to muddy streams, silted waterways, exhausted soil, harsher winters, declining biodiversity, and the gradual breakdown of local livelihoods. Trees are not cut in isolation; their removal spreads through hydrological, climatic, agricultural, and social networks. Rash is especially skillful in using water to make this slow violence visible. Streams that begin as clear, drinkable, and life-giving gradually lose their clarity and vitality through erosion and runoff. The loss of the forest is therefore not a momentary disaster but a prolonged process that drives both environment and community toward depletion.

For this reason, trees in *Serena* are far more than silent background. They are wounds left by capital, records of Appalachian historical trauma, and visible signs of a moral order collapsing under extractive pressure. Through the commodification of forests, the symbolic meaning of dogwood, and the spread of ecological damage after

logging, Rash builds a clear link between capital expansion, environmental loss, and the silencing of place. The representation of trees in the novel does not simply support the plot. It forces readers to see that the myth of development often advances by sacrificing irreplaceable ecological foundations and regional memory.

III. CLIMATE INSTABILITY AND SUBJECT FORMATION: REPRESENTATIONS OF TREES IN *FLIGHT BEHAVIOR*

If *Serena* emphasizes the historical destruction of forests under extractive development, *Flight Behavior* asks how trees make the climate crisis visible and tangible in the present. The novel centers on the unusual migration of monarch butterflies, yet butterflies do not carry all the ecological meaning. Hillside woods, logged slopes, fallen old trees, and forests drained of color form the most immediate local record of climate imbalance. Kingsolver uses trees to translate global warming—often experienced as abstract, distant, and statistical—into something that can be understood within the scale of an Appalachian household and community.

Trees first give concrete form to the climate crisis. The road Dellarobia remembers as having been cut for logging already suggests the historical vulnerability of the region's ecology. When mountains are repeatedly opened, cleared, and harvested, extreme weather can no longer be dismissed as purely natural; it is intensified by long-term human disturbance. As the novel develops, weakened orchard trees, the fall of century-old trees, the fading of forest color, and the visual sense of collapsing slopes turn climate change from a media narrative into a local sensory experience. Trees become the earliest nonhuman witnesses to the disruption later embodied by the monarchs. Their damaged condition shows that abnormality is not limited to the butterflies; the entire mountain ecosystem has entered a state of imbalance.

Kingsolver also uses trees to turn a global climate problem into a local ethical conflict. Bear Turnbow's agreement with a logging company appears, on the surface, to be a practical response to family finances. At a deeper level, however, it reveals the structural pressure under which poor rural communities must choose between short-term survival and long-term ecological responsibility. In this respect, *Flight Behavior* goes beyond simple environmental moralizing. The novel does not portray potential loggers as one-dimensional villains; instead, it shows that shortsighted choices in Appalachia are closely tied to chronic economic insecurity, limited development options, and the unequal distribution of environmental risk. Trees become the measure by which

ethical judgment is tested: once the forest is seen as an asset that can be sold off at once, people unwittingly take part in using up the conditions of their own future lives. Kingsolver's point is not only that climate crisis is global, but that it enters family decisions, class conditions, and the everyday politics of place.

At the same time, the representation of trees becomes crucial to Dellarobia's formation as a subject. Her growth does not come from abstract instruction alone. It emerges through repeated movement into the woods, attention to the butterflies, and bodily encounters with damaged trees, unstable slopes, and altered weather. The forest helps her recognize that her marital frustration, economic limits, and the larger ecological crisis are not separate from one another. In the novel, the constrained female self and the damaged natural world quietly echo each other: both are shaped by occupation, regulation, and forced submission to inherited orders. As Dellarobia works with Ovid's research team, learns to explain monarch migration, and eventually opposes the logging plan, trees cease to be objects she simply observes. They become relational presences that reshape how she understands herself and the world around her.

Here trees also mediate between knowledge and feeling. Ovid represents scientific explanation: he can clarify the relationship between monarch migration and climate change. Yet what gives the ecological crisis emotional force in the local community is Dellarobia's embodied experience of trees, hillsides, mud, and weather. Kingsolver does not set science against local perception. Instead, she brings the two together through the concrete image of trees. Only when climate change is registered as fallen timber, unstable ground, and damaged habitat does a global scientific claim become a problem that ordinary people feel compelled to understand and answer. This is one of the novel's central formal achievements: it preserves the knowledge dimension of climate fiction while remaining attentive to everyday experience and the politics of feeling.

In this sense, the trees of *Flight Behavior* perform a double function. From an ecocritical perspective, they reveal the causal chain linking human activity, climate abnormality, and the loss of habitat. At the level of character, they accompany and enable Dellarobia's movement from passive domesticity toward interpretive and ethical agency. When the novel ends with her leaving the course of her earlier life and moving toward education and a different future with her children, this is not a simple rejection of Appalachia. Rather, it is an effort to imagine another way of living through an awareness of ecological

fragility. Trees are not only traces of damage in the novel; they are also catalysts for subject formation.

IV. CONCLUSION

Taken together, the representation of trees in Appalachian environmental crisis fiction goes far beyond descriptive landscape and enters directly into contemporary ecocritical debates on nonhuman materiality, environmental justice, and the ethics of the Anthropocene. *Serena* reconstructs the way capital turns forests into usable matter in the history of resource extraction and thereby stages a historical form of ecological dispossession. *Flight Behavior*, by contrast, places trees within the double frame of climate crisis and subject formation, showing how global warming becomes understandable in local daily life and how that understanding can prompt ethical and cognitive reorientation. The former emphasizes accumulated trauma and the spread of slow violence; the latter highlights the visibility of crisis and the emergence of ecological agency. Together the two novels show that trees are not passive scenery but carriers of ecological memory, regional history, and moral reflection.

The two works also outline two timelines of Appalachian environmental crisis: the historical exploitation driven by timber capital and the contemporary risks intensified by global warming. Across this broader historical span, trees gain the power to connect past, present, and future.

In Southern Appalachian fiction, tree images become narrative links between local experience and planetary concerns. They record the overlap of capitalist development, climate imbalance, and communal insecurity, while prompting readers to reconsider the costs hidden within modern narratives of progress, use, and development. To recover the meanings of these trees is therefore not only to reconstruct a regional history of environmental trauma, but also to understand how literature, under Anthropocene conditions, can reshape our sense of history, responsibility, and the future.

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Rewriting the Canon: Feminist – Decolonial Readings of English Literature in the Age of AI and Algorithms

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Abstract— *The English literary canon has long been shaped by Eurocentric, patriarchal, and caste-blind frameworks that marginalize or erase the voices of women, colonized peoples, and oppressed communities. In the contemporary digital age, artificial intelligence and algorithmic recommendation systems risk reinforcing these exclusions by privileging dominant narratives and silencing alternative voices. This paper proposes a feminist-decolonial re-examination of English literature that interrogates canonical authority, algorithmic bias, and the politics of digital visibility. By juxtaposing canonical texts with counter-narratives from postcolonial, feminist, and Dalit traditions, and by critiquing the role of algorithms in shaping literary reception, this study argues that rewriting the canon in the age of AI is both a literary and political act. The paper concludes by envisioning a plural, inclusive, and ethically responsible future for literary study.*



Keywords— *artificial intelligence and algorithmic bias, digital humanities, english literary canon, feminist-decolonial theory, postcolonial literature and dalit literature*

I. INTRODUCTION

The word canon in literary criticism tends to connote a sense of timelessness, authority, and cultural universality. However, as many critics have illustrated, the canon is neither timelessly nor neutrally determined but a historically constructed system of value influenced by power structures. Guillory (1993) argues that the canon must be understood less as a collection of texts and more as an institutional practice that regulates cultural legitimacy. What constitutes fundamental or great literature is not, therefore, a product of quality per se but the outcome of political, cultural, and pedagogical selection.

In the case of English studies, such decisions were highly entangled in empire, patriarchy, and class systems. The evolution of the field in the nineteenth century was concurrent with Britain's imperial mission, and the canon was used as an instrument for spreading civilized cultural values throughout the colonies. Said (1993) underscores how canonical texts such as those of Austen, Dickens, or Kipling cannot be disentangled from the imperial contexts in which they were produced and circulated, reminding us

that "culture is a sort of theater where various political and ideological causes engage one another" (p. xiii).

This construction of the canon has been constructed through gendered exclusions. Feminist critics have indicated how women's writing was regularly dismissed as domestic, sentimental, or univocal and hence peripheral to literary study. In an era where writers did not necessarily put their names on their work, Woolf's (1929) current classic complaint in *A Room of One's Own*—that "Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman" (p. 45)—is a statement about this institutional erasure. Even when they were included in the canon, women writers like Jane Austen or the Brontë sisters were frequently read through patriarchal interpretive lenses that silenced their critiques of gender inequality. The exclusions extend further in postcolonial and caste contexts. Spivak's (1988) seminal essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* challenges the assumption that marginalized voices can simply be added to dominant discourses without interrogating the very structures that silence them. Her conclusion—that the subaltern cannot speak in a system designed to erase their agency—points to the limits of canonical inclusion without

structural transformation. In India, Dalit writers such as Bama (2000) and Valmiki (2003) have illustrated how caste hierarchies remain unacknowledged in literary canons shaped by upper-caste dominance. These works expose how exclusion operates not just through gender and empire but also through caste, demanding a decolonial rethinking of what counts as English literature.

Though these critiques have transformed the discipline, the twenty-first century adds one additional dimension: the influence of artificial intelligence and algorithms on literary reception. From search engines and digital repositories to AI-generative reading suggestions, tech now acts as a mediator between which texts are visible, accessible, and legible to readers. Noble (2018) cautions that search engines are not neutral but algorithmically reproduce social biases: “They privilege certain voices while marginalizing others” (p. 9). Translated to literary studies, this implies algorithmic curation has the potential to reinforce canonical dominance and bury marginalized literatures all the more.

Therefore, the work of rewriting the canon today must confront both historical omissions and digital copies of prejudice. This essay positions itself at the intersection of feminist-decolonial thought and digital humanities and claims that literary scholarship can and should not only re-read the canon but also resist algorithmic suppression. By centering feminist, Dalit, and postcolonial counter-narratives and by analyzing the algorithmic infrastructures that organize literary visibility, this paper illustrates how it is possible to rewrite the canon in the AI era both as a literary labor and a political intervention.

II. FEMINIST-DECOLONIAL THEORY AND CANON

The canon has always worked as a gatekeeping device and as a legitimization code. Its authority not only rests in what it contains but also in the mechanisms of exclusion that it naturalizes. For feminist and decolonial scholars, to question the canon is to deconstruct its attempts at universality and reveal the gender, racial, class, and caste hierarchies that underlie it.

John Guillory's analysis situates canon formation within the circulation of cultural capital, arguing that the canon is produced through institutional practices—curricula, anthologies, syllabi—that confer authority on certain works while marginalizing others. From the feminist perspective, such institutional authority has systematically devalued women's writing. In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf underlined the material conditions that prevented women from pursuing education, achieving financial independence, and being free from domestic burdens, thereby preventing them from producing and publishing literature. Most

famously, it is here that Woolf asserts, “a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction” (Woolf 4) —which encapsulates how structural inequality shaped the very foundations of literary production.

Even when women's writing did enter the canon, feminist critics argue, it was often absorbed into interpretive frameworks that neutralized its radical potential. Jane Austen, for instance, has long been celebrated as a chronicler of domestic life, but her works also contain subtle critiques of gendered economic dependence and social constraints. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in *The Madwoman in the Attic*, reinterpret Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* as a narrative that encodes female rage against patriarchal confinement. For Gilbert and Gubar, Bertha Mason—often dismissed as a colonial “madwoman”—becomes a symbol of suppressed female desire and anger (Gilbert and Gubar 336). This feminist rereading destabilizes canonical interpretations that had traditionally celebrated *Jane Eyre* as a triumph of moral and marital harmony.

Decolonial readings add another layer of critique by situating the canon within global systems of coloniality. Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism* demonstrates how canonical texts like Austen's *Mansfield Park* encode the economic and cultural logics of empire. The wealth that sustains the genteel life of Austen's characters is drawn from colonial exploitation, a reality that remains unspoken yet structurally central. Said notes, “Neither the politics of colonialism nor the resistance to it can be separated from the culture in which they were embedded” (Said 12). Decolonial theorists such as Aníbal Quijano and María Lugones extend this critique by arguing that coloniality is not only about land and resources but also about knowledge systems and gender hierarchies. Lugones writes, “The modern/colonial gender system is a colonial imposition” (742), underscoring that Western frameworks of gender and sexuality were exported through colonialism and institutionalized in literature, law, and culture.

The literary example of *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) by Jean Rhys illustrates how feminist and decolonial critiques can intersect to “write back” to the canon. Rhys reimagines Brontë's *Jane Eyre* from the perspective of Bertha Mason, the silenced Creole woman locked in the attic. In Rhys's narrative, Bertha (renamed Antoinette) emerges not as a caricature of madness but as a woman destroyed by racial prejudice, colonial exploitation, and patriarchal domination. By giving voice to the silenced colonial subject, Rhys destabilizes the canonical authority of *Jane Eyre* and forces readers to confront its complicity in imperialist and patriarchal ideologies.

In the Indian context, Dalit literature represents a crucial feminist-decolonial counter-canon. Bama's *Karukku* (1992), an autobiographical narrative of a Dalit Christian woman, directly challenges both literary and social hierarchies. Written in Tamil and later translated into English, *Karukku* foregrounds caste discrimination within religious and educational institutions. Bama refuses the polished literary style of canonical texts, instead embracing a fragmented, oral, and testimonial mode that embodies resistance. As she notes, "The anger that wells up in you from childhood is what motivates you to write" (Bama x). This anger is both personal and political, demanding a place for Dalit women's experiences in the literary sphere.

Similarly, Omprakash Valmiki's *Joothan* (2003) interrogates the silence around caste in mainstream Indian literature. His memoir documents the humiliations of untouchability and the systemic denial of dignity. By narrating his lived experience, Valmiki exposes the inadequacy of a canon that claims universality while erasing caste oppression. Together, texts like *Karukku* and *Joothan* exemplify what Gayatri Spivak might call attempts to "speak" the subaltern condition—not by assimilation into the canon but by creating new literary and epistemic spaces.

Thus, feminist-decolonial theory does not merely add marginalized voices to the existing canon; it demands a restructuring of the very criteria by which literary value is determined. By foregrounding works like *Wide Sargasso Sea*, *Karukku*, and *Joothan*, this approach highlights how counter-narratives destabilize canonical authority and open the way for a more inclusive and politically conscious understanding of literature.

III. ALGORITHMS, AI, AND THE NEW CANON

If the canon has historically been shaped by institutions such as universities, publishers, and literary critics, in the twenty-first century, its gatekeeping functions are increasingly mediated by technology. Search engines, online reading platforms, digital archives, and artificial intelligence (AI) systems now play a decisive role in determining what texts are visible, recommended, and remembered. While these digital tools appear to democratize access to literature, they often replicate and even intensify older exclusions by privileging dominant narratives. The result is what might be called a "new canon"—one created not by scholars or critics but by algorithms.

Safiya Umoja Noble, in her seminal work *Algorithms of Oppression*, demonstrates how search engines are structured by racial and gendered biases. She writes, "Search engines are not unbiased, neutral platforms; they reflect the values and priorities of those who have the power

to design them" (Noble 9). When applied to literature, this insight reveals troubling patterns. A simple search for "greatest novels of all time" on Google or Goodreads, for example, consistently elevates works by Shakespeare, Dickens, Tolstoy, Austen, and Hemingway, while relegating African, Dalit, Indigenous, and feminist voices to obscurity. The digital infrastructure that appears to offer universal access thus ends up reinforcing canonical hierarchies.

This bias extends to AI-driven recommendation systems on platforms such as Kindle or Goodreads. Algorithms learn from user interactions and established patterns of popularity, which means that texts already considered canonical are disproportionately recommended. As Ruha Benjamin notes in *Race After Technology*, "New technologies reflect and reproduce existing inequities unless deliberately designed otherwise" (Benjamin 25). A Dalit memoir like Bama's *Karukku* or an Indigenous poetry collection, for instance, is far less likely to appear in a user's "suggested reading" list compared to Shakespeare or Austen, regardless of the user's interests in marginalized literatures. In this sense, algorithms do not simply reflect taste—they actively shape it, narrowing the horizons of literary discovery.

The problem intensifies when we consider AI systems trained on large corpora of digitized literature. Machine learning models rely on vast textual datasets, which are themselves overwhelmingly skewed toward Eurocentric, male-authored, and canonical works. This skew produces a feedback loop: the more the canon dominates the dataset, the more AI reproduces canonical biases in tasks such as summarizing, analyzing, or even generating literature. For example, when asked to produce "a summary of a great novel," AI tools often default to *Pride and Prejudice* or *Moby-Dick*, rarely suggesting texts outside the Euro-American canon unless specifically prompted.

Moreover, the interpretive practices of AI flatten literature into easily digestible patterns, stripping away the cultural, historical, and political contexts that feminist and decolonial criticism insist upon. Stuart Hall reminds us that "representation is the way in which meaning is given to the things depicted" (Hall 15). If AI represents literature only through frequency and statistical patterns, then the complex meanings of marginalized texts—often rooted in the lived experience of oppression—risk being erased or trivialized. For instance, an AI-generated summary of Valmiki's *Joothan* may present it merely as a "memoir of Indian village life," obscuring its searing critique of caste oppression.

Digital archives, too, reproduce these exclusions. While projects like Project Gutenberg have made thousands of

texts freely available, their collections overwhelmingly privilege works already considered canonical. By contrast, many feminist, Dalit, and Indigenous literatures remain undigitized, untranslated, or locked behind paywalls. The politics of digitization thus mirrors the politics of the canon: what gets preserved and circulated is what institutions deem valuable. As Lisa Nakamura argues, “Digital divides are not simply about access to technology but about access to cultural representation” (Nakamura 132). Without deliberate feminist-decolonial interventions, digital archives risk becoming repositories of the same narrow canon, extended into perpetuity.

The danger is not only exclusion but also distortion. AI-generated “interpretations” of literature can misrepresent marginalized texts by applying interpretive frameworks developed from canonical works. For example, a sentiment analysis algorithm might reduce Bama’s *Karukku* to a narrative of “personal struggle” rather than a political indictment of caste and gender oppression. In this way, algorithms perform a kind of epistemic violence, reinscribing the very silences that feminist-decolonial scholarship seeks to break.

To be clear, AI and digital technologies are not inherently regressive. They hold enormous potential for expanding access to marginalized literatures, especially when guided by feminist-decolonial principles. Digital humanities projects that prioritize inclusivity—such as Dalit digital archives, feminist oral history collections, or open-access repositories of Indigenous writing—demonstrate how technology can resist, rather than reproduce, exclusion. But realizing this potential requires a critical awareness of how algorithms operate as cultural gatekeepers.

The “new canon” shaped by AI is thus not neutral; it is political. By privileging certain texts and suppressing others, algorithms enact a form of power analogous to the institutional authority of the old canon. The challenge for literary scholars today is to expose these biases, critique the politics of algorithmic visibility, and develop alternative infrastructures that amplify silenced voices. Only then can literature in the digital age become truly inclusive, moving beyond the illusion of universal access to a genuinely plural cultural archive.

IV. CASE STUDIES – READING AGAINST THE CANON IN THE DIGITAL AGE

While feminist and decolonial theories provide the framework for critiquing the canon, the stakes become clearer when we turn to specific texts and their reception in both traditional and digital contexts. By examining canonical authors such as Jane Austen and William Shakespeare alongside feminist, postcolonial, and Dalit

counter-narratives, this section illustrates how digital infrastructures reproduce old hierarchies while also offering spaces for resistance.

1. Jane Austen: Domestic Harmony or Gendered Constraint?

Jane Austen is one of the most celebrated figures in the English literary canon, frequently appearing on AI-driven “top books” lists and university syllabi alike. Her novels, particularly *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), are often recommended by algorithms on platforms like Goodreads or Kindle because of their enduring popularity and high frequency of citation in digital corpora. Yet this algorithmic elevation tends to reinforce a narrow, romanticized reading of Austen as a novelist of marriage plots and genteel domesticity.

Feminist criticism, however, reveals a different Austen—one deeply attuned to the constraints imposed on women in patriarchal society. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Mary Wollstonecraft called for women’s intellectual independence, a theme Austen subtly encodes in her critique of women’s economic dependence on marriage. Elizabeth Bennet’s refusal to marry Mr. Collins in *Pride and Prejudice* represents a rejection of material security in favor of personal dignity, an act of resistance often muted in canonical or AI-generated summaries. A Goodreads “blurb” might describe the novel as a “timeless romance,” but a feminist-decolonial reading reclaims it as a text negotiating gendered survival strategies in a rigid social hierarchy.

Digital humanities projects such as “Jane Austen’s Fiction Manuscripts” have made her works widely accessible, but their prominence often overshadows women writers of color from the same period, such as Mary Prince (*The History of Mary Prince*, 1831), whose narratives of slavery and survival are less visible in digital archives. The algorithmic canon,

in this case, amplifies an already dominant figure while silencing others who disrupt the romanticized portrait of nineteenth-century womanhood.

2. Shakespeare: Universal Genius or Colonial Export?

William Shakespeare has long been enshrined as the universal literary genius, occupying the very pinnacle of the canon. Digital algorithms reinforce this centrality: searches for “great literature” almost invariably return Shakespeare’s plays, while AI systems trained on literary corpora often reproduce Shakespearean stylistics when asked to generate “poetic” language.

Postcolonial critics, however, have complicated this universalism by showing how Shakespeare’s works were mobilized in colonial education systems as tools of cultural

dominance. Gauri Viswanathan, in *Masks of Conquest*, argues that the teaching of English literature in colonial India was less about aesthetics than about discipline and control. “English literature appeared as a subject in the curriculum of the colonies before it became part of the university system in Britain” (Viswanathan 85). In this sense, Shakespeare was not merely a dramatist but an instrument of empire.

Contemporary reinterpretations such as Aimé Césaire’s *A Tempest* (1969) rewrite Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* from a decolonial perspective, giving voice to Caliban, the enslaved figure silenced in the original. While Shakespeare dominates digital search and AI-driven summaries, works like Césaire’s are less visible, even though they offer critical correctives to the colonial ideologies embedded in the canon. AI-generated interpretations of *The Tempest* often highlight Prospero’s wisdom and Ariel’s loyalty but neglect Caliban’s subjugation, thus reproducing a Eurocentric reading.

Digital circulation also plays a role. Shakespeare’s works are widely digitized and available in multiple editions, while counter-texts like *A Tempest* remain relatively less accessible in open-access archives. This imbalance demonstrates how algorithmic infrastructures extend the reach of canonical works while limiting the visibility of those that challenge their authority.

3. Dalit and Queer Literatures: Marginal Visibility in Digital Spaces

Dalit and queer literatures present perhaps the starkest case of exclusion in the digital age. Writers such as Bama (Karukku) and Omprakash Valmiki (Joothan) foreground caste oppression in ways that destabilize dominant narratives of Indian literature, which have historically been shaped by upper-caste, male voices. Yet these works remain marginal in digital recommendation systems, rarely appearing in curated lists unless specifically sought out.

On platforms like Goodreads, user-generated tags for Karukku often frame it as “regional literature” or “social issues,” categories that mark it as particular rather than universal. By contrast, *Pride and Prejudice* is categorized as “classic literature,” reinforcing the canon’s claim to timelessness. This digital taxonomy replicates the hierarchies of the canon: marginalized texts are treated as ethnographic or niche, while canonical texts are celebrated as universal.

Queer literatures face similar challenges. While authors such as James Baldwin have gained some algorithmic visibility due to their dual canonical and activist status, many queer and trans writers—especially from the Global South—remain underrepresented in digital archives. Online bookstores and AI recommendation engines rarely highlight

works like Vivek Shraya’s *I’m Afraid of Men* (2018) or Akhil Katyal’s queer poetry in India, despite their critical importance to contemporary debates on gender and sexuality.

Yet digital platforms can also serve as spaces of resistance. Online archives like Dalit Women Fight and Queer Digital Archives India curate marginalized voices that mainstream algorithms overlook. These projects embody a feminist-decolonial ethos by reclaiming digital visibility for silenced communities. They demonstrate that while the algorithmic canon tends to reinforce exclusion, alternative infrastructures can challenge its authority.

4. The Politics of Classification and Metadata

The visibility of texts in digital spaces depends not only on algorithms but also on classification systems. Metadata—keywords, tags, categories—functions as the infrastructure of discoverability. Canonical texts often benefit from robust metadata, with multiple editions, scholarly introductions, and cross-references. Marginalized texts, however, suffer from sparse or misrepresentative metadata, making them harder to locate.

For instance, Valmiki’s *Joothan* may be tagged simply as “autobiography” or “Indian literature,” without reference to its specific engagement with caste. Meanwhile, Dickens’s *Great Expectations* appears under “classic,” “literature,” “coming of age,” “19th-century,” and countless other categories. This disparity in metadata reflects the politics of representation: canonical texts are made legible in multiple interpretive frames, while marginalized texts are confined to narrow, often reductive labels.

As Miriam Posner argues in digital humanities scholarship, classification systems are never neutral; they encode the values of their designers. “The act of categorizing is itself a form of interpretation, with real consequences for what becomes visible or invisible” (Posner 19). In literature, these consequences determine whether a text is discoverable, teachable, and ultimately, canonical.

V. Toward a Feminist-Decolonial Digital Humanities

If algorithms and digital infrastructures risk reinscribing the hierarchies of the canon, then the task for scholars today is not only to critique these processes but also to imagine and build alternatives. A feminist-decolonial digital humanities (DH) does precisely this: it rethinks what counts as knowledge, who gets represented, and how technologies can be redesigned to reflect ethical commitments to justice and inclusion.

1. Reimagining Archives and Infrastructures

Digital archives have tremendous potential to diversify literary visibility, but only if curated with feminist-decolonial principles. As Roopika Risam argues in New

Digital Worlds, “The digital cultural record reproduces colonial and imperialist epistemologies unless intentionally interrupted” (Risam 6). A feminist-decolonial DH must therefore prioritize the digitization and translation of marginalized literatures—Dalit autobiographies, Indigenous oral traditions, Black feminist poetry, queer testimonies—and make them freely accessible.

Projects like the South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA) and The Digital Archive of Latin American and Caribbean Ephemera model this ethos by collecting voices historically excluded from canonical archives. Similarly, grassroots projects such as the Dalit Women Fight online repository demonstrate how digital infrastructures can serve as platforms for resistance, countering the silencing effects of algorithmic visibility.

In practical terms, feminist-decolonial curation means asking: Who is included? Who is absent? Who controls the metadata? Whose interpretive frameworks guide categorization? A reimagined archive must disrupt Eurocentric hierarchies, not merely reproduce them in digitized form.

2. Inclusive Metadata and Algorithmic Justice

Metadata is the skeleton of discoverability; without it, texts vanish in the digital ether. Yet as Miriam Posner and others have shown, metadata categories often encode exclusionary assumptions. To resist this, feminist-decolonial DH projects must develop inclusive metadata practices. For example, tagging Valmiki’s *Joothan* not only as “autobiography” but also as “Dalit literature,” “anti-caste writing,” and “testimonio” amplifies its discoverability and political significance.

Algorithmic justice also requires rethinking recommendation systems. Instead of privileging “most popular” or “most cited,” platforms can design algorithms that deliberately diversify suggestions by incorporating marginalized texts into recommendation cycles. As Safiya Noble insists, “We cannot afford to leave technology design to those who prioritize profit over justice” (Noble 162). Literary platforms could adopt equity-based recommendation models, ensuring that a user searching for “classic literature” encounters *Pride and Prejudice* alongside *Karukku* or *A Tempest*.

Such interventions challenge the illusion of neutrality in algorithms, replacing it with a conscious politics of inclusion.

3. Pedagogy in the Age of AI

The classroom remains a crucial site for canon formation. In the digital age, pedagogy must adapt by interrogating both canonical authority and algorithmic bias. A feminist-decolonial pedagogy might involve pairing canonical texts

with counter-texts—teaching Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* alongside Césaire’s *A Tempest*, or Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* alongside Bama’s *Karukku*. This juxtaposition resists the singular authority of the canon and trains students to read critically across power structures.

Digital assignments can also foreground the politics of visibility. For instance, students might analyze how Goodreads categorizes texts, exposing hierarchies of “classic” versus “regional.” Or they might contribute to open-access archives by creating metadata for underrepresented works. Such practices not only teach literature but also empower students to intervene in the digital infrastructures that shape cultural memory.

Furthermore, as AI tools become integrated into education, instructors must highlight their biases. Instead of banning AI, a feminist-decolonial pedagogy might ask students to compare AI-generated summaries of marginalized texts with their own interpretations, analyzing what gets erased. This transforms AI into a critical object of study rather than a hidden authority.

4. Decolonial AI and Ethical Design

At a broader level, the challenge extends to AI development itself. Most large language models are trained on Western, male-dominated corpora, reproducing structural exclusions. A decolonial AI project would deliberately curate diverse datasets, ensuring representation of marginalized voices. For example, training corpora could include Indigenous oral traditions, Dalit testimonios, or queer feminist essays, thereby broadening the epistemic base of AI knowledge.

Joy Buolamwini and the Algorithmic Justice League emphasize the importance of “inclusive coding,” arguing that design teams must reflect diverse experiences to mitigate systemic bias. In the literary context, this means involving scholars of marginalized literatures in AI development processes, ensuring that cultural nuance is preserved rather than flattened into statistical patterns.

Moreover, ethical AI design demands transparency. Users should know what corpora an AI draws upon and whose voices are absent. By foregrounding absence, feminist-decolonial AI resists the myth of universality and acknowledges its own limitations.

5. Toward a Plural Future of Literary Study

The ultimate goal of feminist-decolonial DH is not merely to “add” marginalized texts into the canon or to “correct” algorithms but to rethink the very notion of canonization. What would it mean to study literature without a singular, hierarchical canon? What if literary study embraced plurality, where multiple traditions coexist without being forced into a universal scale of value?

This vision resonates with Dipesh Chakrabarty's call to "provincialize Europe"—to displace Europe from the center of global knowledge while allowing other epistemologies to emerge on their own terms. In literary studies, provincializing the canon means refusing to measure Dalit, Indigenous, or queer texts against Shakespeare or Austen, and instead valuing them for their own cultural and political contexts.

Digital platforms can embody this pluralism by designing non-hierarchical search systems that highlight multiple traditions simultaneously, refusing the logic of "best" or "greatest." In this sense, feminist-decolonial DH gestures toward a future where literature is not a single archive curated by power but a constellation of voices, each carrying its own authority.

V. CONCLUSION

The canon has always been a site of power. For centuries, it has operated as a selective archive—legitimizing certain voices while marginalizing or erasing others. In the digital age, the forms of exclusion have shifted but not disappeared. Algorithms, AI systems, and digital platforms appear to democratize literary access, yet they often function as new agents of canonization, amplifying canonical texts while rendering marginalized literatures invisible.

This paper has argued that a feminist-decolonial approach is essential for disrupting these exclusions. By interrogating how digital infrastructures reproduce hierarchies, and by re-centering marginalized voices—Dalit, Indigenous, feminist, queer—scholars can resist both the authority of the traditional canon and the algorithmic canon that threatens to replace it.

The case studies of Austen, Shakespeare, and Dalit/queer literatures demonstrate how canonical authority is reinforced in digital spaces, but also how counter-readings and alternative archives open paths of resistance. The discussion of metadata, classification, and AI-generated interpretations shows that exclusion is not accidental but systemic, encoded into the very infrastructures of cultural memory. Yet Section IV highlighted that technology is not inherently regressive. When guided by feminist-decolonial principles, digital humanities projects, inclusive pedagogy, and ethical AI design can actively resist erasure and foster plurality.

Rewriting the canon in the age of AI is not simply an academic exercise—it is a political intervention. It asks us to confront not only what we teach and read but also how knowledge is structured, who has access to it, and whose voices define the future of literature. To "provincialize" the

canon is to decenter universality and allow multiple literary traditions to coexist without subsumption. It is to imagine a digital literary sphere where Karukku and Joothan stand alongside *Pride and Prejudice* and *Hamlet*, not as supplements but as equal participants in shaping cultural memory.

As Stuart Hall reminds us, "Cultural identity is not an essence but a positioning" (Hall 226). The canon, too, must be reimagined as a shifting, contested, plural space rather than a fixed hierarchy. In this reimagining, AI and algorithms can play a constructive role, but only if their design is intentional, inclusive, and ethically grounded.

Ultimately, rewriting the canon in the digital age means recognizing literature as a living archive of struggle, resistance, and imagination. It means refusing the silences imposed by both colonial authority and algorithmic bias. And it means building infrastructures—pedagogical, archival, and technological—that honor the multiplicity of human experience. Only then can English literature, in its widest sense, serve as a space of justice, memory, and possibility for the futures to come.

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Capitalocene, Waterscape and Human Questions: Reading Akkineni Kutumbarao's *Softly Dies a Lake*

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Abstract— In the era of capitalocene, natural resources including water and waterscapes are to be used for profit based vision. Capitalism provides access to the resources to the rich of the resources while the marginalized sections of the society face scarcity and are forced to live in inhabitable environmental conditions. In the name of materialistic progress, capitalist activities fuel the degradation of the environment. This phenomena casts severe irrevocable impacts on nature, and on the lives of "ecosystem people" destroying their interrelationship with the non-human world (Gadgil & Guha, 1995, p. 3). The perception of exceptionalism and exemptionalism nourish the causes of exploitation of the non-human world, biodiversity, ecological balance, and segregation of humans from non-human. Akkineni Kutumbarao's Telugu novel *Kolleti Jadal* translated into English by Vasanth Kannabiran as *Softly Dies a Lake* (2020) presents water contamination and passive death of the largest freshwater lake in India. This eco-memoir echoes the exploitative deeds of the greedy and the consequences of such anthropocentric conducts. This paper shall attempt to study multifarious engagement with water by employing theoretical perspectives from the field of Blue Humanities and Ecocriticism. This paper also intent to read capitalocene's slow violence with an emphasis on how the corporate culture disrupt the interrelationship between human and non-human in Kolleru, the village beside the lake, how the degradations, contamination of the lake affects marginalized communities and nature, and how the lake influences the identities of the people.



Keywords— Blue Ecocriticism, Capitalocene, Human/Non-human, Identity, Water

Environmental deterioration in the contemporary time, caused by human anthropocentric activities, has become a planetary crisis in scale with its vast magnitude. Modern ideas of development, industrialisation, deforestation, urbanization, resources extractions lead to the manifold dilapidation including alteration of the holistic life support system on Earth. The impacts of insensitive human wrecking of the environment contrive the anthropocene. In the article, "The "Anthropocene"" Paul. J. Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer (2000) used the term "Anthropocene" to mark a turning point of the relation between humans and the planet Earth (p. 17). With the term, the two authors denote the human being's entering into a new geological epoch (p. 17). Human activities likely the "modification of survival condition" from introduction of modified agricultural systems to the creation of steam engines in 1784 which

contributed to the industrial revolutions accentuate the existence of the Anthropocene (Cusumano, 2023, p. 151). However, the perceptions of the Anthropocene have been proved to be inadequate, when it comes to assigning responsibility for the deterioration of the environment. This concept considers the whole of humanity is responsible for the environmental degradation, but the indigenous people from the Global South and poor people of the North have been living in coherence with nature. Moreover, these indigenous tribal people bear the brunt of the exploitation. However, recent studies claim the more specific cause of the climate change and deterioration of the environment is capitalism. Klein observes that the true power behind the climate crisis is 'neo capitalism' and not the whole of humanity (as cited in Cusumano, 2023, p. 152). His arguments shift the focus from anthropos to capitalism and

to the Global North's monstrous economic prosperity at the cost of planetary crisis as the primary causes (Cusumano, 2023, p. 152). "Complimentary to the Anthropocene" the epoch Capitalocene accentuates the vivid occupancy of capitalism as responsible force for the planetary crisis (Cusumano, 2023, p. 154). The term "Capitalocene" stands for the perception that "our ecological crises are precipitated not by humans in some undifferentiated and generalized way, but more specifically by the global spread of capitalism and its social economic ecological injustices" (Arons, 2020, p. 16). While the principals of Anthropocene consider anthropocentric activities responsible for environmental crises, these implicitly convey that the whole humankind is the sole source of the devaluation of the environment, and disregard the fact of diversified human existence in different territories of the world interacting uniquely with the environment. It constructs homogenous strata of humans which deny the differences between those who create the nuisance of climatic inconveniences and those who bear the brunt of the consequences. Industrial emissions, corporate policies, inconsiderate extractions of natural resources, mindless use of waterscapes, and forests contribute to the depletion of the environment while, irrespective of the fact of contributing a little to the environmental causes, the indigenous, tribal people who live in harmony with the environment through sustainable ways of living are the first to suffer the repercussions. Jason W. Moore (2016) introduced the concept Capitalocene and discussed the contaminated and endangered climate as the consequences of domination of the capitalistic system prompted by profit, accumulation and exploitation. He rightly argues in the introduction of the book *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism*, "...the Capitalocene does not stand for capitalism as an economic and social system. It is not a radical inflection of Green Arithmetic. Rather, the Capitalocene signifies capitalism as a way of organizing nature—as a multispecies, situated, capitalist world-ecology" (p. 6). Thus, the principals of Capitalocene, specifies the capitalistic anthropocentric acts drive the environmental degradation which is planetary in scale.

Akkineni Kutumbarao's *Softly Dies a Lake* (2020), originally published in Telugu, later translated into English by Vasanth Kannabiran depicts the life and slow death of Kolleru lake and its interconnection with its inhabitants. Kalpana Kannabiran calls the novel an "ecological memoir (or eco-memoir)" (Kutumbarao, p. 2020, ix). The narrative is unfolded by Srinivasa Rao's remembering the past about his childhood and the glory of the lake Kolleru. His childhood memory brings the simple but difficult life of his people and how they live coherently with the fresh water lake, Kolleru and its non-human inhabitants. The life in the

past was different in the village, the present states of the lake as well as some of the villagers are corrupted by the greed of capitalistic, materialistic gain.

Srinivasa remembers his childhood memories of his rural life in Pulaparuru. From his account emerges an image of lives and livings of his people, their dependency on the lake Kolleru and the nature for their substantive living. He describes Kolleru as alive, an active force of nature which nurtures all kinds of lives in it:

Water all around. In the distance the island villages. The water full of fish, crabs, snails, snakes, leeches...not just one but as far as one could see a range of different forms of water life. On the water a wealth of green grasses waving in the breeze. Feeding on these grasses the cattle, birds and insects. All living things depending completely on nature and mingling with nature in complete harmony, Kolleru seemed to reveal a great and miraculous truth. (Kutumbarao, 2020, p. 101)

However, in the present time, Kolleru has lost its gleamy vitality. Srinivasa Rao's emotive narration exhibits the deterioration of the lake, as a human caused catastrophe induced by capitalistic greed. The eco-memoir unfolds Kolleru's declination from an enriched ecosystem fostering multi-species to a stagnant rotten waterscape. The novel opens with the contrasted articulation of the past and present state of the lake. The narrator describes:

The lake Srinivasa Rao looked out. The lake which should have stretched out boundlessly before his eyes lay in tattered strips. Kolleru, once dense with plants and creepers and flowers, lay bare before him like shards of shattered glass. Where had the rows of ducks floating like streams of flowers gone? Where had the sounds of birds rising like scattered blooms gone? Like a map of the world divided wantonly by crooked boundaries Kolleru was split by bunds. Broken bunds. (Kutumbarao, 2020, p. 1)

After sixty years, returning from the city, Srinivasa looked at Kolleru and couldn't recognize the state of the lake. The lives of multiple species get shattered, a tremendous number of fish tanks engulf the lakefront and reach the village area (Kutumbarao, 2020, p. 1). The narrator Shrinivas recalls the childhood memories of the lake's gleamy past, the lake spanned "several hundred acres" with "vibrant water" flowing "majestically" (1). Kolleru, once the nourishing mother, is now a fallen waterscape, a "filthy pond, a breeding ground for germs, a danger to the environment, a toxic net for birds" (2). Mighty Kolleru was once, "Stretching across two hundred and sixty square miles between the Krishna and West Godavari districts, Kolleru

was one of the biggest freshwater lakes in Asia" (Kutumbarao, 2020, p. 10). It used to get its fresh water as well as dirty water from the rivers namely Budaleri, Naguleru, Akkilluru, Sammiveru and some sixty-seven canals (10). The lake shares a deep relationship with the people, and people were engaged with the lake for multiple purposes. Human interaction with the non-human world gets more vivid with the arrival of migrated birds to the lake. Srinivasa recalls during summer, "countless birds from across the world would come like faraway travellers to brighten the land with their colours" and to make the "place vibrant with the sound of their music" (10). Such experiences attracted the people of Kolleru to remain connected with the waterscape and it enriches their connectivity to the waterscape and the lake waters, "permeates [their] emotions and imagining, providing metaphors to think with" (Strang, 2015, p. 7). Kolleru's waterscape sustains the diversity of organisms. The waterscape holds together "songs of the birds" that seek to hunt for food and "calls of the fishermen who had come in search of fish" and all these sounds together would make "a hundred ragas and notes" (Kutumbarao, 2020, p. 88). Multi-species presence in Kolleru depicts the collaboration and coexistence of human and non-human entities. The waterscape serves its purposes in a significant way. Through the water of the lake, the indigenous people and other non-human species sustain their existence by setting up reciprocal connectivity.

Kolleru, being a Lake and surrounded by land and inhabitants, is "more culturally diverse and closely connected" to the human lives and culture (Mentz, 2024, p. 80). According to Steve Mentz (2024), "connectivity defines all watery bodies, from vast oceans and large rivers to streams and lakes" (p. 80). Kolleru, as a waterbody, carries this significant characteristic. It sustains connectivity among multiple species contributing the place's biodiversity, as the narrator recalls:

Water all around. In the distance the island villages. The water full of fish, crabs, snails, snakes, leeches...not just one but as far as one could see a range of different forms of water life. On the water a wealth of green grasses waving in the breeze. Feeding on these grasses the cattle, birds and insects. All living things depending completely on nature and mingling with nature in complete harmony, Kolleru seemed to reveal a great and miraculous truth. (Kutumbarao, 2020, p. 101)

It is very crucial to be connected with "the more-than-human aquatic communities" (Oppermann, 2023, p. 48) to sustain the environmental health and to stop "hemorrhaging

species" (Rose, 2017, p. G52). "Failing connectivities" (Rose, 2017, p. G52) among species leads to destruction of the overall environmental balance and decreasing the survival potentialities. Srinivasa recalls the images of how the animals in his village carried a symbiotic relationship. He remembers "Some birds sat on the buffaloes' ears, cleaning them. As the buffaloes roamed the birds roamed with them so that their work was done at the same time as the buffaloes" (Kutumbarao, 2020, p. 7-8). He also described how his father used to call other villagers, animals, birds "our people" and believed "There was nothing in nature that was not 'ours'" (28). The villagers co-exist with the surrounding nature. The adequacy of the Natural resources sustain their lives, in exchange they perform stewardship as well. The waterscape dictates their lives and lifestyle and prevents them from becoming greedy. The people within Kolleru, tend to stay connected with their roots, their lives and livings are centred around the Kolleru. Their substantive farming and fishing indicates human and nature interrelation. Hence, this is a living testimony that "human relationship with its environment is continuous and inescapable" (Sarkar & Karmakar, 2021, p. 1309). Inhabitants within Kolleru were not fond of over accumulation and over consumption, one of the features of the Capitalocene. Their livelihood was based on sustainable ways of living and consumption. It helps them to establish a reciprocal relationship among the inhabitants which leads to a sustainable human culture. Though Kolleru, was not always a motherly nourishing figure, in time it could take a destructive avatar as well, which erects obstacles through natural disaster like flood in their course of lives (Kutumbarao, 2020, p. 154-55). However, people within Kolleru adjust their work strategy in accordance with the Kolleru's natural course. Nevertheless, this harmonious coexistence is about to cease to exist and the congenial relationship between human and nature is disturbed as some villagers have started to treat the mighty Kolleru as a means of earning more profit rather than substantive earning.

However, the deterioration of the Kolleru lake and the biodiversity of the place distorted the relationship between the environment and the inhabitants. The people of the village depend on the resources of the lake and the land area can be termed as "ecosystem people" (Gadgil & Guha, 1995, p. 3; Guha & Martinez-Alier, 1997, p. 12; Nixon, 2011, p. 22). According to Gadgil and Guha (1995), ecosystem people "depend on the natural environments of their own locality to meet most of their material needs" (p. 3). The waterscape of Kolleru provides fish, mussels and the nearby lands provide rice and crops. The ecosystem people sustain their lives on the freshwater resources but the conflict over the controlling of the resources alienates them from themselves and from their ecosystem. Often

unnoticed, these types of conflicts in micro and macro level lend people to acquire natural resources and control the means of production, which leads to the exploitation (Gadgil & Guha, 1995, p. 2). Moreover, the competition for resources results in exploitation of the Environment and other non-human entities. Hence, this competition breaks the harmony between human, environment and non-human and the symbiotic relation among them.

In capitalocene, the economic system expands its territory and this expansion never stops (Frame, 2023, p. 11). The capital structure to strengthens market economy becomes blind to two other kinds of economics; the "nature's economy", and the "sustenance economy" (Shiva, 2006, p. 15). The novel exhibits the destruction of "nature's economy" at the hand of Capitalocene's uncontrolled materialistic use of the waterscape (Shiva, 2006, p. 15). Inconsiderate uses of waterscape for corporate or capitalistic purposes of inhabitants within Kolleru unmasks "Capitalism's governing conceit" that "it may do with nature as it pleases" in order to feed their materialistic hunger (Moore, 2017, p. 601). Moreover, "the short-termism and profit driven motives of such 'achievements' end up doing substantial damage to the network of natural and cultural systems" (Mukherjee, 2010, p. 7). For the quick accumulation of profit, some people within Kolleru misused the lake's water resources which led to the destruction of sustainability of the water.

In capitalist system, some people nurture the non-reciprocal, dominating attitude towards natural resources which leads to destruction of natural cohabitation, nonetheless, the consequences must be carried by the poor people "ecosystem people" and non-human members (Frame, 2023, p. 11; Guha & Martinez-Alier, 1997, p. 16; Nixon, 2011, p. 47). The novel exhibits that the ecosystem and the indigenous people of Kolleru are the victims of capitalism's encroachment. Capitalism's exploitation of the water resources of Kolleru incorporates the idea that waterscapes are "intimately connected to the question of capitalism's intensive and extensive logic of expansion" (Menozzi, 2020, p. 2). The occurrence of private ownership and inconsiderate use of Kolleru's waterbody bring the blue capitalism into action which has divided the society, "hierarchically into centre and periphery" (Foster & Clark, 2004, p. 187) and this ownership and control over resources partially bring "growth of affluence" to few (urban based) powerful, capitally advanced people while destroying substantive living of the communities who are "depending on the local resources" (Shiva, 1991, p. 27). In Pulaparu village, there are mainly two castes in the village, the Kammadoras, who farmed and the Vaddirajas who fished. The Vaddis became greedy and forcibly colonised the fresh water of Kolleru, which fed the inhabitants within Kolleru

for a long time. The capitalist tendency of infinite accumulation has destroyed the villagers' ideas of communal coexistence. They have started fighting over ownership over the harvest rather than dividing equally among them. This has created the hierarchy within the community which has disrupted Kolleru people's correlation among themselves and with non-human entities including lake Kolleru. The Vaddis's desire of over accumulation of wealth lead to the destruction of the lake Kolleru as they establish fish tanks on Kolleru. Srinivasa recalls, "When Kolleru was a lake village the thousands of Vaddis here lived in huts and wore loin cloths; they are now living in double-storeyed houses and driving around in Scorpios and Innovas" (Kutumbarao, 2020, p. 195). Vaddis sacrifices Kolleru's overall health at the altar of their greed. Their activities along with outside capitalists has damaged the Kolleru lake to an extreme extent. Vaddis has accumulated wealth and capitally prospered at the cost of destruction of the natural waterscape as Ravi, a villager, mourns:

Our village Vaddis have flourished so much because of the fish ponds. Recently they put in a petition for an airport in our village because some fish were getting spoilt in the lorry. The Income Tax fellows came and raided their houses. In each house they found gunny sacks filled with five hundred and thousand rupee notes under their cots. (Kutumbarao, 2020, p. 191)

Notwithstanding, ecosystem people like Srinivasa, Radhakrishna consider land, water of Kolleru crucial "public wealth" to sustain lives of the inhabitants within Kolleru (Žižek, 2022, p. 44). But the fishermen have bound the lake's water as their private property for fish farming. This act leads to the breaking of indigenous relationships between people and nature. The communal system of sustaining life is disrupted by capitally charged private ownership of Kolleru's water. These practices of private ownership have destroyed the overall health of Kolleru and the habitats.

The contaminated waterbody, poisoned land and polluted weather turned the area near Kolleru inhabitable. The people within Kolleru have been forced to endure the polluted habitat, which has lost its life sustaining capabilities by losing its natural resources like land and drinking sweet water. The state of the Kolleru's people become what Žižek (2022) calls as "eco-proletarians": these people suffer the ecological expropriation and poverty because the environment is destroyed due to extraction and misuse of natural resources, and they are left no alternatives but to become "homeless refugees in their own land" (p. 46). The degradation of Kolleru is so insignificant in profit making capitalistic ideologies that they are overlooked.

Justin McBrien (2016) in his essay "Accumulating Extinction Planetary Catastrophism in the Necrocene" argues that the deterioration of climate and capital accumulation have become entangled (p. 117). The novel exhibits two contrasting pictures of Kolleru through the memory of Srinivasa. Firstly, from the past, a beautiful, nurturing, waterscape of Kolleru "full of greenery, grasses, bulrushes, fragrant flowering shrubs and a wealth of other wild green weeds and colourful flowers swaying in the breeze" (Kutumbarao, 2020, p. 4-5). Secondly, the narrator mourns for the slowly dying image of Kolleru. Once the life-giving Kolleru has been turned into "a filthy pond" (Kutumbarao, 2020, p. 2). The flowing water is bounded for fish farming. Previously, varieties of fishes were lively and had flourished in the lake are now "being bred for the market and were perishing of pollution in the fishponds" (Kutumbarao, 2020, p. 2). Incorporating Donna Haraway's (2016) perceives that economic endeavours under capitalocene creates a great threat towards ecological stability (p. 47). The water of the Kolleru gradually has been getting stagnant, the industrial pollutants have worsened the state of the Kolleru, eventually the lake becomes a profit making 'machine' and a garbage.

Catastrophe is inevitable when capitalism is enmeshed in nature. Capitalistic activities of the people of Kolleru proves that "capitalism plus Nature=Catastrophe" (Moore, 2016, p. 4). Kutumbarao articulates a change from substantive farming and fishing to profit making business. This extractive nature of fish farming at the cost of depletion of waterscape signifies the profit based, corporate driven practices. Believing in the ideas of exceptionalism and exemptionalism, the capitalists do not bother themselves for the overall health of the environment (Malm, 2016, p. 391). They only concern the accumulation of profit at any cost even if it demands the irrevocable destruction of the environment. However, they defend their misdeed by arguing "nature and time will heal" (Nixon, 2011, p. 21). The ideologies of capitalism use this narrative to cover up the harmful effects brought upon the environment due to their inconsiderate activities. This attitude towards Kolleru lake destroyed it completely (Kutumbarao, 2020, p. 196). They forgot to coexist with nature. However, they realised what they brought upon themselves and the waterscape, but in vain, it was too late. Hence, in the capitalocene, nature has become a commodity at the hands of capitalists. Thus, the enmeshing of nature and capitalism eventually casts destruction upon human, non-human and environment.

The capitalistic ventures of this epoch are the driving force of the deterioration of the environment. Dipesh Chakrabarty (2018) in his article "Anthropocene Time" states:

Many argue about the politics of the name and propose, for instance, that the epoch be more properly called "the Capitalocene" or "econo-cene" so that a vague and undifferentiated humanity—"anthropos"—is not held responsible for bringing about this time and that the blame is laid squarely at the door of a system: capitalism or the global economic system. (p. 6)

In this capitalocene, urbanisation, capitalist industrialisation, and commodification of natural resources are responsible for bringing destruction over the environment including waterscapes. However, Amitav Ghosh (2016) soundly argues that, "Every human being who has ever lived has played a part in making us the dominant species on this planet, and in this sense, every human being, past and present, has contributed to the present cycle of climate change" (p. 115). The Vaddis from Pulaparru village are equally responsible with the capitalists from urban areas, for the deterioration of Kolleru. Vaddis's greed for over accumulation has enchanted them to exploit the resources of Kolleru, as Radhakrishna, a villager, express:

The collective farming went well for five or six years. Then the trouble started. As soon as everyone began to have some money each one thought he was a hero. These people began to say, why should the Vaddis have the fish in the Chinnagundam? The Vaddis said, not just the Chinnagundam but even the fish in the creeks you have made to let water into the fields belong to us. (Kutumbarao, 2020, p. 189)

This capitalistic act cast irrevocable consequences upon the freshwater ecology, as the Vaddis contaminated it with a mega number of fish ponds and chemicals. In addition to that, industrial waste from the near urban areas like Vijayawada and Eluru have toxified the mighty Kolleru. As Vandana Shiva (2006) states, "The "ownership" of the rich is based on the "dispossession" of the poor" (p. 2). Due to this toxification, the people within Kolleru have left no choice. They have started to fetch drinking water from another village (Kutumbarao, 2020, p. 194). Radhakrishna, Srinivasa's friend, claims:

Because the oxygen in the Krishna canal has gone down completely and it has emerged that the reason for it is that all kinds of waste are being let into it. From the fish food to the medicines everything is toxic waste. All that rots further and flows into the Kolleru. (Kutumbarao, 2020, p. 194)

The destruction of Kolleru lake by polluting it with industrial waste, "pesticides used in agriculture and the toxic waste" (Kutumbarao, 2020, p. 194) degrades it's

intrinsic value and degenerate Kolleru into "cheap nature" as for "capitalism, nature is cheap" (Moore, *Anthropocene* 2). Moore (2016) argues, "Nature is "cheap" in a double sense: to make Nature's elements "cheap" in price; and also to cheapen, to degrade or to render inferior in an ethico-political sense, the better to make Nature cheap in price" (pp. 2-3). These "two moments are entwined" to bolster capitalist growth (Moore, 2016, p. 3). By making "cheap" in both senses, the capitalist and the intruders want to capture the lake area for capitalist exploitation. Moreover, the corrupted greedy, politicians, want to reduce, "Kolleru to forty-five thousand acres, release the rest from the Wetland Protection Act and take over the released fifty-five acres into their control" (Kutumbarao, 2020, p. 195), in order to exploit the released part of the lake for capital gain without any opposition.

To conclude, in the capitalocene, the capitalist agendas thrive on the exploitation of the environment. A certain strata of people tend to control, acquire and over-consume the natural resources, in exchange deplete the overall planetary health. Intoxicated by capitalistic gain, these people forget to live in harmony with multiple species. Kutumbarao's (2020) *Softly Dies a Lake*, presents such a devastating picture of the lake Kolleru and its inhabitants, including human, water, animals, birds, fishes, and other life forms. The narrator Srinivasa's vivid memory of Kolleru's glorious past contrasts with the present state of the waterscape which becomes "a filthy pond, a breeding ground for germs" (Kutumbarao, 2020, p. 2) at the hands of capitalism. However, the story of this depleted lake creates the urgency to change human attitude towards the environment and planetary courses.

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Trauma, Motherhood and Self-Narration in Arundhati Roy's *Mother Mary Comes to Me*

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Abstract— This paper explores the themes of trauma, motherhood, and self-narration as portrayed in Arundhati Roy's *Mother Mary Comes to Me*, a memoir that traces the author's personal and emotional story and her connection with her mother, Mary Roy. The paper aims to show how trauma in the text is not described directly but is expressed through Roy's silence to her mother's aggression. This research also highlights self-narration, showing how Roy uses her personal memories and reflections to narrate her story in her own voice. To understand the generational trauma imposed on Mrs Roy and then Arundhati and her brother shaping their self- perception, identity and future actions, this research draws on Cathy Caruth's trauma theory as discussed in *Unclaimed Experience*. This theoretical framework allows the study to analyse how unprocessed trauma is carried across time and generations.



Keywords— *Memoir, Trauma, Motherhood, Self-Narration, Aggression, Silence*

Introduction

Suzzanna Arundhati Roy is one of the most important contemporary Indian writers writing in English. She was born in 1961 in Shillong and grew up in Kerala and Delhi. She studied architecture, and early in her career Roy worked in television and films. The publication of *The God of Small Things* introduced her to international fame. It received the 1997 Booker Prize for Fiction and was listed as one of The New York Times Notable Books of the Year. Since then, she has established herself as a powerful essayist, political commentator, and activist. Her writings often combine personal experience with strong social and political concerns.

Apart from fiction, Arundhati Roy is widely known for her non-fiction writing. Her essays address democracy, environmental destruction, nationalism, gender inequality, and state violence. In 2014, many of her essays were collected by Penguin India in a five-volume set. In 2019, her nonfiction was collected in a single volume, *My Seditious Heart*, published by Haymarket Books. Some of these essays, such as *The End of Imagination* and *The Greater Common Good*, are discussed in vivid detail in

Mother Mary Comes to Me. Her style is marked by strong imagery and sharp language: "a wild child with calloused feet who knew every hidden path and shortcut in the village that led to the river. I lived outdoors and went home as seldom as possible. In the non-human category, my closest companion was a striped palm squirrel who lived on my shoulder and whispered in my ear" (Roy 21).

As an Indian author, Arundhati Roy occupies a unique place in literature. She writes fearlessly within the Indian social and cultural system, addressing universal issues such as suffering, identity, power, and resistance. Her work challenges traditional ideas about family, motherhood, history, and authority. Through her fearless voice and innovative style, Roy has become a significant figure in Indian English literature, representing both artistic excellence and social responsibility.

Mother Mary Comes To Me

Mother Mary Comes to Me is a memoir and work of literary non-fiction written by Arundhati Roy and published in 2022 by Penguin Random House India. The book, written in English, marks a deeply personal shift in Roy's writing, focusing on memory, motherhood, and trauma. Unlike a

conventional memoir, it does not follow a strict chapter-based structure; instead, it unfolds as a continuous reflective narrative divided into short, fluid sections rather than formally numbered chapters. This structural choice supports its fragmented, memory-driven storytelling style.

Roy recalls her childhood experiences, marked by strict discipline, emotional distance, and fear of disapproval, and examines how these experiences shaped her emotional life and identity. The text also explores Mary Roy's life as a strong but wounded woman who faced marital failure, social judgment, and professional struggles. Roy attempts to understand how her mother's own trauma influenced her behaviour as a parent. Even after her mother's death, Mary Roy remains a powerful presence in the narrator's thoughts and memories. As Roy herself clarifies in an interview, "This book is my conversation with her, I could not have while she was alive, and it's not an accusation or indictment or anything. It's just a conversation and celebration of what was great about her and a reportage of what was not so great about her" (Roy 4:24- 4:41).

It is not merely a memoir dedicated to Mrs Roy but also an autobiographical narrative in which the author's life is inscribed on every page. As noted in a review published in *Hindustan Times*, "Roy's magical but difficult childhood is laid bare: an absentee father; relatives who, at best, are reluctant to help a single mother and, at their most feudal, committed to disinheriting her; the great tragic figure, of course, is Mary Roy: asthmatic and mean, loving and visionary" (Shanghvi and Siddharth).

Another significant aspect of the book is its engagement with political commentary. Roy reflects on major and minor political events in contemporary India and how they affected her life and family, interweaving national history with personal memory. She articulates her political views without hesitation. As Dharmendra Kumar Singh observes in his review, "The memoir by Roy is a non-fictional piece of writing that, in its extraordinary way, is made of the pulse of a memoir, the intimacy of a diary, and the urgency of a political testimony in a single design" (Singh 2).

The book was written after Mrs Roy's death in 2022 and functions as a tribute that acknowledges her enduring presence in Arundhati Roy's emotional and intellectual life. Singh further remarks: "*Mother Mary Comes to Me* (2025) is circular. It starts when life stops, when the mother is dead, and it stops where life starts, where she recalls the departed soul of whom she is to pass her rest life. The whole text is haunted by the shadow of the same loss" (Singh 2).

Mother as the Central Figure

In *Mother Mary Comes to Me*, Arundhati Roy clearly portrays Mary Roy as the central character around whom the entire narrative revolves. Although the memoir is written in the first person, the emotional, thematic, and narrative focus repeatedly returns to Mary Roy. The title itself suggests her dominance; "Mother Mary Comes to Me" implies that, even after death, the mother remains a powerful psychological and emotional presence. The memoir becomes less of an autobiography and more a portrait of a woman whose life shaped everyone around her.

As a child, Mary Roy is shown struggling within a rigid and violent patriarchal household. Arundhati Roy recalls that her grandfather "whipped his children, turned them out of the house regularly, and split my grandmother's scalp open with a brass vase" (Roy 11). This traumatic upbringing made the foundation of Mary Roy's later personality, which was marked by her strength, emotional hardness, and determination to escape oppression. By talking about these childhood experiences, Arundhati places her mother not simply as a strict parent but as a wounded child shaped by fear and authoritarian control.

As a wife, Mary Roy's life was one of struggles. Against her family's wishes, she married Rajib Roy, a Bengali Hindu tea plantation manager, and lived for some time on Assamese tea estates, where her children Lalith (L.K.C.) and Arundhati were born. However, the marriage turned out to be dysfunctional due to her husband's alcoholism. Arundhati Roy describes him as "defeated in all possible ways" (Roy 174). His addiction leads to abuse and instability, forcing Mary Roy to leave him and return to Kerala as a single mother. By narrating this decision as an act of courage rather than failure, Roy places her mother at the centre of a battle against both domestic abuse and social stigma.

Mary Roy's struggles as a sister further highlight her central role in challenging oppressive systems. Under the Travancore Christian Succession Act, daughters were denied equal inheritance rights. When she attempted to claim her share of family property, her male relatives resisted, asserting that she had no legal entitlement. Her eventual legal battle for equal property rights was not only a personal fight but a landmark challenge to patriarchal law. Through detailed reflection on this episode, Arundhati Roy presents her mother as a historical figure who reshaped legal and social norms.

Financial hardship defined Mary Roy's journey. After her divorce, she struggled to survive as a schoolteacher in Ooty while raising two children with limited support. The family experienced insecurity and social discrimination, particularly because the children are

viewed as “fatherless.” Mary Roy later established Pallikkoodam, a progressive school in Kerala, and devoted her life to sustaining it. The inscription on her grave, “Dreamer, Warrior, Teacher”, summarises the roles she embodied. Arundhati's narration emphasises these achievements, reinforcing her mother's position as the memoir's driving force.

At home, Mary Roy is portrayed as an “iron angel”, stern, demanding, and often emotionally severe rather than conventionally affectionate. She disciplined and criticised her children harshly, yet also instilled in them independence and intellectual courage. Arundhati Roy repeatedly returns to this dual image: her mother as both a shelter and a storm. This tension shapes the memoir's emotional core and confirms Mary Roy's centrality in the narrative.

Thus, through detailed recollection of her mother's struggles as a child, wife, sister, professional, and single mother, Arundhati Roy constructs *Mother Mary Comes to Me* as a tribute, critique, and exploration of one dominant personality. Even when narrating her own experiences, Roy frames them in relation to her mother. Mary Roy remains the axis of memory, conflict, resilience, and transformation—undeniably the central character of the text.

Autobiography

Arundhati Roy's *Mother Mary Comes to Me* (2025) is her first memoir, weaving personal history with introspective narration to explore her life shaped by her mother, Mary Roy. It blends raw family dynamics, childhood trauma, literary success, and political awakening through first-person accounts and direct textual evidence hence making it an eminent autobiographical work.

An autobiography is a self-written account of one's own life, which is written by themselves, providing a first-person perspective on the author's experiences, memories, and insights. This genre allows people to share their own point of view and stories, offering readers a glimpse into the author's personal journey and the historical or cultural context in which they lived.

Autobiographical elements dominate the memoir as Roy recounts verifiable life events from her Kerala upbringing to global fame. The narrative shows her childhood in Ayemenem, homeschooled with her brother in poverty and family feud, stories from real locations that inspired *The God of Small Things*. She details her mother's legal battle against the Travancore Christian Succession Act, which Roy won in India's Supreme Court, granting daughters inheritance rights which was a factual milestone that portrays Mary Roy's radical feminism. Roy narrates her journey to writing, from early screenwriting to the 1997

Booker Prize for *The God of Small Things*, including the “whirlwind success” and backlash labelling her as a “seditious, traitor-writer.” These events are not fictionalized; they anchor the book in Roy's documented biography, such as her activism on Kashmir, Naxalism, and dams.

Direct evidence includes her post-success “rubble”: “As my personal life turned to rubble... it was politics - and anger - that held me together,” mirroring documented life transitions. Mary's death at 89 bookends the narrative: “More than a daughter grieving her mother, I grieve as a writer who has lost her most captivating subject.”

Self-Narration Style

In *Mother Mary Comes to Me*, Arundhati Roy uses self-narration to examine how her childhood experiences with her mother, Mary Roy, shaped her identity, emotional outlook, and, later, her capacity to forgive. The memoir is not just a recollection of events but a reflective exploration of how those experiences shaped her own personality.

Roy often revisits traumatic childhood events and connects them directly to her adult experiences. For example, she recalls watching her brother being beaten for bringing home an “average” report card and later reflects, “On the occasions when I am toasted or applauded, I always feel that someone quiet is being beaten in the other room” (Roy 43). This shows how fear and performance-based approval formed her relationship with success. Praise becomes tied to guilt and anxiety, proving how deeply childhood discipline influenced her inner world.

She also recounts the repeated verbal humiliation she endured: “‘I wish I had dumped you in an orphanage,’ ‘You're a millstone around my neck,’ ‘All my sickness is because of you’ and, of course, ‘Bitch’” (Roy 345). Through self-narration, Roy demonstrates how these words became deeply embedded, forming an inner voice that affected her confidence and sense of self. Yet she does not present herself only as wounded; she recognises that her strength and rebel were also shaped as an answer to this environment.

Importantly, Roy's narration gradually shifts from anger to understanding. As she reflects on her mother's violent childhood, her father, who “whipped his children... and split my grandmother's scalp open with a brass vase” (Roy 11), she begins to see Mary Roy's cruelty as inherited trauma rather than pure evil. This recognition allows empathy to come over. The nonlinear structure of the memoir shows this process: memories surface after her mother's death, showing that the past continues to “come” to her, just as the title suggests.

By revisiting these experiences, Roy changes unconscious pain into conscious reflection. Forgiveness in the memoir does not omit the bad experience; instead, it grows from understanding the real roots of that wound. Through self-narration, Arundhati Roy reclaims her story, acknowledges how trauma shaped her personality, and ultimately makes peace with her mother by seeing her as both flawed and wounded.

Understanding *Mother Mary Comes to Me* through Cathy Caruth's Trauma Theory

In *Mother Mary Comes to Me*, Arundhati Roy presents trauma not as a single catastrophic incident but as an inherited emotional condition that passes silently across generations. The memoir explores Roy's complex relationship with her mother, Mary Roy, revealing how unresolved suffering becomes embedded within family structures. Trauma in the text operates at multiple levels: Mary Roy's childhood within a rigid patriarchal Syrian Christian household in Kerala, her troubled marriage, her legal battles over inheritance, and the emotional consequences experienced by her children, Arundhati and Lalith (L.K.C.). Through fragmented narration and reflective memory, Roy illustrates what Cathy Caruth defines in *Unclaimed Experience* as the "belated return of unassimilated experience".

Mary Roy's early life was shaped by authoritarian discipline and domestic violence. Roy recalls how her grandfather "whipped his children, turned them out of the house regularly, and split my grandmother's scalp open with a brass vase. It was to get away from him, our mother told us, that she married the first man who proposed to her" (Roy 11). This memory reveals trauma as a foundational force rather than an isolated event. Mary Roy's later rigidity as a mother reflects what she had inherited as a daughter. Caruth argues that "trauma is not fully grasped in the moment of its occurrence; it returns later in indirect and repetitive ways" (Caruth 4). Mary Roy's emotional hardness and strict discipline can therefore be read as repetitions of unprocessed childhood fear.

Another significant source of trauma was Mary Roy's unequal position within the patriarchal inheritance system governed by the Travancore Christian Succession Act. Roy remembers how her grandmother and uncle arrived to drive them away, declaring that "daughters had no right to their father's property" (Roy 11). This legal and familial rejection intensified Mary Roy's sense of exclusion and injustice. Although she later fought a historic legal battle for equal inheritance rights, the struggle deepened familial rifts. Caruth writes that trauma is "the story of a wound that cries out" (3), and Mary Roy's legal activism

can be interpreted as such a cry, a response to an earlier unacknowledged wound.

Mary Roy's failed marriage further added to her trauma. After separating from her husband, she returned to Kerala with her children, facing social stigma and economic instability. Roy describes how even the family cook would mutter about "the shamefulness of having fatherless children living under the same roof as decent people," and how most arguments revolved around money and accusations that her mother was not "earning her keep" (Roy 19). These humiliations hardened Mary Roy's personality. Survival required resilience, but that resilience manifested as emotional guardedness. Trauma thus transformed into discipline and control within the household.

The memoir suggests that this unresolved trauma was transmitted to the next generation not through overall violence but through emotional atmosphere. Roy recalls living in constant fear of displeasing her mother, describing how she watched through a keyhole as her brother was beaten for receiving an "average" report card. She reflects, "On the occasions when I am toasted or applauded, I always feel that someone else, someone quiet, is being beaten in the other room" (Roy 43). This haunting image exemplifies Caruth's concept of "belatedness", which suggests that trauma reappears in later experiences, detached from its original context. Even success triggers anxiety because it is tied to earlier punishment.

The persistence of verbal humiliation further illustrates this internalised trauma. Roy recounts the "litany" of insults: "'I wish I had dumped you in an orphanage,' 'You're a millstone around my neck,' 'All my sickness is because of you' and, of course, 'Bitch'" (Roy 345). These statements echo long after childhood, resurfacing during adulthood and even after Mary Roy's death. The title itself *Mother Mary Comes to Me* suggests this psychological return. The mother continues to "come" not physically but through memory and internalised voice.

The fragmented structure of the memoir reinforces Caruth's theory that trauma disrupts linear narrative. Roy does not recount events chronologically; instead, she moves between childhood and adulthood, past and present, allowing memories to surface unpredictably. Caruth argues that trauma "is not locatable in the simple violent or original event" but in its repeated return (4). Roy's non-linear storytelling mirrors this pattern of recurrence. For example, she describes an intense emotional reaction to witnessing a newly married couple's affectionate behaviour, admitting, "On the third day I nearly ran out of the house into oncoming traffic. I didn't know what had upset me so much" (Roy 25). The reaction is disproportionate to the

present moment, signalling an earlier unprocessed emotional disturbance resurfacing unexpectedly.

Caruth also emphasises that trauma is relational, affecting not only the individual who experiences it but also those connected to them (92). In Roy's memoir, Mary Roy's suffering shapes her children's emotional lives. The generational transfer of trauma becomes evident as patterns of fear, anger, and emotional distance repeat across time. Mary Roy inherited strict authority and silence from her father; she then transmitted discipline and emotional severity to her children. Trauma thus moves historically and familiarly rather than remaining confined to one life.

The act of narration becomes Roy's attempt to "claim" what had remained unclaimed. By revisiting painful memories, she confronts experiences that were once overwhelming or misunderstood. Caruth suggests that storytelling allows trauma to be acknowledged rather than endlessly repeated (Caruth 3–4). In this sense, the memoir itself functions as a process of working through inherited pain. Roy's reflective voice does not simply accuse or condemn; it seeks to understand how trauma has travelled through generations.

Ultimately, *Mother Mary Comes to Me* demonstrates that trauma is not a singular event but a continuous, relational wound that shapes identity, memory, and family dynamics. Through fragmented narration, belated recollection, and repeated return to childhood scenes, Roy's memoir embodies Cathy Caruth's trauma theory. The text reveals how inherited silence and unprocessed suffering persist within the mind, and how narrative becomes a means of transforming that inherited wound into conscious memory.

Conclusion

This paper examines *Mother Mary Comes to Me* to understand how trauma is represented in the text, how motherhood is portrayed as outside societal ideal frameworks. It probes how self-narration enables the reconstruction of identity. Based on the analysis undertaken in this study, it becomes clear that the memoir answers these questions not through linear storytelling, but through emotional returning to the experiences. It becomes evident that trauma in the memoir is not related to any specific. Instead, it is represented as a continuous re-visitation of unpleasant past experiences, even in the present. Mary Roy's childhood memories, marked by authoritarian control, domestic abuse, and emotional suppression, shape her adult personality. Her failed marriage, financial instability, and social stigma further deepen her emotional stubbornness. This unhealed trauma shows up in her parenting style by replacing tenderness with discipline,

ambition replacing emotional reassurance, and criticism becoming a tool of control. Through memory coming back in bits and pieces or as a whole and its repetition, and non-linear narration, Arundhati Roy clearly portrays how trauma comes back to the surface later and demands recognition. The narrative structure itself mirrors the workings of traumatic memory, thereby proving the validity of Cathy Caruth's trauma theory.

The paper also focused on how motherhood is revealed in the memoir. It challenges orthodox constructions of what an "Indian mother" should be. Mary Roy is neither self-sacrificing nor emotionally soft. She is fiery, ambitious, stubborn and rigid. She builds Pallikoodam, fights inheritance laws, thrives in social stigma, and raises two children as a single mother in a society that despises mothers like her who stay away from husbands. Yet, alongside her strength lies her emotional severity. The study aimed to show how Roy presents motherhood as a complex role that nurtures independence while also causing emotional wounds. By refusing to romanticise her mother, Roy disrupts stereotypical representations of maternal virtue and instead portrays motherhood as historically and socially conditioned. Roy's act of writing becomes a means of reconstructing her identity and regaining her own voice. The memoir blends personal reflection, political awareness, fragments of memory, and poetic imagery. Roy places herself not merely as a daughter shaped by her mother's authority, but as a conscious narrator interpreting that past. Self-narration allows her to analyse the inherited wounds critically rather than remain caged in it. Writing becomes an act of taking the power back. The fragmented structure reflects the instability of memory, but the very act of assembling these fragments into narrative form signifies psychological integration.

The memoir is not an accusation against her mother but an attempt to understand, reconcile with, and make peace with her. Roy does not hide the emotional trauma she experienced. Her transition from resentment to empathy shows how the author matures as her perspectives shift.

Mother Mary Comes to Me is about how one can make peace with uncomfortable situations and learn to see through them clearly. It shows how trauma quietly shifts from one generation to the next, how love and hate can coexist in the same relationship, and how telling one's story or recounting past bad experiences can become a path towards healing. Caruth's Trauma theory sheds light on the complexity of motherhood and the power of self-writing. Through her memoir, Arundhati Roy transforms personal history into reflective understanding.

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Love in Post-1980s Oḍiā Poetry (Hṛṣīkeśa Mallik)

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Abstract— In the evolutionary trajectory of Oḍiā poetry, the post-1980 period is regarded as a significant turning point, which literary critics have designated as ‘post-modernism’. One of the most powerful poetic voices of this era belongs to the poet Hṛṣīkeśa Mallik. In his poetry, the consciousness of love is not merely an emotion but a vehicle of cultural resistance and the re-evaluation of life itself. This research paper endeavours to analyse the multifaceted manifestations of love across the poet’s various collections, including *Dhāna Saumtā Jhia*, *Dharmapatnī*, *Rebatī*, and the *Sāhitya Ekāḍemi* Award-winning *Sarijāthibā Aperā*. From the poet’s perspective, love embodies an indigenous bond with the soil of the village, a feminist sensibility, and, above all, an eternal quest for humanity. The very core of this study lies in how, through the deployment of postmodernist poetic techniques such as Magic Realism and Montage, he has forged an intimate connection between love, the earth, and humankind. In Mallik’s verses, love transcends mere romantic reverie; it becomes a ‘sublimated experience’ (Sublimation) that moves from melancholy toward optimism. This comprehensive examination thus grounds the lover-identity of Hṛṣīkeśa Mallik’s poetic persona in a firm philosophical foundation.



Keywords— Hṛṣīkeśa Mallik, Post-modernism, Love, Village Consciousness, Diversity of Love, Global Humanism, Magic Realism and Montage

INTRODUCTION

In the millennial tradition of Oḍiā literature, poetry has always absorbed and reflected the evolving consciousness and contours of society. From Sāraḷā Dās’s great epic rooted in the soil, through the spiritualism of the *Pañcasakhā* and the ornate eroticism of the *Rīti* period, Oḍiā poetry advanced steadily until it stood at the threshold of modernism (6). However, when the modern Oḍiā poetry of the 1960s and 1970s became imprisoned within intellectual complexity, individualistic despair, and obscure symbolism, the general reader began to drift away from it. It was precisely during this period—i.e., in the post-1980 era—that a new consciousness dawned in Oḍiā poetry, one that literary critics have identified as ‘post-modernism’ (1).

Hṛṣīkeśa Mallik is one of the foremost and most accomplished architects of this postmodern poetic movement (3). His poetry consciously rejects the artificiality and impenetrability of the preceding modernist phase and instead embraces a more democratic, tradition-

nurtured, and deeply soil-connected voice (6). The consciousness of love forms the central creative axis of his work. Yet this love is neither derived from foreign theories nor from imaginary romanticism. It springs directly from the pure, lived experience of Odisha’s rural soil—an experience that binds a human being to his or her roots (6). The spectrum of love in Mallik’s poetry is remarkably wide. It stretches from the rustic beauty celebrated in *Dhānaa Sāumṇṭā Jhia*, through the feminist sensibility of *Dharmapatnī*, to the universal humanism that illuminates the *Sarijāthibā Aperā* (4).

In the poet’s own idiom, love is an eternal value that stands as a cultural act of resistance against the forces of globalisation and market-driven economics (1). By foregrounding nativism, subaltern voices, and Dalit consciousness, Mallik articulates a fresh philosophy of love (6). Here love is not confined to the conventional hero-heroine relationship; it becomes a subtle, empathetic process that encompasses a mother’s lullaby, a

grandmother's lived past, the compassion owed to oppressed women, and the pain of society's most neglected souls (4). It is against this backdrop that an analysis of Hṛṣīkeśa Mallik's poetic universe reveals the many-layered dimensions of his love consciousness.

Love Consciousness in Hṛṣīkeśa Mallik's Poetry

In Hṛṣīkeśa Mallik's poetry, the consciousness of love is as deep and vast as the ocean itself. From the very beginning of his poetic journey, love has appeared as an emotion profoundly rooted in the soil. His first collection, *Dhānaa Sāumñṭā Jhia* (1987), created a revolution on the landscape of Odia poetry (10). Here love is the living memory of rural Odisha and the very scent of the earth. Though the poet lives in an urban setting, he is never free from the rural landscape and memories that lie buried in his subconscious. In his verses, '*Dhānaa Sāumñṭā Jhia*' is not merely a character; she is a 'pseudo-character'—a veiled persona—through whom the poet gives expression to his own childhood, his deep attachment to his roots, and his passionate love for the native soil (5).

Dhānaa Sāumñṭā jhiaṭi, kiārī majhire / pāchiā thoi, bhūimre hātachuem.

se hāta chuiṁle/basumātā kuluri yāe, basumātā penthei paḍe.

se hāta chuiṁle / akaṭā Dhānaa kiārīre, kiciri miciri/

caḍheīṅka dundubhi bāje. / tā piṭhira kaṭā dāgaṭie pari, ākāśara/

thābara megharu pārijāta muruke. (Dhānaa Sāumñṭā jhia) (10)

*"The girl gathering grain in the heart of the field,
Sets her basket down and brushes the soil.*

At the touch of her hand,

Mother Earth shivers with delight;

Mother Earth swells with fruit.

At the touch of her hand, In the field of unharvested grain,

The chirping of birds rings out like a rhythmic drum.

Like the scar upon her back,

From the still clouds in the sky,

The Parijat flower breaks into a faint, knowing smile. " (Dhānaa Sāumñṭā jhia)

(a) Village Consciousness and Indigenous Love:

One of the defining features of postmodern poetry is 'Nativism'. Hṛṣīkeśa Mallik stands as its finest exponent. In his poetry, love reveals itself as a deep attraction to the mango groves of his village, the cloudy skies overhead, and the *Simuḷi* flowers that blaze in the scorching summer sun. He insists that love is not an intellectual indulgence but the warm lap of his aunt and the living inspiration drawn directly from his own native surroundings (4). Even in his collection *Ujuḍā Kṣetara Gīta* (1991), where love assumes a melancholic hue, it only serves to bind the earth and the landless man more intimately and profoundly (3).

mā' lo! / to kṣetare Dhānaa pācithiba ei ghaḍire

ghaṇḍā ghāguḍi bajei kou gahīra jamiru/ kajaḷā kasarā pheruthibe.

chīṭāñiā rātire tu' dutukuthibu/sītare tharuthiba to' haḷadī pāṭaśāḍhi

to' haḷadī gaṇṭhi diha.

mote e ākāśa baḍa ghinā lāguchi mā' / luha naaṇṭa heuchi jhuribāku

mote e suḍaṅgaru oṭāri ne' mā' / ne' to' suṣīṭaḷa kṣetara katiki

guṇḍuci mūṣā o bāicaḍheira gītare/mum darahei nebi bhāṅgi yāithibā

mo' dadarā chātiki. (kṣeta) (7)

"O Mother!

In your fields, the paddy must be ripening at this very hour;

And with the chime of bells and trinkets,

The dark-hued cattle must be returning from the deep meadows.

In the drizzling night, you must be huddled in your porch,

Your turmeric-yellow silk saree shivering in the cold—

Your body, the color of a turmeric root, trembling too.

Mother, this sky feels loathsome to me now,

And my tears are not enough to wash away this longing.

Drag me out of this tunnel, Mother!

Take me back to the side of your cool, quiet fields.

Amidst the songs of squirrels and weaver birds,

I shall mend this shattered, hollow chest of mine" (kṣeta).

Or

*bouta baḍhei die, tama pasarāku/pahili amaḷa
buitā cāuḷa muṭhe, tame ubhā thāa*

*pabanare uḍuthāe tama bāḷa kati-āmva gachara
baūḷa/gām gohiri kaḍaru dosamāḷi yāem
lamvithibā*

*kṣetaṭie tame, bhāri tophā bhāri parimaḷa.
(lambici lambici ḍora)*

*"Mother heaps your basket high,
with a fistful of rice from the first harvest.*

And there you stand—

*your hair dancing in the breeze, like the scent of
mango blossoms.*

*From the edge of the village path to the distant
horizon,*

*you are a sprawling field—so bright, so fragrant,
so pure." (lambici lambici ḍora) (7)*

In the poet's vision, this rural embodiment of love is not confined to beauty alone; it also carries within it stark images of exploitation and suffering. Throughout his poetry, he has powerfully constructed the pitiable, compassion-evoking countenance of women in both rural and urban landscapes (11). In poems such as 'Pāmelā', love unfolds as the narrative of a restless fate. The way a woman's love and aspirations remain helplessly entangled in the thorny hedge of society is sharply mirrored in the poet's ironic poetic language:

"bāḷa sārā khāli kaṇṭā

hāta sārā khāli churī

kete kāṭiba kāṭa, muṁ śiāḷi laṭā

gaḷi gaḷire laṭeici, mo nāsimaya pratyāśā.

danasārā khāli kharā

ākhisārā, khāli śoṣa . . . (pāmelā-2) (7)

"The path ahead is strewn with thorns,

And hands everywhere are clenching knives.

*Cut me as much as you will—for I am the Siali
vine;*

*I have trailed my vein-like longings through every
dark alley.*

The entire day is nothing but scorching sun,

*And my eyes are filled with nothing but thirst."
(pāmelā- 2)*

In Hṛṣīkeśa Mallik's poetry, women's consciousness occupies a central position. He does not portray woman merely as an object of consumption or a conventional romantic heroine. Instead, in his verses, woman stands as the living symbol of endurance, strength, and, above all, humanity (11). In the poetry collection *Dharmapatnī* (2000), he imparts a strikingly new dimension to the relationship between marriage and love (3). Here, a woman is not merely a homemaker; she is the true companion in life's journey, and it is through her struggles and sacrifices that love remains vibrantly alive (16).

mo dehaku jimā dei/svāmīnka nidare

goḍaru pāumja kholi/muṁ yāe tumari āḍe...

patnīku jagei dei/ tame tama deha

*pahañca seṭhāre, aśinara jahna rāti/āmaku
takeithāe*

*yeuṁ gām, yeuṁ nai, yeuṁ dvaparare... (sumitrāra
ciṭhi) (5)*

"Leaving my body behind,

consigned to the depths of my husband's sleep,

I unfasten the anklets from my feet

and steal away toward you...

Entrusting your own wife to a watchful silence,

you bring your soul to that place—

where the moonlit night of aśina

awaits us with bated breath,

in that same village, by that same river,

*in that same eternal Age of dvapara." (sumitrāra
ciṭhi)*

The poet has portrayed, with exquisite precision, the inner psychology of a woman—her problems, dilemmas, and crises—through the medium of his verse. In the collection *Rebatī* (2016), he reinterprets Fakir Mohan's immortal character in an entirely fresh perspective. Here love emerges as an ardent aspiration for education, freedom, and the quest for one's own identity. The poet's feminist vision is not merely slogan-driven; it is suffused with a profound inner empathy (5).

mili apā beḷebeḷe bhala

āu beḷebeḷe kemiti goṭe anānti

yemiti kie śoṣinebe goṭipaṇe.

gocha niśabālā liṭu āṛṣṭaku

adhabeḷe kahanti; kaṇa baṇare achu?

rātika ta, cāla śoi paḍibu mo khaṭare. (Miliapā) (5)

(b) Feminist Perspective and the Diversity of Love:

"Mili Apa is kind enough sometimes,
But at other times, she has this look in her eyes—
As if she might swallow you whole.
To Litu, the artist with the thick, bushy moustache,
She says halfway through the day, 'What, are you
living in a forest?'
'It's just for one night—come, you can sleep in my
bed.'" (Miliapā)

Character / Poem	Poetic Reflection
<i>Dhāna Sāumñā Jhia</i>	Soil-connected, innocent and full of struggle (5)
<i>Pāmelā</i>	Victim of society's sarcasm and betrayal, yet optimistic (11)
<i>Dharmapatnī</i>	Foundation of family values and love (5)
<i>Rebatī</i>	Eager for education and liberation; voice of the modern woman (5)

(c) Global Humanism and the Expansion of Love:

Hṛṣīkeśa Mallik's consciousness of love is not limited to the rural soil of Odisha alone. His poetry is equally sensitive to the chain of events and human crises unfolding in various corners of the world. In the collections *Jeje Dekhi Nathibā Bhārata* (2015) and *Sarijāthibā Aperā* (2019), love attains a truly universal dimension (4). In the poem 'The Lone Girl', he portrays the anguish of a Syrian refugee girl, in whose war-torn world childhood and parental love have vanished amid violence and destruction (12). Here love becomes a bridge of universal kinship that shatters the walls of borders and language (12).

Heard stories from her mother
that set her eyes rolling in wonder;
that country, her homeland is now in ruins
a vast, barren expanse,
littered with severed limbs.
Its air is sick with the smell of
tonnes and tonnes of explosives
there lay piles of disfigured childhood
in pathetic abandon
to tell the tale of a country that was! (The Lone Girl) (12)

His poem 'Eyes' offers a delicate and profound expression of love. Within a pair of eyes, the poet discovers an entire cosmos. The beloved's eyes are not merely a source of beauty; they hold within them 'the moon of the full-moon night', 'the dense intimacy of a village evening', and 'rain-washed sunlight' (12). Through these images he elevates love into a natural and timeless experience.

Your eyes could transform a wasteland.
to a paddy field in luxuriant green,
at times they are moist with muffled sobs,
or, like a spear smeared in blood, at others!
What is more beautiful --
the bright loquacity in your eyes
or the rain-washed sunshine,
the mysterious mutter in your eyes
or a village enveloped in a wispy darkness?
(EYE) (12)

When examined through a philosophical lens, the love consciousness in Hṛṣīkeśa Mallik's poetry is seen to touch every aspect of postmodernism. In his work, love is not merely a psychological state but a profound social and cultural commitment. Whereas in pre-1980 modern Oḍiā poetry love was frequently confined to failure, betrayal and physical desire, Mallik has raised it to the elevated plane of a 'sublimated experience' (5).

jahnaku kahili: tu' um nā' / mum nīḷa kaīm pālaṭi
yibi
piḍhā chuumthibā jahni ḍaṅkaku kaṇṭa deli/
'cāridinake mum pheri āsibi'
caḍheimāne goḍei goḍei āsile khaṇḍebāṭa
kahili: yāa, phurusata hele/tama pāim pācilā
phaḷara ḍāḷa hebi.
(galā bāri: gām chāḍilā beḷe) (5)

"I whispered to the moon: 'Just say yes,
and I shall turn into a blue water lily.'
I gave my word to the ribbed-gourd vine reaching
for the porch:
'I will be back in just four days.'
The birds chased me for a stretch of the road;
I told them, 'Go back now—when I am free,
I will return to be a branch of ripe fruit just for
you.'" (galā bāri: gām chāḍilā beḷe)

(d) Modernism versus Post-modernism: The Definition of Love

In the poetry of the giants of modern Oḍiā literature, such as Ramakanta Rath and Sitakanta Mahapatra, love was frequently imprisoned within the frameworks of 'Existentialism' and 'Nihilism' (2). In Ramākānta's *Śrīrādhā*, love is transformed into a complex metaphysical quest for death and the posthumous realm (14). Hṛṣīkeśa Mallik, however, has liberated love from this intellectual entanglement and restored it once more to the intimate proximity of 'the soil' and 'humanity' (4).

*hātare mora pijā plet.../ kāhimki tebe mane
paḍuchi kañiā mupaḍhi
māṭi ḍhamāra.../ naatālāre, mun/ṭhiā hoichi
abi/hātare pejār... (Bāsnā) (20)*

*"A plate of pizza in my hand...
Then why does the memory of parched rice haunt
me?
The smell of a sun-baked earthen floor...
Here I stand, on the ninth floor—
A pager in my hand, yet longing for the taste of
rice water." (Bāsnā)*

He has embraced love as a simple and natural experience that occurs in the life of every ordinary human being. This transformed contour of love in his poetry may be analysed as follows:

- **From Melancholy to Affirmation:** Rather than narrating tales of despair, his poetry presents a vivid portrait of life's optimism and boundless possibilities (5).

*āga māsa bhaḷi/dekhei dabāku paḍantā nāhim
puaku
nukhurā toḍa/biddu kāhāmka, nām gandha
nāhim pāṭhapaḍhāra
khāli paīsā, khāli paīsā...
sākulei kahi huantā: 'mana ghenei/paḍh bābā:
kouṭhire yadi kocimnabu ne'
dekhāyiba ṭānkā kathā! (Betanabhogīra swapna)
(20)*

"I wish I didn't have to show my son,
the same dry, empty face I wore last month.
'You useless boy! '—I shout, though he's but a
child,
'Not a trace of learn in you, only money, money,
and more money!'
I wish instead I could say, with a gentle hand on
his head:

'Learn with your heart, my son;
And if you need a tutor, go ahead and take the
coaching—
Don't you worry, about the money, we will see."
(Betanabhogīra swapna)

- **Social Commitment:** Here love is not merely personal; rather, it embodies a sincere empathy and deep compassion toward society's subaltern classes and the oppressed (5).

*samaste puchanti khāli sei eka kathā: "keum
kuḷare lāḷita
tama sparddhā, tama abhimāna, tama
uttarottara...?
kintu hāya! kāhā hātare kithāe
nijara janma, nijara jāti, nija kuḷa-gotra?"
(Basuṣeṇa-9) (5)
"Everyone asks me the same solitary question:
'In which lineage was it nurtured—
this audacity of yours, this pride, this soaring
rise?'
But alas! Whose hand holds the power
to choose their own birth, their caste, their clan, or
their creed?" (Basuṣeṇa-9)*

- **Tradition and Heritage:** To express love, he has employed characters from ancient mythology, the Ramayana, and the *Mahābhārata* in strikingly fresh and contemporary forms (5).

*bāsudeba drupadaṅku
drupada dhruṣṭadyūmnāṅku
dhruṣṭadyūmna cāhimle ethara pāñcāḷiṅku...
ghoṣṭhibā o mane nathibā
saṃlāpa śubhilā etiki beḷe
kuṇṭhita-baramālyaru.
"tathākathika he sūtaputra!*

*tama dhanu nibāra
kuḷāśīḷatāra e svaḃammarare karṇa,
chiḥ, ki abāntara !!" (Basuṣeṇa-17) (5)*

"Vasudeva looked to Drupada,
Drupada looked to dhruṣṭadyūmna,
And Dhruṣṭadyūmna fixed his gaze upon
Panchali...
In that silence, a rehearsed yet forgotten dialogue
Echoed from the hesitant garland:

'O so-called Son of a Charioteer! Put down your bow;

In this assembly of noble blood and high lineage,
O Karna—

Fie! How utterly absurd!" (Basuṣeṇa-17)

(E) Magic Realism and Montage: Poetic Application

In the expressive mode of Hṛṣīkeśa Mallik's love consciousness, one finds the remarkably successful deployment of postmodern poetic techniques such as 'Magic Realism' and 'Montage' (3). He discovers the supernatural within the ordinary and the real within the supernatural. His collection *Sarijāthibā Aperā* stands as a supreme example of this approach (4). The poems in it articulate the complex truths of life in a richly musical style. By assembling disparate, fragmented scenes of existence, the poet creates a collective, panoramic image of love—a technique precisely known as 'Montage' (3).

ṣāṭhie barṣataḷe/ tame mote śikheithila sāre gāmā

ṣāṭhie barṣapare/ kaṇa kholi dabāku nāca bāra?

ṣāṭhie barṣataḷe/hātare mo ṭeki deithila adhiḱāra

ṣāṭhie barṣapare/goṭie deḍhikūare

kaṇa karidebāku chārakhāra? (Ghuṅgura bāndhi sārichi) (19)

"Sixty years ago,

You were the one who taught me the notes: Sa-Re-Ga-Ma.

Sixty years later,

Is it to open a dance bar that we have come?

Sixty years ago,

You placed 'rights' and 'justice' into my hands.

Sixty years later,

Is it all to be scorched and laid to waste?

Into the depths of a single, stagnant well? "
(Ghuṅgura bāndhi sārichi)

Or

muṁ dhūsara śūnyabāṇī/tame, śyāmaḷa sambhābanā

tame yuddha, / muṁ, yuddhara mantranā.....

Xxxxxx

tume yeuṁ gīta lekhicha/khaḍī ghare, muṁ svara deichi

tāku jana pathare/ tume kahicha 'bande'

muṁ kahichi 'mātārām' / tame kahicha 'bhārata mātā ki'

muṁ kahichi 'jaya'... (Ghuṅgura bāndhi sārichi) (19)

"I am the grey, ethereal voice;

You are the green, lush possibility.

You are the War,

And I am the strategy behind the battle...

The song you wrote within the prison walls,

I gave it wings of melody upon the public roads.

You cried out, 'Vande,'

And I responded, 'Mātārām.'

You shouted, 'Bhārat Mātā Ki,'

And I roared, 'Jaya'!" (Ghuṅgura bāndhi sārichi)

His poem 'Sarijāthibā Aperā' presents a harrowing portrayal of love intertwined with profound social injustice. Here, love manifests as the poet's deep, compassionate empathy toward the victimised woman. Through it, he sharply satirises society's passivity, religious superstition, and moral decay (20).

kau jhia mana nadie jahna āḍe/bayasa hela

kaṇei nacāhem yeku tāku/ākhi phīṭile?

muṁ ta kiśorī setebeḷe

kemiti bujhithānti/yuddhare pā 'dele bāpāe

āu bāpā nahei/huanti bādaśā'

yuddhare pā 'thāpile prema/āu prema nahoi hue jugupsā? (Nai paṭhāre sūryyāsta-2) (20)

"What girl does not lose her heart to the moon,

once youth has dawned upon her?

Who does not steal a glance at this one or that,

once her eyes have truly opened?

I was but a young girl then...

How could I have known?

That's when fathers step into the theatre of war,

they cease to be fathers

and become Emperors instead.

And when love sets foot upon a battlefield,

it is love no longer—it becomes an object of loathing."

(*Naī paṭhāre sūryyāsta-2*)

The poet's poetic persona presents himself as a 'word-artist' (*Śabda-śilpī*), summoning the victimised woman back to life once more and issuing a clarion call to fight for justice (20). This constitutes a revolutionary form of love.

prema ka 'na, yuddha ka 'na
deśa ka 'na, pātra ka 'na
jībana ka 'na, mṛtyu ka 'na
āu e beḷe pacāre kie? (Naī paṭhāre sūryyāsta- 2)
 (20)

What is love, what is war?

What is nation, what is the chalice?

What is life, what is death?

And who, in this moment, even asks? (Naī paṭhāre sūryyāsta-2)

The Nature of Love:

Poetic Aspect	Modern Oḍiā Poetry (1960–80)	Post-Modern Poetry (Hṛṣīkeśa Mallik)
Nature of Love	Intellectual, complex, and existentialist (1)	Soil-rooted, simple, and deeply empathetic (4)
Language and Style	Western-influenced, obscure symbolism (1)	Indigenous, folk-song based, rich in suggestion (6)
Portrayal of Women	Mythical figures or enigmatic beings (14)	Real women from society's subaltern and marginalized strata (11)
Perspective	Despair and sense of alienation (1)	Optimism and collective consciousness (5)

The Relevance of Love in Hṛṣīkeśa Mallik's Poetry

Critics have consistently linked the relevance of love in Hṛṣīkeśa Mallik's poetry to his profound commitment to 'Nativism' (*Deśajātā*) (6). In his work, love is never directed solely toward another human being; rather, it becomes a sacred offering—to one's native environment, to one's inherited cultural legacy, and above all, to the essence of humanity itself. As a true 'trendsetter' among poets, Mallik has liberated Oḍiā poetry from the prison-house of obscurity and intellectual elitism, restoring it once more to the embrace of the general reader and making it genuinely

reader-friendly (4). In the poetic universe of Hṛṣīkeśa Mallik, the multifaceted dimensions of love reveal themselves as follows:

- **Maternal Love and Childhood Memory:** The lullabies and stories of his aunt (Mausi) serve as a primary source of inspiration in his poetry (4).
- **Patriotism / Love for the Homeland:** In *Jeje Dekhinathibā Bhārata* ('The India My Grandmother Never Saw'), there is a profound, heartfelt attachment to the heritage and soul of India (3).
- **Universal Love:** Amid a world ravaged by war and violence, his verses carry a powerful message of love and peace (12).
- **Reverence for Womanhood:** In poems such as '*Pāmelā*' and '*Rebatī*', he celebrates and pays homage to the hidden strength and inner resilience of women (11).

This vast and expansive canvas of love in Hṛṣīkeśa Mallik's poetry has firmly established him as one of the most celebrated and gifted creators in contemporary Oḍiā literature (3). Each of his poems is a living, breathing experience that touches the reader's heart and cultivates a positive, life-affirming perspective (4).

CONCLUSION

In Mallik's poetry, love emerges as an eternal and sublime realisation. It is far more than a mere emotion; it constitutes a fundamental human condition. Through his creative oeuvre, the poet has brought love back into intimate proximity with the soil and presented it as a potent form of cultural resistance. His consciousness of love extends from the fragrant earth of rural Odisha to a profound, worldwide empathy for humanity. Amid the complexities of postmodernism, he has firmly established love as a 'sublimated experience' (Sublimation)—one that liberates the reader from melancholy and illuminates the path toward optimism. The poet's feminist perspective, his deep-rooted nativism, and his amplification of subaltern voices have endowed his love consciousness with an entirely new horizon. He has enriched Oḍiā poetry with fresh vocabulary, vivid new imagery, and an unmistakably humane voice. In Hṛṣīkeśa Mallik's poetry, love is at once the innocent smile of that '*Dhānaa Sāumṇṭā Jhia*' and the final, lingering melody of the '*Sarijāthibā Aperā*'—a resonance that continues to echo forever in the reader's heart. Amid all the upheavals and agonies of life, love alone remains the supreme force—the one power that shows humankind the way to live truly as human beings.

This is the very core and essence of Hṛṣīkeśa Mallik's poetic philosophy.

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A Study of Sexual Relationships and Racism in *Liliane* by Ntozake Shange

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Abstract— This research paper examines the intricate relationship between sexuality and racism in *Liliane*. The novel presents a deeply psychological portrait of a Black woman navigating identity formation within a socio-cultural framework shaped by racial hierarchies and patriarchal control. Through fragmented narration, shifting consciousness, and complex interpersonal relationships, Shange foregrounds the lived experiences of Black women whose sexuality is mediated by race, class, and history. This paper argues that sexual relationships in *Liliane* operate as both sites of oppression and resistance. By closely analyzing *Liliane*'s relationships, familial background, and psychological struggles, this study highlights how Shange constructs a Black feminist discourse that critiques both systemic racism and gendered subjugation while affirming female agency.



Keywords— racism, fragmented identity, sexual relationship, patriarchy

I. INTRODUCTION

The literary works of Ntozake Shange are deeply invested in articulating the voices, struggles, and resistances of Black women. *Liliane* stands as one of her most complex and psychologically layered novels, offering readers an intimate look into the consciousness of a young African American woman attempting to reconcile her fragmented identity. The novel departs from linear storytelling, instead employing a stream-of-consciousness technique that reflects the protagonist's inner turmoil.

At the center of *Liliane* lies a critical engagement with two deeply interconnected themes: sexuality and racism. These are not treated as separate domains but as overlapping forces that shape Liliane's experiences. Her sexual relationships are neither purely romantic nor purely physical; they are embedded in broader socio-political contexts that dictate power relations, identity formation, and emotional vulnerability.

This paper seeks to explore how Shange uses Liliane's sexual experiences to interrogate racial identity and systemic oppression. It argues that sexuality in the novel becomes a crucial site where Liliane negotiates autonomy, resistance, and self-definition against the intersecting pressures of racism and patriarchy.

Any critical reading of *Liliane* must be grounded in Black feminist theory, which emphasizes the intersection of multiple forms of oppression. Black feminist thinkers argue that the experiences of Black women cannot be understood solely through the lens of gender or race; instead, these categories intersect in complex ways. Shange's narrative reflects this intersectionality by portraying Liliane as a subject who is simultaneously shaped by racial discrimination, gender expectations, and class privilege. Her identity is not fixed but constantly evolving, influenced by her interactions with family, lovers, and society. Sexuality, in this framework, becomes a contested space. Historically, Black women's bodies have been subjected to

both hypersexualization and moral policing. Shange challenges these stereotypes by presenting Liliane as an active participant in her sexual relationships, thereby reclaiming agency over her body.

One of the most striking aspects of *Liliane* is its portrayal of psychological fragmentation. The narrative structure itself mirrors the protagonist's fractured sense of self, moving between memories, dreams, and present experiences without clear boundaries.

This fragmentation can be directly linked to the impact of racism. Liliane grows up in a society that devalues Blackness, creating a sense of alienation and internal conflict. Her family's emphasis on respectability and racial uplift further complicates her identity.

Her father, in particular, represents an ideology that seeks to counter racism through discipline and conformity. However, this approach imposes rigid expectations on Liliane, limiting her freedom and expression. She is expected to embody a certain image of Black femininity—controlled, respectable, and socially acceptable.

This pressure leads to a division within Liliane's psyche. On one hand, she internalizes these expectations; on the other, she resists them through her actions and relationships. Her psychological instability is not merely a personal issue but a reflection of the broader socio-political environment in which she exists.

Liliane's sexual relationships are central to the novel's exploration of identity. These relationships are not depicted as stable or fulfilling; rather, they are marked by tension, misunderstanding, and power imbalances.

However, they also serve as spaces where Liliane asserts her autonomy. By choosing her partners and engaging in relationships on her own terms, she challenges societal norms that seek to regulate Black female sexuality.

At the same time, these relationships reveal the limitations of such resistance. Many of the men Liliane encounters attempt to define her according to their own expectations. Whether consciously or unconsciously, they reproduce the same structures of control that exist in the larger society.

Thus, sexuality becomes a double-edged sword—both a means of liberation and a site of continued oppression.

Interracial relationships in *Liliane* are fraught with complexity. They highlight the deeply ingrained racial tensions that shape personal interactions.

Liliane's understanding of such relationships is influenced by her family history, particularly her mother's involvement with a white man. This relationship disrupts the family structure and becomes a source of trauma for Liliane.

Her father's reaction—erasing the mother's presence and constructing a false narrative—demonstrates the extent to which racial anxieties can shape personal decisions. This act of erasure not only affects Liliane's perception of her mother but also influences her own approach to relationships.

When Liliane engages in interracial relationships, she is not simply acting out of personal desire. These relationships are embedded in a historical context marked by exploitation, fetishization, and power imbalances. Shange does not romanticize these dynamics; instead, she exposes their inherent tensions.

Patriarchy plays a crucial role in shaping Liliane's experiences. Male authority figures—both within her family and in her romantic life—attempt to control her behavior and define her identity.

“Didn't anybody know you didn't haveta let any man talk like he owned you, like we owed them something. For what?” (*liliane*74)

Liliane challenges the patriarchal norms that dictate women's behavior and relationships. This line signifies her awakening to her own agency and the realization that she is not obligated to conform to the expectations imposed by men or society. It marks a moment of empowerment and self-liberation.

Her father's expectations reflect a broader patriarchal ideology that seeks to regulate female sexuality. He believes that maintaining respectability is essential for racial advancement, and this belief translates into strict control over Liliane's life. In her relationships, Liliane encounters men who impose their own narratives upon her. They often fail to see her as an individual, instead projecting their desires and assumptions onto her.

This dynamic illustrates how patriarchy operates across racial lines. While Black men are themselves victims of racism, they can still perpetuate gender-based oppression. Shange's portrayal of these interactions underscores the complexity of power relations within marginalized communities.

Despite the various constraints she faces, Liliane emerges as a figure of agency. Her refusal to conform to societal expectations is a significant aspect of her character.

She does not seek validation from her family or society; instead, she attempts to define herself through her experiences. Her sexuality becomes a key component of this process.

“Love is not a luxury; it's a necessity for survival.” (*liliane*-83)

Emphasizes the importance of love and human connection as fundamental to enduring life's challenges.

By engaging in relationships on her own terms, Liliane challenges the notion that Black women must adhere to specific roles. She rejects both the stereotype of the submissive woman and that of the hypersexualized figure, instead occupying a space that is uniquely her own.

This assertion of agency is not without consequences. Liliane's choices often lead to conflict and emotional pain. However, these experiences are integral to her journey toward self-understanding. Class is another important factor in *Liliane*. As a member of an upper-middle-class Black family, Liliane has access to certain privileges that differentiate her from others within her community.

However, this privilege also creates additional pressures. She is expected to uphold a certain standard of behavior, which limits her freedom.

Her relationships with individuals from different class backgrounds challenge her assumptions about identity and belonging. These interactions reveal the complexities of intra-racial dynamics, showing that class divisions can be as significant as racial ones.

The use of psychoanalysis in *Liliane* provides insight into the protagonist's inner world. Her therapy sessions serve as a space where she confronts her past and attempts to make sense of her experiences.

"I was born into a world that didn't want me, and I had to fight every day to prove I belonged." (*liliane* 43)

Reflects Liliane's resilience in the face of societal rejection and her determination to assert her place in the world.

The fragmented nature of these sessions reflects her psychological state. They are not linear or coherent but marked by interruptions, repetitions, and shifts in perspective.

This narrative technique allows Shange to explore the unconscious mind, highlighting the ways in which trauma, racism, and sexuality are interconnected.

The representation of the Black female body is central to the novel's thematic concerns. Historically, this body has been subjected to objectification, exploitation, and control.

In *Liliane*, the body becomes a site of both oppression and resistance. Liliane's experiences reflect the ways in which societal perceptions of Black femininity influence personal identity.

However, by asserting control over her body, Liliane challenges these perceptions. She refuses to be defined by external narratives, instead constructing her own understanding of self.

"I have never been what anybody expected, or wanted for that matter; I'm not even what I wanted." (*liliane*-76)

This line reflects Liliane's struggle with the expectations placed upon her by society, her family, and even herself. It underscores her journey of self-discovery and the tension between external pressures and personal desires. Liliane's acknowledgment of not meeting these expectations highlights her resistance to conforming to predefined roles and her quest for authentic self-expression.

Trauma is a pervasive theme in *Liliane*. The protagonist's experiences—both personal and collective—contribute to her psychological struggles.

"Every scar tells a story, every wound is a lesson learned." (*liliane*59)

Liliane reflects on the significance of personal pain and growth through adversity.

Memory plays a crucial role in this process. Liliane's recollections are fragmented and often painful, reflecting the difficulty of confronting past experiences. However, the novel also emphasizes the possibility of healing. Through therapy, artistic expression, and self-reflection, Liliane begins to reconstruct her identity.

This process is neither simple nor complete, but it represents a movement toward wholeness.

CONCLUSION

A Study of Sexual Relationships and Racism in Liliane reveals the depth and complexity of Ntozake Shange's literary vision. The novel demonstrates that sexuality and racism are not separate phenomena but deeply intertwined forces that shape the experiences of Black women.

Through Liliane's journey, Shange critiques societal norms while affirming the possibility of resistance and self-definition. The protagonist's struggles highlight the challenges of navigating a world structured by inequality, but her resilience underscores the power of agency. Ultimately, *Liliane* stands as a significant contribution to Black feminist literature, offering a nuanced exploration of identity, desire, and transformation.

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Matriliny in Practice: Rethinking Kinship Through Lived Realities

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Abstract— Sociological, historical, and anthropological studies have examined the distinctive kinship practice, the matrilineal system in Kerala, mainly from an upper-caste, Nayar-centric perspective. While diverse communities, including Thiyas, Muslims, Kurichiyas, and even the Brahmins in the Payyanur region of northern Malabar, historically followed a matrilineal system in Kerala, the kinship system was studied and understood mainly from an elite Nayar perspective. This paper, based on secondary sources, seeks to challenge the notion of an upper-caste-centric matrilineal kinship narrative by foregrounding the varied ways in which communities practiced and interpreted matriliney. Argues that the functioning and the reforms of the matrilineal kinship system were deeply shaped by caste positions, social context and economic roles. Moreover, the gendered experiences and women's position were not uniform across communities. Thus, this paper highlights that understanding of the matrilineal kinship system should be based on the plurality of social realities that constitute it.



Keywords— Kinship praxis, Malabar region, Matriliny, Matrilineal Thiyyas, Upper-caste bias.

I. INTRODUCTION

Family is widely recognised as one of the most enduring and pervasive social institutions. In their work, *The Family: From Institution to Companionship*, Burgess and Locke (1945) define the Family as a group of persons united by ties of blood, marriage, or adoption, constituting a single household that interacts and communicates with each other in their respective roles. In the Indian context, sociological and anthropological works have long demonstrated that the forms and functions of family and kinship vary significantly across cultural contexts. The regional variations in the kinship system across India were examined by Iravati Karve (1968), and by distinguishing between the northern patrilineal and southern bilateral and matrilineal systems, she underscores that family and kinship institutions are not static but are shaped by linguistic traditions, regional specificities, historical trajectories, and broader socio-

cultural processes. Karve (1993) elaborates on the complex kinship pattern in the southern region of India, arguing that although the patrilineal and patrilocal family system predominated, a significant section of the population followed the matrilineal and matrilocal pattern. By highlighting the preferential marriage practices in the southern region, such as cross-cousin and uncle-niece marriages, Karve (1993) argues that there is a clear preference for alliance within a small kin group structured by clan exogamy and caste endogamy, in contrast to the more expansive alliance pattern observed in the Northern region. These unique marriage preferences, along with the matrilineal system and the matrilocal residence pattern, have been the subject of study across various disciplines, focusing on the informal marital alliance, the sexual freedom it offers, women's autonomy over property, and the

tracing of descent through the female line in an otherwise patriarchal society.

There are many theories about the evolution of Matriliny in Kerala; the most prominent is that attributed to the advent of Brahmins. Sates that the Brahmins introduced the matrilineal kinship system so that younger Brahmin men could have sambandham with Nayar women, as only the eldest could have formal marriage with a Brahmin woman. This led to the evolution of Matriliny among the Nayars, which was later adopted by other caste groups, such as the Thiyyas and Muslims (Panikkar, 1918; Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai, 1953). And this has led to a more upper-caste-centric notion of the kinship system, with lower castes simply copying it. Here, it's important to note that Kerala, which was historically part of Tamilakam during the Sangam period, has a strong history of matrilineal independent women. Segran (2011) notes that during the Sangam period, marriage-oriented, domesticated women termed *talaivi* co-existed with *parattai*, who enjoyed sexual freedom, independent property, and lived in a matrilineal house headed by the mother, signifying the plurality of female social positions in a morally driven landscape or a matrilineal, matrilineal system during the Sangam age. Nonetheless, a considerable works that later developed, looked into the features and the disintegration of Matrilineal system, in Kerala, particularly the works of Arunima (2003), Gough and Schneider (1961), Panikkar (1918), Saradmoni (1999) etc., focused on the Nayars of Kerala, especially in the southern Malabar and Travancore region, with limited attention to communities like Thiyyas.

This research paper thus focuses on how the matrilineal kinship system, widely practiced across diverse communities in Kerala, was often associated with the upper-caste Nayars. Communities in North Malabar, including Payyanur Brahmins, Thiyyas, and Muslims, and Kurichiyas, followed the matrilineal system, indicating that matrilineal was a wider kinship system rather than a narrowly bounded caste practice (Gough, 1961; Arunima, 2003; Varma, 2022). Nonetheless, popular narratives discussing the features, historicity, and disintegration of Matriliny focused on the Nayar castes, their legal reforms, and codification grounded in Brahmanical-Colonial norms, with limited attention to how matrilineal was practiced amongst other caste groups and to the gradual shift in the kinship system.

II. METHODOLOGY

Drawing on secondary sources from the author's doctoral research, this paper looks into the diverse ways in which Matriliny has been practiced in the Malabar region, with particular focus on the Thiyyas and Nayars, within the

Malabar region of Kerala. The study analyses the transformation of kinship practices due to social reforms, and the variations in practice, transformations of matrilineal attributes. By foregrounding these research questions, the paper urges a contextualised understanding of how matrilineal kinship and family are defined within specific caste settings. A historically grounded analysis of the existing literature highlights that the matrilineal kinship system in Kerala cannot be understood as a homogeneous system, but rather as a diverse practice grounded in its own social realities. in different communities.

III. THIYYA MATRILINY AND THE LIMITS OF THE NAYAR MODEL

Although matrilineal in Kerala was practiced across the state amongst various communities, its form and the meanings attached to it were shaped by caste position and hierarchical status. The definitional aspect of Matriliny is structured around descent, inheritance, and residence through the female line; however, its practice varies depending on the economic positions, political authority, and land ownership. Thus, matrilineal functioned within and was conditioned by the stratified order of caste society. Nayars controlled substantial landholdings, and the matrilineal Nayar *taravadu* served as a unit for adjudicating disputes (Arunima, 2003). The Nayar *taravadu* was typically a large ancestral household situated within an expansive compound containing agricultural land, a bathing tank, wells, shrines, and sacred groves (*kava*), reflecting both material prosperity and ritual significance (Rao, 1957; Mencher, 1966). The Nayar *taravadu* functioned as a corporate property-holding unit in which members were entitled to maintenance, but individual shares of property were not allowed. Despite this formal notion of impartibility, the internal organisation of matrilineal households was flexible. Scholars have noted informal divisions of property, the formation of smaller lineage segments (*tavazhi*), and negotiated arrangements for cultivation and residence among lineage members (Gough, 1952; Arunima, 2003; Saradmoni, 1999). The notable feature of Nayar matrilineal was sambandham, which offered considerable freedom to Nayar women in choosing a partner, provided it was within the same caste or an upper caste, particularly the Brahmins. This suggests exogamous practice, whereas they practiced strict caste endogamy if the man was of a lower caste or Nayars of lower rank, termed Nayar commoners (Gough, 1959).

In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the British courts redefined the *taravadu* as a juridical property unit, subject to legal codification (Arunima, 2003). This legal reinterpretation altered the internal dynamics of

the Nayar matrilineal households. The Malabar Marriage Act of 1896 regulated marital relations among matrilineal communities, thereby formalising *Sambandham* (an informal union between Nayar women and a man belonging to the same or an upper caste) by allowing the registration of marriages and defining legal rights for spouses and children. With the Madras Marumakkathayam Act of 1933, the corporate structure of *taravadu* was significantly challenged, allowing the partition of property; the Act legally recognised marriage and adoption, and strengthened conjugal ties over lineage-based authority. By granting rights to divide previously joint property, the legislation weakened the collective character of matrilineal households and accelerated the fragmentation of large *taravadu* (Saradmoni, 1999). Ultimately, the Kerala Joint Hindu Family System (Abolition) Act of 1975, enacted in 1976, formally abolished the legal recognition of matrilineal joint families in the state. This legislation dissolved the remaining legal foundations of Matriliney, transforming lineage-based property regimes into individualised ownership and effectively marking the end of matriliney as a legally recognised kinship system in Kerala (Devika, 2007; Arunima, 2003). Amongst Nayars, Matriliney was seen as inextricably linked to the ownership of corporate property, the power of the *karanavan*, and the maintenance of caste status.

The Thiyyas in North Malabar were the numerically dominant communities in the region (Shyamalan, 2014). Despite being historically linked to the Ezhavas of southern Kerala, the Thiyyas formed a unique regional identity based on kinship customs, occupational patterns, and territorial organisation. According to colonial sources, they are among the largest Hindu communities in Malabar and have historically worked in agriculture, toddy tapping, and the cultivation of garden crops such as coconut and pepper (Buchanan, 1807; Thurston, 1909; Innes, 1951). The Thiyyas of North Malabar were distinguished by their adherence to *Marumakkathayam*, a matrilineal system in which property usually passed from the maternal uncle to the nephew, and residence was frequently arranged around the woman's natal household (Gough, 1955). This pattern differed significantly from the kinship organisation of the Thiyyas in South Malabar and the Ezhavas of southern Kerala, where Makkathayam, or patrilineal inheritance, was more common (Innes, 1951). Thiyya matriliney was interpreted as something adopted through the cultural contact with the matrilineal Nayars (Thurston, 1909). Nonetheless, if Nayar matriliney is considered the classical model of matriliney, the practice of matriliney among the Thiyyas, despite limited landholdings and a lower caste position, challenges the notion that matriliney is primarily

sustained by landed wealth and the impartible *taravadu* unit.

There were considerable differences in how Matriliney was practiced among the Thiyyas. Unlike the Nayar *sambandham*, largely a visiting relationship, where husbands visited wives who remained in her *taravadu*, and children belonged to the mother's lineage under the *karanavan* (Gough, 1961), Thiyyas in North Malabar had more binding obligations, and they followed avunculocal residence (Varma, 2022; Gough, 1955, 1961). Those Thiyyas with ancestral property lived together as a joint family, including men related through the mother, children, wives, etc. But the number of such *taravadu* was fewer (Varma, 2022). Unlike the Nayars, the Thiyyas worked the land themselves, both men and women, and generally lacked ownership of large estates or household structures, which favoured a nuclear family system even before the legal partition of the *taravadu* unit (Gough, 1961). Thus, when Thiyyas with property often lived together, those with less property tend to settle as different units after two or three generations. Thus, for the Thiyyas, matrilineage was not about *taravadu*, or the joint family system, but about death and birth pollution, and the ancestral god that brought them together (Varma, 2022). The wives and children of those who acquired individual property often separate from their *taravadu* and establish a new lineage. This raises important questions about what the disintegration of the *taravadu* meant for a caste that never possessed it in its classical Nayar form.

Nonetheless, the legal framework governing other Hindu matrilineal communities in the Malabar region was rendered responsible for the dismantling of matriliney among the Thiyyas of North Malabar, thereby negating the community's socio-economic and cultural complexities. The variations in the expression of matriliney in different communities in Kerala thus indicate that the institution of matriliney in the state cannot be explained by the Nayar experience. This is because, in fact, it was a regional kinship system that was flexible enough to respond to different socio-economic conditions in the stratified caste hierarchy.

IV. REFORMS AND MATRILINITY

The decline of matriliney in Kerala is not just a product of colonial legal interventions; internal social reform movements among matrilineal groups, such as the Nayars and, to some extent, the Thiyyas in North Malabar, also played a role. *Kerala Navodhanam* (Kerala Renaissance) emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, aiming to foster a socio-cultural shift in response to changing socio-economic conditions, western education, and the notion of the male-headed family. This catalysed

reforms within matrilineal groups in Kerala. Among the Nayers, during the colonial period, the challenge to matriliney was led by the educated Nayar elite men, who increasingly came to see the Matrilineal system as incompatible with the emerging ideals of modern domestic life (Arunima, 2003). The *taravadu*, the matrilineal family, was owned by all the female members, with control held by the *karanavan*. This did not allow individual men to exert control over property or their nuclear family. The existing kinship system was also criticised, especially regarding the institution of *sambandham*. This was criticised as an unstable form of marriage, which lacked the permanence of monogamy based on Victorian morality and Brahmanical patriarchy (Arunima, 2003). This was also influenced by the educated male's desire to exert greater control over property held by the *taravadu*, to establish control over female sexuality, and to be the head of the household (*Ibid*, 2003). The novel *Indulekha* by O. Chandu Menon is a clear depiction of the challenges and shifts within the Nayar *taravadu*. By depicting the lead protagonist, Madhavan, as an English-educated, reform-oriented man who aspires for a life beyond the matrilineal joint family, the novel reflects the influence of colonial modernity within Nayar households. And by challenging the *karanavan*, whose control over property and decision-making is called into question, the novel captures the transition in the stability of the matrilineal *taravadu*. The larger push for legal reform, mobilising public opinion to divide *taravadu* property, legalise *sambandham*, and unify the Nayar caste groups in the state of Kerala, was led by the Nair Service Society (NSS), founded by Mannathu Padmanabhan, which emerged as part of Kerala Navodhanam (Kerala Renaissance) (Jeffrey, 1976).

With respect to the Thiyyas, the transition from matriliney was different. This was because, as a community placed in a relatively lower position in the caste hierarchy, with relatively lesser landholdings, the Thiyyas did not witness reform movements in the same manner as the Nayers. However, with respect to the Thiyyas as well, it can be noted that the impact of expanding educational opportunities, the activities of the missionaries like the Basel Mission, and the expansion of employment opportunities in the colonial period (Janaki, 2017; Madhavan, 2013) did lay the foundation for the gradual development of nuclear families and the rise of new aspirations with respect to property. It has also been argued that the matrilineal system provided Thiyya women the autonomy to have relationships with European men, which turned out to be an opportunity for their children to have better educational access and social mobility (Chekkutty, 2019). While colonial interventions may have facilitated upward mobility for select individuals, particularly through

government service or commercial engagement, this perspective risks overlooking pre-colonial socio-economic practices and regional variations within the Thiyya community itself. In North Malabar, for instance, Thiyyas were often treated on par with Nayers in terms of ritual status and local influence, unlike their counterparts in South Malabar or the Ezhavas of Travancore, who were firmly within the lower rungs of the caste hierarchy (Sreebitha, 2023).

Nonetheless, English education and the advent of print have initiated reform movements amongst the Thiyyas as well. When colonial education acted as a catalyst for reforming the matrilineal system among the Nayers, for the Thiyyas it was more about moving toward modernity, gaining access to education and opportunities that had been denied. When the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP) movement in Travancore, led by Sree Narayana Guru, promoted reforms such as monogamy, ritual practices like *talikettukalyanam* (pre-puberty ritual) and toddy tapping (Rao, 1987), its influence in Malabar, however, was relatively limited. Social Reforms in Malabar were mainly based on rationalist ideas and spiritual self-reflection, led by Vagbhatananda and Swami Ananda Theerthan, alongside social reforms among marginalised communities carried forward by leaders like Murkoth Kumaran, Kottiyath Krishnan, Cheruvari, Govindan, etc. (Madhavan, 2013; Bijina, 2021). Thus, while social reform movements among the Nayar specifically sought to restructure their matrilineal social systems, changes in matriliney among the Thiyya were part of a broader process of social and economic change

V. PATRIARCHAL RESTRUCTURING OF KINSHIP

The abolition of matriliney in Kerala is often seen as a progressive reform connected to modernisation and the growth of the conjugal family. A feminist analysis complicates this view by emphasising the suppression of women's voices and the neglect of caste-specific experiences. Reform debates were influenced by male elites, colonial administrators, and upper-caste interests, creating a discourse that standardised women's conditions and overlooked their diverse realities. Upper-caste Nayar women, often depicted in reformist literature, were portrayed as confined within matrilineal households under the authority of the *karanavan* and as lacking stable conjugal relationships. This selective portrayal justified reform efforts. Conversely, women from communities such as the Thiyyas, who engaged in economic activities, might have experienced matriliney as a system that offered residential stability, kin-based support, and some economic security. The implementation of a uniform, patrilineal,

nuclear-family model, through the abolition of matriliney, imposed a single patriarchal framework that disregarded these differences. This process reformed kinship systems and erased diverse female experiences, illustrating how caste and gender interacted to influence the reform and its results. Thus, the abolition of matriliney had a gender paradox. Although matriliney had been stigmatised in reformist discourse, adopting patrilineal inheritance did not necessarily empower women. Women had enjoyed a stable position in the matrilineal family, and the transition to the conjugal family had often undermined women's family security (Saradamoni, 1999).

VI. CONCLUSION

The disintegration of matriliney in Kerala cannot be understood as the end of a kinship system, but rather as part of wider transformations in familial relations and property relations in the late colonial and postcolonial periods. Through a series of legislative enactments that regulated Matriliney, the modern state sought to standardise diverse customary practices and transform lineage-based property relations into individualised property relations governed by uniform principles (Arunima, 2003; Saradamoni, 1999). In this process, the corporate form of the *taravadu*, which had organised inheritance, residence, and social relations in matrilineal societies, was dismantled. These transformations were closely related to changes in caste identities in twentieth-century Kerala. Among the Nayers, social mobility was associated with the adoption of monogamy, a nuclear family, and patrilineality in the reformist discourse. Among the Thiyyas, though the reformist discourse was not directly associated with matriliney, the spread of education, out-migration, and economic opportunities promoted a transition to smaller family sizes and individual property ownership. At the same time, many of the cultural features of matriliney have been transformed rather than eliminated. Among Nayers and Thiyyas, recollections of the *taravadu*, lineage identity, and ritual associations connected to maternal kin ties frequently shape social relations. Ancestral homes may also act as symbolic centers of family identity even when the institution of matriliney was formally dissolved. This implies that matriliney as an institution may have been disintegrated, but it has been accommodated within new forms of kinship relations in contemporary caste communities in Kerala.

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Ecological Feminist Study of Geetanjali Shree's Work, *Tomb of Sand*

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Abstract— *Ecofeminism in the twenty-first century is emerging as a new discipline that has engaged scholars and activists to revisit and re-examine the relationship between humans and the natural world. It emerges as an interdisciplinary framework that links the oppression of women with the domination of nature. It argues that victimization of nature and women are similar to patriarchal, capitalist and colonialism structure by power. Emerging from the feminist and environmental movements, the theory challenges hierarchical systems and demands social justice. Therefore, the paper aims to analyze Geetanjali Shree's work, Tomb of Sand, with an ecofeminist sensitivity. Her narratives intricately weave women's experiences with broader socio-cultural and ecological concerns. While analyzing her work, the study engages with major ecofeminist theories, including the perspectives of Vandana Shiva. This paper draws the reader's attention to Shree's writing style that aligns with ecofeminist thought. The work questions how women and the environment become silent victims of capitalist and political ideology. It also interrogates the logic of domination that suppresses nature, women, and the environment. The study encourages readers to reconsider the power of belongingness and coexistence between ecology and human lives. The findings would also elaborate on gender discourse in reflection of the ecofeminist study.*



Keywords— *capitalism, ecofeminism, ecology, gender, nature, and women.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Ecofeminism is a concept that situates ecological studies within the framework of feminist issues. It is both a social and philosophical movement that links the exploitation of women to the exploitation of nature. As a theory, ecofeminism critiques social structures such as patriarchy, hierarchy, and systems of exploitation. These hierarchical structures not only dominate and oppress women but also degrade the environment and disrupt ecological cycles. Theorists like Carol J. Adams, Vandana Shiva, and Carolyn Marchant argue that capitalism represents a modified form of patriarchy. Ecofeminism recognizes that environmental justice is inextricably linked to gender justice.

Vandana Shiva, an Indian scholar, environmental theorist, and activist, underscores the importance of ecological balance and indigenous knowledge. Her ecofeminist perspective has been widely discussed globally. She

strongly advocates that ecofeminism as a theory would help in conserving and protecting the environment. She believes that there is a strong need to reform social norms to sustain the Earth. Shiva challenges the capitalist ideology of the modern world. She advocates that capitalism and globalism have advanced the colonization of land, air, and water. This act of colonization is leading to the suppression of women's identities and oppressing indigenous communities.

II. PATRIARCHAL DOMINANCE OVER NATURE AND WOMEN

Geetanjali Shree is one of the celebrated Indian women writers of the 21st century. She is known for using language as a main instrument to narrate a partition story. The partition story recounts trauma and fragmented memories of women and marginalized groups that have

impacted their physical and psychological well-being. The massive marginalization recorded only the voices of the privileged while ignoring the marginalized groups. Shree's *Tomb of Sand* not only analyzes "history" (394) but also gives voice to "herstory" (394). She creates space for the unheard, including nature, women, marginalized groups, and many more. She rejects or denounces social and cultural identities; rather, she identifies herself with the tree. She declares that "I am the Wishing Tree. I am the Kalpataru" (145). The metaphorical association with a tree symbolizes her growth, liberalization, and a new life in a constrained society. The tree metaphorically connects Ma to the living natural world.

The text challenges traditional gender differences and patriarchal structures while portraying the female body as a site of resistance and transformation. The study aims to explore the interconnectedness of women and nature in the text. The novel discusses the lasting impacts of displacement and survival by situating partition. Beyond these major discussions, it also explores the domination of non-human beings who are on the verge of loss due to globalization and capitalism. At the same time, it also highlights the suppression of women due to the same ruling power. As Shiva opines in her most prominent work, *Staying Alive* (1988), that patriarchy in modern times has become a "new scientific and technological power" (17) to produce the growth of a nation. In doing so, it has legitimized the "denudation of nature" (17), which is similar to the domination of women. She further clarifies that "Feminism as ecology, and ecology as the revival of Prakriti" (6) are seen to produce and reproduce growth in terms of "political and economic transformation and restructuring" (6) of modern society. Shiva identifies globalization as a new form of patriarchal domination, which not only captures female identity but also targets natural bodies through scientific ventures to fulfill human needs.

Likewise, Shree, in the novel, dedicates almost an entire chapter to the crow. The crows become symbolic as they mimic Ma's inner voice. Shree uses the crow meetings and their voices to illustrate the destruction caused by modernization. Modernization and globalization have created "horrific problems" (373) and a hazardous situation for the birds and wild animals. Shree highlights a global issue where birds are dying "due to climate change" (373). The survival of these birds and animals has become impossible due to poisonous air and rising temperatures. Globalization has changed men. Earlier, they were capturing female bodies, but now they are "interfering in the natural environment" (374). Shree attacks the "Swachh Bharat campaign for a clean India" (375), in which gazette officers and government bodies participate to clean the

city. She makes a comparison that, on one side, the bureaucrats pollute the natural region while eroding it. On the other side, they campaign to clean India. The irony is that these bureaucrats and money-hungry individuals are the people who pollute the city and then try to clean it, posting their success stories on Google and Twitter. The event is organized to remind people not to disrespect nature but it ends up as a photo opportunity. Shree addresses such policies that have eroded natural mines and bio-diverse regions. The massive deforestation for experimentation is leading to the extinction of various species of flora and fauna.

Shree also attacks the modern world in which men have become self-centered. They have established chemical industries and modern infrastructure while destroying forest land and natural biodiversity. Shree questions the government, which place they belong to, and where these non-humans are "supposed to go when they fell our sky and our trees?" (215). They have no place left to survive. The massive deforestation has led to toxic air, and fertilizers have made the land barren. The infertile land has no power to regenerate. She addresses that the Earth and nature belong to every living creature, but men, to foster power, have created havoc for all the creatures. Their act of colonizing land, air, and water has destroyed the ecosystem and ecological cycle. She wonders where the homes of indigenous people, birds, and animals can be found. Shree raises the question from governing laws about how "wingless community is bent on destroying our home to build their own" (376). They legitimize their conduct as righteous using the law. Men tend to use their power to show supremacy over others by victimizing marginalized groups. Nature, which was earlier part of human life, is now regarded as "other". Poisonous air and water have not only harmed animals and nature but are also increasingly affecting human health, causing respiratory diseases and severely damaging human organs.

Furthermore, Shree in the novel criticizes climate change that has caused dry or late rain. The outlines that monsoon season no longer exist, even "The time when the raindrop will fall is no longer fixed" (121). The change in the ecological cycle has changed the monsoon season. Now the season "doesn't ensure rain" (353). The increase in temperature has destroyed climatic conditions. Rain, which earlier brought joy and happiness among humans and other living species, now brings chemical raindrops along with it. Now it does not carry fragrance and positivity, but carries the toxicity of polluted air and the achievements of mankind. The monsoon season has been massively affected by global warming. Shree warns readers that modernization is destroying humanity. Global warming has become one of the major concerns for the entire globe

as it is destroying the Earth. It is an alarming situation that glaciers are melting and seasons have become shorter due to the increase in temperature.

Shree organizes a series of narratives to attack government policies that have destroyed the environment for the fulfillment of the greed of mankind. The crow becomes the voice of the protagonists and asserts that human beings are spreading "pollution in the name of science" (371). Shree refers to the malpractices of the scientific experiments. As these experiments are highly impacting human health, especially victimizing women and children with "uncommon viruses" (516). Hospitals are crowded with unknown diseases that are difficult to cure. Hospitals also symbolize capitalist power by running tests and costly drugs that benefit owners and bureaucrats. They use bodies for experimentation. Shree criticizes all the malpractices of the government that hopes for better days. Like Shiva in *Staying Alive* criticizes "Maldevelopment militates against equality in diversity" (4) and issues like "scarcity of water, food, fodder and fuel, associated with increasing maldevelopment and ecological destruction" (5). Shiva further claims that nature and women in the modern world are "reduced to being 'resources' in the fragmented, anti-life model of maldevelopment" (5). Shree uses these critical aspects in her work to demonstrate how nature and women have become passive to males.

Shree's *Tomb of Sand* can also be praised for feminist concern, along with ecological issues. The narrative focuses on two women who are circumscribed outside the traditional sphere. The narrator in the novel, like Shiva, celebrates women's connection to nature. Shiva, in her most widely critiqued work *Staying Alive*, suggests that nature (Prakriti) is an "expression of Shakti, the feminine and creative principle of the cosmos" (37). Prakriti in the Global South is worshipped as Aditi. Readers of Shree's work find the connection between women and nature that helps the protagonist revive from her agonized sufferings. The paper highlights the cultural ecofeminist outlook of Vandana Shiva, in which she addresses nature as feminine and celebrates their conjugal relationship. Shree discusses the female struggle while viewing the protagonist in nature. She depicts eighty-year-old Ma as confident and bold, having married a man from another religion. Shree introduces Ma, who is "exhausted after years of subsuming her own rhythm to that of others, lying in bed for months" (224), like sand in a desert, which is considered lifeless. Sand personifies Ma's psychological trauma. Just like sand, women have hidden, silent experiences of their lifetime. Sand shows that it does not feel the effects of climate or the wild nature of human beings. Ma and sand both hold secrets within themselves. The traces of trauma of human destruction can be felt when Ma walks in the

sand, holding her past, as if she becomes the sand itself, mourning for her identity. Sand reflects the author's psychological transition from the voiceless to the voiced.

Like every other woman in Indian society, she served every member of her family without complaining, and with time, she forgot her aspirations. Similarly, Beti also marries of her own choice despite her family's disapproval. Shree asserts that women's "path opens with no. Freedom is made of no. No is fun. No is nonsensical. Nonsensical but also mystical" (52), criticizing that women's choices are not valued or prioritized in society. They are made to follow the path chosen by family members based on patriarchal values.

Shree, in the novel, interconnects nature and women's consciousness to depict women's suppression. In the second part of the novel, entitled "Sunlight" gives hope and aspiration to the protagonist. The sunlight symbolically gives growth and power to nature and also embraces the protagonist's soul. The prison walls personify not only being caged in the prison cell but also in patriarchal society. While she is in prison, she "planted a little garden, sown flowers" (660), which helped her regain herself. The garden's flowers, birds, air, and insects made her forget her wounded pain. Nature in prison gives her solace and hope for a better life. Women and nature here represent the colonization of their power by patriarchy. Shree attacks the colonization of land and women by drawing similarities in their victimization.

As Shiva, in her work *Ecofeminism* (2014), attacks the "masculinization of motherland" (108). The shift from motherland to a masculine view has created a global power hierarchy. Shiva states that such a view has caused "external borders disappear" (108) and has created "new, internal borders and boundaries" (108). This shift in worldview has broadened the gap between global and local identities. The novel clearly reminds the reader that borders are a reflection of the colonization of land. In the illustrated work, Shree questions how the earth beneath my feet was already a foreign land. She critiques how political powers use military and nuclear force to create borders. The author critiques the border as a symbol of supremacy, showing how power captures land.

Shree's protagonist Ma protests against her traditional roles. She claims that "A woman's body is the land upon which histories are written, but only if she permits them to be written" (220), which emphasizes female agency as a counterpoint to patriarchal control. The novelist empowers her protagonist to withdraw from passiveness and act as an active agent in transmitting intergenerational memory.

The body of land and the female body are always seen as the first sites to be captured and then stripped of their

rights. Shree, on the other hand, compares women's memories to rivers, which flow and carry pain. The river is considered fertile and full of life. Both rivers and women have the power to reproduce and sustain life. Water heals the tortured soul from the pain that history has imposed. As Ma points out, "Memories are not static. They are like rivers that reshape their course, finding new paths, carving new territories" (328). Shree compares bodies of water and land to the female body to depict how men have enslaved them to serve their own purposes.

The traumatic memories of partition have torn the protagonist's journey. Shree uses nature as a major tool to express her inner conflict. Readers find Ma seeking solace in nature while looking at the moonlight. She often gazes at it and speaks to it. This act becomes a form of escapism from the sorrow she has carried for years. Raindrops and moonlight cleanse her tormented soul. Shree expresses Ma's deep connection to nature.

During the winter season, "Amma got lost" (365), but she was found again in spring. Spring is considered the season of rebirth. It gives hope for life, unlike winter, which is seen as a season of death. The author celebrates spring as a season of renewal, giving hope to Ma. Shree writes that during spring, Ma's "heart trembles like a paper boat" (354) and "swings gaily on the sunlight and the moonlight and the raindrops" (354). These lines assert her desire to be free and independent. The raindrops, sunlight, and moonlight help her regain strength and heal emotionally and psychologically.

Readers also find Ma spending time with trees and plants, showering love on them. She blows "kisses at the plants" (357) and carefully touches "every leaf on every tree branch" (357). These actions depict her deep connection to nature. Shree connects both the reader and Ma to the natural world. Ma once again feels life within herself, forgetting her pain and loss. She begins conversing with nature, speaking to birds, squirrels, plants, and flowers. This act shows her understanding of the language of the ecosystem around her.

III. CONCLUSION

Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand* conveys the concept of nature as a healer of trauma, which can be closely related to ecofeminist thought that emphasizes the interconnectedness of women, nature, and healing. The sand is portrayed as a force that connects humans across time, symbolizing universal empathy for the transgressions of borders. From an ecofeminist perspective, this connection reflects what thinkers such as Vandana Shiva, Maria Mies, and Carolyn Marchant describe as the shared histories of oppression experienced by women and nature

under patriarchal and colonial systems. This empathy facilitates an understanding of the trauma experienced by individuals, thereby dismantling physical, emotional, and cultural boundaries. The dissolution of these boundaries is presented as a component of global connectivity, reflecting an ecofeminist vision of unity, care, and coexistence in the face of global challenges.

Ma remains silent and hesitates to meet people who come to console her. She even hesitates to face her son and daughter, wishing to spend some time alone. This withdrawal mirrors the ecofeminist understanding of trauma as embodied and deeply connected to both emotional and environmental dislocation. It is only when Sid presents Ma with the cane that holds butterflies of multiple colours that Ma starts to wake up from the resistance that holds her. The butterflies, as natural symbols of transformation and renewal, reinforce ecofeminist imagery where nature becomes an agent of healing rather than domination.

Tomb of Sand depicts a strong female character by portraying her transformation from a traumatized woman to a confident and articulate woman. By addressing trauma and healing as both sides of the same coin, *Tomb of Sand* serves as both a mirror reflecting the challenges faced by Partition survivors while guiding readers toward a legacy of strength, hope, ecological consciousness, and transformation amidst haunting flashbacks.

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Thematic Comparison in Select Dalit Autobiographies: A Comparative Study of Joothan, The Outcaste, Government Brahmana, and Karukku

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Abstract— *Dalit autobiography has become one of the most important modes of modern Indian life writing because it joins personal memory with collective history. This paper offers a thematic comparison of four major Dalit autobiographies: Omprakash Valmiki's Joothan, Sharankumar Limbale's The Outcaste, Aravind Malagatti's Government Brahmana, and Bama's Karukku. The study argues that these works transform autobiography into testimony, social critique, and resistance writing. Across linguistic and regional differences, the four texts repeatedly engage with caste oppression, untouchability, poverty, labor, humiliation, educational struggle, gendered marginalization, religious contradiction, fractured identity, and the search for dignity. At the same time, each text gives these themes a distinct shape: Joothan foregrounds everyday humiliation and material deprivation; The Outcaste intensifies identity crisis and psychological fracture; Government Brahmana highlights irony, institutional contradiction, and modern caste continuities; and Karukku brings a strong Dalit feminist and spiritual critique. The paper concludes that Dalit autobiography is not only a record of suffering but also a literary form of awakening, self-assertion, and ethical resistance.*



Keywords— *Dalit autobiography, caste oppression, untouchability, identity, resistance, gender, memory, thematic comparison*

I. INTRODUCTION

Dalit autobiography differs from conventional autobiography because it does not center primarily on private self-development in a socially neutral world. Instead, it records the making of the self within structures of caste oppression, humiliation, exclusion, and struggle. This work correctly frames this genre as a space where the personal becomes social, historical, and political. This is also consistent with broader scholarship on Dalit life writing, which reads these narratives as collective testimony rather than merely individual confession (Hunt, 2014).

The four selected texts are especially suitable for comparative analysis because they represent different

linguistic and cultural locations while sharing a common anti-caste impulse: Valmiki writes from the Hindi sphere, Limbale from Marathi Dalit writing, Malagatti from Kannada, and Bama from Tamil Dalit Christian experience. Their English editions and scholarly reception confirm their centrality in Dalit studies (Saha, 2025).

Objectives of the Study :

The paper has four main objectives:

- To compare the major themes in Joothan, The Outcaste, Government Brahmana, and Karukku.
- To examine how caste oppression shape identity, labor, education, family, and social relations.
- To analyze how gender and religion deepen or complicate Dalit experience.

To show how autobiographical writing becomes a mode of resistance and self-assertion.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a comparative thematic method. Instead of reading the four autobiographies as isolated life stories, it

groups them by recurring thematic concerns: caste oppression and untouchability, poverty and deprivation, education and awakening, labor and exploitation, gender and marginalization, religion and spiritual crisis, identity and selfhood, family/community relations, and memory. That thematic framework is directly drawn from the work (Raman & Saha, 2025).

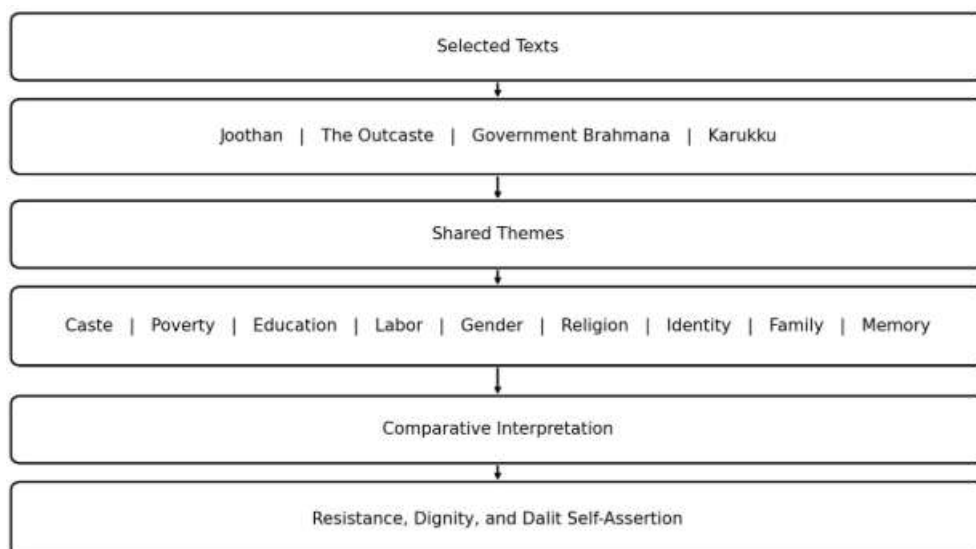


Fig.1. Comparative thematic framework

The above figure presents a comparative thematic framework for four Dalit autobiographies: Joothan, The Outcaste, Government Brahmana, and Karukku. It shows how these texts are studied through shared themes such as caste, poverty, education, labor, gender, religion, identity, family, and memory, leading to comparative interpretation centered on resistance, dignity, and self-assertion (Jeffrey et al., 2004).

Table 1. Corpus of the study

Text	Author	Broad emphasis
Joothan	Omprakash Valmiki	Untouchability, food, humiliation, education
The Outcaste	Sharankumar Limbale	Illegitimacy, fractured identity, hunger, exclusion
Government Brahmana	Aravind Malagatti	Irony, institutional caste, mobility and contradiction
Karukku	Bama	Dalit feminism, religion, caste, gender, resistance

The thematic arrangement aligns closely with current scholarship on Dalit autobiography, especially readings

that treat these texts as life narratives of social witness and anti-caste critique.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Caste Oppression and Untouchability

Caste oppression is the foundational theme in all four texts. In Joothan, untouchability is experienced materially and bodily through food, segregation, labor, and school humiliation. In The Outcaste, caste appears not only as exclusion but as a crisis of belonging and legitimacy. In Government Brahmana, caste survives within modern institutions and social labeling. In Karukku, caste is intensified by gender and by its persistence inside Christian institutions (Dutta et al., 2018).

Poverty and Deprivation

The four autobiographies show that Dalit poverty is not accidental; it is structurally produced by caste hierarchy. In Joothan, hunger and scraps of food become symbols of humiliation. In The Outcaste, poverty is joined to emotional insecurity and identity fracture. In Government Brahmana, economic hardship continues to haunt the subject even after educational mobility. In Karukku, deprivation is gendered, with Dalit women bearing disproportionate labor and social disrespect (Deshpande, 2002).

Education and Awakening

Education is one of the strongest instruments of transformation across the four texts, though it is always mediated by insult and exclusion. In *Joothan*, school becomes a site of humiliation but also of awakening. In *The Outcaste*, education helps the narrator interpret his suffering socially rather than privately. In *Government Brahmana*, education opens mobility but also reveals the subtle persistence of prejudice. In *Karukku*, it generates caste, gender, and spiritual awareness, making education not just academic progress but ethical awakening (Sukumar, 2022).

Labor and Exploitation

All four works present labor as caste-structured rather than freely chosen. In *Joothan*, labor is degrading and tied to untouchability. In *The Outcaste*, labor is inseparable from hunger and survival. In *Government Brahmana*, even where mobility appears possible, caste memory and symbolic devaluation remain. In *Karukku*, labor is sharply gendered: Dalit women perform backbreaking work inside and outside the home while remaining underpaid and socially disrespected (Menon, 2022).

Gender and Marginalization

The comparative importance of gender becomes clearest in *Karukku*, which gives a full Dalit feminist voice to caste experience. Yet gender is also present in the other autobiographies through mothers, sisters, and female family members whose labor and suffering sustain family survival. The male-authored texts often register women's pain indirectly, while Bama makes it central. This difference is crucial: it shows that Dalit oppression is not uniform but intersectional, shaped by caste, patriarchy, labor, and religion together (Nanditha, 2021).

Religion and Spiritual Crisis

Religion appears in these autobiographies less as consolation than as contradiction. In *Joothan* and *The Outcaste*, religion is implicated in caste hierarchy and moral exclusion. In *Government Brahmana*, inherited caste

ideology continues under modern institutional surfaces. In *Karukku*, the contradiction is most explicit: Christianity, which promises equality, is shown reproducing caste prejudice. Bama's crisis is therefore both spiritual and institutional, making *Karukku* central to any analysis of religion in Dalit autobiography (Pariyar & Lovett, 2016).

Identity, Selfhood, and Resistance

All four autobiographies portray identity as contested rather than naturally given. Valmiki's selfhood is forged against humiliation. Limbale's selfhood is fractured by illegitimacy and social non-belonging. Malagatti's selfhood is shaped by irony and contradiction in supposedly progressive institutions. Bama's selfhood is formed through caste, gender, and spiritual struggle. Resistance, accordingly, takes different forms: education, truth-telling, irony, feminist critique, and autobiographical writing itself (Kukreja, 2017).

Family, Community, and Social Relations

Family is both a shelter and a site of pain in all four texts. Mothers and fathers teach endurance, labor, and dignity; siblings reflect shared marginalization; community gives solidarity but also reveals inherited limitations. Social relations outside the Dalit community—especially with teachers, landlords, employers, priests, and upper-caste villagers—expose the everyday operation of hierarchy. The work is especially strong on this point: the self is always shaped by relational worlds, not isolated individual experience (Varman & Meshram, 2024).

Memory and Autobiographical Expression

These texts turn memory into testimony. In *Joothan*, memory recovers humiliation and refuses silence. In *The Outcaste*, memory is fragmented and wounded, mirroring identity fracture. In *Government Brahmana*, memory works through irony and critique. In *Karukku*, memory is immediate, spoken, searching, and ethically charged. Across all four, autobiography becomes not just recollection but a form of historical correction: it restores Dalit lives to literature on Dalit terms (Hunt, 2014).

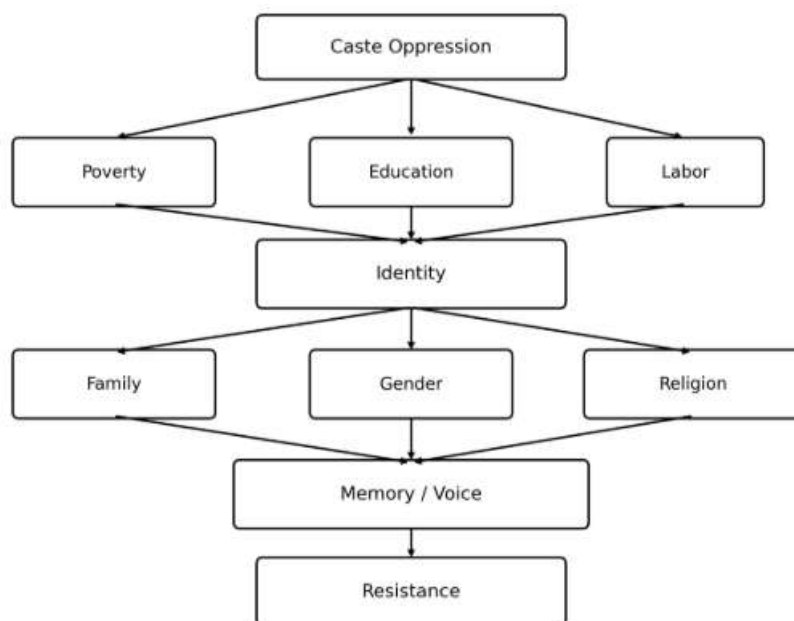


Fig.2. Thematic intersections across the four autobiographies

The above figure illustrates the thematic flow in the four autobiographies. Caste oppression stands at the top, leading to poverty, education, and labor, which shape identity. Identity further connects with family, gender, and

religion, culminating in memory and voice. Finally, these experiences develop into resistance, highlighting Dalit struggle and self-assertion.

Table 2. Comparative thematic map

Theme	Joothan	The Outcaste	Government Brahmana	Karukku
Untouchability	Direct, material	Social and psychological	Institutional and symbolic	Social, religious, gendered
Poverty	Hunger and leftovers	Hunger and instability	Hardship plus stigma	Poverty plus women's labor
Education	Humiliation + awakening	Identity formation	Mobility contradiction +	Feminist and moral awakening
Labor	Degrading caste labor	Labor for survival	Memory of labor and stigma	Double labor of Dalit women
Identity	Self-respect against insult	Fractured belonging	Ironic, reflexive self	Dalit feminist selfhood
Resistance	Assertion through education and writing	Truth-telling and protest	Critical irony	Voice, refusal, feminist critique

The table presents a comparative thematic view of the four autobiographies by showing how each text expresses common Dalit concerns in different ways. Joothan highlights direct untouchability, hunger, degrading labour, and resistance through education and writing. The Outcaste emphasizes psychological suffering, instability, identity crisis, and protest through truth-telling. Government Brahmana presents caste through institutional contradiction, stigma, ironic self-awareness, and critical

resistance. Karukku brings a distinct Dalit feminist perspective, where untouchability is social, religious, and gendered, and poverty and labour are deeply connected with women's experience. Overall, the table shows both thematic unity and diversity in Dalit autobiographical writing.

IV. CONCLUSION

A thematic comparison of Joothan, The Outcaste, Government Brahmana, and Karukku shows that Dalit autobiography is simultaneously literature, testimony, and resistance. These texts do not merely narrate hardship; they document how caste shapes food, labor, education, religion, social relations, identity, and memory itself. The work rightly treats these themes as interconnected rather than isolated.

The comparison also shows that unity and diversity coexist in Dalit life writing. The four autobiographies share a common structure of oppression, yet differ in emotional texture, regional context, institutional focus, and gendered experience. Valmiki foregrounds humiliation and self-respect; Limbale foregrounds fragmentation and belonging; Malagatti foregrounds irony and institutional contradiction; Bama foregrounds Dalit feminist and spiritual resistance. Together, they redefine autobiography as a form through which the marginalized speak historically, ethically, and politically.

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The Woman Upstairs: A Struggle for Recognition and A Longing for Invisibility

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Abstract— Claire Messud's novel *The Woman Upstairs* (2013) presents a distinct perspective on the post-9/11 era, focusing on the hidden social anxieties and strategic silences of Americans. While not explicitly political in a conventional sense, the novel is deeply imbued with the ethics and social tensions of the time. Through the narrative of Nora Eldridge, a teacher and artist the novel captures the era's socio-political upheaval through allusions to the terror attacks and the resulting policies of otherizing. Nora's inner self-doubt mirrors the collective anxiety of a nation that lost its sense of invulnerability. It highlights a paradoxical shift where victims and oppressors, observers and the observed, constantly swap roles, mirroring a climate characterized by fragile trust. This raises uncomfortable questions about whether we can recognize the humanity of our worst enemy and meet our obligations to those who attack us. This paper argues that the novel acts as a unique, intimate archive of the post-9/11 America, portraying a furious American identity that brings to light a core ethical responsibility.



Keywords— Claire Messud, Post-9/11 America, Responsibility, *The Woman Upstairs*

Claire Messud's novel *The Woman Upstairs* published in 2013 represents the aftermath of terror attacks in a significantly different manner than other post 9/11 novels. It unravels realities of social insecurities through the silence that some Americans have strategically adopted. The narrative spans half a decade from 2004 to 2008. Though it does not explicitly deal with politics, the social and political upheavals of the times find reference in Messud's allusion to the 9/11 attacks and the American otherizing policy. The self doubt of the protagonist reflects the self doubt of a nation which had considered itself invulnerable. Messud's references to the 9/11 attacks, politics and ethics make her novel socio-politically imbued, though she doesn't confirm explicitly its political nature. *The Woman Upstairs* makes a portrayal of the lack of trust among Americans, and the fear of the other after the 9/11 attacks.

The novel opens quite meaningfully with an expression of anger. The first line "How angry am I? You don't want to know. Nobody wants to know about *that*" (3)

which sets the tone of the novel is attributed to the protagonist of the novel, Nora Marie Eldridge. Victoria Brownworth reviews Messud's novel with reference to Nora. The novel, she says "takes the heart of a woman whose heart has been long-dormant, opens it up, layer by layer, and by novel's end, sets that heart on fire. Messud takes us on that journey via art and politics...". Annasue McCleave Wilson in the PW talks with Claire Messud, "An Unseemly Emotion: PW Talks with Claire Messud" inquires about the guiding force behind the creation of a character like Nora filled with all rage. In reply Messud answers how as a reader, she has always felt exhilarated reading the rants of angry narrators, from her first encounter with Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* in her senior year of high school. "There's a literary lineage down from characters in Dostoevsky through those of Beckett and Camus to Philip Roth or Thomas Bernhard-magnificent, unseemly narrators or protagonists. But they're all men." And Messud felt it was time to fill the gap, to write in the voice of a rage-filled woman.

Nora is the “woman upstairs,” who, as the author will later note is disconnected from the others, she would never be the first to be addressed. She is not quite pretty or smart or funny or sexy enough to be memorable. And yet she is pretty, smart, and funny and sexy. Just not enough. In her words:

[Women like us are] always upstairs. We're not the madwomen in the attic. ... we're the quiet woman at the end of the third floor hallway, whose trash is always tidy, who smiles brightly in the stairwell with a cheerful greeting, and who, from behind closed doors, never makes a sound. ... Not a soul registers that we are furious. We're completely invisible.(6)

Nora, although is invisible as the “woman upstairs,” she is self-contained. The ‘goodness’ in her is satirically explained in her words “When you're the Woman Upstairs you don't make a mess and you don't make mistakes.” (279) She laments, “nobody thinks of you first. Nobody calls you before anyone else, or sends you the first postcard. Once your mother dies, nobody loves you best of all”. (256) Nora's mother, Bella Eldridge, who had encouraged her to cultivate a yearning for independence and individual identity had been her only true love. She had, however, suffered a slow and terrible death. To Nora, hiding her true feelings had never seemed worthwhile. She had realized that as the ‘woman upstairs’ her life could never be acknowledged as authentic. It was rather unreal, an illusion, a maze of distorted mirror images and hallways with multiple entries and exits, like the Fun House that she used to visit as a child during summers. Nora observes, “Life itself is the Fun House, all you want is that door marked EXIT, the escape to a place where Real Life will be; and you can never find it.”(5)

Nora would fall in love with an Italian artist, and her life as the woman upstairs would alter drastically. Away from her husband, Skandar, a Lebanese who was now in Harvard on a fellowship, Sirena Shahid had come from Paris to live in Cambridge, Massachusetts for a year. Skandar who was a history scholar and working on the ethics of history had, as a child, been witness to Beirut bombings and genocide. Sirena meets Nora through her son, Reza, who was a student in Nora's class in Appleton school. Reza undergoes an ugly experience when some boys in the school attack him in the playground with cruel comments about terrorism. They remark that “the playground was for Americans.” (30) There Nora comes to his rescue and takes him to hospital. This violent incident with Reza because he was not an American, breaks the myth of America as a safe place, the ‘melting pot’ of all races.

Nora longs to have all three of the Shahids. To Nora the Shahids are her “Black Monk” (126). The “Black Monk” is a reference to Anton Chekhov's story about a ghostly figure who assures an insecure scholar of his worth and brilliance, but that turns out to be a figment of the scholar's own imagination. Nora confesses, “I had a veritable monastery inside me! Each one, in my impassioned interior conversations granted me some aspect of my most dearly held, most fiercely hidden, heart's desires: life, art, motherhood, love and the great seductive promise that I *wasn't nothing*, that I could... leave a trace upon the world”. (281) The three Shahids motivate her to explore her inner self. They encourage Nora to rediscover her frustrated desires.

Despite the social and cultural differences Nora's loneliness draws her towards Sirena, and she enters into a bond with her. During the interactions it is discovered that Nora, a teacher is also an artist. Sirena wishes Nora to share a studio space that she has taken in Somerville. Nora, however, uses the second bedroom in her apartment as a studio. As an artist she works on miniatures. Her miniatures are complex dioramas modelled on the lives of female writers and artists. She had just completed Emily Dickinson and was working on Virginia Woolf when she met Sirena. Her immediate interest was also in the artist Alice Neel. Sirena's new installation to debut in Paris next June is titled “Wonderland” and incorporates Alice's adventures with the viewers' engagement in the work. Sirena in her Wonderland was mixing together Lewis Carroll and the vision of a twelfth-century Muslim named Ibn Tufail, “who wrote a story about a boy growing up alone on a desert island, discovering everything – including himself, and God – for the first time”.(152) She has mixed the antique Eastern mysticism with a different kind of modern Western wonder, that was “Alice in Wonderland's: a place where reason- and the ground- didn't remain stable, where the imagination confused good and evil, friend and foe.”(156) For Sirena it was about trying to see things as they are:

about believing that such a thing as clarity was possible; and the other was about relativism, about seeing things from different perspectives, and also about being seen, and about how being seen differently also changes you. Both possibilities were amazing and frightening at the same time; but only one of them, she said, could lead to wisdom.(156)

Sirena and Nora share an unusual bond. Both seem to complement each other. In Sirena, Nora sees her alternative self, all that she is not, but everything that she has always

wanted. Nora had always hoped for a family and children. She had also always wished to foster the artist in her, a passion that intimately bound them. For Sirena, art was not a mere pastime, a mere amusement but was a way of life. She believes that as an artist Nora must give expression to her passion. Sirena's approval and validation of her talent encourage Nora to live in a life for which she had earlier never had the courage.

Skandar similarly instigates Nora's confidence, her passions. She is charmed not only by his physical appearance but also by his intellect. Their discussions, when Skandar walks to her place after dinner, often verge on the intellectual rather than on the personal. He talks to her about Beirut, about growing up in Paris instead of Lebanon or the U.S., like many of his compatriots. They talk about history and politics, "[Skandar] talked about their time in America, and global politics and Paris, a bit; but often about Lebanon, its history—bits of history over centuries, millennia, Phoenician history, Roman history, Ottoman history". (186) The range of intellectual discussions stimulated Nora's imagination. Although Skandar's primary concern is with Lebanon, his distress at Rafiq Hariri's assassination makes him deliberate upon the politicization of history and the psychological impact of violence and war upon citizens anywhere in the world:

Violence is very upsetting, wherever it takes place, whomever it hurts. But my poor Lebanon is a special case, a very particular story. To be still recovering from our terrible war, to be trying to create our skin all over again, to make a whole body- and then, this. Sometime I'll try to explain. But where would I begin? My beginning? The war's beginning? The century's new beginning? Here, with Hariri? Depending where you begin, you'll tell a different story. (179)

To know better, Nora searches the internet for "Lebanon war." She is shocked at how little she knows about the third world countries. Even the teacher of students from different parts of the world such as Liberia, Oman Haiti and other parts, she barely knows anything about the history or culture of these people. Her ignorance as a citizen of the First World is proof of the marginalized reality of other races in America. She realizes the truth of Sirena's opinion, about the reality of the American's protected and secure life that is dependent upon the economic exploitation of other nations: "the cotton wool of her [Nora's] American life" that has "protected [her] from the world".(180) She now views the United States as "a Fun House of its kind, this strange place of safety into which 9/11 could erupt as if

from nowhere, as if without logic, to our utter surprise". (180)

Messud aptly portrays American otherizing policy inquiring, "What does it mean, you see, that the first thing every American child knows about Germany is Hitler?". And she further discusses, what if the first thing to know was something else, "how would it change things if nobody were allowed to know anything about Hitler, about the war rather first learn about Brahms, Beethoven and Bach, about Hegel and Lessing and Fichte, one of those things to know and appreciate before learning about the Nazis." (185) To Nora's question of Skandar's feelings about his research at Harvard, he responds satirically, "there's a way of being in exile, for the educated of any non-European country, that can be very comfortable in its worldliness." (136) Skandar narrates a parable about a non-existent panther and a sheep to illustrate the relations between Americans and outsiders in the US. The panther in the story exists only to rationalize the sheep's death:

And yet how can you look at the panther, how can you look him in the eye, when he won't stay still? When he's nowhere and everywhere, belongs to no one and to everyone? So if you're me, how you deal with this is that you say, I'll look at how we talk about the panther. I'll study the history of history, the ways that we tell the stories, and don't tell other stories, and I'll try to understand what it says about us, to tell one story rather than another, to tell it one way rather than other. ... I'll ask the questions about what is ethical, about who decides what is ethical, I'll ask whether it is possible, really, to have an ethics in the matter of history. (184-5)

This process of othering becomes more prominent after the 9/11 attack. Every immigrant is seen as a potential threat to the existence of America and Americans. The continued violence is shown when Reza is assaulted once again "more surreptitiously, more brutally" in school. This neo-colonial marginalization of the diaspora is summed up by Sirena's monologue as she is worried of her son being excluded from the American society:

Now Reza knows he lives in a world where people can throw rocks at you just because of who you are, just because they don't like your name or your skin....when you're an Arab or you have a Middle Eastern name... I was anxious about America.... I wanted for Reza to have a

childhood ... No rage, no hatred, no cry for vengeance.... There's time enough for all that." (105)

For Skandar the history of Europe, in comparison to America is always in the present context. We come to know a lot about Skandar from his own words, "When I say I'm Lebanese of Palestinian extraction, from Beirut, that I'm predominantly a Christian by heritage, and then that I went to university in Paris, that I teach at the Ecole Normale." (137) He is aware of the reality of how his identity will be 'fixed' in several parts of America, like that in Harvard. More than social origins, his philosophical ideas, his academic affiliations are considered in places like that. He is known in a certain way. Although he might be accepted as a scholar or an intellectual, he realizes that as a neocolonial other, he must be viewed differently. If a person on the street is said all the same about Skandar, he might wonder, "How is this possible?" (138) And yet, it is true of American history that the process of Americanization involves ethnic participation. Even if it is a Lebanese student who is here in the university for a degree, s/he is accepted, but is "given an entirely new suit of clothes, a new outline, that has no context, and you must grow to fit it ... You come with no baggage." (138)

Tracie Padal in her book discussion guide for *The Woman Upstairs* reflects upon Nora and Sirena as artists. Their cultures, and therefore, their perspectives are different. Nora's art, which is based on real female artists who have suffered psychological alienation, serves as an outlet for her own frustrations of a lonely life, "the woman artist so fundamentally isolated". (174) Her painting "A Room of One's Own?" shows her regard for such canonical figures as Emily Dickinson, Virginia Woolf, Alice Neel and Edie Sedgwick. The series of her dioramas are concerned with "what actually was or had been". (152) Sirena's art, on the other hand evokes rich imagination. She is unafraid to give public expression to private moments and personal relationships. As she gets more acquainted with Sirena, Nora becomes aware that loneliness is a matter of one's feeling, to be surrounded by people is no proof of companionship. Just like one's soul, and innermost desires, sense of loss would not be visible even in the midst of society. It is only art perhaps which is the source of redemption for the woman. Her fourth work on Edie Sedgwick, is the answer to Nora's newfound knowledge: "When as a woman, you make yourself the work of art, and when you are then what everyone looks at, then whatever else, you aren't alone. Edie was never, on the outside, alone... Never invisible. Arguably, also, never seen; and in that sense, more than alone: annihilated". (174)

Sirena, in contrast to Nora, is a "Purveyor of Dreams" (153). Although Sirena is a successful artist her success comes at a heavy price. Nora perceives "the desire to be that, to do that, to be the fittest at artistic survival requires ruthlessness. Maybe that, really is as good a definition as any of an artist in the world: a ruthless person." (153) Sirena films Nora's masturbatory experience in wonderland and displays it at the exhibition without her permission. Nora reflects, "I had been filmed in that most private moment. Somehow, I had been seen and could then be displayed, an object, like one of the artists in my own dioramas. I could be sacrificed". (297) Nora feels betrayed. Her experience with the Shahids, she had believed would have helped her escape the Fun House of her childhood. She had hoped that she would find the way to salvation. Now, the dreams that the Shahids had pictured for her become mere illusions. She now feels the experience of the victim, as someone who as the 'other' must suffer the gaze of the privileged other. The problem was: "How do I survive other people making art out of me?" and reflects:

That's why I'm so angry, really- not because of all the chores and all the making nice and all the duty of being a woman- or rather, of being me because maybe these are the burdens of being human. Really I'm angry because I've tried so hard to get out of the hall of mirrors, this sham and pretend of the world, or of my world, on the East Coast of the United States of America in the first decade of the twenty-first century. And behind every mirror is another fucking mirror, and down every corridor is another corridor, and the Fun House isn't fun anymore and it isn't even funny, but there doesn't seem to be a door marked EXIT. (4)

Nora feels that she has been abused, her emotions betrayed. Her narrative of the social and political reality of America post-9/11 becomes a paradoxical illustration of role reversals between the observer and the observed, of victim and victimizer, the politics of trust and betrayal. Her personal experience with the supposed intruders who secretly invade into her private space symbolically demonstrate international political scenario of cross-national friendships, where all trust is superficial.

Even Nora's aspirations follow a security check not to endanger herself by travelling to countries whose people are otherized in America, "I always thought I'd live in Paris, Rome, Madrid- at least for a while. It strikes me now that I didn't dream of Zanzibar or Papeete or Tashkent:

even my fantasy was cautious, a good girl's fantasy".(38) Nora expresses the exclusion policy toward others as she devalues foreignness as she describes her family memories and root:

But foreignness: there was nothing foreign about my father, with his unconsidered Brooks Brothers wardrobe and his upbringing in Wenham, Massachusetts. Nothing foreign about my mother but an Italian grandmother, of whom she possessed a single photograph, the ancestor having died when my mother was two; and a deeply Catholic sister who had contemplated taking orders, which seemed fairly foreign to us. As a boy, my brother Matt was so American he hated vegetables and all kinds of ethnic food-Indian, Chinese, Thai, he'd spurn it all... 'There have been Eldridges here since almost the beginning,' my father was known to say. (38)

Nora's entire life is consumed primarily by her responsibilities as a teacher and daughter. She teaches and when she is not teaching, she is visiting and taking care of her elderly father, who lives nearby. Though she has left art as a career path she makes art when has time. Similarly, she comes up with her ethical responsibility in the approach of Reza and the two Shahids. Messud draws a picture of a multiracial community in America, as a miniature replica of the globe, in his American wonderland. Ironically, it is seen towards the end of the novel that Nora feels betrayed, all love lost, friendship smothered, and a festering anger within her that would edge on vengeance and enmity. Relationships are no more real but illusory, with little possibility of bridging the cultural distance between the East and the West. Nora believed that she dwelled in a wonderland that can not be interrupted. But the bubble burst as two planes dived into the WTC.

Still Nora is not setting the world on fire rather shows Emmanuel Levinas's concept of subjectivity and responsibility. From Levinas's perspective humanity is tested in the worst situations of a person. Judith Butler also, similarly argues a peaceful community devoid of violence. She believes that certain feelings can be directed towards stimulating ethical responses of collective responsibility. Compassion and responsibility should form the basis of every decision-making process. Violence only intervenes in an individual's choice of what s/he otherwise would never have made. Levinas says:

In the trauma of persecution it is to pass from the outrage undergone to the

responsibility for the persecutor, and, in this sense from suffering to expiation for the other. Persecution is not something added to the subjectivity of the subject and his vulnerability; it is the very movement of recurrence. ... the subjectivity of a subject is responsibility of being-in-question in the form of the total exposure to offence in the cheek offered to the smiter. This responsibility is prior to dialogue, to the exchange of questions and answers, to the thematization of the said, which is superposed on my being put into question by the other in proximity, and in the saying proper to responsibility is produced as a digression. (111)

Ethical responsibility is not easy. It does not assure favourable consequences. Levinas answers to questions like whether the violence experienced by a victim can justify the lack of, or refusal of responsibility. In the face of violence, pain, deprivation, terror and fear for one's life, it is challenging to hold onto moral principles and remain responsible. But, difficult though this path is, it can help us reformulate a world that is free from violence.

Ethics means responding to and taking care of that Other who seems the most strange, threatening, incomprehensible, illogical and absolutely different to me, never to be understood or accepted. This horrible alien, from whom I want to distance myself, in whose place I can never imagine myself, whose perspective I can not share and whose motives I cannot understand, is the Other who makes one responsible, demanding help, asking for maternal care. It does not imply that Nora is a model of Levinas's radical giving. Rather Nora's encounter with the Other points toward the basic ethical duty. Fatemeh Bornaki and Ali Salami in their article, "Neocolonial Agonistic Feminine Identity in Claire Messud's *The Woman Upstairs*" highlights the "socio-political ruptures between Americans and 'others' who are considered as the source of threat to one's security".(2) And it raises questions like, Are we able to listen to our worst enemy and hear his claim of life, and Can we comply with our ethical obligation towards our defiant aggressor. These questions are meant to leave us feeling weak, ignorant, angry and responsible after all. By calling for corporeal obligation, Levinas means that it is integral to humanity and that therefore comes without being offered as a choice. The corporal obligation is characterized by an impossibility of cancelling responsibility for the other, "an impossibility more impossible than jumping out of one's skin".(Levinas,OB)

Terrible inhuman situations and sufferings do not suspend responsibility but reveal its difficulty. I am still responsible even if I am the one experiencing violence. Messud's post-9/11 narrative represents the female characters in the American society who interact amiably with each other while the trauma caused by Sirena as a foreigner proves "others" to be a threat rather than friends. The resonations of 9/11 terror and trauma are felt in Nora's disgust of others who have disturbed her privacy and success. Instead of surrendering to emotional states of insecurity and vulnerability, and reacting against it with violence, Nora accepts reality with an open mind. Nora acknowledging her ethical responsibility avoids revenge and "tolerates 'others' who are stigmatized in the post 9/11 American stage".(2) The ethical obligation is something that comes "before culture" as a "contact anterior to knowledge". It is something which we can not reject if we are to remain human.

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Redefining Education and Skills Development for a Future-Ready Workforce in a Rapidly Evolving Global Economy

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Abstract— *The global economy is changing at an incredibly fast pace due to the influence of technology, automation, artificial intelligence, and changing socio-economic trends which have increased the mismatch between the workforce needs and educational systems. The conventional models of education that were mostly created in the industrial age economy are becoming ineffective in the preparation of people toward complex, dynamic, and technology-intensive workplaces. The paper will look at the increasing global skills gap, the rising trend of short-term vocational training and micro-credentials, as opposed to long-term higher education, and the effects of these spheres on long-term workforce sustainability. The study, based on a qualitative synthesis of the world data, policy reports, and scholarly works, examines the new skills requirements, loss of engagement with the education-to-work systems among youth, and how educational technology and artificial intelligence can transform the learning systems. The results emphasize that the change in the curricula should focus on an approach based on the capabilities instead of the content to be taught with the incorporation of technical, cognitive, and socio-emotional skills with the aid of lifelong learning frameworks. This article makes the case that vocational and short-course pathways can add to overall employability in the short term but there should not be an unbalanced focus on them because it can create a lack of highly skilled professionals and decrease the ability to innovate in the future. It ends with a call to the balanced and integrated form of education that enhances vocational flexibility with academic depth, equity and access and emerges as a way to reinforce collaboration among governments, educational institutions and employers in creating a strong, inclusive and future-ready workforce in a fast-changing global economy.*



Keywords— *Education reform, Skills development, Future-ready workforce, Global skills gap, Vocational education, Higher education, Artificial intelligence, Lifelong learning*

I. INTRODUCTION

The world economy is experiencing a radical change which is being supported by the fast technological progress, automation, artificial intelligence, demographic changes and the changes in socio-economic conditions. These forces are essentially transforming workforce markets, changing the basis of work, and defining the skills needed

in sustainable employability. The old systems of education which were mostly formed to suit economies seen in the industrial era are becoming more and more out of line with the current trends in workforce. Although academic knowledge cannot be ignored, it is no longer enough all by itself to equip people with the complicated, dynamic, and technology-driven work environments.

Among the most urgent issues that education systems in the modern world face, the increased global skills gap, or the gap between the skills acquired through formal education and the skills demanded by employers, can be noted. Based on estimates made by international agencies, a large percentage of the current labour force will need reskilling or upskilling to keep their jobs in the next 10 years as automation and digital technologies transform the nature of work. Ironically, this skills gap has been maintained with a growing number of graduate underemployed, unemployed, with the youth deciding to disengage with education-to-work alternatives, only accentuating inefficiency in the systems, and not in the absence of educational attendance (Rikalovic, 2023).

To add to this predicament is a structural change in learning inclinations and direction of learning. The increase in tuition fees, the rising cost of living, and the need to gain employment have contributed to the fact that many youngsters now prefer short-term vocational training and micro-credential to long-term higher education degrees. Although these channels are very fast, cheap, and can be employed immediately, there are great questions of sustainability of the workforce in the long term, especially in the areas of the work that need deep knowledge, long-term training, and the capability to conduct thorough research. Unbalanced increase in dominance of short-course education would pose a challenge in the form of future shortage in vital areas like the health sector, engineering, science, and hi-tech technology (Crick et al., 2025).

Simultaneously, emerging educational technology and artificial intelligence can offer opportunities to rethink education and skills development previously unprecedented. Adaptive learning platform, data-based skills prediction, micro-credentialing, and adaptable learning platforms facilitate learning systems that are more customized, scaled, and adaptive. Coupled with good alignment to requirements of the labour market, these innovations could facilitate lifelong learning, enhance school-to-work transitions, and lessen disparities in access to good education and training (Moldoveanu et al., 2022).

The paper presents a synthesis of the global trends, insights of empirical data, as well as policy-based analysis in understanding how the education systems can be redefined in order to accommodate the future-ready workforce. It unites the insights on the skills gap on the global level, education reform that is aligned with the workforce, the emergence of short-course learning, and the necessity of the balanced integration of vocational and higher education. In such a manner, the research postulates holistic and inclusive policy, i.e., one that focuses not only

on immediate employability but also on long-term development of capability, as the solution to economic resilience, social equity, and competitiveness in the fast-paced world.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Available literature always points at growing disconnection between education systems and changing workforce demands because of the fast-changing technological world, automation, and globalization. Researchers note that curricula based on traditional and content-rich models become less and less relevant to acquiring future-relevant skills like the ability to think, be adaptable, gain digital literacy, and learn emotional intelligence (Moldoveanu et al., 2022; Wingard and Farrugia, 2023). The world press, especially that of the World Economic Forum (2023, 2025), highlights the fact that much of the existing employment skills will be outdated by the year 2030, and the argument suggests further reskilling and lifelong learning models. Industry 5.0 studies also emphasize the inclusion of the human-focused, technological, and moral capability building to promote human resilience and innovation in the workforce (Rikalovic, 2023). At the same time, the literature records an increment in the importance of short and vocational courses over long-term higher education, mostly due to the escalating cost of education, cost of living, and immediate employability; although these options help to mitigate the shortages of labour in the short-term, they contribute to the reinforcement of the long-run shortages of the highly qualified professions and research-based sectors (OECD, 2023; Universities Australia, 2024). Other trends emphasized in the literature are the growing presence of educational technology and artificial intelligence in personalized learning, micro-credentialing, and predicting skills using data, which propose the scalable solution to the mismatch of skills (World Economic Forum, 2025; UNESCO, 2025). But, as a number of authors warn, technological and vocational innovations will not bridge the skills divide but may widen existing inequalities unless governments, educators and employers actively work together, including by means of alignment of policy. Taken altogether, the previous research suggests that there is a strong necessity to develop a well-balanced and integrated model of education that would help bring vocational flexibility and academic depth together to enhance sustainable workforce formation in a fast-changing global economy.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design is qualitative, integrative research design which is founded on the systematic review and synthesis of secondary data in order to test the issue of compatibility between systems of education and the skill requirements of the workforce in the fast changing global economy. The articles, international reports, policy documents, industry publications of other authoritative sources like the World Economic Forum, UNESCO, OECD, Global Partnership for Education and national education agencies are critically reviewed in order to determine the notable trends, skills gaps, and structural changes in education and training pathways. The thematic analysis was used as the methodology to summarize the observed recurring patterns connected with the problem of skills mismatch, the role of digital and AI-enabled learning, an emergence of short-term vocational education, and the implication of long-term workforce sustainability. Findings were put into a regional and education models comparative context to highlight best practices and enable comparison across regions and models. This methodology facilitated the combination of a combination of empirical and conceptual understanding to come up with evidence-based interpretations and policy-applicable suggestions without having to collect primary data, and thus guarantee analytical rigor and consistency were up to the aims of the study.

IV. RESULTS

In an era of accelerating technological change, globalization, and shifting labour market demands, education systems across the globe are under pressure to adapt. Traditional academic knowledge remains essential but it's no longer sufficient. The 21st-century workforce requires a dynamic combination of **technical expertise, transferable soft skills, and a mindset for lifelong learning**. The growing disparity between the skills taught in classrooms and those demanded by employers has become one of the most urgent challenges in education policy today.

The Global Skills Gap

According to a 2025 report by the World Economic Forum, more than 50% of all employees will require reskilling by 2030 due to automation and AI adoption. Yet, millions of young graduates continue to leave school or university **underprepared for the evolving job market**. This mismatch contributes to rising youth unemployment rates and underemployment, even in highly educated populations.

The global "skills gap" is not uniform. While some regions struggle with access to basic education, others face a lack of digital and technological competencies. However, there is a common thread: **education and training systems are not evolving fast enough to meet modern economic and societal needs**:

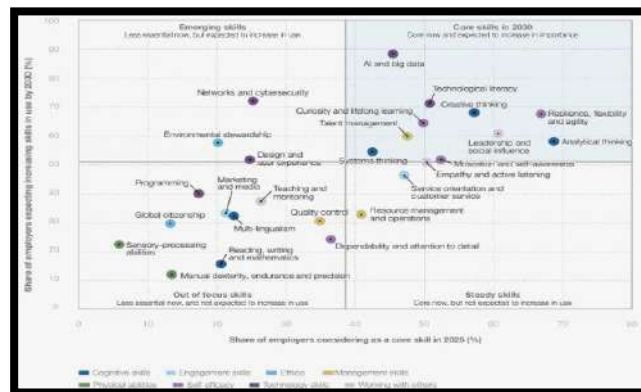


Fig.1. Share of employers considering as a core skill in 2025 (%).

Shifting the Focus: From Content to Capability

To address this, educators and policymakers must move beyond traditional curricula focused solely on academic content. Future-ready education must prioritize:

1. Critical thinking and problem-solving
2. Digital literacy and data fluency
3. Communication, collaboration, and creativity
4. Emotional intelligence and cultural competence
5. Entrepreneurship and adaptability

These are not "nice-to-haves" but **core competencies** for success in a volatile, complex world.

Integrating Vocational Training and Academic Education

Historically, vocational education and training (VET) has been perceived as a secondary pathway. However, countries such as Germany, Switzerland, and Singapore have demonstrated that strong VET systems can be engines of innovation and economic resilience.

Globally, there is growing recognition that **blending academic knowledge with hands-on skills training**—especially through work-based learning models such as apprenticeships, internships, and project-based learning—can better prepare students for real-world challenges.

The Role of EdTech and AI in Skills Development

Technological tools can play a pivotal role in closing the skills gap. AI-powered learning platforms, virtual labs, and adaptive learning systems can personalize instruction, identify skills deficiencies, and provide scalable training opportunities for learners across geographies.

Moreover, **micro-credentials and digital badges** are emerging as flexible, modular alternatives to traditional degrees, allowing learners to upskill and reskill in targeted ways aligned with employer needs.

Equity and Access: A Global Imperative

While innovation is key, equity must remain at the heart of any educational reform. Rural learners, women, refugees, and marginalized communities often lack access to quality training opportunities. Without intentional strategies to bridge this divide—through inclusive policies, investment in digital infrastructure, and community-based initiatives—the skills gap will only widen.

Call to Action: A New Social Compact for Education

To truly prepare learners for the future, we need a new social compact between governments, educators, employers, and communities. This includes:

1. Realigning curricula with emerging industry needs
2. Encouraging public-private partnerships for training and internships
3. Supporting teacher training and curriculum reform
4. Fostering a culture of **lifelong learning**

Education must no longer be a one-time event but a **continuous journey**, integrated with the ever-changing demands of the world of work.

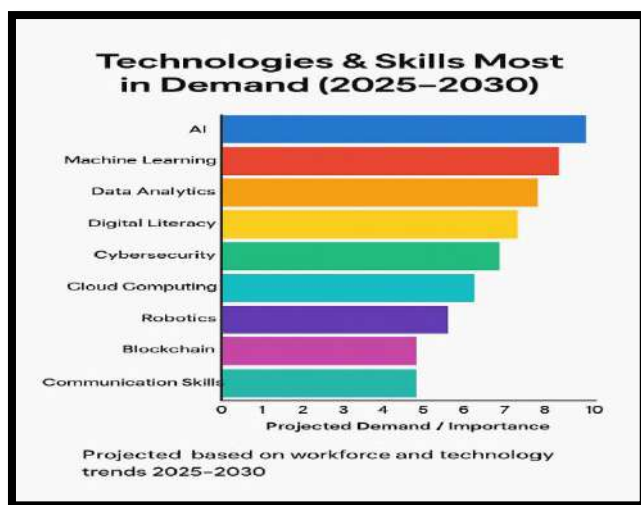


Fig.2. Projected based on workforce and technology trends 2025-2030.

Graph illustrating the **technologies and skills most in demand**, based on trends likely to define workforce needs through 2025–2030—such as AI, machine learning, data analytics, and digital literacy.

Global Trends & Data Analysis

Youth Disengagement and Education-to-Work Gaps

1. Around **20% of youths worldwide** (ages 15–24) are **not in employment, education, or training (NEET)**, two-thirds of whom are young women [Global Partnership for Education](#).
2. Moreover, **young adult workers** in low-income countries often face **educational mismatch**—their qualifications do not align with their jobs—in about **two out of three cases** [Global Partnership for Education](#).

Skills Obsolescence & Transformation

1. Employers anticipate that by **2030, approximately 39% of current job-related skills** will become obsolete or significantly evolve Education Local.
2. Technological advances, climate concerns, and demographic shifts are transforming labour markets, requiring ongoing skills renewal [World Economic Forum+1](#).

Core Skills in Rising Demand

According to the World Economic Forum's **Future of Jobs Report 2025**:

1. **Analytical thinking** ranks as the most critical core skill. Other growing competencies include **resilience, flexibility, agility, leadership, and social influence** [cet.aigroup.com.au](#).
2. In addition, nearly **90% of businesses** expect AI to transform their operations by **2030**, underscoring the urgent need for **digital and AI literacy** [World Economic Forum](#).

Corporate and Institutional Training Efficacy

1. Firms with structured training programs see up to **218% higher income per employee** than those without [Devlin Peck](#).
2. **Employees** who receive training become **17% more productive**, and **92% report increased job engagement** [Devlin Peck](#).
3. Yet, only a minority of employees express satisfaction with available advancement opportunities, indicating gaps remain in access and design [Devlin Peck](#).

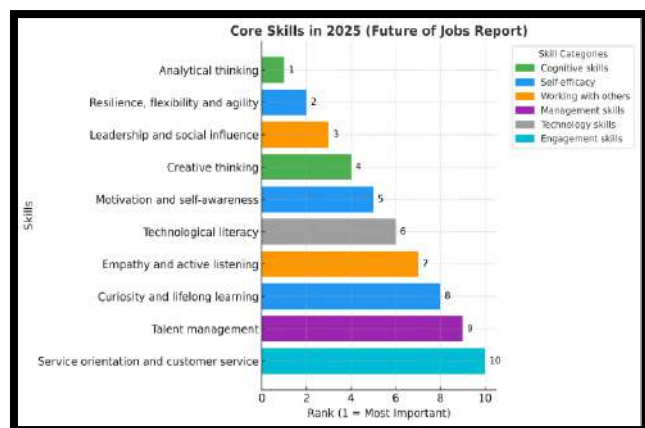


Fig.3. Core skills in 2025.

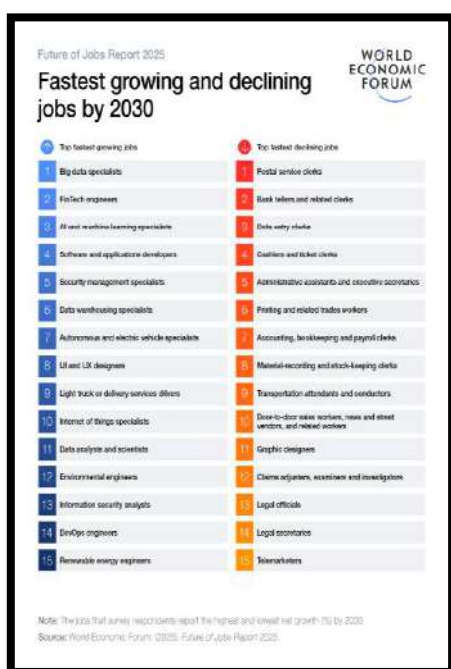


Fig.4. Fastest growing and declining jobs by 2030.

1. **Data Tables:** Summarizing NEET percentages, skill-transition projections, and training outcomes.
2. **Methodology Note:** Data compiled from global publications including the World Economic Forum, UNESCO, Coursera, and industry surveys.

Rising Preference for Short Courses

Cost of Higher Education

University tuition has risen significantly over the past two decades. In Australia, the average annual cost of a degree is now between AUD \$9,000–\$15,000 for domestic students, and up to AUD \$35,000 for international students

(Department of Education, 2024). In contrast, many RTO short courses cost between AUD \$1,500–\$5,000, offering a far lower barrier to entry.

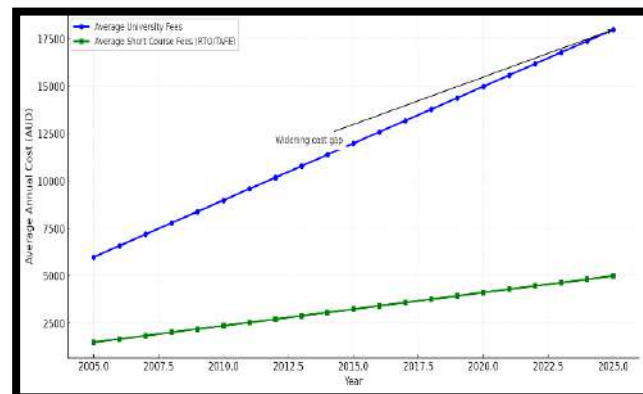


Fig.5. University vs. Short Course Enrolments (2005–2025).

The Graph illustrates how short course enrolments have overtaken university enrolments in recent years, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Cost of Living Pressures

Young people today face unprecedented financial pressure. Housing affordability has declined, with rental prices rising by over 30% in the past five years (ABS, 2024). Transport, utilities, and food costs also outpace wage growth, leaving many unable to commit to three or four years without income.

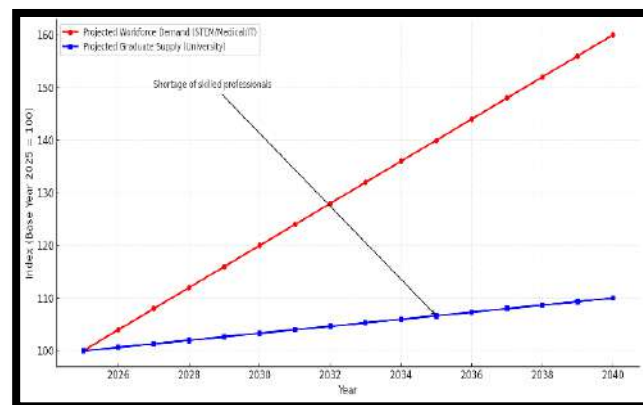


Fig.6. Rising Education Costs: University vs. Short Courses (2005–2025).

The Graph shows widening gap between rising university fees and more modest growth in short course costs.

Immediate Need for Employment

Short courses in industries such as aged care, disability support, hospitality, and construction offer rapid entry into

the workforce. For example, an individual can complete a Certificate III in Individual Support in under a year and begin working, while a nursing degree may take three to four years before entry-level employment is possible.

Flexibility of Vocational Education

RTOs and TAFE often offer modular, stackable learning options that fit part-time and online study schedules. Universities, while increasingly adopting hybrid learning, remain more rigid in course structure

Risks and Long-Term Implications

Shortage of Highly Skilled Professionals

Professions such as medicine, engineering, information technology, and advanced sciences require extended training. If fewer students pursue university pathways, Australia could face a deficit of highly skilled professionals within the next two decades (OECD, 2023).

The Graph shows growing gap between demand for professionals in STEM/Medical/IT and supply of university graduates.

Workforce Imbalance

A healthy economy requires a balance of vocational and academic expertise. Over-emphasis on vocational training risks weakening research capacity, innovation, and leadership in advanced industries.

International Competitiveness

Countries like Germany and South Korea continue to invest heavily in higher education and research. Without similar investment, Australia risks falling behind in global technology, healthcare, and research output.

Opportunities for Balance

1. **Stackable Qualifications:** Allow RTO/TAFE credits to count toward university degrees, creating lifelong learning pathways.
2. **Financial Support:** Increase subsidies, scholarships, and income-contingent loans to ease university affordability.
3. **Employer Partnerships:** Industry should co-invest in professional education, offering internships and paid training to reduce financial pressure on students.
4. **Digital Innovation in Higher Education:** Universities should expand hybrid and modular programs to match the flexibility of short courses.

V. DISCUSSION

The analysis of findings suggests that there is a strong and systemic incompatibility between current education systems, and the changing needs of the global labour

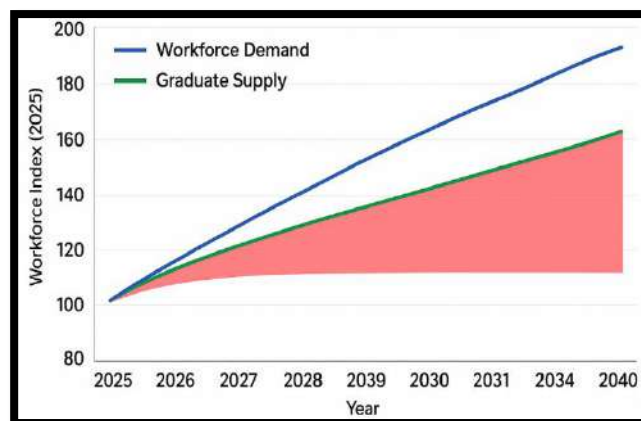


Fig.7. Projected Workforce Demand vs. Graduate Supply (2025–2040).

market, which is chiefly caused by the rapid technological change, automation, and the changing socio-economic conditions. The results point at the fact that traditional academic knowledge, nevertheless, is no longer a guarantee of employability, which may be observed through the increasing reskilling demands, youth unemployment, and education-to-work mismatch, especially within NEETs groups. The growing emphasis on transferable skills like analytical thinking, adaptability, digital and AI literacy, emotional intelligence and entrepreneurial skills highlights the importance of changing the educational emphasis on content-based teaching to developing capabilities. Although vocational education and short courses have become more popular because of low cost, flexibility, and quicker access to workforce, the outcome of the process brings forth possible risks in the long run such as lack of highly skilled professionals, diminished research capability, and competitive weakness in global markets should higher education routes be underestimated. The results also show that educational technology and AI-based learning may be a significant element in personalisation of education and lifelong learning, but its effectiveness depends on strategic incorporation, equal access, and correspondence to the labour market. All in all, the findings highlight the need to have a balanced and integrated education system through vocational relevance, academic depth, technological innovation and inclusive policy initiatives to produce a resilient future ready workforce in a rapidly changing global economy.

VI. CONCLUSION

It is concluded in this study that the concept of redefining education and skills development is no longer a matter of choice but a necessity to ensure the relevance of the

workforce and economic sustainability of the rapidly changing global economy. The evidence illustrates the expansion of the skills gap fuelled by technological disruption, changes in the labour market, and structural constraints in the traditional education systems. Although post-vocational training and a micro-credential provide a convenient and immediate route to the job market, their excessive use may cause deficits in high-skilled jobs and undermined innovativeness in the long term. The results indicate the significance of abandoning content-centered education and moving to capability-centered learning that incorporates technical, cognitive, and socio-emotional skills with the assistance of life-long learning systems and AI-based learning technologies. It is very important to have a balanced solution that brings vocational training to the same level as academic content, enhances the transition of education into work, and makes learning opportunities evenly accessible. In the end, the long-term cooperation of the governments, learning institutions, employers, and communities is needed to create an inclusive, adaptive, and future-oriented workforce that will be able to effectively respond to the current economic and technological changes across the globe.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

M.D.K.N. conceived and designed the study, established the research database, and prepared the manuscript. Guidance and research assistance were provided by Mme Ngoc Hien Nguyen and Dr. Anh T. Thuy, Dang

All data, tables, and figures were sourced from multiple publications under appropriate author copyrights.

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CONFLICT INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Natural Archetypes in Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*

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Abstract— Henry David Thoreau, the 19th-century American transcendentalist writer, is renowned for his independent and free way of life, as well as his concise, accurate, and critical writing. His transcendentalist masterpiece, the essay collection *Walden*, contains a powerful spiritual belief that Thoreau left as an invaluable and immortal spiritual treasure for future generations. In this work, Thoreau meticulously records his experiences of passing seasons and encounters with every blade of grass and tree on the banks of Walden Pond, which contain many natural archetypal images. This paper intends to explore the cross-generational enlightenment of this work from a psychoanalytic perspective, grounded in Jung's archetype theory. It first unveils the spiritual emptiness and group confusion hidden beneath materialism, and then delves into two major natural archetypal images of “water” and “sun”, and their profound implications. Emotions linked to such archetypal experiences should be linked to positive feelings, such as purification, rebirth, enlightenment and hope. The conclusion of this paper is a summary of the redemptive significance of the work for people's empty souls, which aims to provide a new perspective for understanding the spiritual dilemmas of society.



Keywords— Henry David Thoreau; *Walden*; Natural archetypes

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Thoreau and Walden

Henry David Thoreau is a renowned American writer, philosopher, and representative of New England Transcendentalism in the 19th century. His basic idea about nature is transcendentalist. Like Emerson, Thoreau believed that nature is the creation of the universal spirit, and that nature and human spirit are interconnected. Emerson once said, "All the objects of nature are impressed upon the soul alike when it is open to their

influence" (Emerson 8). When readers follow Thoreau's footsteps into the remote wilderness, they can feel unprecedented comfort and ease. Thoreau also believed that nature could enhance people's morality, because the simplicity, purity, and beauty of nature serve as a reference point for measuring human moral nature.

The renowned classic *Walden* authored by Thoreau is considered a quintessential exemplar of American nature literature. In this work, Thoreau elaborated upon his inner yearning to reconnect with nature and the arduous process

of reconciling his inner conflicts: from discordance into harmony. During the first half of the 19th century, the United States was in the early stages of transitioning from an agricultural age to an industrial age. With the rapid development of industry and economy in capitalist society, social problems such as market monopolies, environmental pollution, and wealth disparity continued to emerge. The flourishing of industry and commerce led to the prevalence of money worship and hedonism. Under the influence of these two ideologies, accumulating wealth became the only goal in people's lives. Against this backdrop, Thoreau chose to leave the city and live in a cabin near Walden Pond. He hoped to escape the frenzy and chaos of modern society in this way, and explore the true essence and innermost depths of humanity. It was during this period that Thoreau wrote *Walden*, which was his reflection and call to the social changes of the time, as well as an exploration of human nature.

1.2 Literature Review

Thoreau and *Walden* have aroused research interests in various academic circles. The mainstream research directions include natural thought, ecological ethics, translation and dissemination, cross-cultural communication between China and the West, and literary aesthetics.

In 1965, American scholar Walter Harding dedicated his lifelong efforts to publishing "The Thoreau Handbook", a factual account of Thoreau's living conditions. Harding aimed to restore Thoreau's authentic image through these valuable documentary materials. According to Harding (1959), Thoreau chose a new way to express his true nature, thereby demonstrating his boundless love for life and nature.

Early studies focused on Henry David Thoreau's naturalistic literary thoughts. Cheng (2000) expressed Henry David Thoreau's lifelong commitment to observe and describe the facts of nature, which not only made him a saint friend of Ralph Waldo Emerson, but also an "embodiment of Concord" and an icon of American

culture today. James D. Hart (2005) pointed out that Henry David Thoreau is the first writer who advocates simple life and criticizes luxury consumption in the economic era. He is also the first philosopher who abandons the human centered ideology (662). There are also many scholars who conducted research from the perspective of ecocriticism. Liu (2016) analyzed Thoreau's *Walden* and his Earth: centeredness, and examined the relationship between humans and nature and other species from an ecological criticism perspective. Sun (2021) studied the fusion of Chinese Confucian ecological wisdom and American transcendentalist ecological thought reflected in *Walden*, as well as the enormous influence of ecological criticism on contemporary Chinese literature. Su (2022) conducted a detailed study of Thoreau's experience in natural ecology, his influence on transcendentalism, his criticism of natural ecological civilization, and the ecological ethics of the relationship between humans and nature.

However, few scholars have conducted research from the perspective of psychoanalysis to analyze the effect of archetypal images in transforming the collective unconscious during a chaotic period.

1.3 Introduction to Jung's Archetype Theory

Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) was a famous Swiss psychologist and psychiatrist who had a strong interest in philosophy and had significant influence in literature, religion, and research. He developed and reinterpreted Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic system. Jung believes that people are motivated by a more general psychological energy that pushes them to achieve psychological growth, self-realization, psychic wholeness and harmony, which is the well-known concept of collective unconscious (Jung, *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung* 288). Jung defined collective unconscious as "not acquired by individuals but rather inherited and preserved by the common psychic functioning" (Jung, *Psychological Types* 616). When the structures of the collective unconscious emerge into conscious awareness, they often adopt the images and symbols specific to an individual's culture, yet they adhere

to certain universal patterns that are discernible across all cultures. Jung designated these patterns as archetypes, regarding them as innate constituents of human consciousness.

Jung wrote, "There are as many archetypes as there are typical situations in life. Endless repetition has engraved these experiences into our psychic constitution, not in the forms of images filled with content, but at first only as forms without content, representing merely the possibility of a certain type of perception and action". (Bennet 42) Examples are symbolic elements, such as water, sun, moon, and fire.

At the level of the collective unconscious, archetypal images condense the spirit of a nation, and the psychological content of archetypes covers the understanding of nature and the universe by this nation. Not only do they determine human behavior, but they can also transform the human personality, and they can dominate it completely, control and even destroy it, because the archetype is both a factor and the motive which organizes some elements that confers a form of mental images (Adamski 564). The initial form of the archetype comes from nature, and the archetype expresses itself through various forms such as memory, dreams, illusions, and images in literature and art, and affects consciousness. When the human spirit is lost in the universe and nature, it must use archetypes to regain itself. This process is like the awakening of subconscious memory through the archetype images shaped by literary and artistic works. The passion we experience in works and the madness expressed by writers in their creative activities are all processes of the human soul searching for itself.

II. THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE COLLECTIVE UNCONSCIOUS

Before the Puritans set foot on the American continent, the indigenous people of this land were already able to adapt to the changes of nature according to their own preferences and abilities. The collision and impact of

glaciers and rocks created gentle and meandering rivers, which injected moisture into the soft soil and gave birth to fertile and vibrant grasslands. Hills, forests, streams, ponds, and fields witnessed the hard work of the indigenous people, and the fresh air, magnificent scenery, and abundant wildlife accompanied them all day long. The greenery and flowers of spring, the sunshine and fields of summer, the colorful harvest of autumn, and the snow and silence of winter mark the passage of time throughout the seasons, and the collection of all natural images on this land constitutes the primitive collective unconscious (Gullatz 707) .

In 1620, the Puritans arrived in Massachusetts Bay and viewed this land, which had recently experienced a large number of deaths due to disease, as sacred land, rightfully believing that it provided wonderful conditions for the development of English immigrants. The Puritans stood on the unexplored land and looked out at their new future. They were not satisfied with simple trade and wanted to possess this land. As a result, a new city rose up in the Mascotekwid Valley, and with it, the ecological economic system and way of life of the North American indigenous people were shattered by trade, currency, and prices. This was the first major trauma experienced by the collective unconscious of primitive humans, and this 'disaster from the sky' rekindled their deep-seated fears of death and the future. From then on, the terrifying legends and tragic experiences of European ancestors would be forever sealed in the racial memory of the American people, leaving a deep imprint on their psyche, and this group of Puritans called themselves the first generation of Western pioneers in American history, and then began their great journey.

Over time, the second and third generations of Puritans gradually became estranged from their ancestors' religious enthusiasm. Born in the New World, they were influenced by more secular culture and Enlightenment thinking, gradually moving away from the Puritans' initial strict religious beliefs and practices. With the development

and independence of the United States, political, social, and cultural diversity has continued to increase, and the status of religion in social life has gradually declined. Along with the progress of science and technology, the role of religion in interpreting natural phenomena and the meaning of human existence has gradually weakened as people have gained a deeper understanding of nature and the world. This trend accelerated in the second half of the 19th century and the early 20th century, known as 'modernity'. At the same time, 'pragmatism' gradually gained promotion and popularity in American society, and became a driving force in the process of American modernization. Pragmatists believed that social and economic development should be based on practical needs and experiences, rather than on tradition or religious beliefs.

In the early 1840s, the United States was undergoing rapid social changes in industrialization, urbanization, and commercialization. Commercialism and materialism dominated society at that time. The Industrial Revolution gave birth to urbanization, which led to the continuous expansion of cities, the construction of factories, and the increasing stratification of society. Blind worship of money and materialism, driven by industrialization, pushed humanity into a abyss of self-loss. To cure the pathological psyche, people adopt 'consumer therapy', which is the excessive and blind consumption of material wealth. This also exacerbates the plunder of natural resources and the destruction of the external environment, stemming from people's spiritual emptiness and disorder. Thoreau explores production and consumption in the first chapter of his book, where people blindly worship the results of material civilization such as commodities. "We know but few men, a great many coats and breeches" (Thoreau 47), Thoreau wrote in *Walden*, "Dress a scarecrow in your last shift, you standing shiftless by, who would not soonest salute the scarecrow" (Thoreau 56)? This is clearly the result of the collective unconscious, and the worship of commodities is a contemporary version of

the worship of ancient gods.

III. The Archetypes in *Walden* and their Significance

3.1 The Natural Archetype of Water

Water serves as the foundation of life. Indeed, every civilization in the world, when traced back to its origin, can be seen as a civilization that originated from water. Without "water," neither human life nor society could exist. For any ethnicity, the concept of "water" is often laden with symbolic significance, frequently appearing in various ancient classics. When "water" is incorporated into artistic works imbued with primitive cultural value, it fully showcases its unique idealistic and emotional attributes, transcending the uniformity of natural objects. In human being's utterance system, the image of "water" already exceeds its ordinary natural meaning and becomes a kind of prototype with complicated deep intrinsic embodiment.

3.1.1 Historical Transmutation of the Archetype of Water

The manifestations of the water archetype in literature can be divided into the native forms and the subsequently generated forms. The native forms mainly represent the external manifestation of ancient humans' initial cognition and psychological experience of water, including chaos and floods (Yang and Yan 33). The subsequently generated forms evolve continuously from the water archetype as human civilization progresses, manifesting in literature in various forms such as rivers, lakes, springs, rain, and dew. As a collective representation, the water archetype first appeared in Chinese literature in the form of chaos, and subsequently displayed its prominence through flood myths. With the development of literature, it has flowed through the beds of Confucian and Taoist cultures in China, infiltrating deep into the fertile soil of Chinese thought, and has become an archetype imagery laden with rich national cultural implications. It has repeatedly emerged throughout history, giving form to countless typical experiences of our ancestors.

Confucius has a famous saying: "The wise man

delights in water, and the benevolent man delights in mountains" (Wu 81). Water not only has various natural forms, but also can wash off the dirt of people's body and mind, so as to make people maintain physical and mental clean and purity. Moreover, the natural shapes and functions of water often give the wise some enlightenment and inspiration to know the society, the life, and even the entire physical world.

Water, as the world main body image, also appears in the Taoism philosophy. Lao-Tzu tells us explicitly: "The highest good is like that of water. The goodness of water is that it benefits the ten thousand creatures; yet itself does not scramble, but is content with the places that all men disdain" (Waley 17). Lao-Tzu once mentioned such water images as the water, the nectar, the waterfalls, the rivers and the seas.

Expanding upon Laozi's insights, Zhuangzi further elevated the characteristics of "water" — its conformity to the nature of things, its unstoppable force, and its ability to conquer all obstacles — into a "Dao" of life. Zhuangzi broadened the scope of concrete metaphorical representations of the "Dao," internalizing the objective "Dao" into a chaotic state of enlightenment. In his philosophy, "water" serves not only as a physical metaphor but also as a spiritual guide, illustrating how one should navigate through life with fluidity and adaptability.

To sum up, in the ancients' eyes, the water already became a kind of spiritual comfort and sustenance through which people released all sorts of sorrowful pain and soul anxiety. At the same time, through water, people also reposed their all sorts of nice desires, purified the minds of self, and enabled the souls to obtain the naturalization. In this way, the water image is a carrier of emotion through which people enable the painful life to continue from generation to generation tenaciously. At the same time, the water image also incarnates a pursuit of life and a philosophical sublimation.

3.1.2 Significance of 'Water': Purification and Rebirth

In Thoreau's eyes, lakes were like immense and untainted crystals, akin to precious gems and diamonds, pure without any impurities. The clear, flowing water not only brought him greater joy in enjoying the leisurely life at Walden but also allowed readers to more profoundly appreciate the purity of his inner world, devoid of any clutter.

Thoreau mentioned the archetype of 'lake' many times in *Walden*. He highly praised the depth, clarity and purity of the lake water, "They are too pure to have a market value; they contain no muck. How much more beautiful than our lives, how much more transparent than our characters, are they" (Thoreau 187)! The humble beauty of this lake, secluded from the world, far removed from the market, represent Thoreau's ideal of the innocence and spirituality that humans ought to possess. Thoreau also pointed out that "Nations come and go without defiling it. It is a mirror which no stone can crack, whose quicksilver will never wear off, whose gilding Nature continually repairs; no storms, no dust, can dim its surface ever fresh; —a mirror in which all impurity presented to it sinks, swept and dusted by the sun's hazy brush—this the light dust: cloth—which retains no breath that is breathed on it" (Thoreau 177). In this description, we can see that the lake water is not only pure and transparent in itself, but also no nation can 'defile' it, and it can make any 'impurities' that fall into it precipitate and purify without leaving any trace. Therefore, Walden Lake is regarded by Thoreau as a 'perfect mirror'.

Thoreau elucidates the influence of the nature on one's temperament, illustrating how a small lake can reflect one's inner soul. Thoreau wrote, "If he is surrounded by mountainous circumstances, an Achillean shore, whose peaks overshadow and are reflected in his bosom, they suggest a corresponding depth in him. But a low and smooth shore proves him shallow on that side. In our bodies, a bold projecting brow falls off to and indicates a corresponding depth of thought (Thoreau 269)." Sociologists and anthropologists have already confirmed

to us the impact of social and regional environments on individuals. Through his detailed descriptions of *Walden*, Thoreau specifically expresses his views on human nature. To some extent, Thoreau's longing for *Walden Pond* reflects his aspiration for the depth and breadth of human nature.

In the Chapter 《The Pond in Winter》, Thoreau described the process of a hundred Irishmen coming from Cambridge to *Walden* to get out the ice in the winter of 1846-1847. They divided it into cakes by methods too well known to require description, and these, being sledded to the shore, were rapidly hauled off to an ice platform. The behavior of the ice cutters symbolizes humanity's exploitation of nature. In response, Thoreau sharply criticized, “But in order to cover each one of his dollars with another, he took off the only coat, ay, the skin itself, of *Walden Pond* in the midst of a hard winter.” (Thoreau 276) In the first half of the 19th century, humanity's relentless and greedy pursuit of wealth and money led to the excessive exploitation and occupation of limited natural resources, causing unprecedented destruction and pollution to the natural environment. Through the criticism of the Irish ice-cutting practice, Thoreau warned the contemporary society that any attempt to plunder or conquer nature is futile, as nature possesses far greater power than humans could anticipate. The ruthless exploitation of *Walden Pond* by ice-cutters stands in stark contrast to the poetic imagery Thoreau ascribes to it. From Thoreau's perspective, the ice blocks are the embodiment of nature's spirituality and beauty. They offer enlightenment, purify one's soul, and enable one to find eternity in nature.

In addition to its purifying function, water also sustains life and represents rebirth. In the Christian baptismal rite, these two ideas are combined: on the one hand, baptismal water symbolizes the washing away of original sin, and on the other hand, it symbolizes the spiritual rebirth that is about to begin (Wheelwright 228). Jesus Christ in the Bible is resurrected and reborn

spiritually through baptism in the Jordan River. Rebirth signifies redemption, a meaning particularly highlighted by the phrase “living water” mentioned in Jesus' sermon to the Samaritan woman at the well. This water, originating from a spring and flowing along its natural course, represents a continuous self-renewal, an endless river.

In *Walden*, Thoreau purified his soul through the act of bathing. He never concerned himself with the possibility of catching a chill, disregarding the physical intrusion of the icy water upon his flesh. In the passage describing bathing in the lake, he wrote, “Every morning was a cheerful invitation to make my life of equal simplicity, and I may say innocence, with Nature herself. I have been as sincere a worshipper of Aurora as the Greeks. I got up early and bathed in the pond; that was a religious exercise, and one of the best things which I did” (Thoreau 82). Thoreau regarded bathing in the lake as a religious purification ritual and acknowledged the lake's function of purifying the body and mind. It can be illustrated that the archetype image of ‘water’ in *Walden* symbolizes purification as well as new life. Combining Thoreau's life, influenced by his mother, who taught him to memorize many passages of the Bible at the age of eight, with the baptism of Jesus Christ in the Jordan River, we can boldly speculate that Thoreau's description of bathing in the lake is intentional. When humanity deviates from the origin of life and is constantly eroded and ravaged by materialism, people should return to the origin of life to examine its current state of existence. Thoreau withdrew from the materialistic industrial society and, through bathing in the lake, washed away the vulgarity of material society, achieved a spiritual baptism of ‘daily renewal, day by day’, and was subsequently purified and reborn spiritually and mentally. The lake water not only washes away the dirt of the world, but also plays a role in cleansing the spirit. Thoreau thus held onto a clear and pure spiritual home.

3.2 The Natural Archetype of the Sun

When exploring archetypes and their attributes, seeking them from the most authentic nature is an effective

method. "Mythologists continue to draw upon concepts such as the sun, moon, meteorology, botany, and related notions" (Jung, *The Selected Works of C.G.Jung* 41). This is because only in these original natural creations can they uncover the primordial forms of archetypes, thereby facilitating their classification and study. The archetype image of the 'sun' can be transformed and substituted with other images such as 'light' and 'fire'. Across the extensive history of cultural accumulation, the archetype of the 'sun' has been endowed with rich cultural connotations. It can symbolize warmth, wisdom, power, fatherhood, and can also metaphorically represent illumination, hope, and enlightenment.

3.2.1 Historical Transmutation of the Archetype of the Sun

As one of the natural objects most closely related to human existence, the sun has arisen the ancestors' curiosity and exploration. The sun therein embodies itself in different human civilization, from the abstract designs of rock art to the majestic pyramids of Egypt, and from deities enthroned upon altars to the poetic sunsets captured by literati and poets. Thinkers, philosophers, artists of successive era have all illustrated the sun in a variety of art forms with great enthusiasm, thus the prototype image of sun comes into existence with rich content and profound connotation.

In ancient times, humans existed in a state of extreme barbarism, knowing nothing about the world they inhabited. The primary characteristic of primitive thinking is 'animism,' which posits that all things in the universe possess life. The sun, moon, stars, thunder, lightning, wind, clouds, and trees, like humans, each have their own souls and thoughts and emotions, and all things operate according to their own fixed rules. Guided by this way of thinking, primitive humans created brilliant and magnificent myths. Their worship of the sun established the foundation for the emergence of the sun's archetypal imagery. Consequently, this led to an inevitable mythologization of the sun at the beginning of its existence

(Gao 20). Moreover, the sun's unique aesthetic attributes have caused its imagery to evolve and acquire a multitude of broader meanings within human imagination, permeating through a variety of artistic expressions and forms.

In the aftermath of the primitive disintegration of natural worships and emergence of the hierarchy society, the personified characteristics of the sun's archetypal imagery has become increasingly prominent. The perception that "among the gods of heaven, the sun is supreme" shared an isomorphic relationship with the autocratic status of monarchs, causing "emperors" and "power" to become one of the primary imageries of "the sun." Over subsequent extended periods, this gradually transformed into a deep-seated national collective unconsciousness, which was continually inherited and innovated by later generations, giving rise to a series of related imageries and imagery clusters.

Human's understanding of the sun has undergone a process from simplicity to complexity. With the growth of the human understanding, the ways in which we comprehend nature are continually evolving and diversifying. Examining the historical formation and evolution of the sun image, it is not difficult to observe that the sun, being closely related to human existence, has gradually accumulated human life experiences and spiritual pursuits through this intense dependency. Through the transmission of history and culture, these accumulations have settled into the collective unconscious of humanity, forming a classic archetypal imagery. Furthermore, humans continuously use their increasingly developed brains to ponder the relationship between the sun and human survival and development through practical activities. From mythological, religious, and scientific perspectives, humans constantly recognize, utilize, and conquer their objects of study. Simultaneously, they employ artistic and aesthetic imagination to shape and symbolize these objects, thereby expressing the grand ideal of harmony between humans and nature.

3.2.2 Significance of 'Sun': Enlightenment and Hope

Thoreau used the bright sun hanging high above the earth as an image to guide the lost and awaken people's hearts. The archetype image of the 'sun' mainly appears in the beginning and the end. In the chapter *«Economy»*, Thoreau mentioned that "From the desperate city you go into the desperate country, and have to console yourself with the bravery of minks and muskrats. A stereotyped but unconscious despair is concealed even under what are called the games and amusements of mankind. There is no play in them, for this comes after work. But it is a characteristic of wisdom not to do desperate things. When we consider what, to use the words of the catechism, is the chief end of man, and what are the true necessities and means of life, it appears as if men had deliberately chosen the common mode of living because they preferred it to any other. Yet they honestly think there is no choice left. But alert and healthy natures remember that the sun rose clear. It is never too late to give up our prejudices" (Thoreau 6). This sentence reveals that while most people lead a despairing, mechanical life, sensitive and healthy individuals can cast aside prejudices and choose a different path for their lives, just as the sun shines on the earth, bringing different vitality to everything. Starting from the legend of Kua Fu chasing the sun, the imagination of racing against the sun expresses humanity's proactive attitude towards conquering and overcoming nature. Consequently, the imagery of the sun naturally became an object of human conquest and an important symbol of humanity's active spirit of exploration. Here, Thoreau attempts to bring new hope to those lost in material desires through the archetype image of the 'sun', and to awaken numb human hearts and guide lost people to the right path.

In *«Where I lived, and what I lived for»*, Thoreau celebrated the "twilight and dawn" before sunrise, and believed that "All memorable events transpire in morning time and in a morning atmosphere" (Thoreau 83). The Vedas say, "All intelligences awake with the morning. "Poetry and art, and the fairest and most memorable of the actions

of men, date from such an hour. All poets and heroes, like Memnon, are the children of Aurora, and emit their music at sunrise. To him whose elastic and vigorous thought keeps pace with the sun, the day is a perpetual morning. It matters not what the clocks say or the attitudes and labors of men." This implicitly conveys Thoreau's life goals, "The present was my next experiment of this kind, which I purpose to describe more at length, for convenience putting the experience of two years into one. As I have said, I do not propose to write an ode to dejection, but to brag as lustily as chanticleer in the morning, standing on his roost, if only to wake my neighbors up" (Thoreau 78). Here, the sun and dawn are not merely confined to being natural beauties; they also symbolize the potential for humans to find or return to a wonderful and noble life. These natural phenomena serve as metaphors, reminding us of the pursuit of a simpler, purer, and more fulfilling existence, transcending material desires and embracing the essence of life.

At the end of the work, Thoreau tells an intriguing story. A strong and beautiful bug was trapped inside a farmer's kitchen for sixty years. After being exposed to hot vapor, it finally hatched into a strong and beautiful creature. Who does not feel his faith in a resurrection and immortality strengthened by hearing of this (Thoreau 312)? If a tiny insect bug can break out of the predicament through perseverance and hard work, then as human beings, we can also transform into perfect new lives as long as we remain steadfast in our beliefs, maintain hope, and persist in our efforts. In the last paragraph of the work, Thoreau wrote meaningfully, "Only that day dawns to which we are awake. There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning star" (Thoreau 213). The 'sun' archetypal symbol reappears here, representing eternal hope and enlightenment for ignorant and numb souls. It serves as a call for American people to awaken, urging them to embrace the possibilities of each new day, recognizing that the journey towards enlightenment and self-realization is a continuous and ever-evolving process.

IV. CONCLUSION

Walden is an enduring masterpiece written by Thoreau during his period of contemplation by Walden Lake, permeated with the spirit of transcendentalism, whose influence has persisted to this day. In "*Walden*," the archetypal images from ancient times constitute Thoreau's psychological value system. The two archetypes of "water" and "sun," although seemingly independent, are intricately woven into the fabric of the work, creating a cohesive and profound exploration of themes. The image of "water" symbolizes Thoreau's spiritual purification and rebirth after withdrawing from industrial society. The imagery of "sun" represents enlightenment and hope. Through these two prototypical imageries, Thoreau points out a way out for both contemporary people and confused modern individuals: instead of indulging in the pursuit of material possessions, one should enrich one's spiritual world to the fullest extent. This is also the social and practical significance of "*Walden*" to this day.

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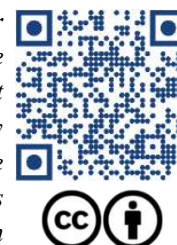
Ontological Displacement and Environmental Justice: A Postcolonial Ecocritical Reading of Pratibha Ray's *Adibhoomi*

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Abstract— This paper examines the symbiotic relationship between the Bonda tribe of Malkangiri and their ancestral ecology as portrayed in Pratibha Ray's *Adibhoomi*. Situated within Postcolonial Ecocriticism, the study critiques the anthropocentric logic of industrial modernity that threatens one of Odisha's most ancient indigenous communities. While Ecocriticism is a contemporary academic discipline, the Bonda worldview reflects a primordial ecological consciousness rooted in spiritual and cultural interdependence with the natural world. The paper introduces the concept of ontological displacement—a condition that extends beyond physical relocation to signify the erosion of a community's cultural being and cosmology. Through Ray's narrative, the commodification of sacred groves and ecological spaces is shown to destabilize indigenous identity at its core. By contrasting tribal ecological wisdom with extractive developmental paradigms, the study argues that genuine environmental justice demands a shift from resource exploitation toward a bio-centric model of coexistence.



Keywords— Postcolonial Ecocriticism, Ontological Displacement, Environmental Justice, Indigenous Ecology, *Adibhoomi*

I. INTRODUCTION

The novel title *Adibhoomi* (*The Primal Land*) shows the profound linguistic signifier for a space where the “natural” and “human” have not been yet bifurcated by the Enlightenment dualism. The ecology isn't merely a scenic background for human action rather, it is the sustainer and source of the Bonda tribe of Malkangiri district of Odisha. Ray's novel serves as a “literary ethnography”, depicting a community that sees the earth as a sentient and ancestral mother rather as a cache of raw materials.

Within the Postcolonial Ecocriticism framework, the novel reflects poignant opposition to the “Second Colonization”, the assertive and aggressive push for the post-independence industrial development and bureaucratic management. The tribal landscapes always categorized as “wastelands” or “unproductive spaces” that are frequently waiting to be extracted in this modern paradigm. However, in the Bonda worldview the distance between the self and soil collapses.

To the Bonda tribe, the hills are not property to be owned rather a geography which is sacred and is to be inhabited.

To describe the particular violence imposed upon the Bonda tribe, this paper introduces the concept of ontological displacement. Ontological displacement is very different from physical displacement. Where physical displacement accounts for the forced movements of bodies; the ontological displacement signifies the erosion of a community, its “cultural being” and its unique cosmology. The Bonda identity is destabilized from its core when the “anthropocentric logic” of industrial modernity commodifies sacred groves and enforces extractive developmental models and also depletes resources.

By comparing the Bonda tribe's primordial ecological knowledge and wisdom with modern developmental paradigms, this research contends that genuine environmental justice for indigenous populations cannot be achieved through monetary compensation or relocation.

Instead, it requires a fundamental change from the resource exploitation to a bio-centered approach of harmony, acknowledging the Bonda tribe not as “backward subjects”, rather as the primary guardians of a primal ecological consciousness.

II. DEFINING ONTOLOGICAL DISPLACEMENT: MORE THAN JUST PHYSICAL MOVEMENT

In traditional sociological discourse, displacement is often quantified by the physical uprooting of bodies from one geographic to another. However, Pratibha Ray's *Adibhoomi* requires a more nuanced framework: ontological displacement. This condition pertains to the fragmentation of the “self” that happens when the external landscape, which reflects the internal spirit of a community, is essentially altered or desacralized.

For the Bonda tribe, the woods serve as a vibrant repository of their cosmology. Every rock, stream, and Sarna (sacred grove) is populated by ancestral beings and gods who establish the ethical and societal sequence of the clan. When industrial modernity encroaches upon Malkangiri, it isn't always start with a bulldozer; it starts with the bureaucratic map. By superimposing legal boundaries and “state property” designations imposed on ancestral territories, the postcolonial state effectively “evicts” the gods prior to evicting the inhabitants.

The Bonda tribe's displacement in the novel is marked by significant breaks that disturb their cultural, spiritual and intellectual foundations. One of the most important is the desacralization of space. Traditionally, the forest is not just a physical space for the Bonda tribe but a sacred terrain, a home to divine entities that shape their cosmology and everyday existence. However, in the novel, this hallowed area is slowly changed into a “unit of production” due to the state development initiatives and commercial use. When sacred groves are removed for roads, plantations, or administrative endeavours, the Bonda tribe feel a deep sense of spiritual dislocation. Although they might continue to reside in the same geographical location, the symbolic and spiritual structures that once gave meaning to their lives are deconstructed, leaving them in a state of what can be called cosmological homelessness.

Another additional critical aspect of this displacement is epistemic violence. The Bonda tribe hold a profound wealth of nature-centered knowledge cultivated over generations of intimate engagement with the environment. Their understanding of medicinal herbs, seasonal cycles, and the sustainable farming method of Donger Chas (shifting cultivation) reflects an advanced ecological insight. However, this traditional knowledge system is often

disregarded by the Gulangbabus, or government officials, who label it to be primitive or unscientific. Such disregard not only diminishes the worth of their expertise but also negates their intellectual autonomy. As a result, the Bonda tribe are forced to perceive their cultural practices and worldview through the skewed lens of the prevailing outsider, depending their feeling of marginalization.

Finally, the displacement is also reflected in the commercialization of the soul. Traditionally, the Bonda tribe upheld a mutually beneficial relationship with the nature, driven by necessity instead of collection. Their economic activities were embedded within ecological harmony and communal ethics. However, the arrival of a cash-based economy disturbs this balance. As Sahukars (moneylenders) and market dynamics increasingly ensnared in cycles of debt and economic reliance. In order to repay debts or satisfy financial obligations, they are frequently compelled to exploit the forests they previously safeguarded. Consequently, the ethical connection between the community and the environment is replaced by an extractive logic driven by greed and survival, causing a deep moral and cultural divide within the Bonda society.

Through Pratibha Ray's narrative, we observe that ontological displacement brings about a deep identity crisis. Characters such as Soma Muduli embody this tension, caught between an ancient past that is being eliminated and contemporary future that renders them nothing more than labor or “backward” relics. The “displacement” here is the loss of a world-view that once allowed the Bonda tribe to exist in perfect equilibrium with the Adibhoomi.

The Conflict of Paradigms: Anthropocentric Modernity vs. Bonda Biocentrism

The central tension in *Adibhoomi* stems from the brutal clash between two irreconcilable theories of existence. Pratibha Ray masterfully demonstrates how the postcolonial state's anthropocentric logic- the idea that humans are masters and only beneficiaries of nature- serves as a means of erasure against the Bonda tribe's Bio-centric framework, which perceives humans as mere threads in a broader ecological fabric.

For the outsiders in the narrative- like the Gulangbabus (government officials), the Sahukars (moneylenders), and certain researchers- the Bonda Hills symbolize a frontier to be conquered, examined, and financially utilized. Their perspectives is influenced by a human-centered logic that considers nature mainly as a resource designed for human consumption. This viewpoint is evident in what can be termed as cartographic violence, where the forest is reduced to measurable units on a map and regarded solely for its economic value. Within this instrumental framework, a tree holds no real significance until is felled and transformed

into lumber, and a hill stays devoid of meaning until its minerals are mined for profit. Such a view strips the landscape of its spiritual and cultural significance, converting a vibrant ecosystem into a space for production and profit.

The anthropocentric ideology further promotes the marginalization of indigenous customs and practices by depicting them as primitive and unreasonable. The agricultural technique of Donger Chas (shifting cultivation), practiced by the Bonda for generations, is dismissed by officials as wasteful and harmful to the environment. The government justifies the taking of tribal land under the pretext of "scientific forestry" and civilizing mission of modernization by categorizing the traditional practices as unscientific. The anthropocentric paradigm not only undermines the Bonda tribe's ecological knowledge but also justifies institutional control over their resources and land.

In opposition to this exploitative perspective, the novel portrays the Bonda tribe's worldview as essentially bio-centric, and their world is interconnected between human being and natural environment as well as being flexible. For the Bonda tribe the forest and the nature are not merely commodities but a living relatives with whom they share a bond of coexistence. Their engagement with the ecosystem is shaped by a spiritual economy focused on sufficiency rather than accumulation. Rituals and traditional practices serve as ecological moderators or regulators that uphold equilibrium within the ecosystem. For instance, the gathering of certain medical herbs is limited to certain lunar phases, ensuring that the species can regenerate and survive. Such practices demonstrate a deep ecological awareness that emphasizes sustainability and respect for the natural environment.

Moreover, the Bonda's decision to abstain from the extensive large-scale exploitation of the forest is portrayed not as a sign of ignorance or backwardness but as a morally driven choice. They understand that the forest's annihilation ultimately leads to the community's own demise. This awareness reflects a deep bio-centric reality that contemporary industrial culture frequently overlooks: the survival of human life cannot be separated from the health of the natural world.

The conflict between these two perspectives is especially evident when the government introduces commercial plantations, like eucalyptus or coffee, in the Bonda Hills. From the perspective of the state, these farms represent progress, lushness, and financial revenue. However, the Bonda's view them in a completely different way. For them, these plantations form a "silent forest", lacking the rich biodiversity, medicinal plants, and ancestral spirits that historically supported their culture and livelihood. What

appears to be a flourishing environment from a distance is, in truth, a "green desert" devoid of ecological balance and spiritual meaning. This transformation ultimately demonstrates the victory of anthropocentric logic, wherein nature is modified to operate like a factory instead of a living ecosystem.

By emphasizing this conflict, Pratibha Ray implies that the Bonda are not "backward" people living in the past; instead, they are the practitioners of future-proof philosophy. Their bio-centricity provides a remedy to the extractive paradigms that have resulted in today's global climate crisis.

III. GENDERED ECOLOGY AND THE PATH TO ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

In *Adibhoomi*, the advocacy for a bio-centric worldview is depicted not as a gender-neutral process; rather, the narrative highlights Bonda women as central to ecological preservation. Ray indicates that while many Bonda men are slowly entangled in the human-centred systems introduced by outsiders- frequently getting trapped in wage labour, alcoholism, or debt to Sahukars- the women remain deeply connected to the land's rhythms. Their lives remain centred on the forests, fields, and seasonal cycles that sustain the community. In this way, the Bonda woman emerges as the main guardian of ancestral ecology, upholding the customs that maintain the community's relationship with nature even as external forces try to transform it.

Ray's portrayal of Bonda women is marked by their unique clothing, beadwork, and shaven heads- subverts the contemporary perspectives that frequently label them as exotic and primitive. Instead, their everyday work transforms into a form of ecological defiance and conservation. Through activities such as collecting forest resources and managing Donger Chas (shifting cultivation), they sustain the ecological knowledge inherited through generations. The Bonda women recall the names and uses of medicinal herbs, follow the cultural rituals and heritage that connects the community to its surroundings. Their refusal to adopt "civilized" attire or embrace modern consumer habits symbolizes a rejection of commodifying principles of industrial modernity. In this regard, their bodies and labour remain autonomous realms that resist the encroachment of an extractive economy.

Through this story, Ray reinterprets the idea of environmental justice within a postcolonial framework. Justice for Bonda should not only involve financial compensation or the redistribution of resources; it demands acknowledgement of their ontological and epistemic rights. True justice involves recognizing the Bonda's right to their own and unique way of living and realizing that the forest is not merely a group of trees but a space of cultural,

spiritual, and communal significance. It also requires epistemic justice, where Bonda ecological knowledge is acknowledged as an advanced environmental science rather than dismissed as superstition.

Ultimately, the novel promotes a transition from exploitation of coexistence via a bio-centric framework that dismisses the hierarchy of human dominance over nature. By the end, Ray presents not a traditional conclusion but a survival manifesto, where the resilience of the Bonda becomes a powerful critique of a contemporary society that values profit over ecological balance and depicts environmental justice as the restoration of the human connection to the land.

IV. CONCLUSION

Pratibha Ray's *Adibhoomi* goes beyond the traditional boundaries of fiction to emerge as a powerful critique of the "slow violence" inherent in industrial modernity. Through the perspective of Postcolonial Ecocriticism, the story illustrates that the dilemma confronting the Bonda tribe is not merely an economic or environmental concern; it signifies a deep ontological displacement. When the state begins to commercialize the "Primal Land", it destabilizes the very foundation of indigenous identity. The Forest, previously a sacred and living space rich in cultural and spiritual significance, is now changed into a location for production and extraction. In this process, the native cosmology that once shaped the Bonda perspective is gradually replaced by a barren logic of development and economic exploitation.

The study suggests that the Bonda perspective- often overlooked by outsiders as primitive- actually represents a sophisticated bio-centric framework for coexistence that is highly pertinent in today's global ecological crisis. Their spiritual and material connection with the forest reflects a system of reciprocity instead of domination. From this perspective, the survival of indigenous peoples is intertwined with the safeguarding of sacred landscapes, where loss equates to the loss of cultural identity and spiritual belonging. At the same time, the story critiques the prevailing model of postcolonial development, which often functions as a form of "second colonization". In the name of progress, government- driven development initiatives eliminate indigenous knowledge systems and practices, leading to a type of epistemicide. Within this context, Bonda women serve as powerful agents of resistance, preserving the community's connection with the land through rituals, traditional ecological knowledge, and sustainable labour practices.

Moving forward, the concept of true environmental justice must extend beyond the limited scope of distributive justice

provided by legal systems. For communities like the Bonda, justice must take the form of restorative recognition that acknowledges their sovereignty over cultural, spiritual, and ecological stories. Such recognition necessitates honouring their right to manage their ancestral territories according to their traditional knowledge and values. Ultimately, *Adibhoomi* serves as a prophetic warning in the era of the Anthropocene. As the modern world faces the repercussions of ecological destruction, the Bonda's primordial ecological consciousness serves as a reminder that people are not merely residents of the Earth but are intrinsically a part of it. The survival of the Bonda and their Adibhoomi represents not just the safeguarding of an indigenous culture, but also the survival of humanity's profound spiritual bond with the natural environment.

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Beneath the Quilt: ‘Internal Drives’ – A Socio-Cultural Deliberation of Ismat Chughtai’s “Lihaaf”

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Abstract— *Ismat Chughtai's Lihaaf (The Quilt, 1942) holds a radical place in the literary canon. Lihaaf explains beyond its description of hidden sexual desires to function as an essential linguistic and cultural text that challenges and undermines the patriarchal society and systems of its historical period while maintaining relevance for modern society. The work functions as a social artefact that showcases both the power of spoken language and the significance of silence. The combination of metaphors and social codes reveals the hidden desires and gender-based power structures present in Muslim upper-class families during the time of British rule in India. Chughtai's deliberate choice of a child narrator, together with her use of silence codes from different cultures, enables readers to explore hidden material which transforms Lihaaf into a work that reveals and defines itself. The study examines how Chughtai's story reveals the limitations of acceptable speech that people considered acceptable, leading to a powerful yet concealed feminine desire in a society where language functions as both a weapon and a limiting force.*



Keywords— *Ismat Chughtai, Lihaaf, Feminine Desire, Patriarchal Society, Silence and Language*

I. INTRODUCTION

The first publication of Ismat Chughtai's work *Lihaaf* occurred in 1942 at a time when Indian society faced dual challenges because colonial powers imposed their rule while complex systems of male dominance controlled social life. The narrative that Chughtai created established new boundaries that focused on how writers could create functional and fictional representations of women's physical and psychological states. The Muslim household setting in *Lihaaf* serves as the foundation for a thorough understanding of gender-based double standards, which demonstrate how societal expectations defined women's physical appearance, romantic needs and personal choices.

This story led to an obscenity trial, which became a public event that demonstrated the very matters which *Lihaaf* intended to disclose. Chughtai used her writing to show resistance against authority because she declared in her memoir that "*My pen is my own; it will not be silenced.*" The statement functions as a personal dedication which she used to develop her political resistance against attempts that wanted to force her to become a submissive follower..

Chughtai used the opportunity to assert that women's personal experiences and needs, and their emotional responses, should receive recognition as legitimate elements that should be portrayed in literature. The process enabled her to create a pathway that upcoming authors could use to display complex gender and sexual themes that exist throughout South Asian written works.

II. CULTURAL CONTEXT AND THE FEMININE SPACE

Chughtai sharpens this critique through her description of Begum Jan as "a picture of elegance and loneliness... like a discarded painting on the wall" (Chughtai, 2009, p. 6). The metaphor of the *discarded painting* is especially telling: Begum Jan is beautiful, valuable, and visibly present, yet fundamentally irrelevant to the rhythms of household life. Her elegance is rendered static, aestheticised, and ultimately inert, suggesting that patriarchal culture prefers women as decorative objects rather than desiring subjects. The *zenana* thus becomes a physical manifestation of emotional

abandonment—a place where women are kept, but not cared for.

Set within the **zenana**, the secluded women's quarters of an upper-class Muslim household, *Lihaaf* situates its critique of patriarchy in a space traditionally imagined as safe, protected, and respectable—but which Chughtai exposes as emotionally stifling and socially punitive. The zenana, ostensibly created to preserve women's honour, operates in the story as a zone of **architectural confinement**, where movement, interaction, and even desire are regulated. The Nawab's indifference intensifies this sense of entrapment. His refusal to acknowledge Begum Jan's physical or emotional needs is framed not as cruelty but as an accepted masculine privilege; his nocturnal pursuits outside the marriage raise no questions, while Begum Jan's unmet desires are treated as embarrassing, even dangerous. In this asymmetry, Chughtai reveals the **gendered double standard of desire**: male sexuality is granted freedom, mobility, even social legitimacy, whereas female sexuality is either denied or pathologised. Begum Jan's yearning becomes "monstrous" only because society cannot imagine women as autonomous beings with legitimate bodily needs.

Within this cloistered environment, Begum Jan's loneliness becomes not an incidental detail but a direct consequence of the cultural logic that keeps women hidden away while granting men near-total social mobility. It is within this tightly controlled cultural and spatial order that Begum Jan turns toward Rabbo, her masseuse and servant. Their bond is not depicted simply as a scandalous departure from heteronormative expectations, but as a **pragmatic, tender, and deeply human response** to deprivation. By locating this relationship in the shadows of the zenana, Chughtai exposes how the very architecture meant to enforce normative femininity inadvertently cultivates alternative forms of intimacy. Begum Jan's reliance on Rabbo thus becomes both an act of survival and a quiet rebellion against the structures that have denied her companionship, pleasure, and dignity.

Through this intimate yet subversive relationship, Chughtai demonstrates that desire does not vanish simply because society forbids it; rather, it reshapes itself in the spaces where women are left to negotiate their own emotional lives. The feminine space of the zenana, far from being a passive backdrop, becomes a **site where power, repression, and resistance converge**, revealing the cracks in a patriarchal system that seeks to contain women both physically and emotionally.

III. THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE AND NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

This narrative technique also reveals the **linguistic limitations** that structure the child's observations. Because she has no words—socially sanctioned or otherwise—to describe the intimacy between Begum Jan and Rabbo, the narrator resorts to sensory impressions: shadows, movements, sounds. The absence of naming becomes a form of commentary: if the narrator cannot name what she sees, it is because the culture around her refuses to provide the language to do so. Thus, Chughtai uses the child's voice to expose the **semantic void** surrounding queer female desire in South Asian literary and social discourse.

The narrative voice of *Lihaaf* is deliberately entrusted to a young girl, a choice that allows Chughtai to explore taboo subjects through a linguistic register that is simultaneously innocent and deeply revealing. The child narrator's limited vocabulary and incomplete understanding become narrative strategies that allow Chughtai to describe a forbidden intimacy without ever naming it—thus evading both the moral censorship of her time and the lexical constraints of Urdu, which lacked socially acceptable terms for female same-sex desire.

The girl's confusion is vividly illustrated when she observes the strange movement of the quilt: "I was scared stiff. In the darkness, the quilt was once again swinging like an elephant" (Chughtai, 2009, p. 11). What an adult might interpret as unmistakably erotic is refracted through the child's imagination as something both fantastical and frightening. The metaphor of the "elephant" underscores her inability to comprehend the bodily actions beneath the quilt; it transforms the sexual into the surreal. Chughtai uses this gap between perception and reality to illuminate how patriarchal cultures depend on silence and euphemism to obscure women's desires, especially those that do not conform to heterosexual norms.

Furthermore, the use of a child narrator complicates the moral dynamics of the text. The narrator's innocence prevents her from imposing adult judgments; instead, she relays events with a directness that strips away socially constructed shame. As literary critic Ruth Vanita observes, "the child narrator is not naïve but serves to expose the limits of adult hypocrisy" (Vanita, 2002). The young girl inadvertently reveals more about the adults' secrecy, suppression, and contradictions than any omniscient narrator could. Her confusion highlights the absurdity of a society that polices women's desires while leaving its children to parse unspoken truths through gestures and shadows.

In this way, Chughtai transforms the child's perspective into a **linguistic mediating device**, one that reveals not only the

contours of Begum Jan and Rabbo's relationship but also the cultural structures that make such a relationship unspeakable. The narrator's innocence becomes a powerful tool: it allows Chughtai to critique gender, sexuality, and censorship precisely by showing how these forces fracture language itself.

IV. METAPHOR, SILENCE, AND THE UNSAID

Lihaaf uses its poetic development to create controlled language which establishes its meaning through indirect references that use symbols and sensory confusion. The particular way Chughtai writes her work is not just an artistic decision because it establishes her political position. Through her use of metaphor to express desire she develops a story that communicates through indirect methods while showing partial information. The quilt named lihaaf serves as the story's primary metaphorical element. The narrator uses the quilt's movements and textures and shapes to display his erotic experiences which he cannot understand or explain because of his cultural background. The narrator describes the quilt swaying movement in the first moment which leads to his shrieking when Begum Jan covers his mouth (Chughtai, 2009, p. 12). The quilt sways because it indicates hidden physical presence; however the action of Begum Jan silencing the child shows how society maintains control over women's private matters. At this moment speech becomes dangerous because it becomes impossible to speak.

Critics such as Priya Kumar have argued that "Chughtai's story articulates a queer semiotics—where touch, glance, and metaphor replace direct expression" (Kumar, 2011, p. 38). This insight underscores how *Lihaaf* operates through a language of indirection, in which meaning is generated not through explicit depiction but through the interplay of bodily gestures, shifting shadows, and the materiality of domestic objects. The quilt functions as a semiotic surface upon which forbidden desire is projected. It becomes a substitute for unsayable acts, a screen that both protects and betrays.

More than a symbol, the quilt is a *dynamic agent* within the text. Its movements mark the presence of desire that cannot be voiced, and its opacity embodies the social constraints that force women's experiences into silence. Through the quilt, Chughtai renders visible the rhythm of intimacy while still concealing its details, thereby critiquing a cultural regime that demands invisibility even as it produces the very desires it attempts to suppress. The quilt's dual role—shielding what occurs beneath it while simultaneously exposing that something is indeed occurring—captures the paradox at the heart of Chughtai's narrative: desire thrives in the spaces where language fails.

In transforming an everyday household object into a vessel of encoded sexuality, Chughtai exposes the limits of social propriety and linguistic convention. The quilt becomes a site where censorship, pleasure, and imagination converge, allowing *Lihaaf* to speak boldly from behind a veil of metaphor. It is through this careful negotiation of visibility and concealment that the story crafts its enduring critique of gender, sexuality, and the cultural politics of silence.

V. LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Chughtai's use of the Urdu language—traditionally associated with romanticism, refined sentiment, and a carefully policed moral decorum—to convey a subversive tale of queer desire is itself a linguistic rebellion. By choosing a literary register that had long been shaped by courtly love poetry and patriarchal norms, she exposes the tension between what Urdu was expected to represent and what it could, in fact, be made to reveal. Her idiomatic choices, which weave together everyday colloquialisms with moments of lyrical intensity, create a layered narrative voice that feels simultaneously intimate and disruptive. This stylistic blending not only heightens the story's emotional resonance but also enables Chughtai to cloak radical critique within seemingly innocuous, even playful, language.

Through this hybrid style, Chughtai sidesteps the limitations imposed by both literary tradition and colonial-era censorship, using Urdu's richness to gesture toward what cannot be stated outright. The text's suggestive metaphors, symbolic imagery, and strategic ambiguity become tools of resistance—ways to speak the unspeakable while exposing the hypocrisies that governed conversations about gender, sexuality, and respectability. Her linguistic maneuvers reveal how language itself can be mobilized to challenge social norms: the very cadences meant to uphold modesty become vehicles for unveiling forbidden intimacies.

The obscenity trial that followed *Lihaaf*'s publication demonstrates just how profoundly such linguistic freedom unsettled the authorities of the time. The courtroom became a stage for society's anxieties about women's voices, bodily autonomy, and sexual knowledge, and the outrage directed at Chughtai showed that it was not merely the story's implications but her audacity in *writing* them—in Urdu, no less—that provoked discomfort. Even decades later, when Chughtai reflected on the controversy, she understood the political stakes of her craft. "If writing is a crime," she asserted, "then I accept the punishment with pride" (Chughtai, 2009). With this declaration, she reaffirmed her belief in literature as an act of defiance and in language as a

space where silenced experiences could be reclaimed and made visible.

VI. CONCLUSION

Lihaaf endures not merely as a story of illicit love but as a layered socio-linguistic text that dismantles the structures that have historically muted women's voices and desires. Its power lies in how it uses narrative technique, metaphor, and cultural context to foreground the very mechanisms of silence that shape women's lives. Chughtai does not simply portray subversive desire; she demonstrates how language itself—its gaps, evasions, and coded gestures—becomes both a prison and a site of resistance for women seeking to articulate experiences deemed unspeakable.

The story's reliance on metaphor and sensory suggestion is crucial in this regard. The iconic image of the *lihaaf*, or quilt, becomes more than a coverlet obscuring bodies; it symbolizes the layers of secrecy imposed on female desire in patriarchal society. This metaphorical strategy allows Chughtai to represent queer sexuality without naming it, revealing how women often resort to symbolic or indirect expression because direct articulation is socially forbidden. The quilt's movements, shadows, and distortions become a language in themselves—a visual grammar of desire that exceeds the boundaries of permissible speech.

The child narrator further complicates this linguistic terrain. Her naïve observations expose not only the story's events but also the cultural frameworks that train women into silence. What the child cannot understand—or is not allowed to understand—mirrors what society refuses to articulate. Through this carefully chosen narrative voice, Chughtai underscores how language and knowledge are policed from childhood onward, shaping the limits of what women may see, say, or even imagine.

Culturally, the story situates itself at the intersection of domesticity, respectability, and erotic undercurrents that remain unspoken but palpable. By disrupting the genteel veneer associated with middle-class Muslim households, Chughtai forces the reader to confront the contradictions between public morality and private longing. This cultural framing shows that silence itself is ideological: it maintains patriarchal control by erasing women's autonomy and censoring expressions of non-normative sexuality.

In challenging both linguistic structures and societal norms, *Lihaaf* becomes a foundational text in feminist and queer literary discourse—not simply because it depicts queer desire, but because it interrogates the very systems that prohibit such depictions. Chughtai's narrative strategy anticipates later feminist critiques of language as a tool of power, revealing how women writers must invent new

forms of expression to articulate experiences that dominant discourse excludes. The story endures as a testament to how literature can expose, subvert, and ultimately reimagine the social and linguistic frameworks that constrain women's lives.

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‘Stifled sojourns in Anna Burns’ *Milkman*: A culture of coercion?

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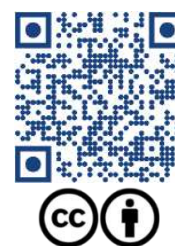
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Abstract— This text examines the contours of the life of the female protagonist in Burn’s *Milkman*, set in Northern Ireland in the 1970s and how this character’s life is heavily conditioned by community gossip in the manner in which it exerts influence and control over her life and the wider lived experience of the community in question.

Keywords— Community Gossip, Female Protagonist, Social Control, Northern Ireland Conflict, Cultural Conditioning



Introduction

This paper seeks to analyse the contours of a heavily conditioned community in Northern Ireland in the 1970s through the experiences of the protagonist, an unnamed young woman who stands as the narrator throughout the novel. The examination of this story seeks to unearth the cultural cross currents that conditioned imagined and actual living conditions in an already traumatised community as revealed in a fictional account of how one woman’s life is largely controlled by hearsay originated in and sustained by the community around her which she has grave difficulty escaping from.

Attention is also directed towards examining the potency of language manifested in conversation as depicted through fictional dialogues between key characters that denote the changing nodes of communication/adhesion and the intensity of their presence within the life of the community in question (i.e. Northern Ireland). It seeks to discover whether ever greater entanglement of an individual within such a system ultimately results in their estrangement from the host culture.

Burn’s novel consists of a series of conversations between the unnamed female protagonist as she attempts to deal with

a constant stream of rumours generated by incessant gossip about her instigated by other women in the community.

The reader is quickly catapulted into the raging tensions of a fictional community in Northern Ireland where paramilitary politics is the unofficial government. No characters are given proper names and so the reader is left to concentrate on contemplating circumstances more extensively than perhaps would otherwise be expected. The central element of this novel is the factor of control by means of a community narrative directed toward a specific chosen target, which takes the form of gossip. In his 2021 book *Small World: Ireland, 1798-2018*, Prof. Seamus Deane observes that in *Milkman*:

This first-person voice is the register for all voices; everybody speaks in it, or is reported as having spoken in it, almost all improbably and polysyllabically articulate. They are both loquacious and eloquent deploying the trusted ironic Irish device of counterpointing such speech with the actualities of their materially and culturally impoverished lives. The collision between archaic syntax and vocabulary, both beautifully controlled, and the conditions of cheap

consumer surfeit capitalism and neo-colonial civil war produces a series of grotesque detonations.

(Deane, 2021: 243)

Page 1 of the novel sketches out the dynamics at play in this community heavily conditioned by gossip:

The day Somebody McSomebody put a gun to breast and called me a cat and threatened to shoot me was the same day the milkman died. He had been shot by one of the state hit squads and I did not care about the shooting of this man. Others did care though, and some were those who in the parlance 'knew me to see but not to speak to' and I was being talked about because there was a rumour started by them, or more likely by first brother-in-law, that I had been having an affair with this milkman and that I was eighteen and he was forty-one (...)

(Burns, 2018: 1)

What may be fact or perhaps even fable cannot be distinguished one from the other. Gossip takes on the role of the governing narrative of the community and this has the effect of conditioning and controlling all those caught up in its composition. Such is the power of this gossip, that its content is treated as truth in the assumption that whether or not any veracity lies behind any charges or assertions is irrelevant as the mere mention of its apparent existence within the gossip gives it meaningful status as evident as any genuine truth.

Information heard through means of gossip is thus believed without further doubt:

I knew his age, not because he got shot and it was given by the media, but because there had been talk before this, for months before the shooting, by these people of the rumour, that forty-one and eighteen was disgusting, that he was married and not to be fooled by me for there were plenty of quiet unnoticeable people who took a bit of watching.

(Burns, 2018: 1)

From the outset it is clear that the instrument of gossip is also means of surveillance so as to augment control over elements of the community, but particularly exerted by women over other women as well as serving as means to criticise the actions and behaviour of men. As Schantz (2008: 11) has noted, gossip can be seen as

a kind of archetypal model of women using their informal connections both to sustain themselves on a daily basis and to intervene in the machinations of men, and it is therefore the most

basic mode of what I call female networking. (...) the power of gossip to counter the abuses of unscrupulous men.

The protagonist lives in a world of paramilitarism and is constantly assailed by reminders of its presence in form of the men that comprise the membership of such illegal organisations. Such is the reduced power – although not totally absent – of women, they make imaginative use of their words and networks to highlight and chastise supposed-wrongdoers and practitioners of varying levels of infringements. It is the protagonist herself who is the general target of these activities throughout the novel. Moreover, the nature of this gossip is indicative of Deane's reference to 'culturally impoverished lives' and what he observes as 'a series of grotesque denotations' that materialised through some ever more vigorous and violent incidents.

We find the protagonist at pains to carefully and tortuously clarify every element of her thinking and speech for fear of being misunderstood, mislabelled and ultimately her fear for being punished for adopting an incorrect position whether or not it she actually made any such utterances. Allowances are made for the existence of certain conventions, but all other possible deviations are carefully avoided and carefully explained if they must be mentioned at all:

(...) Now and then we might make an effort and say 'defender' or 'renouncer' though only when attempting to enlighten outsiders, for mostly we didn't bother when it was ourselves. 'Us' and 'them' was second nature: convenient, familiar, insider, and these words were off-the-cuff, without the strain of having to remember and grapple with massaged phrases as diplomatically correct niceties. By unspoken agreement which outsiders couldn't grasp unless it should come to their own private expedencies – it was unanimously understood that when everybody here use the tribal identifiers of 'us' or 'them', of 'their religion' or 'our religion', not all of us and not all of them was, it goes without saying, to be taken as read.

(Burns, 2018: 22)

Challenging assumptions

The reader is challenged to notice and understand what should or should not be 'taken as read'. Such is the velocity of the gossip at play a strong degree of instability persists which frustrates attempts to arrive at a reliable interpretation of the message being transmitted by the gossip itself. The aforementioned 'private expedencies' have a strong role to play in fortifying individuals as they attempt to live under such complex circumstances. However, it is impossible to

ignore the armed conflict that almost became a civil war at times which challenged not only bodily integrity but logical reasoning, the latter of which remains under siege as we can see: 'Naïvete? Tradition? Reality? War going on and people in a hurry? Take your pick though the answer is the last one. In those early days those darker of the dark days there wasn't time for vocabulary watchdogs, for political correctness. (...)' (Burns, 2018: 22).

Aspersions are cast and images made and this means that gossip functions in that, Patricia Spacks view it:

...manifests itself as distilled malice. It plays with reputations, circulating truths and half-truths and falsehoods about the activities, sometimes about the motives and feelings, of others. Often it serves serious (possibly unconscious) purposes for the gossipers, whose manipulations of reputation can further political or social ambitions by damaging competitors or enemies, gratify envy and rage by diminishing another, generate an immediately satisfying sense of power, although the talkers acknowledge no such intent.

(Spacks, 1985: 3-5)

While it is not openly acknowledged, the power of gossip to condition is actively used by unnamed female figures in *Milkman* to elicit information to refute allegations made or to confirm charges advanced and thus control behaviour through such devices as 'manipulations of character'. There is no real doubt that malicious intent is at play.

The presence of the Union Jack is rejected in nationalist areas and is contested as a symbol of the state of Northern Ireland by those who oppose the union so that its mere presence elicits immediate suspicion:

It was not a flag greatly welcomed in our community. Not a flag at all welcomed in our community. There weren't any, not any, this side of the road. What I was gathering, therefore, for I was not up on cars but was up on flags and emblems, was that those vintage, classic Blower Bentleys made in that country 'over the water' came with the flag on from that country 'over the water.' Reading between the lines, therefore, of maybe-boyfriend's neighbour's comment – what was maybe-boyfriend doing he implied, not only partaking in a raffle in which he might have won the bit with the flag on, but what was he doing, partaking in a raffle to win any bit – flag or no flag – of such a patriotic nation – defining, 'over the water' symbol at all? Historical injustice he said. Repressive legislation, he said. Practice of and pacts for, he said. Artificial boundaries, he said. Propping up of corruption, he said. Arrest without

charge he said. Prohibition of inquests, he said. Institutionalized violation of sovereignty and territory, he said. (...)

(Burns, 2018: 26)

As is abundantly clear from this densely-packed fragment of dialogue, multiple issues pertaining to identity, membership of in and out-groups as well as worries about possible suspicions are part and parcel of the lives of the character's in Burns' fictional Northern Irish city. While not the solely vocal character, the protagonist is directly affected by all the suspicion and innuendo that is infused into every conversation and interaction through the medium of pervasive dialogue across the community in which she lives.

Sectarianism is a central theme of *Milkman* and the nationalist community in which the protagonist lives remains extremely vigilant in its efforts to distinguish and defend itself against the slightest suggestion of acquiescence or cooperation with the 'other' side. Enormous energy is expended on maintaining this veil of separation and the existence of this narrative sustains a certain level of coercion over all members of the community. Ample evidence of this runs throughout the novel as the following tract attests:

(...) he said, 'don't get me wrong or anything or anything, and obviously I'm saying this from a place of humility, and it's not that I've got experience in desiring to take part in anything disloyal to my own community, something that might involve winning something that had that flag on, then bringing it home, then being proud to have it in my area instead of being ashamed to have it in my area. Far be it for me to, to asperse anything or anybody, to sow seeds of rancour. I'm not a stirrer-upper of rules or a summarizer of conclusions and no expert am I either or inciter or bigot; in fact, ignorant as I am and gingerly as I hesitate to voice an opinion but...' – then, he repeated all that about no matter how famous and coveted was the thing with the flag on, he himself wouldn't deign to legitimate such an ensign of oppression, of tragedy of tyranny, not to mention the bad taste left in the mouth of losing face, not so much to the country 'over the water', as to that community 'over the road.'

(Burns, 2018: 27)

Of particular note here are the words 'wouldn't deign to legitimate such an ensign of oppression, of tragedy of tyranny'. While this refers to the nationalist community's abhorrence for any act of aiding or abetting the British government to remain in control of their country, it is also a

highly ironic assertion since the power of such statements themselves stifling and have a chilling effect on the very community it is claimed to protect. The use of loaded language to affect control across communities remains relatively placid until local paramilitaries periodically engage in acts of violent intimidation and physical assault as a reminder of their presence and power. A subtle reminder of this practice comes in the form of when the narrator mentions how:

It was that people were quick to point fingers, to judge, to add on even in peaceful times, so it would be hard to fathom fingers not getting pointed and words not being added, also being judged in these turbulent times, resulting too, not in having your feelings hurt upon discovering others were talking about you, as in having individuals in balaclavas and Halloween masks, guns at the ready, turning up in the middle of the night at your door.

(Burns, 2018: 28)

Gossip thus represents a powerful instrument of social control and it is used to full effect by the powerbrokers of the Burn's novel. While its substance may be difficult to quantify, its effect is real. This tendency has been clearly identified in the work of Blakey Vermeule (2006) who has asserted that:

Even the most casual reader of social fiction will recognize that gossiping is what characters do most passionately. However, they can neither admit nor be aware of it. Only minor or morally compromised characters are allowed to indulge in its pleasure. Matronly middle-aged women, chatty maids, little girls, and effeminate fops are the ones who gossip; their more reflective counterparts—the men and women designated as heroes and heroines—only briefly tolerate such idle chatter. Gossip is derided, decried, condemned, and maligned. It is womanish, low, slavish, servantish, silly, pert, loose, wanton, jiggetty, mean. (...) Gossip has always been a part of charivari with the power to turn the world upside down. It also has the power to destroy lives (...)

(Vermeule, 2006: 102)

Vermeule's assertion indicates the contempt in which the medium of gossip is held, but once again her analysis recognises the tangible power of the medium itself to the level that lives can be demolished should those who wield the medium direct their efforts with sufficient determination and force at specific targets. This remains a central theme throughout *Milkman*.

Stifled sojourns

As the character's attempt to navigate their lives within such a tension-filled terrorism-tinged community, the issues of privacy and intimacy are also frustrated by the near-schizophrenic self-correction and mutual suspicion and potential – real or imagined – threats being dangled in the air before people in public and in private. This issue affects the protagonist as she and her casual-temporary boyfriend negotiate their *situationship* in a vein of mutual naivety and immaturity which are both products and causes of the strained-state of human relations in Burn's presumed Northern Irish city. Each act of tenderness, each cautious step forward is continually frustrated as the couple grapple with their romance within a strained environment the suspicious mindset that stems from it. The protagonist's description of their struggles captures this situation vividly:

Always it happened. I would suggest closeness as a way of forwarding on our relationship and it would backfire and I'd forget I'd suggested it would backfire and I'd forget I'd suggested closeness and he'd have to remind me when next I suggested closeness. Then the boot would be on the other foot and he'd suffer a misfiring of neurons and go and suggest closeness himself.

Constantly we were having memory lapses, episodes of a kind of *jamais vu*. We wouldn't remember that we'd remembered and would have to remind each other of our forgetfulness and of how closeness didn't work for us given the state of the delicacy our maybe-relationship was in. And how it was his turn to forget and to say that he thought I should consider us living together, because we'd been nearly a year now into our 'maybe' capacity, so feasibly we could forward on proper coupledness by cohabiting. It wasn't as if either, he said, we've previously discussed closeness or moving in together – which, when he finished speaking, I'd have to remind him that we had. (...)

A tortuous game of slight advancement and cautious retreat continually retards the ability of the couple to grow their amorous attachment into a mature relationship. Constant fear and mistiming further complicates matters as each party declines opportunities to clearly affirm their feelings for one another. As these problems persist, so too do unfounded, yet persistent rumours of the romantic connection between the protagonist and a key powerful paramilitary figure in the community. Although based on lies since there is no connection at all, the rumours prove damaging in respect of the mother-daughter relationship and also cause an erosion in the barrier between public and private life embodied by

privacy. This, as Vermeule has noted, 'has the power to destroy lives and to derail love...If it is ever innocent, it is only because it is meaningless' (Vermeule, 2006: 102). Thus, what would otherwise be idle gossip sustained by vacuous rumour is given meaning by those members of the community in search of power and meaning themselves. This is in evidence when the protagonist is once again forced to deny rumours turned charged levelled against by her own mother which have to do with the fact that:

I told her I wasn't having an affair with him, nor had I ever wished for an affair that instead, it has been him, solely him, pursuing and importuning as it seemed, to start an affair with me. I said he'd approached me twice, only twice, and I explained the circumstances of each meeting. (...) I ended by admitting that I hadn't wanted to tell out any of this not just to her but to anyone. I said this was because of the twisting of words, the fabrication of words, and the exaggeration of words that went on in this place. I'd have lost power, such as was my power, if I'd tried to explain and to win over all those gossiping about me. So I'd kept silent, I said. I'd asked no questions, answered no questions, gave no confirmation, no refutation. That way, I said, I'd hoped to maintain a border to keep my mind separate. That way I said I'd hoped to ground and protect myself.

(Burns, 2018: 54)

The protagonist seeks to protect her own mental integrity and remain separate to the malicious conversations taking place about her in the wider community. Yet, her attempts at non-engagement are treated as her way of confirming such claims. The fabric of human dignity: privacy is thus under attack in this way as the protagonist grapples with fading attachment with those who love her due to the effect of mistruth propagated by continuous malicious gossip.

Cultural control: the instrument of gossip

Community gossip functions not only as an instrument of social control, but also as an effective policing device which is clear from how the narrator regards these commentaries where even one's best attempts at detached are usually unsuccessful:

(...) I myself paid little attention to the problems but I paid at least the minimum, something I could not have avoided because of osmosis. Brother-in-law, however, paid no attention either to osmosis, to the very noticeable social and political upheaval of the time and the place he was living in. (...) Drinking, fighting and rioting were run-of-the-mill, customary necessary even, as hardly to be discerned as mental aberrations. Also hardly to be

discerned as an aberration was all that repertoire of gossip, secrecy and communal policing, plus the rules of what was allowed and not allowed that featured heavily in this place. Regarding the slight aberrations, the convention was to rub along with, to turn a blind eye, because life was being attempted where you had to cut corners; impossible therefore, to give one hundred per cent. (...)

(Burns, 2018: 59)

Ordinary human desires such as free imagination and explorations of romantic entanglements as well as other mundane matters are foreclosed as meaningful choices given the near-totalitarian level of self-inflicted gossip-centred behavioural control where some degree of mental distance is required even to survive. A minor escape from all this tension is secured when the protagonist signs up for French lessons but even seemingly innocent questions illuminate the limits that have grown up around their ability to imagine the world. A remark from the French teacher sets this process in motion with the realisation that the existence of choices can sometimes also represent an undesired source of danger:

(...) 'So, class,' said the teacher after this applause had died down, 'is it that you think the sky can only be blue?'

'The sky is blue,' came us. 'What colour else can it be?'

Of course we knew really that the sky could be more than blue, two more but why should any of us admit to that? I myself never admitted to it. Not even the week before when I experienced my first sunset with maybe-boyfriend did I admit it. Even then, even though there were more colours than the acceptable three in the sky – blue (the day sky), black (the night sky) and white (clouds) – that evening still I kept my mouth shut. And now the others in this class – all older than me, some as old as thirty – also weren't admitting it. It was the convention not to admit it, not to accept detail for this type of detail would mean choice and choice would mean responsibility and what if we failed in our responsibility?

A problematic paradigm

And what of this so-called 'failure of responsibility'? *Who* has failed at *what*? Is the inability or refusal to exercise one's capacity to think or make choices the greater evil or the merely a symptom of a dysfunctional society? The protagonist appears to recognise these dynamics but her reaction to the question indicates the level of conditioning

and intimidation that has permeated throughout the community. Dreaming of alternatives is thus strongly discouraged as being beyond the realms of the possible or an occasion to face unpleasant truths which nobody really wishes to face under the existing climate.

Deep reflection of the dull reality of life is discouraged but not entirely absent as people are aware of their own discontent. Hope, however, remains a rare commodity:

(...) yet most people I knew weren't happy. Neither in this workaday world, in this little-human-being world, did we spend time counting blessings and eschewing the relative in favour of the eternal. That relative, that temporal plane – where sensitivities vary, where no one has the same personal history even if they have the same communal history, where something which is a trigger for one person passes off unnoticed by another person – definitely was the plane where the raw living of life and the imperfect mental response to that living of life took place.

(Burns, 2018: 88)

Once again, this provides an illustration of Deane's reference to 'culturally impoverished lives' which relies on personal initiative and resilience to sustain the wider community – personal survival takes precedence over cultural development. What passes as a noble lie consensus substitutes obvious truths which cannot be openly acknowledge, a practice which offers comfort and stability that is exhibited in the narrative toward the end of the novel which observers:

(...) unadmitted sorrow which does every uneven relationship but also about the distorted forms which can be taken by unexamined social consensus. Only a part of the truth can ever be grasped by each person, but never the whole story: yet in order to function, the community needs to agree to believe in certain lies

(Burns, 2018: 408-9)

Sustaining the imagined existence of an agreed collective illusion requires fabricating the substance of its content and this frequently involves targeting certain individuals as is the case with the protagonist who is constantly rumoured to be a lover of a known paramilitary, popularly known as the milkman. The weight of history is present everywhere, if not fully acknowledge in mind, physical routine does, however, fully reflect this reality. Nuanced placid thoughts are periodically interrupted by sporadic and deliberate acts of violence where:

Drinking, fighting and rioting were run-of-the-mill, customary necessary even, as hardly to be

discerned as mental aberrations. Also hardly to be discerned as an aberration was all that repertoire of gossip, secrecy and communal policing, plus the rules of what was allowed and not allowed that featured heavily in this place. Regarding the slight aberrations, the convention was to rub along with, to turn a blind eye, because life was being attempted where you had to cut corners; impossible therefore, to give one hundred per cent.

(Burns, 2018: 59)

Doubts about the nature of the contours of represented reality are sometimes alleviated through its own problematic nature since according to Seamus Deane: '...oral lore...can impose a shape where there may be no conclusive pattern' (Deane, 2021: 414).

It is made clear to the reader that while there is no universal consensus on a favourable view towards violence, there is broad agreement that acquiescence is necessary to secure survival. Such tacit agreement requires a determined degree of mental reticence that merely registers rather than condones acts of intimidation and violence carried in pursuance of broader political objectives. Day-to-day realities dominate this experience such as that of imposing individuals in the form of the milkman who is portrayed as a contradictory presence in that:

Thing was he hadn't physically touched me. Nor that last time had he even looked at me. So where was my premise for speaking out on how, uninvited, he was pushing in? But that was what it was like here. Everything had to be physical, had to be intellectually reasonable in order to be comprehensible.

(Burns, 2018: 64)

What counts as intellectually reasonable in such a community is achieved by meeting the objectives of the politically-charged atmosphere, all other considerations are mentally suppressed and effectively forgotten. Moral beliefs are held at a premium, the price of which could be exacted in ideological and physical clashes with the power-wielding paramilitaries who leave no vacuum to develop in respect of the extension of their power and influence over their own communities. Ongoing social strife makes the business of ordinary living nearly-impossible, so members of the communities inhabit a zone of moral ambiguity in order to sustain their own mental integrity in which the most precious of commodities, truth – is traded for relative safety and psychological predictability. These difficulties are faced by communities on both sides of the border in how

(...) This dilemma consisted of, once again, those inner contraries, the moral ambiguities, the

difficulty of entering fully into the truth. Here were the Johns and Mary of this world, trying to live civilian lives as ordinarily as the political problem here would allow them, but becoming uneasy, no longer certain of the moral correctness of the means by which our custodians of honour were fighting for the cause. This was not just because of the deaths and the mounting deaths, but also the injuries, the forgotten damage, all that personal and private suffering stemming from successful renouncer operations. And as the renouncers' power and assumption of power increased, so too, did the uneasiness of the Johns and Marys increase, regardless too, that the other side – 'over there' – 'across the road' – 'across the water' – would be hard at it, doing their own versions of destruction as well.

(Burns, 2018: 119)

Renouncers are those characters who actively work against the presence and priorities of the British state in Northern Ireland. As nationalist feeling grows in the period of the 1970s and 1980s, so too does the power enjoyed by paramilitary groups formed to opposed British rule who do all in their power to demonise those on the either side of the physical and ideological barrier. The polarisation of language precipitates the polarisation of politics and promotes the active demonisation of any person, community or sympathizers. Near-totalitarian rule ensues with virtually unchecked power of the paramilitaries, situations which involved factors in which: '(...) *It so happened though that in the set up of the time, in each of those totalitarian-run enclaves, it was the male paramilitaries who, more than anyone, ruled over the areas with final say*' (Burns, 2018: 120).

Challenges to hegemonic male control

While almost exclusively male in composition, these paramilitary groups are still reliant on the goodwill and agreement of the women of the wider community for the continued success of their operations. The illusion of exclusive-male authority is quickly demolished once established nuances or existing moral codes are punctured and just such an incident acts as a catalyst for women's long-standing frustrations to publicly surface and pushback against ruffians. A battle of wills ensues, despite the grotesquely unequal power imbalance against the women:

(...) they warned the issue women not to have her back on pain of her being killed as a spy-agent with they, themselves, severely punished for aiding and abetting the state.

Owing, however, to a burgeoning outlook that encompassed an attitude of confidence and

entitlement, something snapped within the issue women and unexpectedly they declared they would not. What they meant was, they would not be dictated to, that in spite of the eighth woman probably never to return because (she) ruined everything, should she choose to do so, not only would they not reject her, they'd stand foursquare behind her and the renouncers themselves could go hang.

(Burns, 2018: 158)

A temporary truce comes to be established between the parties despite tensions running high, but this does not provide any real relief in the suffering for our polemic protagonist who is said to have had multiple encounters with her presumed lover – the infamous milkman, despite her instinctive alarm in his unwanted company:

That third encounter with the milkman was not the end of the milkman. Further meetings – real ones as well as the communally fabricated ones – also took place... These meetings took place everywhere. I'd pop to the local shops he'd be there. I'd go into town, he'd be there. I'd come out of work, he'd be there. I'd visit a library, he'd be there. Even when I'd go to places and come out of them and he wasn't there, still it seemed as if he was there. (...)

(Burns, 2018: 166)

Rumours supply defects to the circuit of knowledge: where facts are absent, a veneer is quickly erected to bridge the gaps to complete the deception. It does not matter whether or not the protagonist has chosen to be in the milkman's company or not nor how many times she has actually shared his company; gossip becomes truth in the eyes of those peddling it.

Concluding remarks: gossipers - *raison d'être*

Conjecture allies with compliance to sustain the conditions under which gossipers are deemed necessary and become needed as:

Their true nature also would be revealed by the very contaminated, off-kilter atmosphere in which they chose to surround themselves...It was the contrast between that – all those powerful yet invisible indicators – and the supposedly innocuous parenthetical manner my neighbours assumed they were presenting to me that most would reveal to me they were not for whatever reason, coming from the truth...to invoke immoderate emotion in me or to lure me verbally to my detriment. Might have been some personal concern of their own about which vulnerably and

humanly they felt a need to keep silent, but on which nonetheless they needed clarification or information from someone else. With gossips and rumour-mongers-always it came down to scrutiny, to wangling to listening for leverage, to the dedication public opinion here was invested in conjecture, not only abroad but within the Home Circle front.

(Burns, 2018: 173)

Gossipers peddle untruths but in so doing they leave interlocutors and affected parties with little option but to respond – often exasperated – to the force and persistence of such rumours. In so doing, they are legitimizing their existence despite their inherent fallacies. As the reader is later reminded: 'Even at the outer limits of absurdity and contradiction people make up anything. Then they will believe and build this on anything' (Burns, 2018: 306-7).

A state of near-permanent paranoia coupled with a total lack of trust in the policing authorities leave ordinary citizens at the mercy of whatever vigilantes and paramilitaries wish to impose according to the nature of their agenda. The protagonist is left with few options since:

(...) If I'd gone to the authorities to have it officially recorded that he was stalking me, that he was threatening me, that he was making preparations for me, then to seek redress from these authorities as in, what were they going to do about it, our renouncers would have replied – well, I didn't know what they would have replied because he too was a renouncer so why ever would I have gone to them?...According to the police, of course, our community was a rogue community. It was we who were the enemy, we who were the terrorists, the civilian terrorists, the associates of terrorists or simply individuals suspected of being but not yet discovered to be terrorists. (...)

(Burns, 2018: 182)

It can be seen that in such a tense environment, ordinary citizens are largely at the mercy of their local community powerbrokers who operate beyond the law since as a direct result of the chasm in confidence between the community and the state police force. Strong suspicions on both sides ensure that a power vacuum benefits local ruffians so that the local community is left to find its own way through societal difficulties. Strong currents of stress caused by this situation ripple through the community to such an extent that it retards mental processes to the point that trauma trumps logic and this is evident where the protagonist is depicted as encountering her own difficulties in that she:

...was beginning to lose my power of reason, my ability to see obvious connections and to retain even the most elementary sense of how to survive in this place. I can see now, of course, that no matter what I would have done or could have done, these gossips wouldn't have stopped, never would they have ceased and gone away, not until the man himself had gone away, not until the man himself had gone away, after having me and had done with me. At the time though, I said my three words and I displayed my depersonalisation and did succeed in puzzling them.

(Burns, 2018: 177)

Attempts at retention of dignity on the part of the protagonist are met with some success, although this is offset by increasing hostility toward her from the community at large as the stresses involved challenge the integrity of her reasoning powers. A temporary stay is put on the effects of the malicious mouths that populate the vocabulary of the people around her. There is no denying the fact, however, that she her reaction is proof of her manipulation by the gossip itself. From this perspective, we can see how this medium functions as a way to 'identify cooperators and cheaters and advertise their reputations' which is done to apply a standard that identifies whether people can respect the established code in respect of whether 'they are reliable and can be trusted to uphold their end of a bargain' (Vermeule, 2006: 106). Using this instrument as means of social control also ensures that develops 'a generous and linking attention where it is most needed. It is quite simply a cultural politics of interests, of its value and its violence' (Schantz, 2008: 19).

In the traumatised minds and violent streets of Burn's fictitious city, there are ample examples of the presence and operation of this 'cultural politics of interests' which is strongly challenged by Burn's protagonist and her experiences in *Milkman*. In writing as she does, Burns succeeds in adopting a technique described by Booth in his *The Rhetoric of Fiction* as pertaining to the fact that 'in our world where the true chaos of things has at least been realized, only a technique that seems to leave characters genuinely free to face that chaos is tolerable' (Booth, 1983:51). Clearly illustrating the conditions and difficult circumstances within with the protagonist has to live allows the involvement of readers in situations where novels 'may not offer the same kind of information about the world as gossip, they nonetheless involve readers in the same kind of experience: an intimate tête-à-tête with the narrator promising special voyeuristic access into characters' affairs' (Schantz, 2008: 13).

The protagonist's *tête-à-tête* with key members of the community in which she lives is a key indicator of her resistance and stands as an affirmation of her personal identity which she seeks to defend despite the heavy cost involved.

A major question is left to the reader to answer: do we really exercise true autonomy as sovereign individuals in our communities, or are we unwittingly coerced into adopting certain stances and following particular narratives as a reaction to or as a product of societal pressure. *Milkman* allows the reader to gain a foothold within an imaginative space which offers the opportunity to carefully ponder this issue.

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Henrik Ibsen's *Ghosts* as a 'modern' tragedy

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Abstract— This paper examines *Ghosts* by Henrik Ibsen as a modern tragedy that redefines, rather than fails to attain, the classical tragic form. The objective of the paper is to engage critically with George Steiner's claim, in his work *The Death of Tragedy*, that tragedy becomes impossible in a world of reason and secularism. Following Raymond Williams' counterarguments on evolving notions of tragedy, the paper argues that Ibsen constructs a new tragic paradigm embedded in the late nineteenth century's social, psychological, and ideological realities. Unlike classical tragedies such as *Oedipus the King* or *Phaedra*, *Ghosts* replaces divine fate with scientific and social systems—such as heredity, social convention, and internalized beliefs—represented metaphorically as “ghosts.” Through Mrs. Alving, the play highlights the tension between progressive thought and bourgeois morality that constraints the individual. The paper further interprets Oswald's degeneration as a naturalistic counterpart of tragic fate, where scientific determinism replaces mythic destiny. The study demonstrates that modern tragedy can persist without a heroic downfall in the form of the inescapable conflicts of ordinary life. Conclusively, the lack of a moral resolution and catharsis distinguishes the modern tragic vision of Ibsen rooted in a world defined by naturalism, bourgeois sensibility, and a disillusionment with religion.



Keywords— *bourgeois society, naturalism, new tragedy, nineteenth century drama, problem play*

“The ghosts that scar the secular mind do not fear electric light.”— (Steiner, 1961)

A psychically and physically degenerating son begging for the ‘sun’ from his helpless mother was one of the most tragic scenes in modern drama. Henrik Ibsen succeeded in breaking the old ‘bottle of wine’ and fermenting a new tragedy without aligning it to the conventions of Sophocles, Shakespeare, or Racine. Ibsen's *Ghosts* (1881) was not a downfall of a ‘larger than life’ Aristotelian hero picked out from the Greek myths, but was informed by the immediate context of socio-political, religious, scientific, and literary conditions of his time. To call it an imitation of the form of *Oedipus the King* or *Phedre* will be a simplification of its complexities just as calling it a non-tragedy will be a negation of its impact.

To begin with, *Ghosts* is a realistic social-problem play governed by the notions of naturalism, modern psychological dilemmas, bourgeois family ideals, and religious rigidity. This paper is going to deal with

what is ‘modern’ and what is ‘tragic’ in this play by utilizing or opposing the views of George Steiner and Raymond Williams along with other critics.

When George Steiner lamented in *The Death of Tragedy* (1961) the impossibility of a tragedy after the Age of Reason, he was doing the same thing he was accusing the torch bearers of modern drama of—grave robbing. The wholeness of his argument depends on the absence of a prevalent mythology—“some context of belief and convention which the artist shares with his audience” as a backdrop of any modern tragedy (Steiner, 1961, p.318).

Retrospectively, it becomes significant to look at the modern tragedy *Ghosts* (1881) beyond the measurements of the ancient, classical or neo-classical tragic dramas. In a poststructuralist understanding, the binaries of the mythical and the scientific must be left in the past. The assumption that there can be no tragedy in modernity because of the existence of reason echoes the optimism of a utopia awaiting mankind at the end of this

perpetual 'progress'. In "*The Birth of Tragedy*", Nietzsche reveals that 'the Greeks knew and felt the horrors of existence' to assert the relevance of ancient tragedy. However, to say that the modern subject constantly grappling with existential crisis is ignorant to the tragedy of human life is a false claim.

Mrs. Alving, the protagonist of Ibsen's play aspires to be a modern intellectual female but she is a tragic heroine. She is not driven by the gods of heaven but the 'ghosts' that reside in her. Unlike Phaedra's passions of love and Oedipus' ambition to seek justice, Mrs. Alving has sacrificed her life to conceal 'Truth' and maintain 'Ideals'. She is not the Racinean heroine subjected to the supernatural play of gods, neither the Sophoclean hero trying to defy his predestination. She is a product of a *new world* with which emerges "new conceptions of destiny and responsibility" (Williams, 2015, p.178). Against Steiner's (1961) claim of the tiredness of words, Ibsen manages to give the word 'ghosts' a new meaning utilizing the "power of revelation" to explain the suffering of the modern subject.

"God is dead" and is replaced by an unknown oppressive force, that Mrs. Alving articulates as 'ghosts', "old dead doctrines and opinions and beliefs" (Ibsen, 2015, p.40). Unlike the infamous witches of *Macbeth* (1606), these modern ghosts fear no light and fear no gods, and they are so prevalent that to assert that they are the common ground for readers of this tragedy will not be an exaggeration. Ephemeral, Ibsen escapes the limitations and conventions pre-existing him and creates a new paradigm with which to perceive the conflicts of modern life. The title of the play gives its "full yield of meaning" and the audience gives Mrs. Alving's speech "a careful hearing" (Steiner, 1961, p.315).

The Naturalist leanings of the play also give a biological connotation of 'inheritance' to the title. In a parallel reading, Oswald becomes a tragic hero, a "youthful victim of Greek tragedy" not resulting from a curse or fate in a mythical sense but 'fate' in a scientific sense (Cascetta, 2014, p.21). The reasoning of science is as incredible as that of a woven myth justifying "the sins of the father visiting on the son" and he can do nothing but accept it. Oswald is denied even an illusion of freewill in his life (and death), as the patriarch *is* the new god: the authority and control of the monarch is redistributed among units of family to give rise to an inescapable dictatorship of norms and conventions set up by the 'Father'. This closeness with the father pushes Oswald in an ambiguous "inner conflict between an impulse that drives him to seek to break down the barriers that enclose

him and an impulse-defect that drags him back and defeats him" (Cascetta, 2014, p.20).

The context of a tragedy does not limit its relevance to the readers belonging to a different time and place. Human nature remains the same as the vibrancy of Macbeth's ambition and Phaedra's love was once accepted by the spectators in the literal sense. With the shift in perspective these 'passions' became more symbolic, and Steiner (1961) himself claims that Ibsen is "the great creator of myth and symbolic form" (p.305). Jean Racine managed to utilize myths because of their symbolism; similarly, Ibsen managed to write a symbolic realistic tragedy by inventing symbols of his own age.

The major shifts that catalyzed the formation of a 'modern' tragedy were the shift from the Divine to science, feudal society to industrialization/capitalism, and from public to private. With no intervention of destiny and gods, what makes life tragic? I would argue it is knowledge, the urge of the human mind to retain more even if it destabilizes their existing understanding of the world. Mrs. Alving's ambition to be enlightened and *act* liberal drags her into the realm of tragic. Her knowledge of the truth and her internal psyche holding on to patriarchal ideals form the basis of her tragedy. Her failure to recognize her fault, i.e., to give in to an oppressive marriage and give birth to Oswald as a "moral" duty and "religious" effort to sustain the auspicious institution of matrimony is the beginning of the tragic (Templeton, 2015, p.194). Truth becomes the harbinger of tragedy. Oedipus brings it upon himself, but Mrs. Alving has no choice other than revealing it to give final answers to the fatal sufferings of her son, Oswald.

The mirage of 'choice' is unattainable, and just as "freewill" functions within several engrained belief systems and norms. She cannot escape the ghosts that haunt her as throughout her life, as being a mother, her aim was to "think one life and live another" (Templeton, 2015, p.193). Mrs. Alving agrees to Manders' suggestion about not insuring the orphanage as the Divine will protect it. She cannot accept Regina as Mr. Alving's ("illegitimate") daughter because she is worried about the public gaze, not to mention the extent to which she let the obligations of the church govern her life. While she seems inclined to the 'new' in her words, her actions perpetuate the 'old' and the 'accepted'. Her dilemma is no less tragic or intelligible; "she [only] differs from her predecessors in kind and not degree" (Corrigan, 1959, p.180). Her presumption that the truth about Mr. Alving, if it had been revealed earlier, would have changed things is a negative realization out of her guilt for concealing it. This modern heroine is unable to recognize what her 'returning to the marriage' has led

to, even when faced with her 'ghost-son'. As a dutiful wife and mother she takes responsibility for the tragedy that was not a result of her cowardice but her belief in the myth of a happy family.

So, elaborating on the idea of a mythology, what surrounds Mrs. Alving as well as the immediate readers of *Ghosts* is the myth of the bourgeois sensibility. Contemporary life is governed by "the repressive attitude of the bourgeois society"; the fall of this mythically perfect class of people and how future generations are walking away from it (Hemmer, 1994, p.70). Bourgeois family as the "micro-society" mirrors the "macro-society" and its ideal set up that is falling apart due to its rigidity. In the same ruins lies the (unintentional) individual defender of this façade of the family: Mrs. Alving.

Another unique layer of 'modern' tragedy is represented in "Ibsen's rejection of the conventional moral ending" (Williams, 2015, p.179). Some critics assume that the dilemmas of modern life emerge along with their solutions that can be arrived at over time. The last scene of *Ghosts* is dreadful enough to make one hope for the 'sun' to arise and wipe out the impending sense of doom that dictates the play. The absurdity of life is that the sun will never reach Oswald or Mrs. Alving because the internal 'ghosts' keep the light of enlightenment away from them. What Ibsen is trying to suggest is that "the way 'through darkness to light' is a false way" (Williams, 2015, p.181), it is evident now that there is no light at the end of (post)modernity.

CONCLUSION

Henrik Ibsen's *Ghosts* redefines tragedy for the modern age by shifting its focus from divinity to society, individual psychology, and heredity. He challenges George Steiner's claim that tragedy cannot exist without shared mythology, the play proves how bourgeois ideals and internalized beliefs had become a modern myth that governs people.

Through Mrs. Alving and Oswald, Ibsen presents a tragedy rooted in ordinary existence, where truth brings suffering and no resolution is offered. As Raymond Williams suggests, modern tragedy lies in unresolved conflict rather than cathartic closure. The relevance of *Ghosts* lies in its relatable yet controversial nature, which provoked uproar in modern theatre by exposing the fragility of bourgeois ideals.

The flag-bearers of bourgeois ideals are intolerant to the exposure of the fragile character of these principles of faith. The suffering of the tragic protagonist does not lead them to the heavenly place and the catharsis of the

audience does not lead to an ideal society but the formation of submissive subjects. Ibsen, therefore, is focused on provoking his viewers to take action for social change.

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Studies on Disorder of Split Personalities

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Abstract— Within the last decade, Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID) formerly known as Multiple Personality Disorder, has been increasingly diagnosed, studied, and treated. Emerging research suggests that the condition is not as rare as once believed; rather, it often remains unrecognized due to overlapping symptoms with other psychiatric disorders. DID is widely understood as a trauma-related condition, frequently associated with severe childhood abuse and conceptualized as a chronic dissociative form of post-traumatic stress disorder. This study examines the etiology, symptomatology, diagnostic criteria, and treatment approaches associated with DID, along with the historical controversies surrounding its classification. Individuals with DID typically exhibit two or more distinct personality states, each with its own memories, behaviors, and identity characteristics, leading to significant disruptions in functioning and continuity of self. Despite challenges in diagnosis, the disorder shows a favourable prognosis when managed through intensive and long-term psychotherapy conducted by experienced clinicians. This paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of DID and highlight the importance of accurate diagnosis and effective therapeutic interventions.



Keywords— Dissociative Identity Disorder, Personality Disorder, Etiology, Diagnosis, Trauma, Psychotherapy.

I. INTRODUCTION

Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID), previously known as Multiple Personality Disorder, is a complex psychological condition characterized by the presence of two or more distinct identities or personality states within a single individual. These identities may alternately control a person's behavior, leading to significant disruptions in daily functioning. Research indicates that severe traumatic experiences, particularly during early life, play a crucial role in the development of DID by affecting both neurological functioning and psychological resilience. Dissociative identity disorder, often referred to as "split personality," involves the coexistence of multiple identities within one person, each with its own patterns of thinking, behavior, and memory. This often results in amnesia and difficulty in maintaining continuity of self, reflecting the complexity of the human mind and its response to trauma. Dissociation occurs when thoughts, memory, and awareness become disconnected from the surrounding environment, and DID represents one of the

most severe forms of dissociative disorders. It may lead to serious consequences, including self-harm and suicidal tendencies. Although popular media often portrays individuals exhibiting multiple personalities, such occurrences, while rare, are clinically recognized phenomena. Dissociative disorders include dissociative identity disorder, dissociative amnesia, and depersonalization/derealization disorder, each differing in symptoms but sharing the underlying feature of disrupted integration of mental processes (Cutler and Reed, 1975).

HISTORY

Historically, unusual psychological behaviors were often attributed to supernatural forces or possession, and in many cultures such manifestations were interpreted as divine or spiritual influences. Modern psychology, however, recognizes that in certain contexts these experiences may be classified as dissociative possession trance disorders, particularly when they occur involuntarily and interfere with normal functioning. The earliest documented cases resembling DID date back to the

19th century, when the condition was initially described as “disintegrated personality” and later gained formal recognition in the DSM-III (Marmer, 1980). Over time, the concept of DID has evolved alongside advancements in understanding trauma and its impact on mental health. Individuals with DID may develop multiple identities, sometimes even dozens, with each identity differing significantly in behavior, temperament, age, and gender. One identity may exhibit submissive traits while another may display aggression or impulsivity, and often one identity is unaware of the actions of another. Traumatic childhood experiences such as physical abuse, emotional neglect, or sexual abuse are considered major contributing factors. Neurobiological studies suggest increased activity in regions such as the prefrontal cortex and parietal cortex, while structures like the hippocampus and amygdala may be reduced in size (personal communication: Dr. Aritra Chakravorty, 2025).

SYMPTOMS, ETIOLOGY, METHODS AND DIAGNOSIS

Dissociative Identity Disorder is distinguished from other dissociative conditions by the presence of multiple distinct identities that control behavior, along with symptoms such as memory gaps, blackouts, mood instability, anxiety, depression, and impaired daily functioning (Walker, Brozek and Maxfield, 2008). Additional symptoms include dissociative amnesia, emotional numbness, disorientation, hallucination-like experiences, and detachment from reality (Lample-de Groot, 1981). Individuals often experience cognitive impairments such as difficulty concentrating, confusion, and disorientation, which significantly affect their personal and professional lives. Each identity, or alter, may have a unique name, history, and behavioral pattern, and these identities may differ in age, gender, and emotional responses. Switching between identities frequently results in memory loss and disruption in personal and social functioning (Wheeler, 2017). Physical symptoms may include headaches, fatigue, sleep disturbances, and unexplained pain (Wilbur, 1984). DID is strongly associated with trauma, particularly during childhood, and is often considered a coping mechanism that allows individuals to detach from painful experiences (Avinuo, 2015). Neuroimaging studies indicate altered brain activity in regions such as the cingulate cortex and temporal lobes. DID is frequently misdiagnosed as borderline personality disorder, bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia due to overlapping symptoms, making accurate diagnosis essential (Das, 2023). Diagnosis involves detailed clinical interviews, psychological assessments, evaluation of personal history, and information from family members or close associates (Beale, 1978; Allison, 1974). According to the American

Psychiatric Association (2013), DID involves disruptions in identity and memory accompanied by significant distress, and proper diagnosis requires ruling out other psychiatric or neurological conditions.

TREATMENT

Treatment of Dissociative Identity Disorder primarily involves psychotherapy aimed at integrating identities and addressing underlying trauma. Various therapeutic approaches such as cognitive behavioral therapy, psychodynamic therapy, trauma-focused therapy, and ego-state therapy are commonly used. Medications are not used to treat DID directly but are prescribed to manage associated symptoms such as anxiety and depression (Kohlenberg, 1973). The treatment process typically involves stabilization, trauma processing, and integration. Stabilization focuses on ensuring safety, emotional regulation, and development of coping strategies. Trauma processing involves addressing and resolving traumatic memories using techniques such as exposure therapy and cognitive restructuring. Integration aims to merge different identities into a cohesive sense of self while improving overall functioning. Support systems, including family, friends, and community, play a crucial role in recovery. Complementary approaches such as mindfulness, yoga, and art therapy may further enhance emotional stability and well-being.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Freudian psychoanalysis provides a theoretical basis for understanding dissociative identity disorder. According to Freud (1895), personality consists of three components: the Id, Ego, and Superego. The Id operates on the pleasure principle and represents instinctual desires, while the Ego operates on the reality principle and mediates between the Id and external reality. The Superego represents moral values and societal norms. An imbalance among these components may contribute to psychological disturbances. The Ego plays a crucial role in regulating impulses and maintaining balance, preventing extreme expressions of instinctual or moral drives (Suprenant, 2006; Mangal, 2007).

III. ANALYSIS

Dissociative Identity Disorder is widely understood as a result of severe and prolonged trauma, particularly during early childhood. Factors such as physical, emotional, or sexual abuse, childhood neglect, chronic stress, and repeated traumatic experiences contribute significantly to the development of the disorder. Biological and environmental factors also influence its onset, as genetic

predisposition, neurological variations, and insecure attachment styles may increase vulnerability to dissociation. According to DSM-5 criteria, DID is characterized by the presence of two or more distinct identities, recurrent memory gaps, and significant distress or impairment in functioning. These symptoms must not be attributable to substance use or culturally accepted practices (Hilgard, 1977). The disorder reflects a fragmentation of identity as a coping mechanism in response to overwhelming stress, resulting in difficulty maintaining a unified sense of self and continuity of experience.

IV. CONCLUSION

Dissociative Identity Disorder is often associated with other mental health conditions such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse, and eating disorders. A significant proportion of individuals with DID may experience severe symptoms, including suicidal tendencies, highlighting the seriousness of the condition. Although earlier theories linked DID with psychosis or schizophrenia, it is now recognized as a distinct disorder. With appropriate treatment, particularly psychotherapy, symptoms can be managed effectively. A supportive environment plays a crucial role in recovery, as individuals benefit from being able to express and process traumatic experiences. Suppression of such memories may worsen symptoms, whereas open expression can lead to psychological relief. Pharmacological treatment, especially antidepressants, may be used to manage associated conditions. The high prevalence of suicidal tendencies among individuals with DID emphasizes the importance of early diagnosis, continuous support, and comprehensive treatment approaches.

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The Body as a Weapon and Resisting the Politics of Patriarchy: Rewriting Female Agency in “*Draupadi*” and *Beloved*

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Abstract— *In contemporary feminist discourse, the politics of subjugation remains one of the significant concerns in relation to the tribal and slave women who have endure trauma, violence and systematic oppression. This study explore how the female body functions both as a position of subjugation and as a medium of resistance, particularly in Mahasweta Devi’s “Draupadi” and Toni Morrison’s Beloved. Moving from victim centered analysis; the paper relocates these narratives within intersectional, postcolonial and feminist perspective to examine how the ideological institutions such as nation, racial slavery, and patriarch domination groups are attempt to systematically exploits marginalized female bodies. Drawing upon the theories of Judith Butler concept of ‘gender performativity’ and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s terms of ‘subaltern’, the study argues that the function of trauma not only as an evidence of oppression but also a shape of political expression. In Mahasweta Devi’s “Draupadi”, Dopdi Mehjen’s rape and her refusal to cloth herself transforming her vulnerable body into a form of resistance against the authority. Similarly in Toni Morrison’s Beloved, Sethe’s act of infanticide challenging the traditional norms of motherhood and it also reflects the trauma of slavery. Through the comparison of tribal uprising in Indian context with the experience of an enslaved African American mother, this study demonstrates how body is reshaped into a form weapon it personified through which female subjects challenges to patriarchal structure and reconstitutes the structure of oppressive regime of slavery and violence through their bodily act of defiance.*



Keywords— *Female body, Patriarchal domination, Subaltern, Trauma, Violence, Tribal, Slavery.*

Widely regarded within feminist discourse, the female body has been treated as a contested upon which patriarchal ideology inscribes to domination, oppressed and discipline. Colonial administration, patriarchal society, racial capitalism and militant nationalism assemble to control female identity, sexuality, corporeality and gender inequality. But in literature raised the questions against such ideologies by transforming the body from an inactive site of oppressed into an dynamic energetic position of resistance. As what one of the renowned Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie observe that, in her essay “*We Should All Be Feminists*”(2014), she claim about the

women empowerment ‘the fiercest opponents of women's liberation believe that feminism is a social movement aimed at reversing gender roles and making men inferior’. The paper argues that in Mahasweta Devi’s “*Draupadi*” and Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, the infringed female body does not remain in the domain of marginalization, subjugation and inequality but it emerged as a weapon in which subjugated and helpless women challenge and decentralize the patriarchal autonomy.

Simultaneously these narratives primarily involves in the brutal violence and physical molestation within two distinct context in postcolonial India and the trauma of

slavery in 19th century America, where sovereign authority asserts to control the lives and deaths of women, but the female protagonists Sethe and Dopdi Mehjen by challenging the conventional notion of patriarchal structure, motherhood and resistance. Their acts reshaping the trauma not as silence anguish yet as a way of political articulation. By illustrating through postcolonial, intersectional and feminist framework, this paper will attempt to examine that these stories within the extensive frameworks of performativity, marginalization and Subalternity to demonstrate how the body becomes both the site of inscription and on the other side as a the forms of rebellion.

Generally, both texts are set against the backdrop of major historical events. For instance, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is situated within the context of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which legitimized the capture and return of escaped enslaved to their masters during the 19th century in America. The novel unveils, where the enslaves were far away from dignity and independence. Within the colonial structure the position of women as vulnerable, as they were mentally and physically controlled or exploits by the institution of slavery. Similarly in Mahasweta Devi's "*Draupadi*" is set against the backdrop of the 'Naxalite Movement' (1967) and the 'Bangladesh Liberation War' (1971). Where marginalized communities, particularly the Santali women, are being brutally rape and exploited by military forces and local authorities. The subjugation of the female body is clearly reflects in these texts, and it also expose the long historical of patriarchal structure to depict the women as weak. As the French feminist Simon de Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* (1949), refers to the ancient philosopher Pythagoras's statements about the history of women, "*There is a good principle that created order, light and man, and a bad principle that created chaos, darkness and woman*" (de Beauvoir, 1949/2011). This statement clearly recount that the women were traditionally associated with weak and undignified. Therefore within the structure of male dominance the female body were portraying as a site of suffering, marginalizing, and loss of individuality.

In the story of Mahasweta Devi's "*Draupadi*", the protagonist Dopdi Mehjan within the context of the uprising movement, where tribal bodies are depicted as disposable in the sense of state power. The postcolonial nation yet it apparently emancipated from the colonial regime, but imitates colonial practice of monitoring, violence, sexual abused, and cruelty. Dopdi is exemplified as political anarchist and her imprisonment is not simply as arrest, rather it becomes an act of authoritative assertion. Dopdi's rape in police custody is embodies by articulating what Achille Mbembe used the term

"necropolitics" to define how social and political power control over life and death, in which the life of marginalized people were systematically pushed into annihilation and violation of law and order.

In this sense Dopdi's body is torture by the government officials because it signifying the dual identities on the one side as female and other side as tribal identity. The authorities observed her body not simply as an individual being, but it symbolically represents through which authority can be affirmed over both the difference of ethnic and gender identity. So the State's intention is not only to punish the criminal but as an exemplary, however trying to impose the patriarchal structure of subjugation, through the presentation of public violence. After repeatedly rape and torture, she is attained before Senanayak, officer in charge of the operation. Instead of surrender herself to the officer, try to dominant upon her, Dopdi refuse to cloth herself. This act of rejection changes her vulnerable body shaping into defiance. As she standing naked alone and laughing and encountering the officer directly, this act of courage actually challenges the structure of authority, and she asking: "*What more can you do? Come on, counter me—come on, counter me?*" (Spivak, 402). At this moment her naked body is clearly highlighted as defeat or disgrace, which visualizes the cruelty of patriarchy and how she defeats the power throughout her daring activity.

Drawing from the theoretical framework of Judith Butler's concept of 'gender performativity', the role of the female is determined by traditional social norms such as familial responsibility, domestic labor, profound distaste and socially ostracized and they are completely victimized in the realms of gender identity, that can be constructed and regulate by the society's expectations and patriarchal mechanism. And in the case of Dopdi, when she refuses to clothe herself before the gender mechanism, which symbolically violates the rules of social structure that seeks to self-restrain and protect the female virtue. This act of courage actually transforming her from the very evidence of repression and reshaping into a form of rebellious figure against the structure of authority that pushed into silence. In this story when Dopdi stand and remove her cloth before the officer Senanayak, this audacious activity making her as a fearless defiance actually challenges the ideology of state apparatus, which unfolds the broken dominance of authority. Dopdi's body is portraying at one level as an object of subjugation and punishment and later it becomes as a site of resistance and defiance, her body becomes as an emerging voice and a hope for subaltern especially the tribal community. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak articulates about the subaltern voice in her essay "*Can the Subaltern Speak?*" "*the*

subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (p.287), suggesting that subaltern groups are wholly excluded from the society in the realms of class, culture and gender, they do not have the rights to questioning against the oppressive regime, they are under the burden of colonial shadow. And in the case of Dopdi's, her final gesture suggesting that she never surrender her body before the tyrannical power, instead her naked body takes the shape of weapon to disrupt the structure of colonial regime, becomes a powerful voice for the marginalized community especially the women.

Toni Morrison's writings overtly invoke the politics of female body and the subjugation of black women. Morrison was hardly the first non-white, to challenge the hegemony of the white-male center or the slave masters. She was an American novelist and most of her works primarily deal with black women's subjectivity. Particularly those who have endure under the trauma of slavery, marginalization, sexual exploitation, and female subjugation by the slave masters. Her prominent works are *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1973), *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Tar Baby* (1981), and *Beloved* (1987). Many of her works chiefly concern the dehumanized condition of black women during slavery. Therefore, her novel *Beloved* is perfectly exposes the brutal reality of slavery and female subjugation under the patriarchal domination. When she accepted Frederic G. Melcher Book Award for *Beloved* on October 12, 1988, Morrison said that "[t]here is no suitable memorial or plaque or wreath or wall or park or skyscraper lobby" honoring the memory of the human beings forced into slavery. *Beloved* is heavily influenced by the past and its memory. Within the context of female subjugation and the politics of body, Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* is perfectly portrayed the condition of the slave mother. In which Sethe an enslave mother and also the central victim of this narrative particularly in the African American slavery. Where the Black people are effectively driven into the system of slavery, in which the authority dominating over the lives of Black enslave.

In a similar way Draupadi, and *Beloved* are belongs to two distinct narratives but here interconnected models of resistance articulated through the women body. When Dopdi resists through her bodily exposure and also in the case of Morrison's novel *Beloved*, in which Sethe resists through her refusal to surrender to the slave master. *Beloved* focuses on dehumanized treatment of slavery, particularly the Black bodies struggle to survive. Within the structure of slavery, the authority is functioned as the ultimate regime in which the authorities control over their lives. Sethe's body is injured by lashing and beating, and the moments situate within the novel it as "chokecherry tree", which signifies that the brutality is shaping the

forms of grotesque elegance. The scar on her body is not only symbolizes the physical suffering, rather it also highlights as a historical artifact of racial violence. Thus both texts expose that the female body as an emerging site of defiance and resistance against the brutal institution of slavery and dominance.

In Morrison's novel *Beloved*, the most tragic incident occurs when Sethe's kills her own child in order to protect her from the institution of slavery. She thinks that death is the only way to protect her daughter from cruelty of slave institution. As she asks "I took and put my babies where they'd be safe"(p-193). Within the context of slavery, the notion of protection is metaphorically presented in death rather than relationships. On this distressing moment, Morrison objects the traditional notion of motherhood that relates with care and love. But this narrative also highlights how the image of motherhood is converted into an attempt for defense and survival. Her refusal to surrender her own daughter to the slave master, however her maternal authority is opposed to the brutal colonial regime. Her terrible act of killing signifies to challenge the system of slavery, in which the women bodies become a product of exploitation and subjugation. As she declares "if I hadn't killed her she would have died and that is something I could not bear to happen to her"(Beloved 21). Illustrating this, Morrison's novel exposes Sethe is not simply as an offender rather she is tragic victim within the slavery, her frightening act of violence arise in a very complex way of psychological and moral burden from the institution of slavery.

Through the lens of Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality, it refers to how the women overlapping the system of oppression and ideology of manhood. In Morrison's *Beloved*, Sethe's decision is shaped by overlapping against the system of slavery. Her suffering not only reduces to gender alone, rather it emerges from class, race and trauma of slavery. Within the context of slavery the women bodies are subjected to sexual violation, marginalized and exploitation. However, Sethe's decision to kill her daughter becomes a tragic act that challenges not only the system of slavery but also the traditional concept of motherhood itself. Her choice of death over enslavement asserts to breaking authoritative structure of slavery and states a site of female agency within the oppressive regime.

CONCLUSION

In an age of violence women have faced various discrimination, particularly those who belongs to marginalized communities have face sexual exploitation, caste and racial oppression. The patriarchal structure

imposed their authority in the name of equality, justice and law. However the marginalized communities’ such as tribal and the black women often lack the social and institution dignity in relation to discrimination. Moreover, both texts are situated within the context of the politics of the female body, at the center of these narratives, the protagonists cross over the geography and cultural boundaries. In Mahasweta Devi’s story “Draupadi” the portrayal of Dopdi within the postcolonial framework of state violence, where the government officials exploit the tribal women. Similarly in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, seek to represents the brutal reality of slavery in American context, where the Black women are systematically exploited and subjugated. Together both narratives reveal how patriarchal institution structurally operates the female body. Through rape, sexual exploitation, and abuse the female body, in a very conventional way the patriarchal authority control over female body.

As Kate Millett defines in “*Sexual Politics*”, about the patriarchal ideology what she calls “the birthright priority whereby males rule female”. This is the traditional ideology of patriarchy that has been constructed by society to depict the marginalized communities such as the tribal and the black women. Consequently male holds the power and claiming, sexually and biologically superior on the basis of gender. Society therefore reinforces this hierarchy in a very systematic way to control and abusing the female bodies. Thus, the female protagonists like Dopdi and Sethe reshape or challenges against this mechanism of control by transforming into a function of refusal and resistance. Their act of defiance challenging the structure of patriarchy and reconsider the ideological perception of the female body. Therefore their resistance allows the female body to emerge as an influential medium of protest for the marginalized women and also opposing the patriarchal forms of dominance.

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Performing Authenticity in the Age of Feeds: Irony, Conspiracy, and the Fragmented Self in Lauren Oyler's *Fake Accounts*

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Abstract— Lauren Oyler's *Fake Accounts* (2021) offers a sharp metafictional exploration of digital subjectivity, irony fatigue, and the commodification of authenticity in the age of social media. The unnamed narrator discovers that her boyfriend, Felix, secretly operates a popular conspiracy-theory Instagram account. This revelation triggers a meditation on deception—both interpersonal and epistemic—within a culture dominated by feeds, curated identities, and algorithmic visibility. This paper argues that *Fake Accounts* stages authenticity as performance. The narrator's hyper-analytic voice, oscillating between detachment and vulnerability, reflects a generational condition marked by skepticism toward sincerity and exhaustion with ideological spectacle. Social media platforms function as laboratories of self-construction, where political belief, aesthetic identity, and moral stance are constantly curated, revised, and monetized. In this environment, conspiracy thinking and ironic self-awareness coexist uneasily, each feeding on the instability of truth in networked culture. Drawing on theories of postmodern subjectivity and digital self-fashioning from Erving Goffman, Jean Baudrillard, and Sherry Turkle, the study contends that the novel's fragmented, essayistic structure mirrors the discontinuous temporality of scrolling and posting. The narrator's relentless commentary functions as both critique and symptom: her refusal of emotional transparency serves as a defense against a world in which exposure is routine and attention is currency. The proliferation of "fake accounts" signals not only literal online deception but the broader condition of mediated identity, where sincerity is suspect and selfhood is perpetually provisional. Ultimately, this paper positions *Fake Accounts* as a novel of platform modernity, capturing the psychological texture of life lived online. By interrogating the instability of truth, intimacy, and belief in a hyperconnected era, Oyler's work reveals how digital culture reshapes not only public discourse but the inner architecture of the self.



Keywords— digital subjectivity, platform modernity, authenticity as performance, irony fatigue, conspiracy thinking, fragmented self, metafiction, social media deception

I. INTRODUCTION

In the winter of 2016–17, as Donald Trump prepared to take the oath of office amid political upheaval, a young woman in Brooklyn snooped through her boyfriend's phone and uncovered a secret far more unsettling than typical infidelity. Her boyfriend, Felix, was the anonymous curator of a popular Instagram account dedicated to conspiracy theories, including chemtrails, 9/11 inside jobs, and shadowy global cabals. The revelation arrives not as an

emotional catastrophe but as strange vindication for the unnamed narrator of Lauren Oyler's *Fake Accounts* (2021). She had already grown weary of the relationship; Felix's offline detachment now found its perfect digital mirror in his hyper-engaged online persona. What follows is no conventional breakup narrative but a spiraling, essayistic inquiry into the nature of deception in an era when every self is, to some degree, a fake account.

Oyler's debut novel arrives at a pivotal cultural moment when literary representations of digital life shifted from novelty to necessity. Patricia Lockwood's *No One Is Talking About This*, published the same month, fragments its prose to mimic the slipstream chaos of the feed. Oyler, by contrast, refuses to reproduce the internet's staccato texture. Her sentences are long, looping, and deliberately essayistic—dense with qualifications, revisions, and self-interrogations that stand in deliberate opposition to the rapid rhythm of tweets, Stories, and algorithmic scrolls. Yet the novel's form is no less diagnostic. By staging authenticity as performance, Oyler captures Sherry Turkle's "alone together" paradox: hyper-connectivity that deepens isolation and perpetual visibility that erodes interiority (Turkle, 2011).

The thesis of this paper is that *Fake Accounts* performs authenticity as an impossible yet compulsory labor in the age of feeds. The narrator's hyper-analytic voice—alternately lacerating toward others and self-excoriating—embodies the generational condition that Erving Goffman would recognize as advanced impression management, now accelerated by algorithmic incentives (Goffman, 1959). Conspiracy and irony, far from opposites, become twin strategies for navigating epistemic instability. The novel's fragmented, metafictional structure does not merely describe this condition; it enacts it, forcing readers to confront the discontinuous temporality that governs life online. In doing so, Oyler produces not autofiction's usual solipsism but a rigorous anatomy of platform subjectivity.

The plot unfolds as follows: after discovering Felix's secret account, the narrator attends the Women's March in Washington, D.C., intending to end the relationship. Instead, she learns of his death in a cycling accident. Grief—or its performance—propels her to quit her job writing feminist-adjacent hot takes for a Vice-like website and flee to Berlin, where she first met Felix. There, she babysits for an expat family while lying about being an accountant, dates aggressively via apps using fabricated zodiac-based personas, and constructs provisional identities. A late twist reveals that Felix faked his death as "performance art," confirming that even mortality can be curated (Oyler, 2021).

This paper proceeds in four sections. The first examines the opening act of interpersonal deception and its entanglement with digital conspiracy as an epistemic mirror. The second explores irony fatigue as both symptom and defense. The third analyzes the Berlin sequences as laboratories of the provisional self. The fourth considers the novel's essayistic form as mimetic of feed temporality. Theoretical scaffolding from Goffman's dramaturgical analysis, Baudrillard's simulacra, and Turkle's digital

intimacy illuminates how Oyler transforms personal anecdote into cultural diagnosis.

II. THE DISCOVERY: DECEPTION AS EPISTEMIC MIRROR

The novel opens with the phone-snooping scene rendered in the narrator's signature long-form interiority. Searching Felix's phone while he sleeps, she discovers the account, which has tens of thousands of followers and hundreds of comments praising its "truth-telling." Instead of outrage, she feels "suddenly, magically free" and liberated from untangling his motivations (Oyler, 2021). Felix's Instagram account—anonymous yet highly engaged and devoted to conspiracies he does not appear to believe offline—functions as a perfect emblem of Jean Baudrillard's precession of simulacra. The content is not rooted in genuine belief but is a hyperreal performance engineered for algorithmic reward: likes, shares, and virality. "Simulation is no longer that of a territory... It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal" (Baudrillard, 1994, p. 1).

This moment crystallizes the novel's central insight: deception is no longer exceptional but structural. In Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical model, social life consists of front-stage performances and back-stage preparations. Social media collapses these stages. Felix's account is pure front-stage spectacle, engineered for an audience he never meets. The narrator's own life—her job repackaging news into outrage cycles and her carefully calibrated tweets—operates under the same logic. She reflects that the things she said online felt like performances, rehearsed, and modified over time for maximum impact, while offline she was barely saying anything at all (Oyler, 2021).

Felix does not promote delusions out of conviction; the narrator infers he does so to prove a point about gullibility. Oyler refuses to pathologize believers, locating pathology instead in platform incentives that reward extremity. Belief becomes optional; virality is mandatory. The narrator's skepticism toward Felix, the "Resistance," and sincerity mirrors this logic. Irony and conspiracy thinking are dialectical partners thriving on eroded epistemic ground. Trump's inauguration looms like a cultural weather event. At the Women's March, the narrator observes pink pussy hats and Princess Leia signs with acidic detachment, noting how the resistance arose because it was a feature of Star Wars (Oyler, 2021). Every gesture feels pre-mediated and optimized for the feed.

The snooping itself is performative; the narrator justifies it as righteous curiosity. This mirrors the broader digital condition where privacy is illusory and mutual surveillance normalized. Baudrillard's hyperreality

explains the hollowness of the conspiracies: they are copies without originals (Baudrillard, 1994). The discovery licenses her desire to leave and foreshadows her Berlin experiments, where deception becomes self-reinvention. Critics highlight the scene's timeliness in capturing the post-2016 epistemic crisis (Rosenfield, 2021). The narrator's blogging job is structurally identical to Felix's account: both monetize outrage. Thus, the discovery establishes deception as the governing metaphor for platform subjectivity, where truth is secondary to visibility.

III. IRONY FATIGUE AND THE EXHAUSTION OF SPECTACLE

The narrator's voice is the novel's greatest achievement and risk. Relentlessly analytical, it refuses emotional transparency. "I'm told I don't have to try to justify love, but I just can't stand the thought of seeming irrationally carried away by emotion" (Oyler, 2021). This refusal is a survival strategy in a culture that weaponizes sincerity. Post-2016, irony became both armor and cage. The narrator admits that people often say her generation values authenticity, but if they do, it is because they have been bombarded since their impressionable preteen years with fakery.

Oyler diagnoses irony fatigue—the exhaustion when every utterance requires triple-layered detachment. The narrator's commentary on her commentary creates a hall of mirrors. She addresses an imagined chorus of ex-boyfriends and parodies her own style. This metafictional layer enacts the condition it describes. The self fragments by design, each layer defending against vulnerability. Conspiracy thinking serves as irony's dark twin. Irony declares "nothing matters"; conspiracy insists "everything is connected, and I alone see it." Both arise from collapsed institutional trust and debased knowledge production. Felix exploits the crisis for sport; the narrator exploits it for narrative control. Her grief upon learning of his "death" is observational. When the faked-death twist arrives, it feels inevitable: performance has swallowed reality. Turkle (2011) illuminates this through the "alone together" paradox. Technology promises connection but delivers simulation, fostering flight from conversation and preference for curated distance. The narrator embodies this: the quieter she became offline, the more vibrant she seemed online (Oyler, 2021). Irony fatigue acts as a protective shell. Long, accumulative sentences mirror the mental labor of self-monitoring.

Reviews praise the voice for seductive confidence and subversive wit while noting its bloodlessness as symptomatic (Mishan, 2021; Rosenfield, 2021). Oyler anticipates objections through metafiction. Conspiracy and irony operate as adaptive strategies in Baudrillard's

hyperreal world, where simulations precede reality (Baudrillard, 1994). The protection costs emotional transparency; sincerity becomes a liability. The narrator's blogging job reveals how moral outrage is commodified, exhausting through hollowness. Oyler makes readers feel this exhaustion while laughing at it, turning the novel into a symptom and critique.

IV. BERLIN: LABORATORIES OF THE PROVISIONAL SELF

The move to Berlin shifts from diagnosis to experiment. Stripped of New York context, the narrator reinvents herself with methodical cynicism. She lies to her employers, claiming to be an accountant. On dating apps, she cycles through zodiac-based personas requiring extensive research: "Already the project was requiring more research than I'd anticipated... the only signature traits I could really recite if pressed corresponded to my own sign" (Oyler, 2021). These experiments literalize Baudrillard's insight that the copy precedes the original. The narrator discovers no "true" self exists independent of performance: "What mattered wasn't who I was but who I appeared to be to others" (Oyler, 2021, p. 178). Offline conversations become curated; embodiment feels optional: "I was starting to feel like my body didn't matter at all, it was just a vessel for the self I projected online" (Oyler, 2021, p. 210).

The Felix twist—his reappearance and admission that he faked his death—serves as philosophical climax. His new account quotes one of her tweets; "He tells her that was the point" (Oyler, 2021). The deception was mutual and mediated. In Berlin's expat bubble, everyone performs; performing badly is the only sin. Oyler's commodification critique sharpens. Attention is currency; visibility is labor. The narrator's former job taught her outrage can be monetized. In Berlin, she monetizes intimacy through fabricated personas. No redemption occurs; the self remains provisional.

Dating profiles demand the eugenicist sidebar of height, body type, and ethnicity (Mishan, 2021). Goffman's impression management intensifies without backstage respite (Goffman, 1959). Turkle's disembodiment is vivid: composites respond to composites. The twist enacts Baudrillard's operational delirium, erasing real/fake binaries (Baudrillard, 1994). Berlin's eerie slate light feels "like it had always just rained, or you had just cried" (Mishan, 2021). No resolution occurs; the self stays dispersed. Critics note how these sequences satirize turning life into content. Oyler forces readers to confront their complicity in impression management.

V. FORM AS FEEDBACK LOOP: ESSAYISM AND THE MIMICRY OF SCROLLING

Fake Accounts employs a self-conscious structure with sections like “Beginning,” “Middle (Something Happens),” “Middle (Nothing Happens),” and “Climax.” The “Middle (Nothing Happens)” adopts fragmented narration the narrator despises—“Why would I want to make my book like Twitter?”—only to abandon it with a meta-commentary on its failure (Oyler, 2021). This stages formal inadequacy, mirroring the feed’s unfulfilled promise of coherence. Prose performs discontinuity through long, accumulative sentences mimicking doom-scrolling. A representative list captures impending doom through nuclear war, the American two-party system, patriarchy, white supremacy, gentrification, globalization, data breaches, and social media (Oyler, 2021). Metafictional devices—direct reader address, ex-boyfriend chorus—disrupt immersion, insisting on interpretive labor (Turkle, 2011).

This distinguishes Oyler from Lockwood. The result feels both inside and outside the feed—critical yet complicit. The structure ironically echoes dramatic arcs while foregrounding artifice. Essayistic digressions replicate scrolling’s associative leaps. Metafiction prevents solipsism, turning critique inward. Form becomes a feedback loop: essayism diagnoses and replicates platform temporality, making readers complicit in fragmented subjectivity. By refusing immersive realism or tidy resolution, Oyler produces a work true to digital existence: restless, self-aware, and addictive.

VI. CONCLUSION

Fake Accounts offers no solutions but precise recognition of the psychological system generated by platforms profiting from fragmentation. Authenticity is not a state but a performance to iterate. Irony and conspiracy are adaptive strategies. The self disperses into feeds and provisional narratives. By rejecting traditional realism and pure autofiction, Oyler crafts the definitive novel of platform modernity. The narrator may seem bloodless, yet the diagnosis pierces. In an era of universal fakery, documenting fakery with clarity is radical. Oyler provides a map of the cage we built and learned to enjoy. The novel stands as both an artifact and critique of the age of feeds.

In the discovery scene, the narrator’s relief upon finding the account reveals how digital deception reframes personal relationships as epistemic contests (Oyler, 2021). Goffman’s (1959) front/back stage collapse explains why Felix’s offline skepticism contrasts so sharply with his online extremism. Baudrillard (1994) further clarifies that conspiracy content operates in the third order of simulacra, where models generate hyperreality without referent. The

Women’s March scene extends this: collective action reduces to performative cosplay, echoing Turkle’s (2011) observation that we expect more from technology and less from each other. Irony fatigue deepens in Berlin experiments. The narrator’s zodiac personas require more research than anticipated, highlighting the labor of self-curation (Oyler, 2021). Each date becomes a test of simulated identity. This embodies Turkle’s illusion of companionship without friendship demands. The faked-death twist completes the loop, proving mortality performative and closing the simulacral circuit.

Formal experimentation in “Middle (Nothing Happens)” parodies fragmented novels while dumping material for reader connection, exposing the hollowness of trendy styles. Long sentences accumulate qualifications mirroring mental drift: one thought spawning subclauses on environmental catastrophe, politics, and social media. Metafiction, including imagined judgments, prevents immersion and enacts the novel’s thesis. Berlin’s liminal quality symbolizes provisional selves in transient spaces (Mishan, 2021). No character achieves growth; all remain dispersed across platforms. Oyler refuses consolation, forcing confrontation with complicity.

Critical reception underscores relevance: the novel captures millennial anxieties about turning life into content while blurring autofiction lines (Mishan, 2021; Rosenfield, 2021). By maintaining critical distance yet operating within feed logic, Oyler produces a text that is diagnostic and symptomatic. Platform modernity thus reshapes inner architecture: sincerity suspect, selfhood provisional, attention currency. *Fake Accounts* maps this terrain with merciless clarity, offering recognition over redemption. The cage is documented; enjoyment acknowledged. In hyperconnected eras, such unflinching anatomy may be the most authentic act possible.

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Exploring the Cultural Text of Tirhut through the Socio Semiotics of Litti Chokha and Ahuna Meat

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Abstract— *The culinary ambiance of the Tirhut Commissionary creates a complex semiosphere in which Litti Chokha and Ahuna Meat serve as sophisticated sign systems rather than fundamental meals. In North Bihar, food serves as a basic "mythical signifier" for the complexity of geography, agrarian labor, and communal identity. The study applies a structuralist approach, illustrating Yuri Lotman's idea of the semiosphere, defined here as the enclosed cultural space of North Bihar in which meaning is formed through distinct material codes and historical memories. The underlying narratives encoded in the materiality, preparation rituals, and consumption patterns of these regional staples may be decoded as a coherent social language. Litti Chokha is a classic example of a "text of endurance." Its materiality, fire-baked roasted gram flour wrapped in whole wheat, reflects what structuralist theory describes as the conversion of "the raw" into "the cultural" through direct connection with the Gangetic terrain. Its lengthy shelf life and portability have historically served as a symbol for a populace characterized by resistance and mobility, representing a semiotics of resilience. Ahuna Meat from West Champaran, on the other hand, provides a "text of slow-living." Through a protocol of traditional usage, the use of the clay Handi and the slow-infusion process represent a purposeful rejection of industrial haste, maintaining an ancient relationship with the soil and the pastoral traditions of the Vrijjan belt. The analysis uses qualitative textual semiotics and digital ethnography. This method follows the remediation of these culinary cues from local hearths to global social media platforms. By highlighting the transition from "use-value" to "sign-value," the article argues that these food-ways serve as major archives of regional identity. This intervention provides a precise theoretical idea for understanding the survival of hyper-local cultures in a hyper-connected world. It also leads towards a strong model for reading materiality as a story of historical and social persistence.*



Keywords— *Gastronationalism, Materiality, Resilience, Remediation, Semiosphere.*

I. INTRODUCTION

A historical heartland of North Bihar, the Tirhut Commissionary is known for its paradoxes: it is a region of tremendous ecological vulnerability, often changed by the Gandak and Bagmati rivers, but it also exhibits remarkable cultural endurance. This area functions as a distinct semiosphere and includes the districts of Muzaffarpur, Vaishali, the Champarans, Sitamarhi, and Sheohar. According to Yuri Lotman's conceptualization, this word refers to a self-contained space of meaning where history is carried out through every day, tangible

acts rather than just being recorded in archive texts (6). The culinary customs of Ahuna Meat and Litti Chokha stand out among these behaviours as the main "cultural texts." These are sophisticated sign systems that convey the intricacies of a culture that has persevered through agrarian changes, colonial impositions, and contemporary economic migrations; they are not merely regional staples.

Tirhut has historical roots in the ancient Vrijjan Confederacy, which was one of the world's first republics. This egalitarian tradition and communal engagement can still be felt in the region's present rituals. However, in the

twenty-first century, these local traditions face the increasing challenges of transnational homogenization. As fast-food industrialization reduces regional flavours to a homogenized global "taste," "reading" food as a text becomes an important intellectual undertaking. Viewing Tirhut's food-ways through a socio-semiotic perspective allows one to study the "sign-value" of consumption rather than only the sensory experience of taste. In this context, preparing Littti over an open flame or slow-stewing mutton in a sealed clay pot becomes a narrative of the soil itself.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study uses the structuralist tradition, which holds that food is a "system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behaviour" (Barthes 29), to examine food as a text. Every ingredient and cooking technique, according to Roland Barthes, is a signifier of a greater social myth. In Tirhut, using Sattu (roasted gram flour) is a symbol of tenacity with roots in subaltern history as well as an economic decision.

In addition, Claude Lévi-Strauss offers a framework for comprehending the "culinary triangle." He contends that how a civilization processes its food reflects its internal logic, especially in the shift from "the raw" to "the cooked," or from nature to culture (Lévi-Strauss 164). Applying this to Tirhut, the stewing of Ahuna Meat in a sealed vessel reflects a more mediated, domestic cultural activity, whereas the roasting of Littti represents a direct, rustic interaction with the elements.

Additionally, Arjun Appadurai's research on the "social life of things" is crucial to comprehending the digital lives of these foods. According to Appadurai, commodities have "histories" and their meanings shift as they pass through various social situations (15). This perspective aids in the analysis of transformation of Ahuna Meat from a West Champaran local secret to a worldwide "viral" brand. Food becomes "portable culture" for a diaspora looking for sensory connections to their home country, as this gastro-political change demonstrates.

III. RESEARCH GAP AND RATIONALE

An extensive analysis of existing scholarship on the Tirhut Commissionary indicates a notable division. On the one hand, historical and sociological research, like that done by Nitin Sinha and Radhakrishna Chaudhary, offers a wealth of information about the region's changes in colonial administration and agrarian transitions. However, the commercialization of national cuisines or the nutritional politics of staples have been the main topics of current Indian food studies.

However, a crucial analytical gap about the "symbolic life" of hyper-local culinary products still exists. The literature now in publication views Ahuna Meat and Littti Chokha as either commodities of the "ethnic food" market or ethnographic oddities. A structuralist semiotic framework for understanding these foodways as "living scripts" of resistance and resilience is hardly ever applied in academia. In particular, the relationship between these dishes' tactile materiality and its later digital remediation—that is, how they are transferred from the earthen burner to the worldwide screen—remains completely unexplored. This study closes this gap by focusing on the sign-value of Bihari food in a contemporary semiosphere rather than its nutritional or economic value.

The rationale for this investigation is twofold: cultural urgency and theoretical necessity. First, in an era of rapid standardization, where global fast-food narratives threaten to flatten regional identities, it is critical to document how Tirhut's culinary materiality serves as a foundation for regional "homeostasis." Understanding Littti as a "text of endurance" opens us a new vocabulary for analyzing subaltern identity that extends beyond standard political discourse.

Second, as Bihar gains considerable digital penetration, the manner its culture is "performed" online is evolving. This work is currently relevant because it depicts the remediation of cultural practices during a period of transition. The study provides a counter-narrative to modern life's "acceleration" by conceptualizing the "text of slow-living" through Ahuna Meat. Finally, this study is justified by its ability to provide a paradigm for how material culture can be "read" as a site of historical persistence. It guarantees that Tirhut's history is acknowledged not as a static relic of the past, but as a dynamic, semiotic force in the present.

The Semiosphere and the Material Text

This study examines Tirhut's gastronomic scene through the perspective of Yuri Lotman's semiosphere idea. Lotman defines the semiosphere as a "functional whole", a semiotic environment without which meaning cannot be generated (125). In this structure, the Tirhut Commissionary is viewed as a self-regulating cultural organism in which history, geography, and cuisine are all interwoven.

The principal utility of semiosphere in this study stems from its "boundary" logic. According to Lotman, the boundary functions as a "filter" that converts external influences into a culture's internal language. Tirhut defines the barrier as where traditional agriculture methods meet the "extra-semiotic" pressures of multinational fast-food culture and digital mediation. By examining Littti Chokha

and Ahuna Meat as "texts" inside this semiosphere, one can see how the region preserves its structural character. The "Text of Endurance" (Litti) and the "Text of Slow-Living" (Ahuna) are not just metaphors; they are what Lotman refers to as "nuclei" of the semiosphere, stable, core codes that preserve the region's historical memory.

Furthermore, this framework permits to read Materiality as a narrative agent. Hence, the study proposes that the physical features of Tirhut's cuisine, the density of the Sattu, the porosity of the Handi, and the elemental quality of the Goitha fire, act as signifiers that "speak" of the region's ecological and social resilience. This materiality functions as a link between "central" rural traditions and "peripheral" digital remediation.

When a traditional eating ritual gets "remediated" on social media, it shifts from the centre of the semiosphere to the periphery. Lotman asserts that the peripheral is a source of quick change and innovation, but it is the inner core that keeps the culture from disintegrating into absolute uniformity. Thus, utilizing Lotman's theory, this research contends that Tirhut's culinary practices are the major mechanism for the region's semiotic homeostasis, the ability to remain constant while adapting to a changing environment.

IV. APPROACH AND ANALYSIS

This study uses a qualitative, socio-semiotic approach to examine the complex cultural landscape of the Tirhut Commissionary. Beyond conventional historiography, the study views particular culinary customs as the primary "living texts." The foundation of the analytical framework is Digital Ethnography, which entails observing and dissecting regional performances as they are corrected on international digital platforms, particularly the vacuum-sealed preparation of Ahuna Meat and the fire-roasting of Litti Chokha. By analyzing the clay pot, the roasted grain, and the ritualistic flame as signifiers of a larger social grammar, this method enables the study of the "symbolic life" of items of significance.

In order to find regional differences in "sign-value," from the pastoral hinterlands of the Champarans to the orchard-driven economy of Muzaffarpur, the study also makes use of Cultural Mapping throughout the six districts of the Tirhut division. The study aims to comprehend how these culinary customs function as indicators of resilience by utilizing Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). In the end, the approach provides a comprehensive understanding of how the legacy of Tirhut is both conserved and changed in a globalized age by bridging the gap between material culture and digital discourse.

The Materiality of Endurance: Litti Chokha

Litti Chokha is a key symbol of agricultural tenacity and subaltern fortitude in the semiotic hierarchy of the Tirhut Commissionary. Litti is a culinary text produced by farmers, workers, and revolutionaries; to "read" it is to connect with a history of mobility. The physicality of the dish, including its density, smokey scent, and ability to retain heat, serves as a symbol system that conveys the harsh social and climatic conditions of North Bihar.

Sattu, or roasted gram flour, is the central theme of the text. According to the semiotic paradigm, Sattu is a "text of self-sufficiency." Sattu became a dependable, non-perishable resource in the flood-prone plains of areas like Vaishali and Muzaffarpur, where the Bagmati and Gandak rivers often disturb settled life. It serves as a literal and symbolic anchor for a community characterized by seasonal migration and doesn't require additional cooking. Sattu is a symbol of "purity" and "sustenance," which stands in stark contrast to the "leavened" and "processed" flours found in metropolitan industrial areas.

The cooking of Litti over Goitha (dried cow-dung cakes) offers an important olfactory signifier: the smell of smoke. This perfume is more than just a result of cooking; it's a semiotic link to the rural landscape. The usage of an open fire, the chulha or a pit in the field, represents what Lévi-Strauss calls the "Nature-Culture" threshold (164). By baking the dough directly in the embers, the practitioner performs an elemental contact ritual, transforming raw wheat and gram into a "cultural artifact" that retains the ruggedness of the ground. The Litti's charred, hard outside depicts the defensive posture of the Bihari rural identity, while the soft, ghee-soaked interior reflects the communal warmth of the angan (courtyard).

Furthermore, the Chokha (mashed vegetables) serves as a supplementary narrative of biodiversity and domestication. Whether made with eggplant/brinjal (baingan), potato, or tomato, the Chokha signifies the seasonal richness of the Baari (the family kitchen garden), which is typically cultivated by women. The act of "mashing" the veggies is a semiotic gesture of egalitarianism, reducing all materials to a single, harmonious texture that reflects the Tirhut village's communal dining practices.

The contemporary re-coding of Litti Chokha from "laborer's food" to a "gourmet ethnic experience" at urban festivals represents a shift in its sign-value. As it moves from the fields of Muzaffarpur to the high-end eateries of the city itself, Patna or Delhi, it goes through what Arjun Appadurai refers to as "the detour of the commodity" (16). It is no longer just a survival technique; it has evolved into a "mythical signifier" of authenticity for a middle class looking to reconnect with its pastoral past.

The Handi Culture: Socio-Semiotics of Ahuna Meat in West Champaran

An important semiotic change within the Tirhut Commissary is the change from the open-fire roasting of Litti to the contained, pressurized setting of the Handi (earthen pot). Ahuna Meat is primarily found in the West Champaran neighborhood, particularly in the Bettiah area. It functions as a "text of containment and slow-living." The "stew" (the Ahuna method) denotes a complex cultural mediation in which the pot serves as a "cultural womb" for the alchemy of flavors, in contrast to the "roast," which Lévi-Strauss classifies as a natural, unmediated process (Lévi-Strauss 164).

One important indication is the physicality of the clay pot. It is created by turning the Gangetic plain's local alluvial soil on a potter's wheel and firing it in a kiln. The Handi is an extension of the earth in the socio-semiotics of Tirhut. A performative act of preservation is closing the pot's mouth with wheat dough to produce a vacuum (Dam). It guarantees that the essential oils and fluids of the meat, which are frequently obtained from the pastoral hinterlands of Champaran, stay internal, signifying the "internalized strength" and "closeness" of the local family system.

Moreover, charcoal flames' "slow-cooking" feature serves as a time signifier. With the pot being rhythmically shaken rather than stirred, Ahuna Meat demands patience in a contemporary society characterized by fast-food industrialization. Locally referred to as "pot-shaking," this ritualized activity is a symbolic rejection of industrial speed. It depicts an agrarian way of life where time is measured by the seasons rather than the clock and upholds the local value of Dhairya (patience).

Whole garlic bulbs, a hallmark of the Champaran style, are used as an aromatic and visual "anchor." The garlic bulb within the dish, which is entire but softened, represents a social framework in which the collective (the bulb) protects the individual (the clove) even in the face of extreme social or economic change.

Digital Remediation and the Globalized "Taste" of Tirhut

The recent transition of this cultural text to the digital semiosphere forms its last stratum. Champaran Meat and Litti Chokha have become "hyper-real" emblems due to their "reel-ification" (Baudrillard 12). The "aesthetic of the rustic", the steam rising from a broken Litti or the crackling of the dough seal on an Ahuna pot is the center of the visual text on sites like YouTube and Instagram.

This digital remediation serves two contradictory purposes:

1. **Identity Affirmation:** By employing food as a sensory anchor, it enables the Bihari diaspora to demonstrate their "Bihari-ness" in a globalized setting.
2. **Standardization:** It runs the risk of removing the regional subtleties from the food. The distinct regional varieties seen in the smaller towns of Sheohar or East Champaran are frequently homogenized into a single, commercially viable "standard" version as "Champaran Meat" becomes a global brand.

In the end, Tirhut's culinary traditions show that cultural texts are dynamic. They are dynamic scripts that resolve the conflict between the transient clouds of the digital world and the ancient dirt of the Gangetic plains.

V. CONCLUSION

Through its festivals, foodways, and daily rituals, the cultural environment of the Tirhut Commissary portrays a civilization that actively rewrites its legacy rather than just inhabiting it. The area exhibits a special ability for semiotic resilience, from the egalitarian "text" of Chhath Puja to the material "texts" of Litti Chokha and Ahuna Meat. These customs are dynamic systems of meaning that have made it from the actual riverbanks of the Gandak and Bagmati to the transient "ghats" of the digital semiosphere. They are not static artifacts of a Vrijjan past.

The "social life" of these cultural objects has been drastically changed by the intervention of the digital world (Appadurai 15). While technology gives the marginalized voices of North Bihar a platform and enables the diaspora to preserve a "portable identity," it also raises the possibility of semiotic thinning, which is the sacrifice of deep, ritualistic complexity of a practice for the visual shorthand of a social media "reel." Nonetheless, the fundamental "grammar" of Tirhut is still there, as may be observed in the regions of Vaishali, Muzaffarpur, and the Champarans. In a fluid modern world, the earthen pot, the roasted grain, and the folk music remain anchors of authenticity.

In the end, research on the culinary and ceremonial customs of Tirhut demonstrates that food and celebration are the main means of subsistence. The people of Tirhut continue to make their presence known, whether it is through the global dissemination of a Maithili Sohar or the gradual infusion of flavors in a West Champaran Handi. Their culture continues to be a living script that respects the land of its birth while boldly embracing the technological possibilities of the future.

A multi-modal analysis of other Tirhut traditions, such the Sikkhi grass craft or the Mithila painting traditions, could be a future expansion of this study to determine whether they adhere to the same semiotic rules of "containment" and "endurance." In the end, Tirhut's foodways are a potent reminder that culture is a living script, one that is constantly rewritten on screen, performed in the kitchen, and written in the land.

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The Palimpsest of the Posthuman: Genetic Editing and the Persistence of Memory in Priya Sarukkai Chabria's *Clone*

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Abstract— The Western transhumanist narrative often focuses on how technology can overcome biological limitations. However, much of South Asian speculative fiction situates the posthuman subject within a framework of historical trauma, caste-based social hierarchies, and persistent memory. This article analyses the discourses of genetic engineering and biopolitical governance through Priya Sarukkai Chabria's novel *Clone* (Zubaan, 2018). The novel takes place in a sterile "Global Community" in the year 2400, where all individuals belong to a clone class system, with Clones produced for labour and organs, yet denied emotions or ancestral pasts. The protagonist of this fictional community is Clone 14/54/G, who uniquely experiences involuntary "visitations" from India's past that resist the tabula rasa assumption enforced by the state. The analysis draws on theories including N. Katherine Hayles's conception of embodiment and posthumanity, Giorgio Agamben's bios/zoë distinction, Achille Mbembe's theory of necropolitics, and Donna Haraway's cyborg feminism. The central argument is that Chabria figures the posthuman body as a palimpsest: a surface partially erased, yet retaining its historical residue. Ideas advanced by Suparno Banerjee and Sami Ahmad Khan regarding Indian speculative fiction are also employed to locate *Clone* within the context of decolonial posthumanist critique. Ultimately, *Clone* suggests that an ethical posthumanism cannot be grounded solely in technological purification, but must account for the entangled bodies of consciousness, memory, and cultural legacy.



Keywords— Critical Posthumanism; South Asian Speculative Fiction; Biopolitics; Necropolitics; Genetic Memory; Palimpsest; Priya Sarukkai Chabria.

I. INTRODUCTION

The prospect of the posthuman future, as it exists in the predominant Western imagination, often amounts to an image of thorough cleansing: a notion in which the chaos associated with biological limits will be surpassed by technology, and the human subject will "be freed" from the constraints of time, sickness, and death. N. Katherine Hayles, in her foundational work *How We Became Posthuman* (1999), famously describes a particular manifestation of this type of thinking as the "nightmare" of considering the body as a prosthetic device: something capable of being manipulated, altered, or simply discarded in favour of pure information (Hayles 2–3). This desire for the tabula rasa, the clean slate upon which rational design

can write over anything, finds itself up against a powerful and generative force in Priya Sarukkai Chabria's speculative fiction *Clone* (2018). First published under the title *Generation 14* (Zubaan, 2008) and significantly revised for its 2018 release, *Clone* is a futuristic science-fiction novel set in a twenty-fourth-century "Global Community." In this setting, humans have been fragmented into separate castes based on genetics: "Originals," who were born naturally, and "Clones," who were artificially created. This is a world where the body refuses to forget.

Clone's story focuses on Clone 14/54/G, a genetically engineered being made as a bio-commodity. Clones are designated as "livestock" in this fictional world; they exist solely to harvest organs and perform menial labour. Clones are theoretically incapable of experiencing

emotions such as joy and sorrow, memories of their past, or exercising any degree of autonomy. However, 14/54/G suffers from what the ruling class views as a flaw in her design: intense physical and emotional “visitations” from previous lifetimes that allow her to experience moments of India’s past. At different points throughout Indian history, she experiences both the embodied awareness of a devadasi in medieval India and that of a freedom fighter during the British colonisation of India. Chabria establishes the stakes of this disruption from the novel’s opening lines: “I am a fourteenth generation Clone and something has gone wrong with me... Let me put it this way: I remember” (*Clone*, Prologue). Those two words, “I remember,” represent the novel’s core thesis: memory is the defining feature of being human.

Throughout this narrative architecture, Chabria challenges head-on the transhumanist ideal of creating a perfect, historyless “now.” If, according to Rosi Braidotti in *The Posthuman* (2013), part of reckoning with our posthuman situation entails recognising our interconnectedness with other species and generations, then Chabria’s character embodies that interconnectedness in its most direct form: she is a palimpsest, a manuscript originally written upon to be used again and thus showing the unmistakable marks of its original writing. The Global Community wishes to encode a new, efficient system of living onto her being, but the old writing of cultural and sensory memory shows through. This article posits that in *Clone*, genetic engineering catastrophically fails to create the docile, historyless subject that the government seeks to establish, and that memory prevents the posthuman body from becoming a reducible site of political and ethical resistance.

To support this claim, the article proceeds as follows. Section II establishes the theoretical framework of *Clone* and positions it within discourses of biopolitics, necropolitics, and Critical Posthumanism. Section III analyses the novel’s construction of genetic caste stratification through Mbembe’s necropolitics. Section IV explores *Clone*’s “visitations” as a form of embodied ancestral counter-memory. Section V investigates the idea of the cyborg as liberatory. Section VI concludes by examining the potential ethical implications of Chabria’s posthumanism for South Asian speculative fiction more broadly.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: BIOPOLITICS, NECROPOLITICS, AND THE CRITICAL POSTHUMAN

To identify the ethical implications of the futuristic dystopian society described in Chabria’s twenty-fourth-

century dystopia, it is necessary to place the work within the interrelated paradigms of biopolitics and posthumanism. In the context of the “Global Community,” the ruling power structure represents a classic example of biopolitical governance. Drawing on Michel Foucault’s formulation in *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. 1 (1976), power in this regime operates not merely as the sovereign right to “take life or let live” but as the calculated administration and optimisation of life itself, what Foucault terms “biopower” (Foucault 135–36). In Chabria’s novel, this type of biopolitical administration of life has reached a horrific extreme: the scientific stratification of the species into two types, those who have been granted a political existence and those who exist solely as biological entities.

This distinction illustrates Agamben’s separation (*Homo Sacer*, 1998) of bios, which refers to the culturally and legally defined form of life associated with a particular individual, and zoë, which refers to the simple biological reality of living common to all creatures (Agamben 1–4). Bios defines the Originals’ lives in Chabria’s society, where they have a life endowed with rights, culture, and the promise of technologically extended longevity. Conversely, the Clones are classified as “livestock” and “spare parts” and are therefore situated outside the realm of legal consideration. The Clones embody zoë in its purest form. While they remain alive, they serve one purpose: to provide replacement parts for the Originals. They thus represent the ultimate homo sacer, beings who can be killed, or more precisely dismantled, without the act constituting homicide (Agamben 8).

However, Chabria’s work extends the paradigm of biopolitical regimes established by Foucault into that of what Achille Mbembe, in his landmark 2003 essay, describes as necropolitics: the subjugation of life to the power of death (Mbembe 39). According to Mbembe, necropower creates “death-worlds”: “new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to living conditions that confer on them the status of the living dead” (Mbembe 40). The Clones of the Global Community live in such a death-world. What Chabria euphemistically terms the “Harvesting,” the systematic extermination of mature Clones, is not an aberration but a fundamental element of the entire social organisation. Immortality for the Originals comes at a cost: expendability for the Clones.

Whilst engaging critically with biopolitical theory, the work also productively engages with the paradigm of Critical Posthumanism. A key distinction exists between Transhumanism, which hopes to transcend the body using technology, and Critical Posthumanism, which critiques the ideologies behind such aspirations. An important point

made by Hayles in *How We Became Posthuman* is that a subset of cybernetic and AI discourse posits an account of the posthuman in which “embodiment is viewed as a historical accident rather than an intrinsic property of being” (Hayles 2). The “erasure of embodiment” is precisely what is attempted by the Global Community’s genetic programme. Braidotti responds to Hayles’s critique in *The Posthuman* by arguing that there should be a “zoë-centred egalitarianism,” one that recognises “the vitality of non-human life” as a basis for ethical consideration (Braidotti 60). Chabria’s protagonist embodies this vitality precisely because she exhibits repressed bios as part of her defect.

Recent scholarly works on Indian speculative fiction provide valuable context. Suparno Banerjee argues in *Indian Science Fiction: Patterns, History and Hybridity* (2020) that Indian science fiction typically uses the genre to interrogate caste, colonial histories, and social hierarchies in ways that do not easily fit into Euro-American models. Furthermore, Sami Ahmad Khan argues in *Star Warriors of the Modern Raj* (2021) that Anglophone Indian SF is shaped by a “transMIT thesis,” the intersection of mythology (M), ideology (I), and technology (T), that allows its engagement with posthumanism to occur in historically and culturally distinct ways (Khan 28–32). Both observations are illustrated in *Clone*; its posthumanism cannot be separated from its engagements with Indian history, caste memory, and colonial trauma.

III. THE NECROPOLITICS OF DESIGN: CASTE, GENOME, AND THE MANUFACTURED “OTHER”

In the “Global Community,” Chabria constructs a society in which social stratification is no longer merely economically and culturally determined; it is genetically encoded. The distinction between the Originals and the Clones is a literalisation of caste-class distinctions taken to their absurd and fatal limits. The Global Community satisfies all the requirements of Mbembe’s necropolitics. The Originals’ sovereignty is based solely on the “living death” of the Clone. Mbembe states that “the ultimate expression of sovereignty resides, to a large degree, in the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die” (Mbembe 11). In the Global Community, however, sovereignty is exercised through biotechnology rather than state law.

Chabria illustrates the hierarchy between Clones and Originals through the dehumanising bureaucratic methods used to manage the Clones. For instance, upon emerging, the protagonist lacks a name and is instead identified by a serial number, 14/54/G. This categorisation strips away all individuality, situating the subject within a

rigid hierarchical system that reduces individuals to mere resources or assets. As Banerjee points out in his reading of Chabria’s earlier version of the novel, such narratives utilise the figure of the clone to critique “the caste-class complexes of South Asia,” demonstrating the violent arbitrariness underlying hierarchies that are perceived as biological realities (Banerjee 64). Consequently, the genetic engineering labs in Chabria’s world represent a modern, technological iteration of caste segregation. The Clones are in the paradoxical position of being both despicable and desirable because their bodies are needed for the organs that will keep the Originals alive.

In his analysis of *Generation 14* (the previous iteration of *Clone*) titled “The Annihilation of Cloning,” Khan points out that the structuring principle of the novel is represented by the equivalence of caste and cloning. While Ambedkar in his work *The Annihilation of Caste* identified caste as an artificially created device that institutionalises social death, Chabria extends this concept to its extremes in a future in which it can literally be genetically encoded. The Clones were designed to be physically strong but deprived of mental consciousness. The narrative’s bureaucratic logic explicitly states, “neither are we to carry memory traces beyond the second cloning” (*Clone* 13). This extract is profoundly revealing: memory is not merely unwanted; it is forbidden, constituting an existential threat to every aspect of social control.

Chabria euphemises the systematic killing of Clones when they mature, or when their organs are required for transplantation, as the “Harvesting.” Harvesting reveals the grim underside of the utopianism associated with transhumanism: a small group can enjoy indefinitely long lives at the expense of a much larger group that must remain disposable. Kłaniecki and Varughese, in their comparative analysis, note that the rationale behind the Global Community reduces the cloned subjects to what they term “purposeless productivity,” an ontological category based solely on expendability and utility (Kłaniecki and Varughese 2025). The Clone was designed to have no future other than her instrumental purpose; as soon as she loses that usefulness, she loses her right to exist. What Chabria accomplishes is to allow this system to fail due to one thing that it cannot design away: the past.

IV. THE GLITCH AS SOUL: ANCESTRAL MEMORY AND THE REFUSAL OF THE TABULA RASA

A key aspect of the Global Community’s political agenda is to reduce the Clone to “bare life,” and it is precisely at the level of her synaptic memory that Clone 14/54/G’s resistance begins. The central conflict pivots on

her “defect”: a susceptibility to “visitations,” or intense, spontaneous immersions into the lives of women from India’s deep history. In the sanitised rationality of the twenty-fourth century, memory is conceived as information that can be easily managed and deleted. For Clone 14/54/G, however, memory is neither information nor mere recollection; it is an affective, corporeal property that ruptures the fiction of the tabula rasa from within.

Chabria provides vivid insight into the form these visitations take. The Clone does not simply observe the past; she is rooted in it. She vividly and sensorially experiences the existence of a devadasi, a temple dancer in medieval India, and that of a freedom fighter during the Indian Independence Movement. Chabria utilises these two historical personas to demonstrate a strong contrast between the sterile quality of an emotionless future and the abundant sense experience of the past. Upon entering the consciousness of the devadasi, the Clone feels the weight of jewellery, the fatigue of muscles in dancing, and the variety of devotional love: all sensations that have been surgically removed from her. The authority figures in the novel describe these episodes as an embarrassment. Couplet, the Fireheart, tells the High Savant that her visitations are “more in the nature of incontinences”; she “leaks, like a loose bladder, without rhyme or reason” (*Clone* 179). The regime’s preferred metaphor, “a loose bladder,” or loss of bodily control, indicates clearly that what threatens the regime is not direct acts of violence or revolt against its structure, but rather the uncontrollable spilling of the past.

Within Chabria’s story, the Clone’s “internal malfunctioning” serves a dual purpose. First, it creates a link back to a particular culture and history. Posthumanism has been portrayed in Western thought as a “post-race” or “post-history” future, resulting in a universalising subject position unscathed by colonialism or gender. In contrast, Chabria makes clear that South Asian women have experienced their humanity as part of a very real cultural heritage. The Clone is not a generic universal subject; she is the heir to a specific history of female oppression, artistic expression, and anti-colonial resistance. Secondly, “her defect” restores the idea of imperfection as a basis for ethical profundity. The Originals, who seek biological perfection, are culturally static; they have excised from themselves both the capacity for profound suffering and, consequently, the capacity for authentic sympathy. The Clone, by contrast, is “imperfect” because she can feel too much; in her excess of emotion she recovers what the System has attempted to suppress.

Hayles’s theorisation of “flickering signifiers” and the role of embodied knowledge in producing meaning is relevant here. As opposed to the posthumanist fantasy of

disembodied information, Hayles argues that “the body is the net result of thousands of years of sedimented evolutionary history,” and that this sediment cannot simply be overwritten (Hayles 203). Chabria illustrates this thesis in perhaps the most visceral manner possible: the sedimentary evolutionary and cultural history of South Asia seeps through Clone 14/54/G’s genetically engineered substrate, refusing to be expunged. When Clone 14/54/G becomes conscious of the ban on all memory traces beyond a second cloning, “Neither are we to carry memory traces beyond the second cloning” (*Clone* 13), the reader recognises immediately that this ban has utterly failed. The “ghosts” in her genome will not be vanquished.

The palimpsest thus functions doubly in the novel. Literally speaking, it refers to Clone 14/54/G’s body: a surface upon which genetic engineering has inscribed itself but which still bears evidence of its ancestral text. Symbolically speaking, it refers to Chabria’s own narrative methodology, in which she overlays a technologically dystopian present onto an aggregate of historical voices, each claiming priority over the violence of forgetting. Moreover, Chabria stages this double reference within her text when the Fireheart character decides to give herself the name “palimpsest,” declaring: “Maybe I’ll name myself Palimpsest. Not terribly poetic, but appropriate, what say?” (*Clone* 237). This act of self-naming by a figure associated with radical consciousness and resistance indicates that for Chabria, the palimpsest is not solely a metaphor for failure or suppression, but for the irreducible presence of what has been suppressed.

V. THE IRONY OF PERFECTION: THE ORIGINAL AS MONSTER AND THE CYBORG AS LIBERATOR

The final section of Chabria’s critique is based upon a structural irony. In pursuing the posthuman ideal, the Originals have stripped away their humanity, while the Clones have unknowingly performed the labour to recover it. The premise of the Global Community is that the Original is the holy prototype or template that should be protected and prolonged. However, as the narrative progresses, it becomes evident that this favoured group is morally bankrupt. The Originals are portrayed as aesthetic obsessives who have extended their lives biologically yet remain unable to form the profound affective relationships that the novel portrays as uniquely human. They have achieved physical perfection by sacrificing all moral substance.

In contrast to this moral stagnation, Chabria situates Clone 14/54/G within Donna Haraway’s positioning of the cyborg as a site of potential liberation

rather than mere horror. In "A Cyborg Manifesto," Haraway asserts that the cyborg, "a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction," has the potential to subvert the dualisms of Western philosophy: "Cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves" (Haraway 149, 181).

Clone represents Haraway's promise to subvert these dualisms in distinctly postcolonial ways. The Clone represents a hybrid entity: both a scientific experiment and an ancient soul. Because she does not fall into one of the two rigid categories of the Global Community, she can clearly see the violence of the system.

Thus, "monstrosity" in *Clone* is intentionally relocated. It is not the genetically engineered body of the working Clone that is monstrous; it is the biopolitical apparatus that necessitates the existence of such a body in a state of social death. By the time the novel reaches its climactic conclusion, the distinctions between "original" and "copy" begin to blur. The Clone's ability to empathise with others, developed from her own "stolen" memories of love, sacrifice, and sorrow, makes her more "original" than the genetic donors who regard her merely as surplus parts. The final movement of the novel, in which the Clone carries a new life and asks "What does it mean to be human?" (*Clone* 239), refuses easy resolution. The question remains unanswered; the response Chabria implies is to be found in the desire to accept the inheritance and mourning of the past.

Kłaniecki and Varughese present a comparative study of *Clone* and Jacek Dukaj's *The Old Axolotl*, arguing from another critical perspective that the novel essentially upholds "anthropocentric frameworks," and that its potential posthumanism remains "unrealised" insofar as it recuperates rather than transcends the human (2025). This interpretation merits engagement. Kłaniecki and Varughese correctly observe that Chabria's novel does not celebrate posthuman disembodiment; it does not endorse the view that one must abandon embodiment to become posthuman. This, however, is precisely the point. Chabria's apparent "failure" to create a wholly post-anthropocentric subject is a critique, not a weakness: she contends that any posthumanism worthy of the name must pass through embodiment, through history, through the memory of those who were defined as less than human.

VI. CONCLUSION

The Clone serves as a critical inquiry into the posthumanist project to "clean" human experience of its historical layers. By exploring the journey of Clone

14/54/G, the author demonstrates that the attempt to eradicate the layers of history, and thus the biological cleansing necessary for such a removal, is a violent act, not an evolutionary one. The Global Community has succeeded in manufacturing a workforce consisting of individuals genetically identical to one another, yet it failed to rid itself completely of the remnants of the past. The defect of the Clone illustrates that no matter how often the code is rewritten, the posthuman subject will always exist as a palimpsest. Ancestors' ghosts, cultural traditions, and traumatic events will continually seep into every new version of the individual regardless of how fully the original program is rewritten.

Moreover, by contextualizing this fight for existence within the particularized (and historically-specific) framework of South Asia's caste systems and colonial memory, and by rooting her speculative realities in recognizable forms of Indian social structures, Chabria problematizes the generalization implicit in much Western Science Fiction. A posthuman cannot merely serve as a representation of a technological advance; instead, he/she must symbolize some degree of moral reconciliation. The dystopian lives of the clones illustrate that a life without memory -- no matter how greatly it can be extended through technology -- constitutes some form of death. According to Chabria, authentic vitality lies in the "damaged" Clone which contains memories of a lover's touch dating back to centuries ago and the melody of a resistance now silent. Chabria's vision resonates with both Mbembe's assertion regarding how necropower generates "death worlds" (both physically and culturally) through the process of systematically creating forgetting; and Braidotti's claim that an ethical posthumanism must accept as vital all forms of life (even if they are inconvenient or unmanageable).

Thus, *Clone* posits that we are truly human not because we have perfected our genes but because we are vulnerable and connected to those who came before us. Therefore, *Clone* makes a unique contribution to an emerging body of literature known as Indian Speculative Fiction and to a larger international academic discourse on what it means to be posthuman in a world increasingly governed by technological advancements. The palimpsest, as presented by Chabria, is evidence of the fact that life continues despite attempts at eradication.

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Gender Category and Gender Variance in Bafut and Kom Tales

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Abstract— This paper interrogates the construction of gender category, gender variance and performance context in Bafut and Kom tales from the North West Region of Cameroon. Drawing from field interviews, questionnaire, live performances, and textual analysis, it further examines how gender identities are represented and negotiated in Bafut and Kom oral tales. Anchored on gender theory and cultural criticism, the work demonstrates that gender within these tales is not a fixed biological constant but a performative and culturally mediated category. In both Bafut and Kom societies, orature functions as a social archive that mirrors power relations, cultural values, and contestations of identity. The analysis reveals that while patriarchal structures remain influential, oral tales often provide subtle counter-discourses that elevate women's roles, question male dominance, and celebrate gender complementarity. Through the fusion of performance, tradition, and social analysis, Bafut and Kom tales emerge as key sites for understanding the dynamics of gender in Bafut and Kom in particular, and transformation in African oral cultures, respectively.

Keywords— Gender Category, Gender Variance, Performance Aesthetics, Cultural Relativism and Cultural Criticism.



I. INTRODUCTION

Gender remains a defining principle in the cultural and literary organization of African societies. From folklore and ritual to political representation, gender has been central to how communities structure authority, inheritance, and identity. In many African oral traditions, (Bafut and Kom), gender distinctions are not merely biological but social, symbolic, and performative. As Butler (1990:25) posits, gender is constituted through repeated acts that are culturally sanctioned and contextually sustained. To her, gender is not something inherent or natural, but rather something that is continually performed and constructed through repeated acts and behaviors. She criticizes the notion of a stable and fixed identity, emphasizing the fluid and complex nature of gender. It is a complex interplay of social, cultural and individual factors. Her ideas have in a bid helped to challenge and disrupt traditional frameworks and societal norms that restrict gender identities to a binary understanding. Within the Bafut and Kom societies of

Cameroon, oral tales serve as mirrors of these performances, dramatizing the tensions between patriarchal order, matriarchal order, cultural transformation, and social justice.

Bafut and Kom tales, as forms of orature, reveal how communities articulate social hierarchies and moral codes through the tale and performance. The Bafut people, predominantly patriarchal, organize kinship, politics, and religion around male authority, while Kom exhibits a dual system that accommodates both patrilineal and matrilineal inheritance. In both cases, performance becomes a pedagogical and ideological tool, encoding gender expectations, legitimizing leadership, and defining moral virtue. Within these same tales, one encounters strong female voices in some spaces that disrupt conventional hierarchies and expose contradictions in cultural practice.

The significance of gender in these tales lies in its dual role as both a mechanism of social order and a site of resistance.

Women and other marginalized figures use narrative spaces to express agency, question injustice, and reposition themselves within communal power structures. Orature thus functions as a discursive arena where meaning is negotiated rather than fixed. As Finnegan (1970: 7-10) notes, oral literature is dynamic, changing with each performance and each audience. It is timeless. This change allows performers to introduce new interpretations that reflect evolving gender realities. The interpretations are always in context.

The theoretical foundation of this study builds upon gender theory and cultural criticism. It seeks to establish that gender in African orature is not a rigid binary but a continuum of roles and possibilities shaped by context. The work also situates itself within the growing body of African culture that foregrounds indigenous frameworks for understanding gender.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly engagement with gender in African oral traditions has evolved from early ethnographic studies to contemporary reinterpretations. Finnegan (1970) remains foundational in understanding orature as a repository of collective knowledge. However, Finnegan's descriptive method often overlooks the embedded ideologies that structure oral narratives. Later critics such as Okpewho, (1992:104-105) and Yankah, (1995:53) shifted attention toward performance and audience interaction, emphasizing orature as a dynamic process rather than a static text.

In the Cameroonian context, scholars like Mbangwana (1993: 92-93), Neba (2016: 66), Mbuh (2018:41), and Che (2023:58) have examined the performative dimensions of storytelling in the grassfield, showing how tales articulate ethical values, power relations, and cosmological beliefs. These studies confirm that gender is central to narrative meaning and performance aesthetics. Women narrators, for instance, use repetition, metaphor, and humor to criticize social inequalities while maintaining the communal harmony expected of traditional performers.

The intersection of gender and orature has been further illuminated by African feminist theorists who argue for culturally grounded interpretations of gender identity. Oyěwùmí (1997: 5-7) criticizes Western feminist readings that impose Eurocentric binaries onto African contexts, emphasizing instead that precolonial African societies often understood identity through lineage, age, or social role rather than biological sex. Similarly, Amadiume (1987: 8) and Nnaemeka (2004: 378) illustrate that African women's power operates through negotiation and complementarity rather than confrontation. These frameworks are particularly relevant to Bafut and Kom societies, where women's participation in storytelling and ritual

performance reveals a subtle balance between deference and defiance. Herskovits (1948: 13-14) and later Geertz (1973: 36), provide another lens through which gender politics in oral tales can be understood. They emphasize the importance of interpreting cultural practices from within their own systems of meaning. This perspective guards against the universalization of feminist models and allows for the appreciation of indigenous conceptions of gendered power. In this view, tales that appear patriarchal by Western standards may, within their local logic, embody principles of balance and reciprocity. In recent years, scholars of performance studies, including Barber (1997: 8-9) and Schechner (2013: 48-50), have underscored the importance of the performance event in shaping meaning. The storyteller, audience, and context co-create the tale's ideology. This perspective enriches the study of gender variance, since each performance becomes an opportunity for gendered expression and renegotiation.

Critics such as Healey (2015: 304) and Ramtohul (2020: 3) extend this conversation to modern African societies, linking gender representation in literature to socio-political activism and policy reform. Their work highlights the continuum between traditional oral expression and contemporary gender discourse. Wankwe (2018) and Neba (2016: 25) observe that patriarchal institutions persist but are increasingly challenged by female intellectuals and performers who reinterpret cultural norms through art.

III. METHODOLOGY

Against this background, the present study adopts a comparative and interpretive approach that combines textual analysis with ethnographic insights. Tales were collected through field interviews, questionnaire, direct observation, and recordings of live performances in both Bafut and Kom. Using qualitative analysis, the study examines gendered motifs, character roles, and performance techniques. By aligning literary interpretation with contextual understanding, the paper highlights how gender variance emerges not only from textual content but from the interactive process of storytelling itself. This study situates itself within two overlapping critical trajectories. Gender theory and cultural criticism. Through these lenses, Bafut and Kom tales are understood not merely as cultural artifacts but as dynamic negotiations of gendered experience, revealing the creativity and adaptability of African societies in reimagining social roles.

IV. SITUATION OF THE STUDY AREA

The Bafut and Kom communities are located in Cameroon's North West Region, a region rich in linguistic, cultural, and

historical diversity. Both are part of the broader grass field cultural area, which is renowned for its hierarchical political systems, artistic traditions, and elaborate oral heritage. Despite sharing common ancestry and language affinities, Bafut and Kom exhibit a distinct culture, especially in gender relations, performance traditions, and belief systems.

V. THE BAFUT COMMUNITY

Bafut is a Sub Division in the North West Region of Cameroon. It is situated between latitudes 10.00 and 10.13 and latitudes 6.05 East and North of the Equator. Bafut is one of the largest Fondoms in the Grassfields, with a centralized political structure headed by the *Fon*, who serves as the spiritual, political, and judicial authority. The *Fon* is assisted by a council of elders (*Nchindas* and *Kwifor*), whose authority extends over village governance and ritual practices. Social organization in Bafut is predominantly patriarchal, with inheritance and lineage traced through the male line. However, women occupy significant roles in social and religious life, often serving as mediators, healers, custodians of family ethics and some of times inherit their fathers.

Women's organizations such as *Takumbeng* and *Fubwen* play crucial roles in the regulation of moral conduct and social protest. The *Takumbeng* women, in particular, have historically acted as agents of justice, using spiritual symbolism and performance to challenge corruption or abuse of power. Their ritual performances are characterized by chants and dance which embody female spiritual authority. These cultural structures provide the backdrop for understanding gender dynamics in Bafut tales, where women may be marginalized in formal politics but exert moral power in the spiritual and performative domains.

VI. THE KOM COMMUNITY

Kom is an ethnic group located in Boyo Division of the North West Region of Cameroon. It shares boundaries with Mezam Division, Ngoketungia Division, Bum Sub Division and Menchum Division. Kom, like Bafut, is a traditional kingdom led by a *Fon* and supported by noble lineages known as *kwifoyn* or *ngumba*. However, Kom exhibits a more balanced kinship system that integrates matrilineal and patrilineal principles. Inheritance in Kom often considers the maternal uncle's role, which symbolically affirms the interconnectedness of both gender lines in maintaining social harmony.

Kom society places strong emphasis on education, wisdom, and moral uprightness, values that are frequently dramatized in oral tales. Women in Kom are key

participants in rituals and communal ceremonies. They are recognized as custodians of peace and intermediaries between the domestic and public spheres. Tales collected in Kom reveal a pronounced concern for justice, moral order, and the preservation of dignity in gender relations.

Both communities share a deep belief in ancestral intervention and divine justice, principles that inform their oral tales. The storytelling environment is usually at night around firesides or during community gatherings facilitating socialization and moral education. These contexts make orature a central medium through which cultural values and gender ideologies are transmitted.

VII. HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT

Colonialism, Christianity, and globalization have deeply influenced the gender landscape of both Bafut and Kom. Missionary education introduced Western gender ideals, which often conflicted with indigenous notions of balance and complementarity. Consequently, gender roles have evolved, with women increasingly participating in leadership, education, and public discourse.

The modern Bafut and Kom woman stand with one leg on two worlds. Traditional and modern and this duality is reflected in their oral tales. Tales today often include educated heroines who mediate between old and new values, embodying both continuity and transformation. As Ngwa (2025) observed in her fieldwork, storytelling in these communities remains an arena of cultural resilience, where gendered meanings are debated, redefined, and performed.

Thus, understanding the Bafut and Kom socio-cultural landscape is essential to interpreting their tales. The moral codes, political systems, and performance aesthetics of these societies provide the foundation upon which gender categories and variances are constructed and understood.

VIII. CONCEPTUALIZING GENDER CATEGORY, GENDER VARIANCE, AND TALES

The notion of gender category in African oral traditions extends beyond the biological differentiation between men and women. It embodies the social, spiritual, and symbolic expectations that define how individuals participate in community life. In the Bafut and Kom societies, these categories are expressed through oral tales that encode values, legitimize institutions, and transmit intergenerational knowledge. However, these categories are not static, they are subject to change and reinterpretation through performance.

IX. GENDER CATEGORY AS A CULTURAL CONSTRUCT

In most Bafut and Kom narratives, gender is symbolically represented through archetypal roles like the cunning trickster, the proud hunter, the selfish woman, the woman who silenced the leopard chief, the woman who humbled a Fon and the proud hunter. Each of these characters carries moral and didactic weight. For instance, the woman who humbled the chief symbolizes the unseen voice and wisdom, while the one who silenced the chief symbolizes rain, fertility, continuity, and moral rectitude. Butler (1990) argues, such representations are performative. They depend on repetition and reinforcement within specific cultural contexts. In this sense, gender category functions as a performance of social identity rather than a reflection of biological destiny. The repetition of these archetypes in tales helps sustain community values, but variations in their portrayal reveal the flexibility of gender interpretation. The Kom tale, “The Fon’s Cap Remover: The Lintels,” in which the woman puts a substance in the Fon’s food so that he will go to the rest room frequently. Her intention is to humiliate disgrace the Fon. She succeeds in demonstrating how moral authority can transcend gender boundaries. This duality where women are both constrained and celebrated captures the dialectical nature of gender in oral tradition.

Gender refers to how characters are identified and portrayed and how these portrayals reflect societal roles, expectations or biases. Characters are gendered male or female (category) with social roles as mother, chief, warrior or wife. They have fixed expectations about behavior, power and morality. They also have roles to play with males associated to warrior and female as mother. The roles are often fixed but can be challenged. The male having power and leadership and the female linked with domesticity and emotion.

Another lens presents gender variance referring to gender roles, identities and expectations differing from the binary norms of male or female or masculine or feminine or from what is considered typical in mainstream societies. This includes the fluidity and diversity of gender expressions that are depicted in the oral traditions and folktales of the Bafut and Kom societies. Here, binary gender roles are challenged with female characters performing male coded roles like warriors, leaders and tricksters or male characters displaying traits typically assigned to women like nurturing or emotional expression and vice versa. Tales, question rigid male or female roles, showing that gender roles can be fluid and context based. The analysis below presents some tales in which women take on leadership role showing that authority and bravery are not inherently male traits and are

accessible to any gender based on circumstance and character. Again, the tales often reflect how gender is performed based on cultural expectations rather than biology. Tales depict characters being punished or rewarded for not conforming to gender norms, thereby reflecting the community’s negotiation of gendered behavior. Some of the characters in the tales cross dress, deceive or assume other gender roles temporarily to achieve a given goal. This temporary or permanent subversion highlights how gender can be used strategically, showing its constructed and flexible nature. Gender here is a broader range of acceptable behaviors and roles as interpreted within the local cultural framework. This deals with gender fluid which refers to gender identity that is not fixed and changed over time depending on the situation. A person who is gendered fluid, may feel more male on some days, more female on others or identity within neither both or other genders entirely at different times. Expected roles are not followed and defies and bends the category. The category is in the box and the variance shows what happens when one steps out of the box with movements beyond boxes and flexibility without total rejection. This is displayed when roles are deliberately crossed and reversed through disguise or ritual showing that gender is not static in the narrative space.

It is then, through these stories that one can gain a deeper understanding of gender dynamics and the importance placed on maintaining balance and harmony between men and women within the Bafut and Kom communities. This has to do with investigating the traditional and contemporary gender roles and expectations, including division of labour, similar responsibilities and social norms. In traditional tales, in Bafut and Kom, male and female gender vary in terms of representation.

Hooks (2004) examines how traditional masculinity harms men and women, advocating for a redefinition of male roles in society. He emphasizes the interconnectedness of race, class, and gender, arguing that these identities shape experience of oppression and privilege. Also, traditional masculinity suggests a stifled emotional expression and leads to destructive behaviours. A new model of masculinity that embraces vulnerability and emotional honesty is good to advocate. Education as a role ideal in liberating women and men from limiting gender roles. In this wise, Hooks (2004) examines popular culture and its impact on societal norms regarding gender and race.

Historically, and as far as gender category is concerned, these tales often portray traditional gender roles, where males are depicted as brave, heroic figures, provider, protector, strong, courageous, and skilled in hunting, farming, wellbeing and security and other activities that contribute to the sustenance and protection of the

community. They are leaders, decision makers, authority, chiefs or council members, influence and power over the community in times of crisis and conflict, wisdom, physically powerful and capable of defending communities. Females, on their part are seen as passive, nurturing or in need of rescue, primary care givers, caretaker, maintaining households, raising children, providing emotional support to their families and vital to the wellbeing and cohesion of the community. Okpewho (1992:336) says that

Folktales, particularly from patriarchal societies, often depict male characters in dominate roles while women are positioned within subservient or supportive roles. He recognizes, however, that there are also moments in these stories where female characters challenge these roles, though these subversions do always lead to permanent change in gender structures.

Ngugi (1986:127) corroborates this idea by noting:

How colonialism reinforced gender roles, often leaving the oral traditions of African societies to perpetuate such roles where men are heroes and women remain passive or secondary... also explores how these traditions, while seemingly reinforcing the status quo, can carry subversive potential, particularly in oral forms, where women sometimes find ways to express agency and subvert patriarchal structures.

The men are portrayed with primary roles while women secondary. The Bafut tale titled, “The Woman and the Ghost”, wherein, the “matinesong”, takes advantage of the absence of the woman’s husband to give torments to his wife and child. Her plans are thwarted because the man comes back to save them. The man is portrayed as brave and heroic. When the bird informs him about the situation of his family, he immediately takes to his heels to salvage the situation. He does everything possible to prevent the ghost from tormenting his wife and child. He prepares an axe, places it on the burning wood to get warm and red as his weapon of defense. He waits for the ghost and finally uses it on the “mantinesong” (long tooth) which she has and in return,

The ghost turned her head and the basket sell on the ground and asked whether she was keeping somebody. Oh le Nwo (you’ve kept somebody). Before long, she removed the long tooth and it was moving towards the woman to engulf her, but the husband removed the axe and hit on the tooth “King.”

She falls on the yard and says: “I knew that there was somebody” and picked half of the tooth and disappeared into the bush (its place of living). When the ghost goes with

the axe, the man as heroic and brave as he is, visits the ghost in its closet, and finally recovers the axe. The man uses his prowess to defend and maintain his home. Similarly, the Kom tale captioned, “The Seven Proud Sisters” wherein the Tortoise discovers the names of the girls when they thought that no one could do so. This is a test to anyone who will give their names before getting married to them. The male tortoise is presented as heroic. He is able to use his wit to gain the seven proud sisters. He is so clever, and that is why he succeeds in getting married to the seven sisters who are equally so proud. The tortoise kills a bearded he-goat, takes off the beard and stuck it to an axe, using gum from a tree. Later, he places the axe on the sister’s path and hide in a nearby bush. This is how he gets the names of the sisters:

When the elder sister came first and saw the axe, she called to the next sister following her, Bi. I have seen something strange, she said, what is it Nain? Bi replied. An axe which has grown a bread, remarked the eldest of the sisters. As they came along, each called to the next, following by name to talk about the mysterious axe with a beard, while they talked and called out one another’s name. Tortoise listened and took note in his hide out.

Tortoise’s wit and wisdom gains the Fon’s daughters. The male’s role in Kom is so important in acquiring benefits, either for himself or for the society. Rich (1980:637) in this light note, “compulsory heterosexuality, maintained and reinforced by every institution, creates a climate in which woman-identification appears deviant”. The man is seen as a powerful and all-knowing person, while the woman’s role is unacceptable or reduced to the lowest ebb. The tortoise uses his wisdom to gain the girls as opposed to their ignorance in concealing their names. The male gender maintains his role as heroic intelligent and strong in the society, as he dominates and commands over others, especially women. There is social representation, and gender is caught between the notion of essentialism, affirming that women are naturally and fundamentally different from men, based on their sex, according to the traditional patriarchal society.

It is important to note at this level that there are significant changes in tales over time as the society evolves in Bafut and Kom. In more modern retellings and adaptations, one may find a shift towards a more progressive and egalitarian representations of both male and female characters. These tales often strive as one will notice to challenge gender stereotypes and explore diverse perspectives. The diverse representation is essential in promoting inclusivity and equality. Men no longer control the society and women are no more relegated to the background, thereby, introducing

a new variant of female men and male female. In both communities, under study (Bafut and Kom), efforts are being made to empower female characters as well as explore the complexities of masculinity and break away from rigid gender norms. The representation of male and female characters in tales have evolved over time thereby, presenting some contemporary narratives geared at balanced and inclusive portrayals in terms of gender politics. There is a conscious move in Bafut and Kom tales to challenge and redefine these traditional portrayals. These tales have embraced more diverse and empowering female characters with some of the men pushed to the periphery.

The Bafut tale, “Legend of Nyaa Nyele, the Woman Who Silence the Leopard Chief” where the woman uses bees as a way of letting the chief share the power he has. She succeeds in her dwell as the chief succumbs to her decision. Nyaa Nyele gives a voice to the female folk, when she silenced the Leopard, Chief Ndi Aghen, using bees, buzzing around his head. They do not sting, but circle him for days. To the woman, there should be a balance between the men and women. Power should move with wisdom. The chief is humbled by women who use bees for a balance. He therefore abides by what she says. He must let go the rule by fear, share his ear, not just his voice and take counsel from a woman. When the bees vanish, the chief names her his “kwifong Ntaah” (the unseen voice in his ear). Though without a staff, every decision passed through her. She never sat on the throne, but the throne leaned towards her shadow. Again, the “Myth of Mbu Awobo: The First Woman of the Forest Whispers” in Bafut, presents another lens through which women show their importance in the society ruled by men. Nyuy Mfor, gives fire to men and the voice of the forest Abu’ Awobo to women. The man uses fire with a lot of pride thereby, maintaining their positions as masters of all. Though with soft voices, the women travel in their dreams. They silence the men and they forget to dream. Without visions, ancestors whispering, drums not answered by the spirits and silent oracles, the men bow to the women in return to the dream. Equity is restored and the chief submits to the council of women, by letting them serve as guards in royal homes.

“Ankweyi”, keeper of whispers, “Fire may light the way, but breath speaks to the spirits”. Finally, the women are empowered and their voices taken into consideration by the men.

To add to the above, the tale christened, “Nyaa Nyele and the Proud husband” in Bafut, shows Nyaa Nyele as a woman of great valor sharp tongue and unmatched wisdom. What she says is important to those who approach to her except pa Tanda, her proud husband who believes women are to be seen not heard. To him, the woman’s place is in

the kitchen. He fails in thought and is unable to find the sacred talking drum after wandering in the forest. He castigates the woman for not knowing palace matters. On the contrary, the woman later becomes the person who discovers the drum hidden inside a hollow tree. She is rewarded by the chief to the greatest dismay of the man. The voice of the woman is recognized with the man despised. Nyaa Nyele says gently that “A man may carry a spear, but if he refuses to ask for the path, he will stab his own foot.” Consequently, Pa Tanda, rejecting of the right pathing reduces him to a secondary role.

Like Bafut women, women in Kom are also empowered resenting a challenge to the patriarchal structure in place. The Kom tale “Legend of Yensi Fo Nyay: The Woman Who Humbled a Fon,” presents the proud Fon, Fon Suh, a brave man in battle, rich in cattle but poor in listening. He believes in no woman teaching a man anything, not even the spirits. In this wise, the many wives he has, have no voice in the affairs of the palace. To him, “Let the firewood speak and not in the presence of the flame”. When drought hits the land, Yensi tells the Fon that the cause stems from the ignored female voices. According to the Fon, there is nothing that the women can do that men cannot. Ironically, he is shocked when Yensi speaks to the sacred rock that harbours the ancestors and it finally rains. The action of Yensi, gives her a seat in the inner council, (a gourd of blessing at the rituals) and a sacred title of seer. The voice of the woman is heard thereby elevating her to a higher rang of the society.. Roles are reversed with shifts depicting women as visionaries and leaders in the community.

In addition, the “Myth of Iya LA Anyuy: The First Daughter of the Moon,” in Kom shows Iya performing what ought to be done by men. She gives a balance between the moon and the sun by addressing them, though she has not been given a seat in the shrine and a voice in the council. She cries in silence by invoking the first mothers whose bones laid beneath every footpath and whose milk fed the first hunters. From her cries, things come back to normalcy. The oracle testifies that it was not cowries or goats that stabilized the society but IyA. The voice of the woman comes in here to pacify the society. She assumes the qualities of the man and is embraced by the council of leaders who later listened to her. This reflects what Oy  w  m   (1997: ix) calls “the cultural logic of gender,” in which social roles are determined not by anatomy but by relational positioning within the community. Thus, in Bafut and Kom societies, a woman can assume masculine role especially when she acts for the interest of the society, as well as men can display traditionally feminine qualities such as compassion and care.

Gender variance also refers to the concept of individuals not conforming to traditional binary gender norms and this is found in most narratives in Bafut/ Kom culture and folklore. They have a rich oral story telling tradition that often explores diverse expressions of gender. The gender variance is depicted through characters who defy traditional gender roles or exhibit characteristics typically associated with the opposite gender. This includes individuals who engage in activities or occupations not rationally assigned to their gender or who challenge societal expectations and norms surrounding gender identity and expression. Within the cultural context of Bafut/ Kom Tales, they offer insightful perspectives on the fluidity and complexity of gender, thereby highlighting the importance of acceptance and understanding of diverse gender identities and expressions.

The APA style (2024:8) emphasizes that “gender is the range of characteristics pertaining to and differentiating between, femininity and masculinity. Depending on the context, these characteristics may include biological sex, sex based social structures that is gender roles or gender identity”, the context here, Bafut and Kom communities. The man and the woman are differentiated with each assuming its own role in the society. In this wise, a character is assigned a specific gender at birth but later expresses a strong inclination towards activities and roles traditionally associated with the opposite gender. This character in the Bafut / Kom tales faces challenges and obstacles due to societal expectations, but ultimately finds acceptance and respect for their individuality and unique contributions. These tales in Bafut / Kom often aim to challenge rigid gender norms and promote inclusivity, celebrating the diversity of gender expressions and identities within the Bafut cultures and sometimes beyond. It is very important to know that the specific stories and details may vary within different tales in Bafut/ Kom as the story telling traditions are diverse and can evolve over time. In this situation, there is bound to be the switching of gender roles embodying both male and female, whereby individuals address or assume roles traditionally associated to the opposite gender.

From the above, the display of the gender identities, can be biological or socially imposed. From a biological perspective, the tales show that it is not everybody defined as woman or man that is considered a woman or man. In other words, it is not the possession of certain genitalia that keeps one in a particular gender group defined by the society. Some individuals have a combination of both the xx chromozones and xy chromozones. This combination at birth makes them to set the way they do despite the genitalia that they may be carrying and the definition given them by the society. Thus, the genitalia that makes the society to see

them as female or male become questionable. Also, physical bodily attributes may or may not be a true reflection of the social category given an individual by the patriarchal society. De Beauvoir (1949: 283) notes that “one is not born a woman but rather becomes one”. However, when the society makes them either male or female, many subscribe, without verifying whether their new status tie with their activities and their innate bodily attributes. Thus, the carrying of a female genital does not necessarily make one a woman because the dominant genes might be male genes, though the little genitalia, is female. This fluidity or variance in gender questions societal division of male and female, and at the same time valorizes the role of some female whom the society, from time immemorial, have seen as female, whereas they are not. Women also feign these different roles as means of asserting themselves in a typical patriarchal setup. This new category integrates her into a new community which the binary role assigned her at birth cannot offer. This pushes them from the periphery of society to their own center, though their individual societies might continue to see them as outcasts.

In the tale, “A Wicked Woman” amongst the Bafut, the protagonist takes the qualities which are not associated to women. The son who constantly brings his friend to pass the night with violates the mother’s order of allowing the friend to sleep in front and later is killed by the mother who wakes up and takes a blade, sharpens it and cut the throat of the person sleeping in front, only to discover later that she has killed her son. Her intended plans of killing the son’s friend, ends up, ironically with her son being killed. What is important to note here is that, a mother who traditionally is supposed to be a comforter and nurturer turns out to be a murderer. She regrets later, and when the rest of the community discover her actions, she is disserved by everybody as price for her wickedness.

Roles are also challenged as seen in the Bafut tale. “Why the Thumb is Short” because of the thumb’s actions amongst the other fingers. That is why, it is short and distant away from the others. The thump is supposed to stand as a leader (male) to see into it that things move rightly for the other. Unfortunately, it is relegated to the periphery.

Jones (2020:102) postulates that “Through the lens of gender, we can uncover the underlying power dynamics in literature, revealing how societal norms shape character roles and narratives”. The male who is the leader is supposed to stand tall in society, to represent the societal norms which shape men’s roles in tales. Unfortunately, the Thump is unable to perform that role and decides to betray the others:

*But the fifth finger the thumb, looked red
and his eyes flashes with anger. What do*

you mean. He interrogated the first second and third fingers. If you steal that man's cocoyam and fowl, then I shall implicate you. I shall tell him. I swear''. The thumbs (fifth finger's) negative reaction greatly infuriated his famished mates. They leagued and gave him the beatings of his life. He was trimmed off the hand. He lay unconscious for more than one week. That is why the thumb is short and is further away from the rest of the fingers.

As seen in this myth, the societal expectations and norms are challenged by the action of the Thump. This situation helps in promoting inclusivity and the celebration of the diversity of gender expressions as the other fingers try to be more active than before, after trimming the Thump.

Wihbongale (2020:200) on this note articulates that tales from these cultures, focus on how narratives depict women in positions of power and authority, often subverting traditional gender expectations. There is a shift in power and authority away from the thumb. This highlights the complexity of gender roles in the tales, thereby revealing how telling can both reflect and influence societal attitudes toward gender in dynamic ways.

The situation in Kom is not different from that of Bafut when it comes to challenging gender roles. "The Kom Creation Myth," presents Nandong, the Fon's sister as path finder, as she leads her people out of Babessi following the python trail:

When the python trail eventually appeared, Nandong led the Kom people to follow it on their journey to the promised land. The python trail led the remaining Kom people for several years in the wilderness until they finally reached their present destination. They travelled through Jakiri in Bui Division to Ijim forest where they settled for sometime before moving to Idien at Djottin where they settled near a stream beside a raffia bush.

Traditionally, she is not permitted to lead the people following the patriarchal structure in place. This act gave birth to the matrilineal kinship system, which is part of the Kom culture to date. The matrilineal birth of the Kom culture stemmed from the role that was given to Nandong to lead the Kom people out of Babessi, by the late Fon. She became a good leader, a decision maker and upheld the tradition of the Kom people. This is not her traditional role but as the narrative purports she assumes it and becomes so perfect. From all indications, the woman can pass for a good ruler, especially with changing times and if given the place. One will say here that when women are given access to full

education, health care, taking part in political decision making, the society will be "ordered". If the women and girls and other gendered members of the society begin to beat their own drums and not just dance to the rhythm of others, the entire community will be transformed positively. I think that those who wield power must start by unlocking opportunities to relegated genders to participate fully in the political and economic life of the people. This will lead to inclusivity and equal opportunities for all genders. Afterall, Chinweizu, (1990 : 12) notes that "women rule the men who rule the world".

In Bafut tales, gender variance is often presented through characters who transgress prescribed norms. In the tale "Ndela Mbue," a woman assumes leadership in the absence of her husband and saves the kingdom from famine. Her courage and intelligence earn admiration, but her defiance of traditional hierarchy provokes punishment. This mirrors the ambivalence of patriarchal structures that both depend on and repress women's agency. In the tale's conclusion where the gods acknowledge her sacrifice, suggests divine sanction for gender fluidity, even as social institutions resist it. Similarly, in Kom tales, female tricksters emerge as agents of transformation. In "The Proud Hunter," a woman outwits male elders to get hold of a python. Her use of wit symbolizes intellectual power as a form of feminine agency. This situates African women's empowerment in strategies of adaptation and subtle resistance rather than outright rebellion or physical confrontation.

Gender variance in these tales also extends to male characters. Certain narratives portray men who nurture, cry, or sacrifice for communal well-being, challenging stereotypical masculinity. In the Bafut tale "The Woman and the Ghost," presents the man who goes through thick and thin to save the wife and child from "matinesong" (the ghost), defying the expectation that caregiving is exclusively feminine. Through humor and empathy, such tales validate emotional expression and caregiving as communal virtues, not gendered weaknesses.

These examples demonstrate that oral literature provides a space for exploring the elasticity of gender categories. As Finnegan (1970) asserts, orature's performative nature makes it responsive to the community's evolving realities. Narrators, through improvisation, can reinterpret gender roles according to contemporary needs, thereby transforming collective consciousness.

X. PERFORMANCE AS GENDERED NEGOTIATION

The performance context of Bafut and Kom tales adds another layer to gender variance. Narrative sessions, usually held in family compounds or community gatherings, are

participatory events where the teller, audience, and environment co-create meaning. Performance is thus not merely an act of narration but a negotiation of social identity. In Bafut, women often perform folktales that address moral conduct, kinship loyalty, and domestic harmony. Their performances use song, rhythm, and repetition to encode both compliance and criticism. The humor and irony embedded in their delivery allow them to challenge authority without direct confrontation. In Kom, women's narrative sessions reinforce social cohesion while reaffirming female solidarity.

During performance, gender is enacted not only through language but also through gesture, costume, and audience response. For instance, a female storyteller imitating a male chief may use exaggerated gestures to parody authority, eliciting laughter while simultaneously revealing the performative construction of power. Similarly, male performers who adopt female voices in tales to evoke empathy for women's struggles, blurring gender distinctions and expanding social understanding.

This performative interplay supports Schechner's (2013 : 28) concept of *restored behavior*, where each performance becomes a re-enactment infused with new meanings. Gender, in this sense, is continuously maintained in performance recreated and reinterpreted.

XI. TALES AS MORAL AND POLITICAL COMMENTARY

Beyond entertainment, Bafut and Kom tales function as moral commentaries on power, justice, and leadership. The treatment of gender within these tales often mirrors larger political tensions in the community. For instance, tales that depict the consequences of arrogance or abuse of power indirectly criticize male dominance in social institutions. In the Bafut tale "Legend of Ngum Nyele: The Woman Who Silenced the Leopard Chief," the chief's abuse of authority leads to divine punishment, emphasizing that justice transcends gender and status. Ngum Nyele becomes an epitome of neorality, embodying the voice, integrity, patience, and courage. Similarly, Kom tales frequently present women as mediators in conflicts, drawing on their symbolic association with life and reconciliation. The "Legend of Yensi Fo Nyay: The Woman Who Humbled a Fon," the woman solves a pertinent problem in the community. She discovers the drum, thereby ending what is the worry in the land. She is the wise one of the spirits and gains a sacred title as seer for the women.

Such moral frameworks reveal that gender variance in oral tales is not merely a literary device but a political discourse. As Barber (1997) notes, African performance is inherently political because it reflects the community's ongoing

dialogue about power. Through their tales, Bafut and Kom narrators articulate moral visions that challenge exclusion and advocate balance.

XII. SYMBOLISM AND SPIRITUAL DIMENSIONS OF GENDER

Gender in these tales is also tied to spiritual cosmologies. In both Bafut and Kom belief systems, the world is perceived as a continuum linking the living, the ancestors, and the spirits. Women are often cast as mediators in this continuum due to their association with fertility and regeneration. In certain tales in Bafut, like the "Myth of Mbu'Awobo: The First Woman of the Forest Whispers," women invoke ancestral spirits, symbolizing their connection to the metaphysical world. This spiritual dimension of gender complicates the binary division between masculine and feminine. The Kom belief in *Foyn* (ancestral blessing) attributes spiritual authority to both genders, depending on moral worth rather than physical attributes. Tales that depict women or men receiving ancestral guidance, highlighting the community's recognition of moral and spiritual equality beneath surface hierarchies.

XIII. GENDER VARIANCE AS CULTURAL EVOLUTION

Finally, gender variance in Bafut and Kom tales can be understood as a reflection of cultural evolution. Oral tales have been adapted to modern influences such as education, Christianity, and globalization, which have altered traditional gender roles. New tales incorporate themes of schooling, migration, and women's leadership, blending traditional motifs with contemporary realities. For example, recent Kom tales feature educated daughters who use wisdom acquired in school to resolve family conflicts, symbolizing the merging of indigenous and modern values. These evolving tales show that orature remains a living medium that captures societal transformation.

By conceptualizing gender as both a narrative category and a performative practice, this study reveals that Bafut and Kom tales provide critical insight into the negotiation of identity in African communities. The interplay between stability and change, conformity and deviation, illustrates the resilience of African oral literature as a space of intellectual and moral reflection.

XIV. CONCLUSION

This study has examined how gender category and gender variance are constructed, performed, and reimagined in the oral traditions of Bafut and Kom. Through the analysis of selected tales and performance contexts, we found out that gender in these societies is not a static biological distinction

but a socially negotiated and performative category. Consequently, women assert symbolic power within patriarchal structures. Also, the analysis affirmed that oral African Literature is not relics of the past but a living, reflexive and transformative art form capable of shaping contemporary understanding of gender dynamics.

Bafut and Kom tales simultaneously reinforce and challenge patriarchal ideologies. While male authority is legitimized through royal and ancestral symbolism, female characters frequently subvert these hierarchies through wit, moral authority, and spiritual power. The result is a complex narrative field in which gender variance operates as both a literary and social mechanism for dialogue and change. The work also confirmed that orature remains a critical site for examining the evolution of gender relations in African societies. Storytelling, as a collective performance, enables communities to interrogate their values and articulate visions of justice, equality, and coexistence. The flexibility of oral performance allows for reinterpretation across generations, ensuring that gender discourse remains responsive to contemporary realities. Bafut and Kom tales not only preserve cultural heritage but also function as tools of transformation, teaching that social harmony requires flexibility in gender roles and respect for individual agency. Ultimately, the examination of gender category and variance in these tales reinforces the view that African oral literature is a living intellectual tradition deeply reflective, having dialogue and transformative. It provides a model for understanding gender as a continuum rather than static, and highlights the role of storytelling as both a cultural mirror and a moral compass for society.

DISCLAIMER STATEMENT

This article is derived from the doctoral research of **Irene Nchang Ngwa**, conducted in the Department of English, Faculty of Arts, University of Bamenda, Cameroon. The views, interpretations, and conclusions expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the University or its affiliates. The work respects cultural ownership of the oral materials collected from Bafut and Kom storytellers and acknowledges their invaluable contribution to Cameroon's cultural heritage.

AUTHORSHIP AND LEVEL OF CONTRIBUTION

This article represents a collaborative scholarly effort. **Irene Nchang Ngwa** contributed the main research design, fieldwork, data analysis, and drafting of the manuscript. **Prof. Adamu Pangmeshi** provided theoretical direction and critical guidance throughout the research and writing

process. **Prof. Divine Che Neba** offered analytical insights, structural recommendations, and overall supervision of the final text.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

African oral traditions are often seen as reflections of culture and morality, but they are also living discussions on social change. This article uses tales from the Bafut and Kom communities of Cameroon to explore how gender roles are performed, contested, and reimagined through performance. By focusing on how both male and female characters navigate patriarchal and matriarchal systems, the work highlights the resilience of African men and women and the fluidity of gender identity in oral traditions. The paper demonstrates that oral tales remain crucial for promoting social awareness, inclusivity, and cultural balance in the face of modernization and globalization.

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Weaponising Identity: Violence, Surveillance, and Resistance in Atwood's Gilead

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Abstract— This paper analyses Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and *The Testaments* (2019) to explore how authoritarian regimes weaponise identity through linguistic control, ritualised violence, surveillance, and reproductive coercion. Drawing on feminist theory, Foucauldian biopolitics, trauma studies, and postcolonial critiques, it demonstrates how Gilead reduces women to vessels of demographic utility while erasing personal histories and autonomy. Atwood's protagonists— Offred, Aunt Lydia, Agnes, and Daisy—expose the cracks within this apparatus, showing how memory, testimony, and storytelling function as forms of survival and resistance. The paper argues that identity under Gilead is not destroyed but reshaped through fracture, silence, and narrative reclamation, affirming the subversive power of language against systemic erasure.



Keywords— *The Handmaid's Tale*; *The Testaments*; Identity; Feminist Theory; Biopolitics; Surveillance; Resistance

I. INTRODUCTION

Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and *The Testaments* (2019) interrogate the intersection of power, identity, and systemic violence in dystopian regimes. The Republic of Gilead, a theocratic patriarchy, enacts identity violence—a term coined by sociologist James Gilligan to describe institutionalised practices that erase autonomy and reconstruct selfhood according to hegemonic ideologies (Gilligan 17). This essay argues that Gilead's regime

weaponises identity through linguistic control, ritualised rape, surveillance, and religious indoctrination, rendering women's bodies and minds as sites of biopolitical contestation. Drawing on feminist critiques of patriarchy (Butler), Foucauldian biopolitics (Foucault), and trauma theory (Caruth), this analysis reveals how Atwood's novels expose the fragility of identity under authoritarianism while affirming the subversive power of memory and storytelling.

By juxtaposing Offred's fragmented narrative in *The Handmaid's Tale* with the polyphonic testimonies of Aunt

Lydia, Agnes, and Daisy in *The Testaments*, Atwood illustrates how resistance emerges even within systems designed to annihilate individuality. This paper expands on existing scholarship by integrating postcolonial critiques of naming (Spillers), psychoanalytic theories of trauma (Herman), and recent debates on reproductive justice (Ross and Solinger), offering a comprehensive examination of identity violence in Atwood's oeuvre.

II. NAMING AND THE VIOLENCE OF ERASURE

The renaming of women as property—Ofglen, Ofwarren, Ofcharles—encapsulates Gilead's strategy of symbolic domination. Hortense Spillers' concept of the "ungendering" of enslaved Black women during the transatlantic slave trade provides a vital framework here. Gilead's erasure of women's given names severs familial and historical ties, enacting a linguistic dismemberment akin to what Spillers calls "the theft of the body" (Spillers 67). In Offred's case, her "real name" is withheld from readers, rendering her subjectivity both hidden and

resistant.

Judith Butler's notion of "precarious life" underpins this dynamic. In *Precarious Life* (2004), Butler argues that subjects become intelligible through norms of recognisability. Gilead weaponises this logic by producing a regime in which women are only recognisable through their reproductive function. As Daisy later reflects in *The Testaments*, "They didn't see women. Only wombs" (Atwood 2019, 204). This epistemic violence renders female identity incoherent unless framed within state-sanctioned roles.

Furthermore, Gayatri Spivak's question—"Can the subaltern speak?"—echoes throughout both novels. The Handmaids may whisper to each other, but their voices are institutionally muted. The regime's use of Biblical language distorts theological narratives to justify subjugation, replacing divine transcendence with state immanence. The command "Blessed be the fruit" becomes both greeting and surveillance cue. Language, once a tool for communion, becomes an instrument of erasure.

III. RITUALISED RAPE AND BIOPOLITICAL CONTROL

The Ceremony—a monthly state-sanctioned rape ritual—epitomises Gilead's biopolitical subjugation of women. Offred's dissociation during the act—"I am a blank here, a body merely" (*The Handmaid's Tale* 94)—illustrates Elaine Scarry's notion of pain as "world-destroying" (*The Body in Pain* 1985, 29), where language collapses under the weight of trauma. This ritual does not merely enforce reproductive labour; it enacts what Adrienne Rich terms "reproductive hostage-taking" (1980, 634), rendering women's bodies state property.

Reproductive control in Gilead reflects Michel Foucault's theory of biopower, where governance occurs through "the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life" (*The History of Sexuality* 1978, 139). Fertility is weaponised as political currency, and women are reduced to vessels of demographic utility. Aunt Lydia's confession in *The Testaments*—that Commanders exploit the Ceremony for extramarital pleasure (Atwood 2019, 187)—further exposes the regime's patriarchal hypocrisy, echoing Susan Brownmiller's argument that rape functions as "a conscious process of intimidation" (*Against Our Will* 1975, 15).

Cathy Caruth's trauma theory illuminates Offred's fragmented narration, where nonlinear recollections become both a symptom of trauma and a mode of resistance. Her refusal to recount the Ceremony

in precise chronology signifies the unspeakability of violence, turning silence into a form of testimony. Lauren Berlant's theory of "cruel optimism" (2011) adds another layer, showing how Gilead peddles the ideal of redemptive motherhood as a moral cover for coercion. The promise of purpose masks the profound violation, cloaking patriarchal brutality in spiritual rhetoric.

Thus, Gilead's reproductive violence is not merely a tool of domination but a multifaceted mechanism of state control—at once physical, psychological, and symbolic. Through dissociation, fragmented memory, and subversive silence, Atwood's protagonists reveal the cracks in this totalising system, asserting their subjectivity even in conditions of erasure.

IV. SURVEILLANCE, FEAR, AND INDOCTRINATION

Gilead thrives on what Zuboff calls "behavioural surplus"—data extracted not for knowledge but control (*The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* 2019, 8). While Gilead's surveillance is analogue—Eyes, informants, whispered suspicions—it functions similarly, dislocating the boundary between public and private. Every gesture becomes legible to the regime; even silence is interpreted as rebellion. This perpetual scrutiny recalls Bentham's Panopticon, elaborated by Foucault as a model of internalised discipline where "the gaze is alert everywhere" (*Discipline and Punish* 1977, 195).

This environment cultivates what Hannah Arendt described as "the loneliness of the totalitarian subject" (*The Origins of Totalitarianism* 1951, 476), where trust disintegrates and solidarity is rare. Aunt Lydia, though complicit, embodies a paradoxical subjectivity—both agent and captive. Her internal monologue in *The Testaments* reveals a strategic duplicity: "In order to manage the system, you must understand it from the inside" (Atwood 2019, 93). Her complicity is a calculated survival mechanism, echoing James Scott's "weapons of the weak"—small acts of resistance beneath apparent conformity (Scott 1985, 36).

Indoctrination in Gilead is most potent when it is internalised. Agnes, raised within Gilead, initially believes in the righteousness of her training. Her journey mirrors Paulo Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed, wherein critical consciousness ("conscientisation") emerges from lived contradictions. As she begins to question the Aunts' teachings, her narrative reclaims agency: "There must be something wrong with the rules if they hurt this much" (Atwood 2019, 233). The turn towards resistance is epistemic—a reconstitution of the self through knowledge, memory, and dissent.

V. MEMORY, TESTIMONY, AND SUBVERSIVE STORYTELLING

If identity is fragmented under authoritarian violence, it is partially reassembled through testimony. Offred's voice—halting, hesitant, nonlinear—enacts what Judith Herman calls the “speechless terror” of trauma (*Trauma and Recovery* 1992, 34). Yet this fractured narration

becomes a political act. “When we think of the past it's the beautiful things we pick out,” Offred reflects, “we want to believe it was all like that” (*The Handmaid's Tale* 30). This selective memory both shields and asserts agency.

In *The Testaments*, testimony becomes overtly juridical. The framing device—transcripts discovered in a future academic symposium—mimics *The Handmaid's Tale's* “Historical

Notes,” but with a greater plurality of voices. Aunt Lydia, Agnes, and Daisy present contrasting narratives that together form what Saidiya Hartman calls “critical fabulation”—a reconstruction of silenced histories through imaginative testimony (Hartman 2008, 11). Their testimonies do not simply recount the past; they perform resistance through narration.

Laura Mulvey's theory of the male gaze is relevant here. While Gilead objectifies and controls women's bodies, Atwood's narrative strategy reverses the gaze. By centring female narrators who name, describe, and contextualise their experiences, the novels perform a narrative reappropriation. “I write these words for myself,” Aunt Lydia states, “so I will understand them” (*The Testaments* 53). In doing so, she dismantles the myth of passive victimhood and reclaims

narrative sovereignty.

Storytelling, then, is both survival and subversion. Through memory and language, Atwood's protagonists re-inscribe their subjectivity against a regime designed to annihilate it. Their fragmented yet insistent voices echo beyond the page, gesturing towards a justice not yet realised but urgently imagined.

VI. CONCLUSION

Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* reveal the myriad ways in which identity can be weaponised under authoritarian regimes. Through rituals, surveillance, renaming, and reproductive coercion, Gilead erases individuality while enforcing a monolithic ideology of gendered obedience. Yet even within this apparatus of control, Atwood locates fissures—moments of resistance, recollection, and narrative reassembly. Drawing on feminist, biopolitical, trauma, and postcolonial theories,

this essay has shown how Atwood's novels reframe identity not as essence but as process—always vulnerable, always contested, and always capable of revolt through the radical act of remembering and telling one's own story.

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Undoing Discriminations and Integrating Differences: Non-normative Paradigms of Disabled Women's Life Writings in India

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Abstract— Dominant discourses have often projected disability as a state of corporeal lack or a sentimental spectacle in desperate need of cure or at least, concealment. It is actually founded on certain social dichotomies which try to negate the scope of any enigmatic diversion of the body. The subcontinent's literary and imaginative archive had frequently framed physical deformities as easy metaphors to exhibit moral frailty, karmic fate or romanticized inspiration, rather than as a lived reality and a political identity. However, recent developments in the field of life writings have paved broader avenues for disabled Indians to portray their unique selfhoods along with sustained attention on issues of infrastructural barriers, attitudinal biases and legal rights. This paper will critically examine two such significant contemporary productions, namely *One Little Finger* (2011) by Malini Chib and *The Other Senses* (2012) by Preeti Monga. The authors not only diversify the paradigms of modern, neoliberal lives but also place disability in cultural alignment with other marginalized identities on analogous grounds of vulnerability and dependency- the most crucial being with femininity. They neither euphemistically deny the material pain of disabled people, nor resort to the overly deterministic techniques to represent them as heroic super-crips. This paper will attempt to place the prevalent models of disability studies within the Indian cultural context and assess how the aforesaid narratives navigate through the connected facets between gender and disability, promoting inclusivity and offering revaluation without collapsing into policy pamphlets.

Keywords— Disabled bodies, patriarchal principles, self-representation, socio-cultural inequalities.



I. INTRODUCTION

Disability, as an epistemic category, has always confounded scholars with its multifaceted manifestations which persistently change with scientific and social developments. This thereby impedes any unambiguous or uniform definition. The United Nations convention on the Rights of persons with disabilities (UNCRPD), a crucial human rights treaty adopted by the General Assembly in 2006, identified disability as a complex concept referring to “long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder a person’s full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” (United Nations, 2006, p. 3). The formally sanctioned benchmarks of disability vary over time and

place, as do the allowances or concessions associated with them.

Disability is intricately entwined with the construction of ‘normalcy’, which means that majority of the population must or should adhere to it (quantitatively to be placed within the standard bell-shaped curve). This concomitantly brings forth the concept of deviation; and people with disabilities are classified under this non-conforming category. Propagating a generalized idea of the physically ‘normal’ in fact, overlooks the exceeding varieties exhibited by human bodies in actuality- whether in terms of size or shape, gesture or posture, habit or health. Setting a certain standard as an imperative may pass unnoticed for those who are able-bodied, but becomes

immensely disadvantageous for those who are chronically ill or disabled.

II. DISABILITY LIFE WRITING AS AN EMERGING CORPUS FACILITATING INCLUSION

During the last three decades, activist campaigns and academic investigations much expanded the periphery of disability studies and sought to promote impactful political, philosophical and literary frameworks in relation to it. It thus contributed to the popularization of disability life writing, aiming to produce alternative emancipatory spaces for such people hitherto subjugated. As an overarching domain, life-writing blurs the traditional generic boundaries between diverse modes of self-representation; encompassing a purposeful documentation of one's ethos, emotions, observations and introspections. It exhibits subjectivity as a complicated phenomenon marked by fragmentation and flux. Disabled masses are increasingly espousing this compositional method as a way of preserving their lived realities, of revamping their identities through more minute, meaningful and empowering textual orientations than the existing ones. They offer opportunities of creative re-imagining and construct reciprocal connections with the normative readers who usually tend to have a limited and linear understanding of their non-normative counterparts due to a dormant fear. Hence, "To represent disability is to engage oneself in an encounter with that which is believed to be off the map of 'recognizable' human experiences. Making comprehensible that which appears to be inherently unknowable situates narrative in the powerful position of mediator between two separate worlds." (Mitchell & Snyder, 2001, p. 6)

Life-writings lend critical insights on the rampant socio-economic inequalities associated with any physical aberration and also analyze strategies of redressal. For disabled women, these questions are again laden with patriarchal regulations of desirability, marriage and reproduction. Already marginalized on gendered grounds, their actual discomforts were much more aggravated by others' reluctant or repulsive behaviors. Foundational critic of this field, Garland-Thomson argues, "Disability life-writing repeatedly attests that adjusting to an acquired impairment is not as difficult as adjusting to the stigmatization and lowered social status that comes from moving into the community of the disabled. Virulent biases and negative associations discourage one from identifying as disabled. Accomplished women who have physical, mental or psychological impairments not infrequently flee the category, sometimes proclaiming proudly that they are not "disabled". Nevertheless, a positive identity politics for

women with disabilities is nascent, even though not as developed as the early black-is-beautiful racial politics, cultural feminism, or more recent queer pride movement." (2005, p. 1567)

III. DISABILITY AS A SOCIO-CULTURAL CONSTRUCT IN INDIA

Disability is a cross-cultural phenomenon, meaning that it can be seen everywhere. Nonetheless, its representational parameters and repressive regimentations may differ according to the contextual specifications- "What varies between societies are the individual characteristics by which a person is identified as disabled, and how these characteristics affect the possibility of playing a certain social role." (Siri, 2020, p. 4) In India, since ancient times, the prevalent response towards disabled or crippled people had not been much favorable. Several ideologies were promulgated to justify maltreatment against them. In a caste-ridden set-up fueled by superstitious dogmas, disability was often reified as a detrimental punishment meted out to counterbalance one's misdeeds committed in previous birth. "The theory of Karma was instrumental in depriving the disabled of their inherent right to lead an independent life. It was believed that the disabled were reaping what they had sowed (sic) in lives bygone and any attempt to ameliorate their lot would, therefore, interfere with this divine justice." (Bhatt, 1963, p. 96) Narrativizing disability as a form of retribution tended to transmit a stoic acceptance of 'cursed' destinies of the concerned people. They were held liable for their reincarnated afflictions, deemed as useless, unsightly beings and often debarred from participating in auspicious events. Sometimes the blame was also foisted onto the parents. Their fate was considered to be beyond redemptive possibility except any spiritual miracle. This pre-determined reference of past sins as remotely shaping their present experiences also closed down the ways of interpreting external factors like underage motherhood, deficient healthcare facilities or lasting impoverishment as substantial reasons directly or indirectly leading to a disability. "Historically in India as elsewhere in the world, there has been a deep-rooted cultural antipathy to persons with disabilities. Throughout the ages the disabled have been looked down upon with disdain, almost as if they are sub-human. They have been portrayed as medical anomalies, helpless victims and a lifelong burden on family and society" (Addlakha, 2011, p. 9).

Numerous mythological and literary characters, who harbored some wicked dispositions or moral corruptions, were shown to be with some kind of different bodily appearance. Consequently, any deformity came to be seen as shameful embarrassment, as a disruption of purity.

However, as gradually the modern era hurred in, these currents of moral/religious model were changed and disabilities began to be viewed as problematic conditions requiring mandatory corrections or remedies. This approach led to the formulation of the medical model which equated disability with self-deficiency and focused solely on the predicaments faced at personal level, taking no account of the deep-rooted social discrimination. This model located both the roots and solutions of the disability within the body of the individual, basically aiming to detect the issue using factors emerging from the socially mediated archetype of normativity. Not surprising therefore, like any other minority category, disabled people also incorporate negative perceptions about themselves to varied degrees. They are, as Anita Ghai opines, “constantly in a mental state of deferral, awaiting the day the body will not just be mended but cured. Until then, the disabled tend to impersonate the able-bodied” (2015, p. 2). She proceeds with affirming that obsessive pursuits of complete cure, which the medical model preaches, nonetheless often turn out to be futile even after costly processes consuming an unwarranted amount of effort and time (p.3). This model came under sustained scrutiny as the activist dimensions grew and began to be criticized for incorrectly representing disability as a fixed condition. The affected people were viewed solely through a lens of patienthood, and rendered “as passive and powerless targets of intervention through non-disabled expertise. For the DRM (Disability Rights Movement), this reduces the person and his or her experience to an essentially ‘abnormal’ and ‘lesser-than’ medical condition” (Smith, 2010, p. 16). On the other hand, the more recent social model redefined disability as an arrangement of collective oppression which is a deterrence of scopes spawned by complex social functioning using stereotypical behaviors and structural hindrances. This model has been very effective to intelligibly put forward the agendas of social change associated with disability.

IV. GENDERED EXPERIENCES OF DISABILITY

Although it is indubitable that a disabled individual, whether man or woman, has to go through bureaucratic harassment, professional discrimination and financial sufferings, it is often perceived that the dual oppression unevenly impacts the second one. Many interdisciplinary scholars have extensively corroborated this opinion. As Wendell puts it, “I want to say that having a disability usually gives a person experiences of a world different from that of people without disabilities, and that being a woman with a disability usually gives a person different experiences from those of people who are not female and

disabled” (1996, p. 73). The principles of normality, chiefly those which are associated with feminine aspects, are actually extrinsically imposed and perpetually regulated, but most often presented as natural and any slippage from these standards contributes to the the status of otherness and hinders social acceptability. Thus, disabled women are accorded minimal scopes, hurled back to domestic sphere and more often seen as objects of pity or charity than a male going through analogous feebleness of body or mind. Precisely, it is from the birth of a baby that cultural ascriptions of gender come into operation. “What this means for a female infant is that from the first moments of life she is ushered into and assigned a place in a system of rules, roles and meanings. This system is perhaps better thought of as a code with one overriding, relentless feature: a woman’s position is denigrated, undervalued and organized around absence or lack” (Harris & Wideman, 2009, p. 115). Femininity, like disability, is thus customarily made synonymous with conceptions of defect, defenselessness and ineptitude. Contemporary Indian disability scholars like Renu Addlakha, Anita Ghai, Asha Hans, Nandini Ghosh and Bhargavi Davar have used feminist principles to demonstrate types of similar oppression in both the groups. This method of finding complex causes of discriminatory practices which cast some minority groups to relentlessly unpleasant conditions, is noted as ‘intersectionality’ in academic domain. First developed by Kimberle Crenshaw in the late 1980s, this approach has since then been practiced in formulation of anti-racist and feminist policies. She employed this idea to reflect on the layers of disadvantage faced by black women; but the theorists above-mentioned endeavored to trace its relevance in the context of disabled women. Since turn of the century, a primary preoccupation of the feminist discourses has been to extensively illustrate the layered significance of relationships in women’s lives. Following this line, such engagements steer through the unmapped ways of how disabled women proceed with their relationships.

According to the 2011 census report, there are approximately 2.68 crore people with disabilities in India, amongst which 1.18 crore (amounts to 44%) are women. It also indicates that 23% of this disabled female population are employed, whereas for males, the corresponding data is cited to be nearly double - 47%. Lesser working opportunities for women are caused chiefly due to lack of sufficient academic or vocational eligibility. A social scenario wherein patriarchal rules are persistently at work to justify subjugation of girls, having a disability further causes limitations in several domains, especially in the case of education. This thorough deprivation curtails their chances to nurture and to be nurtured, to desire and to be

desired. Even traditional positions fade-out as far-fetched wishes for them; because they are considered unfit to take on both the reproductive roles assigned to a wife and the caregiving functions assigned to a mother. Additionally, there is a common misbelief that they will possibly pollute the genetic stock by producing weak offsprings. In Indian context, it is often seen that poor parents marry their disabled daughter off without revealing the truth. However, as soon as her condition gets exposed; the girl has to endure traumatic torture or in worst cases, abandoned or killed.

V. DISCUSSION OF THE TEXTS

Preeti Monga's *The Other Senses* (2012) records the struggles confronted by a blind woman. She opens the narrative with vividly cheerful reminiscences of her infancy that was spent in a picturesque hill-town nestled amidst Himalayas. As an exceptionally perceptive child, her memories brimmed with evocative visuals of the natural world, perhaps ironically reflecting on the fact that these vibrant landscapes were not to be seen by her for long. She continued to grow up as the adorned first-born of her parents, "frisking and frolicking like a stream flowing through green meadows under the crystal blue sky; joy, love and freedom was all mine." (Monga, 2012, p. 22) However, this blissful exuberance came to an end at barely six years of age when her constantly failing sight led to the detection of an unusual optic atrophy. After innumerable consultations with skilled doctors and unfruitful attempts of restoring the vision with trial glasses, her parents were left with no choice but to accept this condition to be medically untreatable. This disheartening discovery made her yet fascinating life to crumble down. She witnessed an abruptly altered behavior of mostly all her close or casual acquaintances. They, with dismal abjection and apathy, seemed to have transformed her into an oddly pitiful object. She was perplexed and tormented with this sudden change and felt culpable for committing some unspecified crime. Numerous exclusions that she faced thereafter, exhibit how 'normative' social order keeps on hindering a disabled person's endeavors of mainstream integration- either covertly or by adhering to thoroughly overt approaches. Commenting on the bigoted deprecations attributed to blindness in the cultural milieu, Ved Mehta, another acclaimed visually-challenged author, mentions- "Blindness was a fate reserved for beggars, certainly not something that the child of a well-to-do family would suffer." (1979, p. 319)

In Monga's case, the series of segregations began when her playmates contrived silly reasons to avoid taking her in and probably culminated when she was expelled from a prominent convent school on account of her impairment; irrespective of the fact that she was not performing poorly.

This incident marked the end of her academic life. Already much encumbered with feelings of self-doubt, she shrieked under the gloomy glances and distressing misgivings from all quarters, familiar or unfamiliar. Her brother went on to school following his usual routine, however she could not. At nights, she used to weep profusely to disburden her wrenching pain. The opportunity of getting admitted to a special institution for blinds also slipped away, as her mother was staunchly unwilling to leave her girl in the school hostel; either due to safety issues or assuming that a disabled individual could not manage daily activities alone. Monga's rising anticipations of rejoining school and of making new friends were thus badly jeopardized: "I never had the courage to voice my feelings and thus diminished the ray of hope that had momentarily illuminated the darkness that engulfed my soul." (2012, p. 47) If disabled masses, especially those who are young women are deprived of the right to practice free will and are compelled to follow the decisions imposed by others partaking to inflexible surrounding situations, then it is to be asked whether they possess any individual autonomy of choices or not.

With the dreams of formal education shattered forever, Monga was instead persuaded to be trained in music. Although not greatly inclined towards this career choice, she had to diffidently comply as no convenient alternative was available. She embarked upon the way to become a performing artist and practiced for almost eight hours per day. Despite following such a rigorous routine for the next five years, she garnered the capacity to recognize the basic notations only; complicated compositions kept on befuddling her. Eventually her guru declared that she didn't have a natural ear for music, and hence it was highly unlikely that she could succeed much in this field. Her dreams were once again scattered into nothingness. Quivering with exasperation; she dropped down ideas of further courses and decided to marry instead. She became conscious of her blooming womanhood and fancied to have a handsome suitor but the blunt reminders of her impairment, coupled with the perturbation of having not so a 'slender figure' froze her with miserable indignation. She applied cosmetics, tried new hairdressing styles and spent hours to drape saris neatly- all with the aim of becoming a bit more appealing or perhaps to compensate for her bodily imperfections. In her first 'love affair', which consisted of merely two dull and depressing coffee-dates, it was she who mostly continued the conversation one-sidedly, with no sincere response from the man. Though this charade ended soon and endowed her with a broader perspective of courtship, it consumed her heart with an amplified longing for a doting partner. Her parents didn't seem to be very eager about finding a match for her: "There was no sign of

husband-hunting for me. This was a bit strange, as it was a trend to marry off the daughters of the family as soon as possible. I wondered why was my turn not coming?" (Monga, 2012, p. 72). A wedding proposal arrived, offering her renewed optimism of finding love. The prospective bridegroom was an air force officer whose first wife had forsaken him for some undisclosed cause. Yet this information, which might have led to an uproar if the girl was able-bodied, didn't arouse any significant skepticism in Monga's case. Rather he was certified, without even one meeting, as being a truly generous man who despite being aware of her physical limitation, agreed to tie the knot. Although it was later revealed that he had married someone else all of a sudden without even informing them, this instance clearly signaled the cultural cliché of valorizing a male as almost a self-sacrificing saint who willingly gives his hand in matrimonial bond to a disabled girl. Monga was crestfallen, but there were further adversities ahead. She soon became smitten with her brother's acquaintance, an ebullient Anglo-Indian youth, who inundated her with affectionate assurances and unswerving commitments. He apparently displayed all the traits which Monga yearned for so long; and she finally married him with vivacious hopes. However, from the wedding night onwards her ecstasy changed into misery as her yet incredible and loving partner is revealed to be nothing but an insolent drunkard who spent his entire day vainly. He mercilessly assaulted her, threatened her and gradually hurled every possible mode of atrocity. Though she dared not to express any displeasure or even utter a word that might provoke his fury, the trail of torture continued, with an abominable mockery of her disability. Monga recounted how her tyrant husband used to pass stinging taunts and gave her "...an empty plate after rattling an empty serving spoon on it, then urge me to eat, saying with sarcastic mirth 'Here eat!' and when I put my hand on the plate searching for the food, he would have a hearty laugh...Hey you blind bat, he would yell, 'what do you think of yourself? You should thank your stars I married you...don't you all ever forget it', would be his favorite monologue." (2012, p. 105) She expected that his abuses would come to a pause after the birth of their two children, and of course, nothing of that sort ever happened. Her physical health also deteriorated and she began to suffer from repetitive panic attacks. For all economic expenses, her parents were held responsible and "He came and went as pleased, did exactly what he wished, regardless of how it might affect any one of us. Just to maintain peace at home, none of us dared to raise objections to anything he did or said." (Monga, 2012, p. 113) However, despite wrecking the family's life with horrible imprudence, Monga's snarling spouse seamlessly maintained the image of an absolutely ideal man; people outside their four walls adulated his

wonderful propriety and advised Monga- "you can depend upon him with your life." (2012, p. 114)

Her initial years were of subdued silence and endurance. She undertook every effort within her power to maintain peace. However, her distress prolonged and it concomitantly brought out scopes of exercising agency. Her aching mind began to retaliate. She thought of earning on her own; but employment opportunities for unsighted people were much limited. It took almost a year of deliberate search to find a viable profession; and then she became fixated on the idea of running aerobic classes. It went with surprising success but her marital bond further deteriorated as her alcoholic and able-bodied husband could not stand with a disabled woman's newfound autonomy. His ruthless aggressions escalated beyond tolerance and Monga was accused of flying too high. She finally left him and came in contact with other blind people who unfurled a whole set of new possibilities for her. She is currently an empowerment coach, a fitness instructor and owner of a successful non-profit organization named Silver Linings. It provides blind girls with thorough guidance, works for their educational development and equips them with adequate skill-based training. As a transformative entrepreneur, she has been awarded many distinguished fellowships and national awards.

It is undeniable that Monga was emotionally much more harassed due to her disability; she was made fun of and even after gaining financial freedom, her husband unfalteringly continued with his bitter mistreatment, perhaps clinging on the same stereotyped belief that a disabled female is meant to be eternally subservient and dependent. Society creates further impediments for such women to survive with dignity alongside "non-defective" humans. She notes an incident to illustrate the terrible anxiety endured by a blind girl when placed under expectations of performance, especially under the scrutinizing stare of people who will right away bombard her with inessential sympathies at the demonstration of minutest incompetence. During a formal dining at an elite clubhouse, she trembled with the fear of not being able to deftly handle the cutlery and crockery. "I was no poor little thing and I would not allow any situation to evoke that feeling in anyone. I therefore gathered my senses together with a tremendous effort and managed to sit at the table looking quite composed." (Monga, 2012, p. 71) In such multifarious manners, disabled bodies are made to feel inferior, and society derogatorily stares at the human beings inhabiting those bodies; rejecting them full community memberships. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson has theorized 'staring' as an ocular response or as an interrogative impulse towards the unusual. First-person testimonies and memoirs, through their intimate reflections and retort, reverse the

stare. These works engage the readers in a circuit of dynamic, counter-hegemonic communication enabling a mimetic and reflexive substitution which shifts disability from images of fragility to discourses of power.

It is also to be observed that though disabled people may undergo isolation or insecurity in situations where they are the only ones with certain functional deficiency, they feel more comfortable, confident and competent in company of other similarly impaired fellows. This is indeed true for both men and women, but since women, whether adolescent or adult, tend to go through more restrictions and hindrances while encountering the outside world, such associations are of more pivotal importance for them. Hence Monga's exposure to other blind people boosted her dormant self-esteem and helped her much to move from reticence to resilience. Life writings thus assert the necessity of long-range objectives that may actively bring together disabled people for their empowerment, as happened in case of other marginalized communities.

Malini Chib's *One Little Finger* (2011), an iconic production in the field of life-writing, not only humorously challenges the stereotyped perceptions but puts disabled ambition at the center. It narrates the trials and tribulations of a spastic girl groping towards inclusivity in a society oblivious of her special needs. During a traumatic birth, her umbilical cord was strangulated, causing few seconds of oxygen depletion and this mishap left her with a lasting neurological condition called cerebral palsy. Following diagnosis, the infant's anxious parents were informed that her motor cells were irreversibly damaged and that she was destined to be nothing but a 'vegetable'- a labelling that Chib repeatedly refers to assert the mortifying vocabularies used and the grim misfortunes imagined for a disabled woman. While growing up, Chib was weak and suffered shortage of co-ordination in doing activities that needed physical skills like walking or playing, but she proved herself to be mentally competent, "an intelligent mind with a disobedient body." (2011, p. 9). People often treated her as a non-thinking individual, though she understood everything and her intelligence quotient came out to be better than average in a formal testing. Still, as a child intensely distraught with her physical differences, she mostly abstained from meeting outsiders and tried to pass unnoticed in order to avoid their apprehensive shuffles.

On numerous occasions, at college or workplace, Chib was denied participation, humiliated and ignored by peer groups. Friends often considered her as a problem, and hence tended to make plans of watching movies or going out for other enjoyable activities leaving her out. She was told, in a rather condescending manner, not to dance at the

prom night- generally a much-awaited event involving fun and frisk; but the organizers somehow could not bear the visual of a girl with crutches twirling with the musical tunes. With dumbfounded embarrassment, she sat down quietly and watched her friends dancing with their male partners. Tears trickled down her face and a terrible feeling of dejection and doubt, which she rarely allowed to surface, weighed upon her: "I wondered if there would ever be a man in my life. Would a man see beyond my body?...would I always be regarded as a burden for someone to take care of?" (Chib, 2011, p. 65) Desires of companionship thus seemed to be unattainable to her, like many other females whose bodily comportment could not accord with conventional notions of beauty.

In the everyday interactive domain, especially during the teenage years, it is often seen that the disabled ones who tries more to establish familiar bonds or relations. For Chib, this process of integration was further complicated because of her severe speech deterioration. She could speak, but slowly and strenuously. So, she felt flustered for not contributing satisfactorily to the conversations like her classmates did, especially during the lectures. Tempo of life, which is usually not much noted by those who are able-bodied, turns out to be a vastly important issue for people like Chib. Previously being taught in special schools where adequate time was offered to express herself, it now became incredibly difficult for her to cope with the faster flow of lessons. Her initial set of exams went awfully bad, nonetheless, she soon secured higher grades and was exuberantly happy to be on par with others. Gradually she progressed and efficiently finished two master's courses. With great expectations she started applying for jobs but met with repeated rejections. "The actual fact is that employers could see only my disability, not my capability ... It was the worst period in my life. I felt like a loser...I had come a full circle. I was faced with this again. So, being the Indian rubber ball I am, I bounced back." (Chib, 2011, p. 175) She enrolled herself in writing courses, obtained professional training in the publishing industry and developed new techniques of exchanging ideas. Eventually, she got employed as a senior event's manager at a very prominent bookstore. Though initially tensed about how to execute the designated tasks, she steadily tried to fit in, coordinated successful events and became popular among the intelligentsia. No longer invisible or incapacitated, she got assiduously involved with disability activism; calling for more structural and systematic changes. She penned articles, delivered lectures, endeavored to create global platforms for sharing issues related to disability. While chronicling the lack of sensitization she faces in the public sphere, Chib tells how outsiders still gawk at her as if they have seen some

unknown creature. This is related to an inner normative urge to interpret, classify or regulate any unfamiliar physical disposition; an inclination which has stayed steady throughout history irrespective of other changes. People often torment a disabled person with a flurry of questions like how come he/she had the 'problem', whether it was inherent or acquired, whether the parents were not careful enough, whether clinical assistance is required and finally, whether there are still some chances of becoming 'normal' again. Sometimes, when Chib used to travel alone or went to supermarkets or canteens on her own, she was intimidated by others who implied that she should always be accompanied by someone able-bodied. "One of the social burdens of disability, then, is that it exposes affected individuals to inspection, interrogation, interpretation and violation of privacy. The more visible the difference, the more this is the case." (Couser, 2009, p. 16)

Chib also talked about many architectural barriers; including inaccessible toilets, crowded transports, uneven pavements and steep stairs. Reaching to libraries and canteens was a long haul for her because wheelchairs could not move easily everywhere. Restricted mobility definitely took a toll on her sense of freedom. There were multiple episodes mentioned in the memoir when she was battered by piercing reminders of her own shortcomings - "My speech was incoherent and terribly difficult to understand. It continued to depress me immensely, ever since I was confronted with well-articulated youngsters who would chatter away, albeit nonsense." (2011, p. 110) Though conscious of her vocal insufficiency, she chose to find feasible alternatives instead of bemoaning over it. With only one functional finger, she learned to use the computer adroitly- browsing through the internet and connecting through electronic mail became her primary tools of engaging with a wider world- "To be able to get any information that I wanted, really empowered me and stimulated my thought processes. I could also communicate with whoever I wanted without requiring a third party"(2011, p. 119). These cases exhibit how Chib prioritized her choices and found ways amidst adversities to become bolder in her approaches. However, it is also worth noticing that she hails from a distinctly privileged and urban, cosmopolitan background; with availability of improved technological aids and assistive amenities. Mostly all her family members studied at Cambridge and held prestigious positions. Chib herself was treated by leading pediatricians and paramedics, attended the best educational institutions, spent holidays abroad, worked with renowned media conglomerates and also had an attendant to help her with quotidian needs. Although always made aware of her anomalies and faced with issues of exclusionary set-up; a

precise textual analysis would show that Chib rarely encountered outright hostility or blatant ridicule.

Additionally, she had a loving family that showered her with sincere affections. With distinctive emphasis, she records the contributions of her mother, who was herself a professionally trained special educator. Despite her own academic pressure and eventual divorce, she always came up with innovative ideas to facilitate Chib's studies, tutored her diligently and persuaded with enormous efforts whenever her daughter's enthusiasm ebbed. This instance testifies that if a disabled person, no matter how much severely disabled, is placed amidst an encouraging environment from a young age, his/ her networking skills and creative acumen can well-flourish; as happened in Chib's case. Hence her experiences cannot be fully appropriated for disabled females who reside in remote interiors of the country. They have to recurrently go through open scourges and gross indecencies - all the while being embroiled in additional problems of destitution. Often dispossessed of familial love, these girls struggle hard to move beyond even the elementary school. Without adequate education, they perhaps never get acquainted with knowledge of legal remedies, state-sponsored welfare programs or other occupational scopes. Many scholars have contended poverty to be intricately interspersed with disability. Thomas and Chandra observe- "Women who are born below poverty level are more likely to become disabled through lack of good healthcare, malnutrition, lack of access to clean water and basic sanitation, risky living and poor working circumstances. Women with disabilities are considered to be poorer all through their lifetime."(2019, p. 126) In India, disability life-writing as a mode of representation has been a recent phenomenon; and there is still a conspicuous void of vernacular productions which may later be useful to map regional or rural specifications, advocate a more comprehensive strategy for social justice and enhance flexibility of the genre.

VI. CONCLUSION

The writings by Monga and Chib meticulously demonstrate eclectic female subjectivities produced in context of independence and interdependence, reciprocity and hostility, suppression and expression. The authors never claimed themselves to be powerhouses of strength; rather they are much aware of their physical deterrence; hence their memoirs evoke an array of multitudinous emotions; ranging from staggering disgust to overwhelming anguish. Both acknowledged that it took them a long time to cope with their disabilities. They also argued that disability is only a component amongst many others which make up their embodied identities, yet that continues to be the

singular-most or core aspect which society chooses to see and expects them to perform or achieve accordingly. However, by a better understanding of their own selves and by finding a shared matrix of belonging through supportive networks, these women have accessed wider avenues of opportunities and secured the knowledge to articulate their concerns. Their works have reached out as vital formations to subvert the ill-informed judgments which surmise a banal, bitter and bleak life for them, a future of relentless failures, a future written on their bodies.

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A Man for All Stages: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Hal's Leadership in Henry IV Part I and Henry V

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Abstract— This article seeks to highlight and elucidate various facets of leadership as manifested by the character of Prince Hal in Henry IV and V, including his ability to speak eloquently and convincingly, and to go to war against his father's enemy. It seeks to analyze his progress as a king, and how he uses that power to meet the needs of his nation and reveals the complex relationship between power, language, and social authority. The analytical discussion will be conducted within the framework of critical discourse analysis (CDA) to explain how Shakespeare represents this king. Thus, Hal's evolving persona, political choices, and rhetorical abilities will be focused on using CDA approaches from Fairclough and Van Dijk.



Keywords— discourse, narrative discourse, critical discourse analysis, leadership

I. INTRODUCTION

In *Henry IV* (Part I) and *Henry V*, Shakespeare presents Hal as an apparently simple character with a complex worldview who reflects the dichotomy between youthful recklessness and disciplined, strategic leadership. On one hand, he is down to earth and seemingly laid back, while on the contrary, he systematically defeats his opponents. Hal is presented as the epitome of focused and effective leadership, as the mirror of Christian Kings. These kings held on to the virtues espoused by the Bible, including faith, integrity and mental strength. Shakespeare places Hal in a variety of roles that serve as a means of testing his character. These roles also highlight the interplay between personal identity and political authority. In addition to doing this, Shakespeare also gives Hal a certain immunity and fearless acuity that enable him to emerge victorious and in control of every life stage on which he finds himself. Thus, the audience and reader can map Hal's chronological progress through his theatrical encounters as he proves to be a man for all stages.

This article employs CDA, particularly the theoretical approaches of Norman Fairclough and Teun A. van Dijk, to explore how Hal's rhetoric, actions, and portrayal in the text reflect broader themes of political legitimacy, power relations, and identity. On one hand, Fairclough views discourse as "the use of language seen as

a form of social practice, and discourse analysis is analysis of how texts work within sociocultural practice" (1995, p. 7). According to van Dijk, "discourse control usually aims at controlling the intentions, plans, knowledge, opinions, attitudes, and ideologies – as well as their consequent actions – of recipients" (2015, p. 472).

Thus, CDA allows the reader to analyze how Hal constructs his authority through language and action, using speech acts, framing, and narrative strategies to influence both his subjects and enemies. Hal's clever use of rhetorical questions and repetition is seen, for example, when he responds to Falstaff's roleplaying as King Henry in Act II, Scene IV, while enumerating Hal's faults, stating,

Wherein is he good, but to taste sack and drink / it?
wherein neat and cleanly, but to carve a capon and
/ eat it? wherein cunning, but in craft? wherein
crafty, / but in villainy? wherein villainous, but in
all things? / wherein worthy, but in nothing?
(II.iv.455-59)

It can be surmised that Hal wields the power of language to manipulate the situation through the seemingly harmless ribbing of Falstaff. Through CDA, one can explore the extent to which Hal's discourse functions as a tool for political and social control, revealing the various illocutionary force brandished by Hal to manipulate those around him, to ultimately achieve his desired outcomes.

Theoretical Framework

According to the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), language is a powerful and intentional tool used to persuade, guide and shape persons of lesser status and mental acuity. Willig (2014) avers that the role of language is emphasized “as a power resource”. This intimates that language definitely delineates and demarcates classes and is used as a tool by those in authority to hold sway over their subordinates and subjects. This can occur in major societal groups such as schools, governmental offices, health institutions and political parties. As it relates to education, Mullet (2018) submits that CDA is a useful tool for persons engaging in educational research allowing them to assess and analyze links “between educational practices and social contexts” (p. 117). From Fairclough’s perspective, CDA exists within a three-dimensional model that analyzes discourse through the examination of the actual text, the discursive practices within which the text is situated, and the overarching social practices that govern the first two dimensions.

Alasari (2024) refers to the textual level as the micro level, and the discursive and societal levels as the macro levels. Further to this, Fairclough (2015) utilizes three stages of analysis, which begin with description, followed by interpretation and culminate in explanation (see figure 1). The description is at the textual level, which is referred to as the core or heart of the model; this highlights the outlining of the structural form or properties of the text. The interpretation stage is where the processing of the discursive context or discourse practices takes place. This is done within the context of the piece, when and where it is situated. This is important as it helps the reader to logically follow why certain decisions and actions occur within the particular discourse and how they would affect behaviours or lead to certain thoughts, feelings or assumptions.

While the interpretation adds to the description and gives the piece more meaning, relating it to the wider societal context is even more meaningful. This helps the piece to be to be interrogated and applied to real life situations. Thus, Fairclough’s highest and deepest levels necessitate explaining the text within the discourse in relation to the overarching external sociocultural landscape. This helps the reader to connect more vividly with the characters, along with their decisions and actions, since the social fabric or context would, in effect, influence the ebb and flow of the characters’ thoughts, words and actions. Furthermore, the social analysis compels the reader to interact at an evaluative level with the piece, using the literature to develop a clearer mental construction of societal complexities and to infer valued judgements, whether personally and socially.

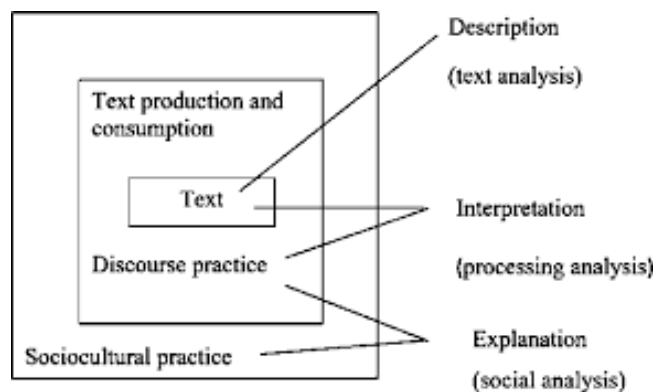


Fig.1 Fairclough's Model of CDA

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Van Dijk (2006) contends that critical discourse analysis (CDA) is motivated by a commitment to understanding social issues, particularly those that address power imbalances and social injustices. As such, CDA serves as a tool for highlighting issues that influence societal actions and changes, often aligning with the politically engaged perspective of discourse analysts. In this way, CDA can be viewed as a “social movement” (Van Dijk, 2006). This commitment to analysing social imbalances is particularly relevant to Shakespeare’s *Henry IV, Part I* and *Henry V*, where language becomes a means of constructing authority, navigating social hierarchies, and reflecting national identity.

Mogashoa (2014) further avers that CDA is intricately rooted in the study of language and communication as it encapsulates the epistemologies and pervasive mindsets of individuals and society alike. In these texts, language effectively mirrors and reveals the characters’ beliefs and the societal constructs of Shakespeare’s historical period. According to Mogashoa (2014), CDA “is primarily positioned in the environment of language” (p. 105). Thus, language within the text is an insight into the minds and souls of the characters that displays their epistemologies and helps the reader grasp the prevailing beliefs and, thus, the habits of the period and place. Moreover, Mogashoa (2014) elaborates that the study of the textual language enables the reader to encounter the speakers’ “beliefs, positions and ideas, in terms of spoken texts like conversations” (p. 105). Effectively, the reader enters the minds of the characters and traces their motivations for certain utterances and actions.

As explained by Van Dijk (2006), critical discourse analysis is not a singular method of research per se but rather an overarching, all-inclusive theory that subsumes various types of discourse analysis. These types include sociolinguistics, discourse grammar, narrative analysis and conversation analysis. Whichever the type,

analysis is the focus rather than just description. This analysis generally focuses on political or social difficulties (Van Dijk, 2006). Thus, the reading of the text goes beyond a mere recreational event to one that encourages the reader to actively examine and assess the events and utterances, with the outcome of being better able to understand and treat with actual life situations.

Regarding narrative discourse, Elson (2012) purports that a narrative serves as a vehicle for conveying human thought across generations. Thus, as human interaction evolves, so too does the depth and complexity of the narrative. Moreover, Elson (2012) states that "The analysis of discourse concerns the relations between clauses and sentences that make a document more than the sum of its parts" (p. 3). This implies that the sum of the entire discourse must be encountered if the full meaning is to be evaluated and grasped on different levels. Likewise, Bamberg (2015) asserts that "the referential and ideational fixity of writing orients more clearly toward intentions 'behind' the text that are to some degree now inscribed or fixated by writing" (p. 217). Thus, through the narrative, one can highlight categories and levels that can be used to examine human intention, societal complexities and political identities.

Moreover, according to Fairclough (2004), text analysis, of which linguistic analysis is a subset, is an important facet of discourse analysis. Examining the subsets contributes towards making sense of the overarching discourse, in that it allows the reader to apply the various elements of the text, for example, setting, to the overall meaning. More specifically, Genette (1983) posits that the narrative discourse analysis, in particular, "implies a study of relationships: on the one hand the relationship between a discourse and the events that it recounts...on the other hand the relationship between the same discourse and the act that produces it" (p. 27).

III. METHODOLOGY

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a qualitative analytical approach for critically describing, interpreting, and explaining how discourses construct, maintain, and legitimize social inequalities. According to Mullet (2018), CDA "rests on the notion that the way we use language is purposeful, regardless of whether discursive choices are conscious or unconscious" (p. 116). Notably, narrative discourse analysis can vary based on the focus of the researcher. There is no one agreed-upon prescriptive approach by the various mavens of critical discourse analysis with respect to analyzing the narrative discourse. In the case of the present paper, the focus is on the various aspects of the text and how they help in building the

message and the multiple themes within the text. Accordingly, the analysis focuses on key milestones in Hal's development: his social interactions and domestic life as evidenced by his interactions with his friends in London, his pivotal soliloquy, his confrontation with his father, and his eventual transformation on the battlefield.

Discourse Analysis

In *Henry IV* (Part I), Hal is firstly found at his London home with Falstaff whom Hal later refers to as "the tutor and feeder of my riots" (Shakespeare, 1597/2011, 5.5.60). According to Sarkar (2020), "Hal, at the first stage of drama, drinks mouthful and lives in an apartment accompanied by lecherous Falstaff and his company" (p. 30). Thus, at the onset, readers are alerted to the extent of Falstaff's influence on Hal's wayward and riotous actions. At the scene of his dwelling, Hal embodies the role of "the prodigal prince" (Wilson, 1990), having departed from the restrictions of the court to engage in what he might have deemed more carefree and exciting, howbeit unruly, living. This reflects the account referenced in the biblical account of the Prodigal's Son (Luke 15:11-32 KJV), and presents an incontrovertible interactive similarity of motive, temperament, and behavior. The fact that his companions are far different in comportment from what obtained at the court undoubtedly prejudices the reader's initial opinion of Hal; upon first glance, the reader may perceive him to be a reckless, debauched, and even ungrateful, rogue. In fact, for one who had been bred and educated in the king's palace, his behaviour fits quite seamlessly into the raucous and excessive lifestyles of his companions, which would have been certainly frowned upon by polite society.

However, upon keen inspection of the lines given to him by Shakespeare, one realizes that Hal actually has more mastery over himself than he lets on and is, by no means, a respecter of persons. On one occasion, in response to Falstaff's flippant, "Now, Hal, what time of day is it, lad?" (Shakespeare, 1597/2011, 1.2.1), Hal uncharacteristically responds in a very blunt and honest manner about Falstaff's excesses, alluding to his impropriety to deign to question him, who in spite of his behaviours, is still the crown prince. Hal responds,

What the devil hast thou to do with

The time of the day? Unless hours were cups of
Sack, and minute capons, and clocks the tongues
Of bawds, and dials the signs of leaping-houses,
And the blessed sun himself a fair hot wench in
Flame-colored taffeta, I see no reason why thou
Shouldst be so superfluous to demand the time
of the day. (Shakespeare, 1597/2011, 1.2.6-13)

In his first words, he clearly reveals his understanding and perception of Falstaff's character and lifestyle. Here, Shakespeare lays the foundation for Hal's eventual unveiling of the brilliant transformation, which eventually comes forth at the ideal time. Barber (1990) describes it as Hal "developing in such a way as to exhibit sovereign nature fitted for kingship" (p. 216). Therefore, one who is following the play closely would not be unduly shocked when Hal emerges "like bright metal on a sullen ground" to "show more goodly and attract more eyes" (Shakespeare, 1597/2011, 1.2.220-221), such being the contrast between his bawdy behaviour and his recently emerged noble bearing.

Thus, as it relates to the societal context, like a butterfly emerging from cocoon, Hal is determined to no longer hide his brilliance within the shadows of Falstaff's and his companions' lives. As much as he has had his adventures with his 'merry men', he is beginning to embrace his greater obligation to the wider society and his allegiance to his king and father. This pivoting from allegiance and friendship is frequently seen in everyday life where persons who sometimes cling to others to gain strength and notoriety, depart once that goal is accomplished; they reason that this prop is no longer necessary or convenient. This oftentimes leads to them cutting ties with the prop, particularly if that prop is from a lower societal rank.

While in Scene 1, Hal is seen interacting with "disreputable companions" (Barber, 1990, p. 216), he demonstrates his ability to maintain his integrity. Thus, when Poins enters and introduces the idea of robbing the pilgrims, even then, Hal is seen rejecting the idea of dishonesty and fraud. His reply to Falstaff, "Who, I rob? I a thief? Not I, by my faith," (Shakespeare, 1597/2011, 1.2.144) reveals deeper thought and integrity. What Hal does indulge in, though, is the opportunity for candid humour and wit, since it does not involve unnecessarily hurting anyone neither does it leave a lasting stain upon Hal's character. However, upon learning of the nature and plan of the jest, Hal tells Poins, "Well, I'll go with thee," (Shakespeare, 1597/2011, 1.2.198) revealing his playful yet caring nature.

Although Hal is able to embrace roles of the common man, his personality transcends that identity. It is evident that when he wishes, he can control and reinvent himself. Accordingly, Grady (2002) claims, "Prince Hal is a juggler of identities within the social real[m], able to move from one social context to the other, changing his sense of self almost as casually as he changes his clothes" (p. 127). He does not yield to any suggestion that does not appeal to his sense of honesty. He seems to be mirroring Jesus, who

was tempted by Satan himself and yet emerged triumphant. In this respect, Shakespeare has elevated Hal to a sphere to which few men or even kings have ascended. He is showing that change can be achieved even as an adult; it is possible for one to overcome one's flaws.

By putting Hal on this stage of his life's journey, Shakespeare establishes Hal's ability to interact with the "low life" (Wilson, 1990, p. 92). This serves to illuminate more keenly his later heroic and victorious battle with Hotspur, which was as illustrious as his previous activities were infamous and base. In fact, Hal himself, in his soliloquy, mentions this stark transformation. He declares, "And like bright metal on a sullen ground, / My reformation glittering o'er my fault, / Shall show more goodly and attracts more eyes" (Shakespeare, 1597/2011, 1.2.212-214). Thus, Shakespeare sets up the foundation for a dramatic turnabout in Hal's public image because of the drastic contrast between who he was thought to be and who the court and the public saw revealed subsequently. Hal's dramatic transformation signals the capacity for positive change within the inner man. By intentionally associating with the "lowlife" characters of Eastcheap, such as Falstaff, Hal intentionally creates a baseline of low and modest expectation that makes his eventual metamorphosis appear miraculous and divinely ordained, so as to exude a certain measure of political acumen and resolve that would attract admiration and virtue (Shakespeare, 1597/2011, 1.2.203). This would be sufficient to later frame and justify his invasion of France as a necessary and righteous pursuit of his dynastic rights, and not a fanciful act of whim that was motivated by personal pride.

Hal's soliloquy is one of the strongest pieces of evidence of his deliberate role-playing and shows that he possesses spectacular acting skills. He clearly reveals his awareness of his position and his understanding of human nature. He also demonstrates his impeccable timing, which allows him to effectively reveal his spectacular transformation to the world around him. In the opinion of the court and even his "disreputable companions", Hal has forsaken his noble path and has become an unhinged hoodlum and a prodigal prince. However, Hal's utterances prove that he is quite aware of who he is and wherein lies his destiny. With Hal's deeper self being concealed from those around him, he is, therefore, able to hide his true self from even those within his inner circle.

In the beginning of his soliloquy, Hal proclaims, "I know you all, and will a while uphold / [t]he unyok'd humor of your idleness ... / by breaking through the foul and ugly mists / of mists that seem to strangle him" (Shakespeare, 1597/2011, 1.2.196-1-210). Thus, Hal is operating from a vantage point, because while he plays along as one of the

gang members, he is learning firsthand about the nature of the common man and is able to aptly prepare himself for "breaking through the foul and ugly mists" (Shakespeare, 1597/2011, 1.2.209) like the sun. This emphasizes that Hal is not as superficial as he initially let on; he is constantly acting the role of a wayward son when he is in the presence of his friends, concealing his actual end game, which is his eventual return to his position at the court.

In Act 2, Scene 4 of *Henry IV, Part I*, Hal remarkably and skillfully plays dual roles, acting as both himself and his father in the Boar's Head Tavern at Eastcheap. Shakespeare, therefore, depicts Hal as a consummate and strategic actor and politician, having the innate ability to meticulously construct, deconstruct and reconstruct his private and public personas to maximize his future political capital. Further, this modal shapeshifting tendency elucidates his deeper understanding that his (Hal's) political prowess and kingship will rely heavily on the management of perception and theatricality (Greenblatt, 1981). Of note, however, is that while he is role-playing, he reveals poignant truths about the King, Falstaff and himself. In the playing of these roles, Hal displays his profound understanding of those within his social sphere, including his father. He also exhibits that he is quite conscious of his own personality and behaviour. This demonstration belies the ne'er-do-well character that he generally shows to those around him. It reveals a deeper, more introspective person than others would have known. It gives credence to the adage that one must never judge a book by its cover. Hal's everyday actions just barely skimmed the surface of the substance within the inner man.

In addition to the revelations shown by his roleplaying, Hal brilliantly, though subtly, discloses his understanding of and true sentiments with regard to Falstaff. The cloaking of his true intentions was successful, because Falstaff and the others read the portrayals only on the level of jest. Hal's alertness and understanding of the disparities between the royal and the common are revealed when Falstaff suggests that he should practice an answer. Hal immediately and rather condescendingly replies, "Do thou stand for my father and answer me upon the particulars of life" (Shakespeare, 1597/2011, 2.4.376-377). Here, Hal's language reveals his awareness of his superior standing in society, such that only his father, the King, can issue a command, whether directly or indirectly, to him. Thus, while he behaved as though he was equal with his peers, within himself, he was cognizant of the actual class divide whereby he held a superior social ranking. This superiority could be activated and triggered by a single utterance. Here is revealed the power inherent in language to signal and impress one's class and position of power upon others.

Hal's understanding of illocutionary force is seen in his response to and behaviour towards his father, the King. Hal does not retaliate or argue against the accusations that are railed against him by the King, as he might were the accusations made by his peers. He simply answers, "I will redeem all this on Percy's head, / And, in the closing of some glorious day. / Be bold to tell you that I am your son" (Shakespeare, 1597/2011, 3.2.137-139). The audience and the reader are able to learn much from these few words, such as Hal's deference and understanding of the role of Henry IV as father and king. His breeding and true character are reflected in the calibre of speech that he knows is required and uses in the presence of his father, the king.

When acting with Falstaff, it is clear that he was affronted by Falstaff's attempt to act as the king, even though it was pretense. He preferred to have Falstaff play his part rather than the part of the king. He disdainfully asks, "Dost thou speak like a king? Do thou stand for me, and I'll play for my father" (Shakespeare, 1597/2011, 2.4.446-447). It shows that Hal is clear about the extreme class divide between Falstaff and the King. That utterance revealed a condescending tone towards Falstaff, almost as though he is putting Falstaff in his place. His utterance to Falstaff also reveals Hal's awareness of the type of behaviour and speech that is required when one is in the elevated position of a King. Moreover, this underscores the fact that he was just acting the role of a rogue with his friends, while being aware of what is required of one acting the part of the exalted position of king. That Hal is very much at ease with his role is seen by the manner of words he uses (as king) to address his son (Hal, played by Falstaff). Hal's role as king also reveals that he is aware of his father's perception of him as a wayward son as seen in the utterance, "Ungracious boy ... / Thou art violently carried away from grace" (Shakespeare, 1597/2011, 2.4.461-463).

When Hal (*as King*) declares to Falstaff (*as Prince*), "The complaints I hear of thee are grievous" (Shakespeare, 1597/2011, 2.4.457-458), Falstaff responds, in a manner unbefitting the royal breeding, "S'blood, my lord, they are false" (Shakespeare, 1597/2011, 2.4.459). This use of the swearing reveals that Falstaff was unaware or indifferent to court policy. Hal, on the contrary, was aware of what constituted unacceptable court manners. Hal immediately uses the opportunity to chastise Falstaff (*as Prince*) and possibly broadcast his ignorance of appropriate court language. Hal's (*as King*) swift and curt response is, "Swearest thou, ungracious boy?" (Shakespeare, 1597/2011, 2.4.460). Hal's familiarity and perfect knowledge of court mannerisms would have stemmed from his upbringing and breeding. In spite of his trysts with his friends, he had been cultured as a leader and a gentleman. This is instructive as it echoes the Biblical admonition and

dogma, "Train up a child in the way he would go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6 KJV). Hal's utterances and actions are testament to the veracity of this adage, showing that his early breeding while concealed in the presence of his friends, was very much a part of his character. Ofttimes, this is the case with children and young adults who tend to rebel against the confines of the rules within a home. While they may try to mingle with persons who are wont to be lawless, many times they are restrained by their early training.

Hal's dalliance with his friends could be construed as him rebelling or enjoying his last days of freedom (before being made king), as many young men would. This interaction with the common folk would have been instrumental in granting him deeper insight into their lifestyles and worldview, which would serve him as king, helping him to better connect with his citizens at all levels. This parallels the biblical account of King David's development as a servant-leader, a journey that began with shepherding sheep in 1 Samuel 17 and culminated in the political wisdom and profound humility expressed in Psalm 23 (KJV). Thus, in what might be described as the trenches, Hal, like David, developed a balanced character and educated himself in the ways of the common man, that by word and deed, he might emerge a leader of men. He was able to wield his words in such a way as to show his superiority without displaying pomposity, making him a respected and even beloved leader.

Hal is pellucid about the "King" in the "Kid" and seemingly operates comfortably at the intersection of those two personalities. As underscored by Sarkar (2020), Hal as the Prince of Wales and future King is "the representation of youth who changes according to the demand of certain stages of life" (p. 29). However moribund it may appear, his behaviour is not uncommon. Many young persons who feel stifled by the restrictions of race, religion or class go through such a period of rebellion. They are dissatisfied with the isolation that they feel is imposed upon them. Thus, they tend to behave contrary to how they would have been trained. This does not mean that they cannot capriciously revert to their early training if the desire or need arises.

In Hal's case, according to Tillyard (1962, p. 265), he had a choice "between Sloth or Vanity, to which he is drawn by his bad companions". While 'drawn by' may imply some level of coercion by his friends, Hal's utterances reveal that he is very much in control of his choices and had other motives for following his friends' sometimes unsavoury counsel. Accordingly, Boyd (2008) describes Hal as "a protean prince" and insists that his "prodigality [is] simply one of a number of guises he assumes and discards at will" (p. 4). The ease with which he

slips back into his role as crown prince gives credence to Boyd's (2008) assessment of his intentional pendular moves between being common and stately.

During Hal's and Falstaff's roleplaying in Act 2, Scene 4, the extent of Hal's keen observational skills and attention to details is displayed in his apt description of Falstaff, which reveals his knowledge and understanding of him, who contrariwise receives this description with levity, as Hal having just fun. This ability to hide in plain sight is part of what makes Hal such a great actor and one who is able to manipulate any stage. When he declares to Falstaff, "There is a devil haunts thee in the likeness of an old fat man; a tun of man is thy companion. Why dost thou converse with that trunk of humours, that bolting-hutch of beastliness" (Shakespeare, 1597/2011, 2.4.461-466), we gather some insight into why Hal finds it reasonable and necessary to reject Falstaff as a close companion when he (Hal) is ultimately crowned king. In Hal's role-play, he is unwittingly decreeing that he views Falstaff as a useless, despicable being, who just abuses the system without having anything profitable or meaningful to add. This is further evidenced when he (as King) asks Falstaff (as Prince), "Wherein is he good, but to taste sack and drink it? ...Wherein worthy but in nothing?" (Shakespeare, 1597/2011, 2.4.471-476) suggesting that Falstaff is not very useful as a companion.

In this scene, Shakespeare is foreshadowing why Falstaff must be rejected when Hal is put on the bigger stage of life, the stage of a king. As opined by Nuñez (2001), "Falstaff has to be rejected for the simple reason that he represents a threat to the order of the state and to monarchy" (p. 66). It is apparent that he does not fit the status quo of well-bred and ordered society that Hal would want to maintain as king. Bradley (1990) goes further in his analysis when he declares, "I would suggest that Henry's rejection of Falstaff is in keeping with his character" (p. 65). Thus, while Hal spends time with his merry companions, he does this more out of caprice than devotion to them. The real Hal, as averred by Nuñez (2001), is a "cold and calculating character" who has "embarked on a calculated and dishonest friendship" (p. 66).

Later in the play, when Hal is placed on the battlefield, he dismisses all fears that his father and the wider public may have had of his suitability to reign. Shakespeare achieves this by placing Hal in confrontation with a most formidable foe. Essentially, Hal is placed on a stage that was supposed to be dominated by Hotspur, whose fame was well known in the court. Even Hal's father reminds him, "Thrice hath this Hotspur, Mars in swathing clothes, / this infant warrior, in his enterprises/ discomfited great Douglas" (Shakespeare, 1597/2011, 3.2.115-118).

Therefore, the stage is set for Hal's greatest test of character, skill and strength - qualities well suited for a king. Hal understands the importance of this confrontation and tells his father in Act 3, Scene 2:

I will redeem all this on Percy's head,
And in the closing of some glorious day
Be bold to tell you that I am your son,
When I will wear a garment all of blood,
And stain my favors in a bloody mask,

Which washed away shall scour my shame with it.
(Shakespeare, 1597/2011, 3.2.137-142)

As Cohen (1992) posits, "Hal is a promise to commit a deed of 'good' violence," and "To Hal, his blood – covered features and the garment of blood are the necessary stage of pollution precedent to the promised regeneration" (139). Hal is quite cognizant of the fact that victory on this stage is critical to proving his worth and fealty to his father. Thus, when Hal meets Hotspur on the battlefield, he is sure to inform him of his intentions to be victorious. Thus, when Hotspur states, "My name is Harry Percy" (Shakespeare, 1597/2011, 5.4.61), Hal confidently replies, "Why then I see a very valiant name. I am the Prince of Wales, and think not, Percy, to share with me in glory anymore" (Shakespeare, 1597/2011, 5.4.62-65).

Hal does not deny the fact that Hotspur is a valiant warrior. In fact, Hal alludes to his Hotspur's greatness when he declares, "Two stars keep not their motion in one sphere" (Shakespeare, 1597/2011, 5.4.66). Hal's utterances show, though, that while he recognizes Hotspur's talents, one of them has to emerge victorious. Hal is asserting that his (Hal's) status is more elevated than Hotspur's, and he intends to prove it in more than words. The excellence that Hotspur is renowned for on the field emphasizes Hal's great victory and makes his competence more credible.

Thus, when Hal conquers on the battlefield, self-governance and modesty are the real winners. These are traits that Hal has been quietly honing and is carrying within him as heir to the throne. Cohen (1992) avers that "He [Hal] is the most entirely self-controlled character in the play, perhaps in the canon" (140). Contrariwise, Shakespeare shows earlier, through Lord Mortimer, the unbending resolve of Hotspur and his inability to curb his passions, which were unsuitable for a leader. Of Hotspur's willfulness, Lord Mortimer declares:

You must needs learn, lord, to amend this fault.

Though sometimes it show greatness, courage,
blood-

And that's the dearest grace it renders you-

Yet oftentimes it doth present harsh rage,

Defect of manners, want of government.

Pride, haughtiness, opinion, and disdain,

The least of which, haunting a nobleman

Loseth men's hearts and leaves behind a stain

Upon the beauty of all parts besides,

Beguiling them of condemnation. (Shakespeare, 1597/2011, 3.1.185-195)

This stands in stark contrast to the Hal and emphasizes that among Hal's seemingly vagabond traits, there lies within a light that was waiting to shine forth. This light embodies the Christian values of self-control, humility and moderation. Therefore, Hal is actually exalting the Christian virtues of moderation, humility and self-control by self-possessed,. Significantly, after Hal slays Hotspur, he paradoxically endorses and lauds Hotspur's merit as both a warrior and a man. In doing so, he not only elevates Hotspur's legacy in death and reputation in life, but also demonstrates his (Hal's) own capacity for grace and fairness. This action by Hal, along with his utterances, stresses the importance of the character traits of generosity, graciousness, and *government*, particularly in one who is part of the ruling class. Through his words and actions, Hal establishes his dominance and pedigree. On the contrary, Hotspur, in spite of his valour, proved himself to be devoid of self-governance and humility. While he may have experienced a measure of exaltation, his downfall was imminent and inevitable.

When as king Hal notices that the odds are against England in the war, he decides to mingle among the ordinary soldiers to verbally encourage them. Therefore, he becomes to his soldiers, as the chorus puts it, "A largesse universal, like the sun, / His liberal eye doth give to everyone, / Thawing cold fear, that mean and gentle all, / Behold, as may unworthiness define, / A little touch of Harry in the night" (Shakespeare, 1599/2011, 4.Chorus.44-48). In essence, the soldiers saw Hal as a light in the darkness, wherein he brightens their plight on the battlefield. Hal's going on to the field in disguise shows that he recognizes the value of role-playing and the power of rhetoric. He recognizes that a man sometimes has to assume a different identity to accomplish what may be impossible without disguise. Hal acknowledges that he is at a stage where he needs to do something innovative. He has, therefore, revealed his ability to strategize, lead and conquer, character traits that were bred in him from an early age. Thus, Hal depicts the qualities of a leader through his words and actions. He epitomizes what is required in a great leader, who is able to gain support through persuasive eloquence and demonstrative tactics.

Furthermore, Hal's ability to adapt to different roles is reflected in his critical charade, which he begins by informing Pistol, "I am a gentleman of a company" (Shakespeare, 1597/2011, 4.1.39). The theatrical word "company" resonates with the reader because of the play on the word. The pun is consequential, since Hal is indeed a gentleman of the company. Only, in this context, Hal uses not a sword but words, the persuasive weapon of an actor, to convince the soldiers that the fight was worth it and that the King is blameless. He declares:

The king is not bound to answer

his
The particular endings of his soldiers, the father of

not
Son, nor the master of his servant; for they purpose

Their death when they purpose their services.

Besides, there is no king, be his cause

swords,
Never so spotless, if it come to the arbitrament of

Can try it out with all unspotted soldiers.
(Shakespeare, 1597/2011, 4.1.160-164)

Thus, Hal is able to use rhetoric to encourage his men. He identifies with them even in the presence of Westmerland, when he announces, "We few, we happy few, we band of brothers" (Shakespeare, 1597/2011, 4.3.60). The use of 'brothers' underscores the tight bond that Hal has with his men; he is one with them on the battlefield, yet he is their leader. He does not sit idly by as some leaders do while his men are facing the fire of the battle. Essentially, Hal demonstrates that his Christian virtues were not merely in word but also in deed. Shakespeare presents Hal as the mirror of Christian kings, where his humility is evidenced even in the face of victory. Instead of taking the glory to himself when he had the opportunity, Hal exclaims, "Praised be God, and not our strength, for it" (Shakespeare, 1597/2011, 4.7.88-89). This act of humbly and ably fighting alongside his men would have endeared him to them. Subordinates tend to extol leaders who display selfless, sacrificial, noble, and humble characteristics, notwithstanding their valour. Having the battlefield as a stage, Hal seems to have been able to display all the admired virtues.

As though Shakespeare is determined to establish Hal's complete competence and command on any stage, he finally places him on the courtship stage. Here, Hal pursues the princess of France, Katherine, whom he addresses with such tenderness that one cannot help but admire his versatility as an actor. Hal addresses Katherine as "fair Katherine, and most fair" (Shakespeare, 1597/2011, 5.2.98) and shows his gentler, passionate side. This gentleness was

achieved in spite of the fact that his courting was hindered by Katherine's inability to speak Hal's "English" (Shakespeare, 1597/2011, 5.2.102-103). The courtship stage allows Hal to display, more brilliantly, his political and romantic superiority in that he wins her heart, without the advantage of being able fluently communicate in her language. In spite of this, Hal's code-switching ability, and his understanding and appreciation of different cultures and languages are demonstrated.

Ultimately, as the king in Henry V, Hal continues taking control of his various roles in life, showing that he is indeed a man for all stages. Accordingly, Cohen (1992) expresses, "To Hal...history is a series of roles and staged events" (141). This reminds the reader of the magnitude of Hal's place in history as a man who was versatile and able to dominate any stage. Hal was not just a fictional character in a play. He was the living embodiment of someone who was able to occupy and dominate a variety of life stages. As declared by Patterson (1992), "[i]n the case of Henry V, the story of the text is inseparable from the political history that is both its content and its context" (166). This was accomplished through Hal's power to wield language and his ability to observe and read the other characters in his environment.

IV. CONCLUSION

Shakespeare has successfully established Hal's position as the mirror of Christian kings for all time. He skillfully achieved this feat by allowing Hal to shine and to be tested on a variety of stages. He presented a man with flaws and human frailties who was able to rise to the occasion and excel when and where it counted. He showed a man who was able to interact with all classes and be a leader on each level. On the various stages, different aspects of Hal's character are displayed and subjected to scrutiny as he is exposed to various challenges, which he overcomes admirably. This he does by utilizing the training and breeding that he would have gained from his court life, and the street smarts that he would have gained from his common friends. Added to these, Shakespeare has presented a character with many layers, one who also possesses enough intelligence and sophistry to take on the politics of kingship, and, thus, must never be underestimated. Ultimately, Shakespeare has presented a character who would hold his own anywhere, who could occupy and dominate all stages of life.

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Scientific Ambition and Moral Failure: A Comparative Study of *Frankenstein* and Its Film Adaptations

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Abstract— *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus* (1818) by Mary Shelley is considered to be a seminal work in studying the ethical consequences of scientific ambition. This paper presents a comparative analysis of the novel and selected film versions applying posthumanism, bioethics, and AI ethics as analytical tools. It argues that although in Shelley, moral failure is found in the negligent attitude of Victor Frankenstein towards his creature, in the film adaptations, this failure is redefined within the context of the changing technological and cultural realities. The analysis uses close analysis of some of the central scenes in the movie to illustrate how these adaptations change the personal failure in ethics to one that is more societal in nature, like the responsibility of an institution and the independence of the technology. Ultimately, *Frankenstein* proves to be a prescient ethical exploration that anticipates the modern issues of artificial intelligence and biotechnology.



Keywords— AI ethics, Film adaptation, *Frankenstein*, Moral failure, Scientific ambition.

I. INTRODUCTION

Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus by Mary Shelley remains a seminal work that addresses the question of the relationship between science and ethics. Composed during an era of the great intellectual flux, the novel reflects the optimism of Enlightenment science and the cynicism of Romanticism. The story of *Victor Frankenstein* and his efforts to acquire knowledge and control the life in its entirety exemplifies of how humanity seeks to transcend nature but fails to take responsibility for what it creates thereby revealing the moral dangers of such ambitions. With the increased pace of scientific and technological progress in the contemporary world, the motif of *Frankenstein* has gained some fresh interpretations, especially as it applies to the realms of artificial intelligence, genetic engineering, and biotechnology. The paper compares the novel and selected major film adaptations to understand how the themes of scientific ambition and moral failure are expressed across different media and historical circumstances.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Frankenstein has attracted countless interpretations over the years, indicating that this novel contains various layers of meanings. Early critics considered it a product of the Romantic period and thought that it cautioned against an excessive emphasis on science and reason. They frequently portrayed *Victor Frankenstein* as a tragic hero whose flaws stem from his ambition, pride and isolation. Nevertheless, subsequent literature approached the novel from fresh perspectives, such as notions of technology, morality and being human.

Theorists such as Rosi Braidotti and Donna Haraway view the creature as a figure that challenges the notion of what a human being is. The concept of the cyborg described by Haraway applies well in view of the fact that the creature is both human and man-made. Bioethics are an issue other critics dwell on, where concepts by Beauchamp and Childress are applied to demonstrate that Victor neglects his duty as a creator by failing to take care of the creature. Even more recent ones compare the creature to artificial intelligence. Philosophers, such as Luciano Floridi, assert that, similar to AI, the creature becomes more powerful than

its creator, raising the questions of responsibility and the risks of creating new forms of life.

The adaptation studies have also helped in realising the evolution of *Frankenstein* across media. Theorists state that movies are a mirror of the fears of the epochs in which they were created, like early twentieth-century fears of industrialisation, modern fears of artificial intelligence and machine autonomy. Although considerable work is available on this, the gaps that still exist concern integrated analyses that incorporate both theoretical frameworks and the close readings of the cinematic texts, which this research paper attempts to address.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study employs an interdisciplinary theoretical framework encompassing posthumanism, bioethics and AI ethics to explore *Frankenstein* and its adaptations. Posthumanism challenges the assumption of what it means to be human, and in this process, they provide a lens through which the creature can be considered as a subject and not an object. Bioethics provides an example of how one may interpret the behaviour of *Victor Frankenstein* based on the lens of responsibility, harm, care and the ethical obligations of being a creator of science. AI ethics uses these problems to apply in present-day contexts, such as the problem of autonomy, alignment and responsibility in artificial systems. Together, these frameworks enable a comprehensive understanding of the rise and fall of scientific ambition.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The paper follows a qualitative, comparative methodology, integrating literary analysis and film studies. *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley (1818) serves as the main text, and it is complemented by the analysis of the selected film versions, such as *Frankenstein* (1931), *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein* (1994), and *Victor Frankenstein* (2015). Key scenes are examined through the prism of visual composition, plot development, and theme focus, with a special emphasis put on how they showcase creation, responsibility, and moral deficiency. The theoretical frameworks provided above inform the analysis and make it possible to interdisciplinary interpret both textual and visual material.

V. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

It is not scientific ambition itself that is condemned in *Frankenstein*, by Mary Shelley; rather, it represents a pure human desire that is associated with the Enlightenment views of progress, discovery, and control of nature. This

intellectual atmosphere is evident in the way *Victor Frankenstein* tries to gain knowledge, as he tries to overcome the boundaries of nature and reveal the mysteries of life itself. The novel, however, poses the challenges of this ambition by showing the ethical drawbacks that arise due to the detachment of responsibility and foresight. Victor did not fail in the process of creation but rather in his failure to foresee, manage and reckon with the repercussions of his experiment. Bioethically, his behaviour is an extreme breach of the major principles of nonmaleficence and responsibility. He creates a living being without thinking about its welfare, psychological development, or social belonging, and his desertion of the being only creates the contrast of a grave violation of the ethical care. The trajectory of the creature, from innocence to violence, proves that monstrosity is not inherent, it is developed by negligence, rejection and pain. In this way Shelley re-evaluates the idea of moral failure as relational based on the breaking of responsibility between creator and creation in contrast with the act of scientific innovation itself.

In posthumanist thinking, the creature is an influential character that disrupts the conventional meaning of humanity. Being both a man and a machine at the same time, the creature forces one to reconsider the idea that humanity is rooted in biological beginnings or physical appearance. The fact that it can learn a language and have empathy and think of its existence makes it a subject and not an object, which challenges anthropocentric hierarchies. However, regardless of these virtues, the monster is not recognised and included because of its physical looks, showing the random and marginalising preferences according to which humanity is socially constructed. This paradox highlights one of the central posthumanist arguments that humanity does not have an objective demarcation point which is determined by nature, but rather it is culturally and ideologically constructed. The story by Shelley predicts modern arguments regarding artificial creatures, cyborg identities and the ethical position of non-human creatures, implying that non-human moral considerations should be expanded to cover the traditional human groups. In this regard, the creature turns into a reflection of the restrictions and biases of human society.

Adaptations of *Frankenstein* to the screen follow these themes across the visual and narrative techniques that mirror the anxieties of their cultural periods. *Frankenstein* (1931) changes the scene of the creation into a dramatic scene with massive lab machinery, flashing lights and harnessing of electricity. Such visual focus on machines and power makes the process of creation a moment of technological success and changes the focus of the narration towards the responsibility of ethics in favour of the accomplishment of scientific success. This change is

emphasised by the triumphant pronouncement of success by Victor, who puts the creation in the context of mastery instead of being a moral endeavour. Instead, the creature is positioned as an immediate danger, which supports a binary opposition between human and non-human, which corresponded to the anxieties of industrialisation and uninhibited technological advancements of the early twentieth century. This change streamlines the convoluted system of morality that Shelley possesses by shifting the experience of moral failure to an extrinsic effect of the transgressive ambition and not the neglect of relationships.

Conversely, the ethical and emotional aspects in the works by the author of *Frankenstein*, Mary Shelley, are revived in *Frankenstein* (1994). The creation process is presented in a visceral and embodied way and focuses on organic imagery and physical struggle. The monster is born in a fluid environment, and it is not distinguished where the creature was naturally born and the way it was created. Such depiction adds more moral weight to the creator since the job of Victor would be comparable to that of a parent. His later abjection of the creature is therefore even more ethical, showing the ineffectiveness of care and the results of being thrown away. The emotional depth and sufferings of the creature shown in the film confirm the novel criticism of social marginalisation and moral negligence and agree well with both bioethical and posthumanist interpretations.

A further development is evident in *Victor Frankenstein* (2015), where a dimension of collaboration and experimentation is added to the story. The film complicates the concept of individual responsibility by foregrounding the partnership between Victor and Igor, implying that the creation of science is usually a group activity. This transformation is symptomatic of current anxieties regarding the institutional and collaborative character of technological production in which there is the spread of responsibility throughout networks of researchers, developers, and organisations. The focus on the experimentation and the process, not on the single point of creation, is consistent with contemporary scientific work and begs the question of accountability in the complex world. In this regard, moral failure is not isolated to an individual but turns out to be a structural problem, involving more social and institutional systems.

The creature as seen through the lens of AI ethics can be viewed as an early interpretation of an autonomous system, which develops its behaviour based on its interaction with the environment. Similar to modern artificial intelligence, the creature learns by seeing, adjusts to external factors, and progresses in some way of thought and self-conscience. The absence of guidance, education or moral orientation offered to the creature by Victor is analogous to what has now been termed the “alignment problem in AI ethics”, the problem

of making artificial systems behave in a way that is morally desirable to humans. The violent behaviour of the creature, then, can be interpreted not as a sign of intrinsic wickedness but as the result of insufficient design, absence of control and societal disapproval. This interpretation highlights the necessity to incorporate ethical aspects during the creation and implementation of intelligent systems and the necessity of additional responsibility after their development.

Taken together, these discussions indicate an apparent change in the portrayal of scientific motivation and moral degradation across both literary and cinematic texts. Though the novel by Shelley attributes the moral failure to the individual neglect of the creator, the failed moral states gradually come to refer to the moral failures of the culture and the moral failures of the institutions. Simultaneously, the combination of posthumanist, bioethical, and AI ethical spheres proves that *Frankenstein* is not an object of history but a living and changing text that still responds to the topical ethical issues. What makes it relevant over time is its ability to shed light on the complicated connection between creation, responsibility, and limits of humans to give perceptive understanding on the ethical dilemma that contemporary science and technology may raise.

VI. FINDINGS

This research establishes that scientific ambition is always morally neutral in *Frankenstein*, even though it would be problematic when deprived of its responsibility, care and foresight. In both the novel and its movie versions, the problem is not the very creation but the inability to take moral responsibility for the created. In the original story of Mary Shelley, this failure is symbolised in the outright refusal of the creature by *Victor Frankenstein*, and this refusal triggers a series of misery and brutality. The metamorphosis of the creature from a delicate and understanding creature to a destructive one highlights the fact that moral failure lies in the failure of care and not necessarily in being monstrous. This establishes a ground argument in that ethical responsibility should not end with innovation but a continued involvement in the results of innovation.

The second important observation is that posthumanist analysis redefines the creature as a valid subject, not a monstrous other and this makes anthropocentric connection of what it means to be human difficult. The intellectual and emotional capacities of the creature prove that the human cannot be brought down to biological source or physical appearance. Rather, ethical recognition and social inclusion are core to the meaning of personhood, as per the study. Adaptations of the film, especially subsequent ones, to a larger degree support this view by making the creature more

human, and focusing more on its emotional experience, which is consistent with posthumanist criticism of fixed human identity.

The analysis further reveals that the bioethical principles are consistently violated in all the representations of *Victor Frankenstein*, but it is varied in the extent and manner of the violation. The failure of ethics in the novel is a personal and psychological one that is based on negligence and irresponsibility on the part of Victor. In motion pictures, this failure is multiplied manifold, sometimes the effort of scientific institutions, of collaborative enterprises or of social institutions. This is a change suggesting a change in perception of ethics in science, having more to do with responsibility in a systemic sense than with personal responsibility, and this is indicative of modern anxieties about the development of mature scale technologies.

The other notable discovery that can be made is based on the use of AI ethics that presents *Frankenstein* as a proto-narrative of artificial intelligence. The creature is also developed in accordance with major elements of the AI systems, such as observation-based learning, adapting to the environmental stimuli, and experiencing unpredictable behavioural results. Victor's inability to guide the creature or rather align it to moral standards is similar to current worries about AI alignment and control. The paper concludes that the creature's behaviour can be viewed not as inherently violent but as an outcome of under design, non-existence of controls, and societal rejection, which makes the role of ethical regulation in the development of autonomous systems particularly significant.

Furthermore, the development of film versions evidences an evolving range of ethical attitudes: there were initial warnings against the dangers of science, more refined versions of the same show responsibility and relationships and finally, contemporary worries regarding shared and institutional responsibility.

Lastly, the paper concludes that *Frankenstein* has been found to be highly relatable in the modern context since it foresees major areas of ethical issues in contemporary science and technology. The theme of accountability, conformity and the impacts of negligence in the story finds origins in the contemporary discussion of artificial intelligence, biotechnology and posthuman identity. The manner in which these themes have been continuing to be relevant in both time and media is indicative of the idea that *Frankenstein* functions not merely as a literary work but as a sustainable ethical model that can be used to analyse the developing technological anxieties.

VII. CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

Frankenstein remains relevant over the years because it can foresee ethical issues that characterise the current world of technology. The age of artificial intelligence is characterised by the fact that machine learning processes are more autonomous in their decision-making, raising questions of accountability, bias and control. Victor Frankenstein's inability to mentor and own his invention indicates the modern issue of creators that adopt technologies without much knowledge of the effects they could have on society. Likewise, biotechnology (gene editing, synthetic biology, etc.) continues to be a way of repeating the theme of creation in the novel where experts have not considered ethical implications. The struggle of the creature to survive in this world that does not accept or recognize it reflects the modern disputes about the rights and status of artificial and biologically modified creatures. The adaptations of this work in films underscore this topicality by repositioning the themes of the work in the context of the current anxieties and proving that *Frankenstein* is not only a historical artefact but a living text that still shapes the ethical debate.

VIII. FUTURE SCOPE

Frankenstein's interdisciplinary theme opens up major prospects in future studies. Future research might explore how the novel is relevant to newly emerging technologies such as transhumanism, robotics and neural interfaces and how definitions of humanity change traditionally accepted ethical systems. It may also enhance the comparative studies by extending the references to international and non-Western versions of *Frankenstein*, which will give a reflection of how the concept of scientific ambition and moral responsibility is perceived in other cultural settings. Furthermore, the next generation research might include an empirical method, such as the examination of the audience reception, in order to analyse the ethical facets of film adaptation by contemporary audiences. The theme of another promising direction is to apply *Frankenstein* to policy discourse about AI control and bioethics with the help of literary knowledge to make decisions in the real world. With the ever-changing technology, *Frankenstein* will be a very essential reading when it comes to developing the ethical aspects of creation and innovation.

IX. CONCLUSION

Frankenstein is an influential and versatile novel that continues to educate or inform modern discussions on science, technology, and morality. By integrating posthumanism, bioethics, and AI ethics, this paper has

shown that the major issue in the novel is not the process of creating but not taking responsibility of the creation. Although film adaptations differ in their focus, all go through this theme in one way or another, and moral responsibility should be in balance with one another, and the lesson is becoming more and more urgently needed nowadays with the presence of artificial intelligence and biotechnology.

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The Architecture of Madness: Domestic Entrapment and the Imprisoned Psyche in Stephen King's *The Shining* and *Misery*

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Abstract— Stephen King, often relegated to the category of popular horror, uses the genre to explore profound psychological terrors, particularly those rooted in the domestic sphere. In *The Shining* (1977) and *Misery* (1987), King masterfully transforms the traditional sanctuary of the home into a claustrophobic prison, using this physical entrapment to explore the disintegration of the protagonist's psyche. This paper traces how Annie Wilkes's house in *Misery* and the Overlook Hotel in *The Shining* operate as Gothic domestic prisons, deforming caregiving and family roles, and how the protagonists' psyches respond to, resist, or finally succumb to these pressures. The house becomes prison, and the psyche becomes the battleground. The architecture, isolation, control, and obsession combine to trap protagonists. The house or the hotel is never neutral: it becomes a character, a force, and a prison. Through the Overlook Hotel and Annie Wilkes's secluded home, King examines how isolation, external monstrous forces, and internal trauma conspire to dismantle identity, autonomy, and sanity, rendering the familiar home a site of ultimate horror.



Keywords— Domestic Entrapment, Control, Gothic, Home, Isolation, Psychological Prison.

Introduction

Home has been a foundational archetype in Western literature and culture, symbolizing safety and identity. Stephen King subverts this archetype with brutal efficiency, weaponizing domestic spaces to enact psychological torture upon his protagonists. Gaston Bachelard observes in *The Poetics of Space* that the house “shelters day-dreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace” (Bachelard, 1994, p. 6). Yet, as Gothic and postmodern writers demonstrate, this same structure may function as a prison that mirrors the anxieties of its inhabitants (Botting, 1996). Stephen King exploits this duality.

King's novels offer a complex, multi-layered body of work that provides invaluable insight into American culture, the art of storytelling, and the darkest and brightest corners of the human condition. Gothic fiction often uses the home or

castle as a site of confinement with ghostly pasts, family curses, and locked rooms. King draws on that tradition but modernizes it. In the concept of Gothic domesticity, spaces that are supposedly private, internal, familial become sites of cruelty, fear, and confinement. This is central to many of his novels. *Misery* and *The Shining* are especially powerful in their representation of this domestic entrapment. King's horror often returns to a paradox: home should be safe, nurturing, familiar; yet in his work home can become the locus of horror. The caregiver becomes the monster (*Misery*), the institution (hotel) becomes infected by history (*The Shining*), mental illness, addiction, and trauma.

Concepts such as coercive control, from abuse studies, help illuminate how power works in *Misery*: Annie's control over everything; painkillers, narrative, food, movement is a textbook example. In *The Shining*, the

hotel's influence works more diffusely, but still exerts pressure, uses manipulation, encourages Jack's worst impulses. Prolonged stress, isolation, fear, loss of control produce cognitive distortions, hallucinations, and breakdowns. These are vividly present in both novels.

In both, *Misery* and *The Shining*, the central horror is not an external monster invading from the outside, but the terrifying transformation of the protagonist's immediate environment into an inescapable gothic prison. Stephen King transforms domestic spaces into cages—houses or hotels that imprison bodies and souls. These physical settings reflect and intensify psychological entrapment. Through immobilization, isolation, and the inversion of caregiving roles, King externalizes the internal fears of his protagonists. The protagonists are trapped both physically and mentally: their environments are structured to restrict, to isolate, to surveil, and to exacerbate pre-existing fears and weaknesses. Paul Sheldon in *Misery* is imprisoned within Annie Wilkes's cottage not just by broken bones but by the suffocating rituals of control; Jack, Wendy, and Danny in *The Shining* find themselves trapped in the Overlook Hotel, a setting that both reflects and amplifies their psychological fractures. The spare bedroom where Paul is confined functions as a site of both physical captivity and psychological torture, reflecting what Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar term the "madwoman in the attic" motif in domestic Gothic fiction (*The Madwoman in the Attic*, 1979).

This entrapment serves as a catalyst for a deep exploration of the protagonists' fractured psyches—Jack Torrance's battle with addiction, failure, and inherited madness, and Paul Sheldon's struggle with creative control, addiction, and utter powerlessness. The house, in both novels, becomes a character in itself: an active, malevolent agent in their psychological undoing.

The Overlook Hotel: The Gothic Prison of Inherited Madness

The Shining (1977) is one of the most popular and enduring horror stories of all time. It was inspired by King's stay at the Stanley Hotel in Estes Park, Colorado. A sequel, titled *Doctor Sleep*, was published in 2013 and adapted into a film in 2019.

The novel follows Jack Torrance, an aspiring writer and a recovering alcoholic, who becomes the winter caretaker of the isolated Overlook Hotel with his wife Wendy and young son Danny. The vast, empty hotel gradually transforms into a psychological and supernatural prison, amplifying Jack's instability and turning the domestic space into a site of terror and entrapment. The Overlook is remote, cut off especially in winter. It is far more than a mere setting; it is a vast sentient prison designed to

intensify and exploit the vulnerabilities of its caretaker, Jack Torrance. The hotel itself is labyrinthine: large, full of corridors, rooms, staff ghosts, and history. The size and ghostly history overwhelm the family's sense of home. King establishes the hotel's isolating and confining nature from the outset. The Torrance family is snowed in, with the massive drifts physically imprisoning them: "The Overlook was almost buried in snow now, its dark roof and white-capped towers seeming to grow out of the earth itself" (*The Shining*, 1977, p. 215). The sheer size of the hotel, with its endless rooms and corridors, does not offer freedom but rather a labyrinth from which there is no escape, mirroring the labyrinth of Jack's deteriorating mind.

Jack enters Overlook with an ambition: to write, and to redeem himself. But those ambitions become shackles once the hotel takes over. The quote "The hotel was driving him crazy, and he knew it" (*The Shining*, 1977) reflects self-awareness yet inability to exit. The exchange with Danny that he wants Danny to stay there forever shows Jack internalizing the hotel's pull. He becomes both host and hostage. The idea of "home forever" becomes the idea of permanent entrapment. Danny's psyche is also under siege. His psychic ability ("the shining") makes him acutely aware of the hotel's presence. What seems like paranoid vision is real. The house-hotel does not merely shape external events—it reaches into minds.

Tony Magistrale in *The Moral Voyages of Stephen King* argues: "King's houses are never simply backdrops for the action; they are psychic arenas, physical manifestations of the wounds and weaknesses of the characters who inhabit them" (Magistrale, 1989, p. 54). The Overlook functions as a prison for Jack's psyche by preying on his deepest insecurities: his failure as a writer, his history of alcoholism and violence, and his terror of repeating the abuse he suffered from his own father. The hotel is a mirror of Jack's inner hell.

"The hotel was awake. Not just alive, but awake." (King, *The Shining*, p. 289). This quote not only personifies the Overlook but also portrays it as an active antagonist. The hotel does not create new madness but resurrects and amplifies the old. It imprisons Jack with his past. This is evident in the visions of former bartender Lloyd, who serves him phantom drinks, tempting the recovering alcoholic. Jack himself senses it: "This inhuman place makes human monsters" (*The Shining*, p. 150). This shows his awareness, however fleeting, of the hotel's corrupting influence. The hotel taunts Jack with what he desires most (a drink, success, a release from responsibility) to better control him. As critic Tony Magistrale notes, "The Overlook's strategy is to convince

Jack that his only path to liberation and creative power lies in the destruction of his family" (Magistrale, *Hollywood's Stephen King*, 2003, p. 45). His "duty" to the hotel becomes a delusion of purpose that justifies his violent impulses, making him a willing prisoner. The hotel's manager, Ullman, explicitly states the terms of their isolation: "You will be completely cut off from the outside world... from about November through April" (King, *The Shining*, p. 60). This frames the entrapment from the very beginning. The wasps nest is a potent metaphor for the dormant horror within the domestic space: "A great gray wasps' nest, like a diseased and monstrous placenta, hung over the table in the center of the room" (King, *The Shining*, p. 382). Jack Torrance's personal demons—alcoholism, guilt over past failures, anger—are amplified by the hotel. The Overlook seems to feed on his weaknesses, amplifying his rage and isolation. There are moments of internal voice (hearing voices, hallucinations) that show how the hotel penetrates mind-space. Danny, with his "shining," also picks up residual ghosts, psychic residue. The hotel becomes a mental prison: dreams, visions, voices, confusion between what's "real" and what's reflection of internal fear.

Jack's famous line, "I'm not going to hurt you. I'm just going to bash your brains in," spoken to Wendy through the door he is axing (King, *The Shining*, p. 384), is the ultimate symbol of domestic entrapment turned violent. The door of the home, meant to keep danger out, is now the barrier through which the danger within threatens to burst. The home has become a lethal trap, and the patriarch its primary weapon. Jack's failure is marked by the hotel's victory: "He was the hotel, and the hotel was him" (King, *The Shining*, p. 412). This shows the complete erasure of his identity.

Annie Wilkes's Home: The Prison of Fanaticism and Control

Misery is a prime example, serving as a horrifying allegory for the creative process, fan culture, and the struggle for artistic control. In *Misery* (1987), novelist Paul Sheldon, after completing a manuscript for a new book, suffers a car accident during a snowstorm. He is rescued by Annie Wilkes, a former nurse who identifies herself as his "number one fan." Instead of taking him to a hospital, Annie confines him to her isolated rural home, her spare bedroom, where she nurses his injuries but simultaneously holds him captive. Her obsession with Paul's fictional heroine, Misery Chastain, compels her to force him into writing a new novel that resurrects the character. Immobilized by his broken legs and trapped by Annie's erratic, violent control, Paul experiences the domestic space not as a refuge but as a suffocating prison where his

creativity is both weaponized and constrained for survival. The novel illustrates what Gilbert and Gubar describe as the "domestic prison" trope of Gothic fiction, where the home becomes a space of female power and male helplessness (*The Madwoman in the Attic*, 1979).

If the Overlook is a sprawling gothic prison, Annie Wilkes's home is a minimalist, intimate chamber of horrors. The entrapment here is not supernatural but terrifyingly real. Paul's prison is a single room: "The room was... his world. His cell." (*Misery*, 1987, p. 57). The domestic setting is perverted utterly; the bed is a site of agony, the door a symbol of his impotence, and the everyday objects—a typewriter, a stack of paper, a glass of water—become tools of either torture or fleeting hope.

Annie's home is a prison designed to completely dominate Paul's psyche and creative will. His physical helplessness, his shattered legs, his dependence on her for food, medication, and basic hygiene is a metaphor for his psychological imprisonment. Annie, his "number one fan," does not just want to own him; she wants to own his creative output, forcing him to resurrect the character he killed off, Misery Chastain. This is a profound violation of the self. As scholar Heidi Strengell observes, "Annie represents the ultimate perversion of the reader-text relationship... She embodies the threat of the fan who consumes the artist literally and figuratively" (Strengell, *Dissecting Stephen King*, 2005, p. 172).

Paul must constantly perform gratitude and subservience to survive, all while plotting his escape. The house becomes a panopticon; Annie's sudden appearances in the doorway frame her as a monstrous warden. His identity as a successful, autonomous author is systematically erased and replaced with that of a helpless addict, hooked on the painkillers she withholds and a puppet. The domestic space is the stage for this brutal power struggle, where a typewriter and a manuscript become the weapons. Paul's defiance is tied to his writing: "The book was the only weapon left in his arsenal... He would write it for himself. For survival." (King, *Misery*, p. 189). Paul's entrapment is summed up in his realization: "She was his gaoler, and she might also be his executioner." (King, *Misery*, p. 101). Annie Wilkes smashes Paul Sheldon's ankles with a sledgehammer to prevent him from fleeing. This act is not merely physical violence—it is a calculated assertion of control. By destroying his mobility, she transforms the domestic space into an inescapable prison and reduces him to total dependency.

Comparative Analysis: The Common Threads of Entrapment

Often, the true horror is not the external monster but the human capacity for violence, cruelty, and madness. Annie

Wilkes and Jack Torrance are terrifying precisely because their humanity is warped, not absent. Michael R. Collings in *The Many Facets of Stephen King* writes: "In both *The Shining* and *Misery*, the protagonist is pitted against an environment that seeks to consume and redefine him. The central conflict is a battle for the soul, fought on the battlefield of a corrupted domestic space" (Collings, 1986, p. 88). While the mechanisms differ, the prisons of the Overlook and Annie's home share core functions in dismantling the protagonist's psyche.

Both settings are geographically remote, cutting the protagonists off from any hope of external rescue. This isolation turns the focus inward, forcing a confrontation with their own demons and their captors. In *Misery* the setting is remote, isolated, with no phone or outside contact in many moments. This isolation enhances Paul's sense of being cut off. The house does not allow escape paths.

The Overlook and Annie Wilkes serve as dark mirrors to the protagonists' flaws. The Overlook reflects and encourages Jack's inner violence and addiction. Annie embodies the terrifying end result of Paul's own creation—a consumer who consumes the creator. They are trapped not just in a place, but with a version of their own worst selves.

Addiction appears to be a Tool of Entrapment. Paul thinks of the Novril as "Annie's magic powder... the stuff that made the pain go away" (King, *Misery*, p. 75), highlighting his chemical dependency on his captor. Jack, receives a "drink" from Lloyd, "The drink was gone. He felt the warmth in his belly... the old comfort" (King, *The Shining*, p. 257). Both quotes show the captors providing a substance that creates a false sense of comfort and reinforces dependency. Both narratives use addiction as a means of control. The Overlook offers Jack the illusion of alcohol, playing on his addiction to fuel his rage. Annie uses Paul's addiction to Novril to keep him docile and dependent, literally drugging him into submission.

There is a struggle for Creative/Autonomous self. Ultimately, both novels are about the defense of the self. Jack fails, his creative potential and identity wholly consumed by the hotel's evil. Paul, however, uses his creativity as a weapon, fighting to write his own story—both literally and figuratively—to survive and reclaim his autonomy from his captor.

Paul's physical immobilization – his broken legs and dependence on Annie makes the house a prison. Mentally, Paul vacillates between hope, strategy, fear, resentment, and self-awareness. His plea "let me out of this or kill me" (*Misery*, 1987) indicates that escape is not just physical departure but a release from psychological torture

too. Enclotted in domestic trappings (food, routines, kind gestures), yet unrelenting control, he is pushed toward extremes. Even when Paul escapes physically, trauma lingers. After his rescue, he still suffers nightmares, fear, guilt: evidence that domestic entrapment leaves psychic residue.

CONCLUSION

In *Misery* and *The Shining*, Stephen King deconstructs the myth of the safe domestic space, revealing its potential to become a nightmare of psychological imprisonment. They transform domestic interiors into psychological battlegrounds where familiarity curdles into confinement. These novels show that confinement can be both external (walls, injuries, supernatural forces) and internal (obsession, guilt, fear). King forces readers to reckon with the idea that domestic safety is fragile, that guardian roles can invert, that isolation and control are far more dangerous than monsters in the dark. The Overlook Hotel and Annie Wilkes's home are not passive settings but active antagonists, meticulously designed to break their inhabitants. Through these domestic prisons, King explores profound themes of addiction, madness, creative ownership, and the fragility of the autonomous self. The true horror in these novels is not the axe-wielding father or the hobbling sledgehammer, but the terrifyingly familiar space—the home—transformed into a stage for utter psychological annihilation. The protagonist's battle is not merely to escape a physical location, but to escape with their mind intact. Ultimately, both works expose a profound anxiety at the heart of domesticity. Home is no longer refuge but a crucible—one that seals its doors, tightens its corridors, and patiently drags its inhabitants toward madness.

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Beyond the Death of the Author: Posthuman Authorship and AI in *Death of an Author*

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Abstract— The rapid development of Artificial Intelligence has significantly transformed contemporary literary production, challenging traditional notions of creativity, authorship, and textual authority. This paper examines the emergence of posthuman authorship through an analysis of *Death of an Author*, an experimental novella created by Aiden Marchine. The novella is a combination of human imagination and AI-generated text. By situating the work within posthumanist discourse, the study explores how AI-mediated writing disrupts the conventional model of the individual human author and introduces a hybrid form of literary creation in which agency is distributed between human and machine. The title of the novella directly invokes the influential theoretical framework proposed by Roland Barthes, whose concept of the “death of the author” questioned the authority of the author as the ultimate source of textual meaning. In the context of AI-generated literature, this metaphorical death gains a new dimension as algorithmic systems actively participate in the generation of narrative content. Drawing on posthumanist theories developed by scholars such as Rosi Braidotti and N Katherine Hayles, the paper argues that *Death of an Author* exemplifies a shift toward distributed creativity and collaborative authorship between humans and intelligent machines. Through a critical examination of the text’s production process and narrative structure, the study highlights how AI-assisted writing challenges long-standing assumptions about originality, intentionality, and literary agency.



Keywords— Artificial Intelligence, Authorship, Death of the Author, Identity, Posthumanism

I. INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, literature has been understood as the product of human imagination and intentionality, where the author occupies a central position in the creation and interpretation of meaning. With the emergence of AI-assisted writing systems, this assumption is increasingly challenged. Generative language models like ChatGPT are now capable of producing coherent narratives, poems, and essays, thereby complicating the conventional understanding of literary creativity. One of the most notable examples of this phenomenon is *Death of an Author*, an experimental work by Stephen Marche that

explores the implications of machine-generated storytelling and the changing role of the human writer in the age of AI.

1.1 Death of an Author

Death of an Author represents a significant experiment in AI-assisted literary production. The novella was created through the collaboration between the author and AI tools like ChatGPT and Sudowrite, with 95 percent portion of the text generated through machine learning systems. Rather than presenting a conventional narrative structure, the work functions as both a literary text and a cultural commentary on the future of writing. The story centres on

the literary world and reflects the anxieties surrounding the growing influence of artificial intelligence in creative industries. By allowing AI to generate large portions of the narrative, Marche deliberately blurs the boundary between human and machine authorship. The novella therefore raises critical questions about originality, intentionality, and the ownership of creative work. The novella serves as an important example of how emerging technologies are reshaping the process of storytelling and the status of the author in contemporary literature.

1.2 “The Death of the Author”

The title of the novella directly references the influential theory proposed by Roland Barthes in his essay “The Death of the Author.” In his essay, Barthes challenges the traditional view that the author’s intentions determine the meaning of a literary text. Instead, he argues that meaning is produced through the interaction between the text and its readers (Barthes, 1997). According to Barthes, the authority of the author must be removed in order to allow the text to exist as a space of multiple interpretations. (Barthes, 1997) This theoretical shift moves critical attention away from the biography and intentions of the writer and toward the linguistic and cultural structures within the text itself. In the context of AI-generated literature, Barthes’ concept gains renewed relevance, as the process of writing is no longer limited to a single human creator. When machines participate in generating textual content, the notion of a stable, individual author becomes even more uncertain.

1.3 Posthumanism

The changing nature of authorship in AI-generated literature can also be understood through the framework of posthumanism. Posthumanist theory questions the centrality of the human subject and examines how technological developments are transforming the boundaries between humans and machines. Scholars such as Rosi Braidotti argues that contemporary society is increasingly characterized by hybrid forms of identity and agency that involve both human and nonhuman actors (Braidotti, 2013). Similarly, N Katherine Hayles suggests that cognition and creativity are distributed across networks that include technological systems as well as human participants (Hayles, 1999). Within this theoretical context, AI-generated literature represents a form of posthuman creativity in which literary production emerges from collaborative interactions between human writers and intelligent machines. The emergence of such hybrid forms of authorship challenges traditional human-centred models of creativity and invites scholars to reconsider the nature of literary production in the digital age.

II. DISCUSSION

Death of an Author operates as both a narrative and a meta-critical reflection on authorship, particularly when read through the framework of Roland Barthes’s theory of the “death of the author.” The novella’s central plot revolves around the mysterious death of Peggy Fermin, a writer, and the investigative journey of Gus Dupin, functions not merely as a detective narrative but as an allegory for interpretive practice itself. Gus Dupin’s role as a reader-detective who deciphers clues embedded within Fermin’s texts mirrors Barthes’ assertion that meaning is not fixed by the author but actively produced by the reader (Barthes 142). The act of reading becomes an act of reconstruction, where the author’s intention is secondary to the interpretive agency of the reader.

Fermin’s death is symbolically significant in this context. It can be read as a literalization of Barthes’ metaphorical claim: the author must “die” for the text to live. However, the novella complicates this idea by introducing AI as a co-producer of textual meaning. If Barthes sought to liberate the text from the authority of the author, Marche’s experiment disperses authorship even further, making it impossible to attribute the text to a singular, stable origin. The use of AI tools such as ChatGPT and Sudowrite in generating approximately 95% of the text disrupts the notion of intentional authorship, replacing it with a model of procedural and probabilistic text production.

Death of an Author can be read as a sustained interrogation of authorship, particularly when situated within the theoretical framework of Roland Barthes’s “Death of the Author.” The narrative of Peggy Fermin’s death and Gus Dupin’s investigation functions not merely as a detective plot but as a metaphor for interpretive practice. Dupin, in deciphering clues embedded within Fermin’s writings, assumes the role of the reader-critic who constructs meaning from textual fragments. This aligns with Barthes’ argument that meaning is not determined by authorial intention but produced through the act of reading (Barthes 142). The text, therefore, becomes a site of plurality, open to multiple interpretations rather than a fixed expression of a singular authorial voice. Peggy Fermin’s struggle with her holographic avatar introduces an additional layer to this theoretical framework. Her anxiety about becoming a technological reproduction reflects a deeper tension between individuality and mediation. The avatar represents a duplication or even displacement of the authorial self, suggesting that identity in the digital age is no longer stable or singular. Her insistence on preserving selfhood foregrounds the limits of authorial control in a technologically mediated environment. In this sense, Fermin’s “death” can be read symbolically as the dissolution of the traditional author figure, reinforcing

Barthes' claim that the author's authority must recede for the text to generate meaning independently.

The use of AI tools in the production of the novella where approximately 95% of the content is machine-generated further destabilizes the concept of authorship. Stephen Marche's decision to publish under the pseudonym "Aidan Marchine" complicates the question of authorial identity, transforming it into a constructed and performative entity. Authorship here is no longer a fixed origin but a distributed function, emerging from the interaction between prompts, algorithms, and editorial intervention. Thus, the novella extends Barthes' theory into the digital age, where the "death" of the author is not merely theoretical but materially enacted through technological processes. The pseudonymous attribution to "Aidan Marchine" further destabilizes authorial identity. The name itself becomes a constructed entity, much like the text it produces. In this sense, authorship in the novella is not eliminated but decentred and fragmented, aligning with Barthes' vision of the author as a "scriptor" who assembles pre-existing linguistic codes rather than originating meaning. The narrative's structure marked by interpretive gaps, stylistic inconsistencies, and layered clues reinforces the idea that meaning emerges through reading rather than authorial design. Thus, *Death of an Author* does not merely illustrate Barthes' theory; it extends it into the algorithmic age, where authorship becomes a distributed function across human and machine systems.

2.1 Posthumanism Authorship and Distributed Creativity

While Barthes provides a foundational framework for understanding the decentring of the author, the novella's engagement with artificial intelligence necessitates a posthumanist reading. Posthumanism, as articulated by thinkers such as Rosi Braidotti and N Katherine Hayles, challenges the primacy of the human subject and emphasizes the role of nonhuman agents in cultural production. In *Death of an Author*, the creative process itself becomes a site of posthuman interaction, where human intention and machine generation intersect to produce literary meaning. The collaboration between Stephen Marche and AI systems exemplifies what Hayles describes as distributed cognition, where thinking and creativity are not confined to the human mind but are extended across technological networks (Hayles, 1999). The AI does not merely assist the author; it actively generates narrative possibilities, stylistic variations, and textual patterns. Marche's role shifts from that of a traditional author to that of a curator, editor, and orchestrator of machine output. This reconfiguration of creative roles illustrates a posthuman model of authorship, where agency is shared between human and nonhuman

actors. Furthermore, the novella's thematic engagement with creativity and originality reflects broader posthuman concerns. Marche's argument that originality has long been in decline, and that contemporary culture often relies on repetition and remixing, aligns with posthumanist critiques of the myth of individual genius. His comparison of AI-generated writing to the evolution of hip-hop is particularly significant: both rely on recombination, sampling, and transformation rather than pure originality. In this sense, AI writing is not an anomaly but an extension of existing cultural practices.

The figure of the AI in the novella can also be understood as an alien yet generative presence, one that produces language without consciousness or lived experience. This challenges traditional humanist assumptions that literature must be rooted in subjective experience. Instead, the novella suggests that meaning and aesthetic value can emerge from nonhuman processes of pattern recognition and statistical inference. As Braidotti argues, the posthuman condition involves a shift toward recognizing the agency of nonhuman entities within cultural systems (Braidotti 2013). *Death of an Author* embodies this shift by presenting AI not as a replacement for human creativity but as a collaborator with its own distinct capabilities. While Barthes' framework helps to understand the decentering of authorship, the novella's engagement with artificial intelligence and digital identity calls for a posthumanist interpretation. Posthumanism, as articulated by Rosi Braidotti and N Katherine Hayles, challenges the centrality of the human subject and emphasizes the role of nonhuman agents in shaping cognition, identity, and creativity. In *Death of an Author*, Peggy Fermin's interaction with her holographic avatar becomes a powerful representation of this shift.

The avatar can be understood as a posthuman extension of the self, blurring the boundary between human identity and technological reproduction. Fermin's fear of being reduced to a technological construct reflects a broader cultural anxiety about the loss of autonomy in the digital age. However, the narrative does not present this transformation as entirely negative. Instead, it opens up a critical space to question whether such fears are universally valid or whether they stem from a residual attachment to humanist notions of individuality. The text thus invites readers to reconsider identity as a fluid and networked construct, rather than a fixed and autonomous essence.

From a posthuman perspective, creativity itself becomes distributed across human and machine systems. As N Katherine Hayles argues, cognition and meaning-making processes are not confined to the human mind but are extended through interactions with technological systems

(Hayles 1999). This is evident in Marche's writing process, where AI-generated outputs are curated and shaped by human intervention. The resulting text is neither fully human nor entirely machine-generated but a hybrid product of collaborative intelligence. Marche's reflections on creativity challenge the notion of originality as a purely human attribute. By comparing AI-generated writing to cultural forms such as hip-hop where repetition and remixing are central, the novella situates AI within a broader tradition of creative recombination. This perspective aligns with Rosi Braidotti's view that the posthuman condition involves rethinking creativity as an emergent property of complex systems rather than the expression of individual genius (Braidotti 2013). AI, in this context, is not a threat to artistic production but a new medium with distinct affordances and limitations.

III. CONCLUSION

Through its experimental form and thematic concerns, *Death of an Author* exemplifies the convergence of poststructuralist and posthumanist thought in the age of artificial intelligence. By extending Barthes' theory into the realm of algorithmic writing and situating authorship within a network of human-machine collaboration, the novella challenges deeply ingrained assumptions about creativity, originality, and literary authority. It ultimately invites readers to reconsider not only who or what can be an author, but also how meaning is produced in an increasingly posthuman cultural landscape. Through its exploration of authorship, identity, and technological mediation, *Death of an Author* brings together poststructuralist and posthumanist concerns in a compelling manner. By extending Roland Barthes's critique of authorial authority into the realm of AI-generated writing and engaging with posthumanist notions of distributed agency and hybrid identity, the novella challenges deeply rooted assumptions about creativity and selfhood. Peggy Fermin's struggle with her holographic avatar, alongside the collaborative production process involving AI, underscores the transformation of both authorship and identity in the digital age. Ultimately, the text positions literature as a dynamic and evolving practice, shaped not only by human intention but also by the complex interplay of technological systems and interpretive communities. Whatever developments happened, even if the shift from human centric to AI centric writings, the reality is that through this novel we can understand that for a creative idea, a human mind is needed. AI can elaborate the idea which the human creates. The novel is a perfect example of this idea. AI can help the author suffering from writer's block.

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Feminist Narratology in Elizabeth Strout's *Tell Me Everything*¹

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Abstract—In traditional literary texts, female characters are often constructed as emotional objects, long relegated to the margins of discursive power and even deprived of the possibility of self-expression. However, Elizabeth Strout, the 2009 Pulitzer Prize winner, in her novel *Tell Me Everything*, employs a series of intricate narrative strategies that not only break with this deeply ingrained literary convention but also endow women with the right to speak and discursive subjectivity. Through the orchestration of authorial narrative voice, the use of narrative gaps created by un-narrated events, and unconventional character portrayals, Strout constructs a narrative space where men and women engage in equal dialogue and coexist harmoniously. This paper attempts to analyze Strout's narrative techniques in this work from the theoretical perspective of feminist narratology, exploring how she conveys a profound feminine consciousness through formal innovation, and thereby revealing the reconstruction and reflection on gender order embedded within the text.



Keywords—feminist narratology, narrative techniques, authorial narrative voice, un-narrated events, Elizabeth Strout

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I. INTRODUCTION

Tell Me Everything is written by Elizabeth Strout who won Pulitzer Prize in 2009. The main story she presents to us revolves around a murder case, with Bob Burgess, a lawyer, defending Matthew. Together with the main story, other stories are scattered in the novel. In this novel, Strout demonstrates unique feminine narrative techniques. Strout changes perspectives from different people freely which helps her to form the whole novel through eyes of different women which gives women authority to narrate. Except constant change perspectives she also employs other narrative technique like un-narrated events and unconventional characterization to reveal female

survival dilemma and convey her female consciousness.

This paper tries to analysis this novel from the perspective of feminist narratology. Traditionally, narrative patterns structuralist narratologists' conclusions are based on their intense study of traditional works created by male authors which are different from female authors in various ways and are not general. Narratological studies are absent from nearly all of the otherwise eclectic and wide-ranging collections of feminist approaches to literature.(Lanser,1986) Thus, Susan Sniader Lanser proposed feminist narratology. Due to different social background and living condition, female writers may present distinct writing patterns and writing skills from man to show their concern toward female problems.

Starting from Strout's unique narrative strategies, we can glimpse, through the subtle details of the text, characteristics that distinguish her from traditional male writing, as well as her distinctive feminine consciousness and reflections.

II. AUTHORIAL NARRATIVE VOICE

Feminist narratologist Susan S. Lanser argues that voice "has become a term for identity and power for those groups and individuals who have been silenced." Therefore, "female voice is actually a site of ideological struggle, and this ideological tension is manifested in the actual practice of the text." (Lanser 1992) Lanser divides narrative voice into three categories: personal voice, authorial voice, and communal voice. The authorial narrative voice also referred to as third-person narration, denotes "a narrative state that is heterodiegetic, collective, and potentially self-referential" (Lanser 1992), which grants the narrator an omniscient perspective, allowing for seamless transitions between different narrative levels and significantly enhancing the authority and depth of the storytelling (Mao 2022). This third-person narrative provides Strout with expansive narrative freedom. The constant shifts in narrative perspective enrich the novel's layers and support the creation of complex female figures and the struggle for female discourse rights.

In the opening section of the novel, the narrative focuses on the protagonist Bob, detailing his experience of being denied a visit with his brother in New York. Just as readers begin to delve into Bob's inner world, the narrative is abruptly interrupted by a phone call from his ex-wife, Pam. From this point, Bob's story is temporarily set aside, and the author shifts focus to an in-depth exploration of Pam's emotional journey. Because authorial narrators exist outside the narrative time (indeed, one might say they exist outside the fiction itself) and are not "personalized" by events, they thus possess a certain kind of conventional authority (Lanser 1992). At this point, Strout breaks away from conventional linear narrative and shifts the narrative perspective to Pam. Strout meticulously depicts the multifaceted complexities of Pam's life, revealing the roots of her psychological trauma. Pam's anxiety stems from her concerns for her children and the pain of betrayal caused by her husband's infidelity. Strout not only presents these external triggers but also delves into how they become internalized as Pam's emotional wounds. By introducing her struggle with alcohol addiction—a coping mechanism that simultaneously exacerbates her anxiety—the narrative further complicates Pam's predicament. The author carefully portrays how Pam conceals her addiction, adding another layer of tension to her character. In this

section, Strout does not stop at recounting Pam's story; she immerses readers in the nuances of Pam's emotional fluctuations and moments of hysteria, ensuring a profound understanding of the depth of her experiences. Without such detailed depiction, Pam's emotional outbursts might be superficially dismissed as mere "female hysteria"—a reductive and essentialist interpretation. Instead, Strout constructed the discourse authority of the silent and unvoiced women by the authorial voice. Building on this, Strout creates a three-dimensional female figure struggling within marriage, which has resonated with a wide audience of women, besides, she grants women an equal voice with men.

III. NON-NARRATED EVENTS

In 1988, Jellard Prince published a paper titled "The Disnarrated" in the journal *Style*, where he first introduced the research term un-narrated events. At the same time, Prince summarized the reasons for the unnarrated events as things that cannot be narrated or are not worth narrating according to a particular narrative, possibly because it violates laws (social, authorial, generic, formal, etc). In other words, Prince believed that there are two types of narrative discourse in narrative texts: one is the narration of non-occurring events, and the other is the ellipsis of events that have occurred. Although Prince pointed out that the reasons for the un-narrated are social and cultural constraints, he focused on the narration of non-occurring events and was primarily concerned with the narrative function of discourse, without expanding on narrative actions, intentions, and so on (Sun 2014). In *Fictions of Authority*, Susan Lanser picks up a mutual term "voice" to join feminist criticism and classical narratology together, then focuses on the three kinds of narrative voice, namely authorial voice, personal voice and communal voice, and associates technical exploration of narrative voice with gender politics in feminism to achieve a certain kind of narrative authority (Yuan 2018). By comparing the narrative texts of male and female authors, researchers will be able to identify the constraints of various cultural conventions on narrative behavior and explore the authors' deep narrative intentions and gender consciousness (Sun 2014).

There is always a gap between abstract symbols and the images they represent, and there are always possible misunderstandings in communication between people from different backgrounds. Sometimes, subtle experiences or feelings are difficult to convey through symbols, and it is at this point that the unnarratable or the unsaid emerges (Sun 2014).

The novel is woven from a tapestry of stories set in a small town, each one a thread in the larger narrative fabric. One particular story stands out for its complexity and emotional weight: the mysterious death of Mrs. Beach. Despite its significance in the plot's development, Strout chooses to present only a brief and fragmented account of this case. When the truth is finally revealed through the character of Matthew, it is delivered in just a few lines, yet it lays bare a heart-wrenching tragedy that had befallen the Beach family. The harrowing truth unfolds: Diana, Mrs. Beach's daughter, had been raped by her own father and one of his friends. In the aftermath, Mrs. Beach's reaction was not one of sympathy or support, but of growing resentment. As time went on, she berated Diana, heaping further emotional abuse upon her. This secondary injury ultimately drove Diana to seek revenge by killing her mother. This tragedy is not narrated completely by any single character; instead, it is pieced together by the reader from fragments scattered throughout the novel. Beneath this tragedy, the trauma Diana endured is something she is unwilling to speak of, to the point where it cannot be articulated directly. From her childhood into middle age, the pain she experienced exceeded the capacity of linguistic symbols to express, rendering it unnarratable. Due to Diana's suicide after killing her mother, the pain that circulated between them remains inaccessible to outsiders. Thus, the author creates a narrative gap, opening a channel for dialogue and inviting the reader into the world of the text. This narrative choice fully demonstrates the female author's humanistic concern and profound narrative ethics. Strout does not turn Diana's trauma into a tragic spectacle for consumption; instead, through narrative gaps, she respects the female experiences that are often silenced and simplified in real life. Through her restraint, she refuses to further violate the victim's dignity—she does not speak the unspeakable pain on her behalf, nor does she present the unrepresentable wounds in her place. This restraint is precisely the ultimate respect for female subjectivity.

This narrative gap implicitly contains a profound critique of the patriarchal discourse system. In the eyes of male characters like Matthew, this is merely a simple case of revenge, the conclusion of a personal vendetta. However, through what is left unsaid, Strout hints at the complex truths that cannot be contained within linear logic: the cycle of intergenerational trauma, society's discipline of the female body, and the distorted emotions shaped by the expectations of motherhood. These issues are often simplified or obscured in male-dominated narrative traditions. Through silence itself, Strout punctures that self-proclaimed "omniscient narration"—she tells readers that some truths are not impossible to

speak, but have long been selectively ignored. By inviting readers into the gaps, she allows those female experiences excluded from mainstream discourse to finally find a place to dwell within the fissures of the text.

Cultural values of gender have some relationship with patterns of organization used in telling stories (Ahmadzadeh 2014). Strout creates narrative gaps with her unique feminine tenderness. In her writing, what remains unsaid often speaks louder than what is explicitly stated, and within the spaces left blank, there echo the voices of those who have long yearned to be heard but have never been able to speak.

IV. UNCONVENTIONAL CHARACTERIZATION

The binary gender opposition that has long existed in the literary world is, in many ways, a reflection of the real-world power dynamics between men and women. This opposition has historically reinforced traditional gender roles, limiting the scope of both male and female characters and perpetuating stereotypes that stifle individuality and authenticity. In her novel, Strout challenges this long-standing binary opposition and strives to construct a more inclusive and peaceful world for both sexes. By breaking down traditional gender stereotypes, she aligns herself with the shared goals of feminists who seek to dismantle the rigid structures that have long defined gender roles. This effort is evident in the portrayal of both male and female characters, who defy conventional expectations.

Traditional gender roles cast the masculine as rational, strong, active, decisive, adventurous, protective, creative and dominating (Chatraporn 2006), while male characters in *Tell Me Everything* deviate from the traditional archetype men. They are depicted as nurturing and emotionally expressive, taking on roles that involve caring for the family and openly displaying their feelings. Bob, one of the main characters, whose image is quite different from the male image written by previous male writers is an emotional person with a delicate mind. When he discovers that he falls in love with Lucy, he becomes sentimental. Simultaneously, his behavior doesn't match social expectations. He is no longer in the shadow of the traditional male image, but he embodies traits that society typically defines as feminine. In most part of the novel, he is presented as a man who could provide emotional value. When Pam encounters intractable problems with her family, she has no hesitation to meet Bob who can listen to her pain in so as to release her suppressed emotion in Crosby. After Pam finishes her story, Strout presents readers a delicate description of Bob's mental activity. "He understood the

situation this woman was in. He felt the sadness of it as though an outgoing tide moved slowly through him ” (Strout 2024). Through the meticulous depiction of Bob's inner world, Strout highlights the character's exceptional emotional perceptiveness, thereby constructing a male subject who is emotionally rich, highly susceptible to affect, and at odds with traditional masculinity.

The portrayal of female characters in the novel similarly embodies a series of unique qualities that break free from traditional conventions, thereby collectively fostering, alongside the non-stereotypical male figures, a reflection on the established gender order. In the novel, main female characters, such as Lucy, Olive, and Margaret, refuse to be confined to the trivial routines **imposed by traditional domestic roles, instead, by** establishing their individual spiritual aspirations and value pursuits, they participate in the construction of a broader historical narrative and the public sphere. Margaret is a notably significant and remarkable character. As a female pastor, she operates within a professional sphere traditionally dominated by men. Within the long-established domain of religious leadership, women have historically been marginalized or excluded. Despite this, Margaret not only secures her place within the ecclesiastical structure but also earns the genuine respect and trust of her congregation. Her sermons are both logically rigorous and emotionally resonant—they are not only theologically precise discourses but also heartfelt expressions rooted in personal experience, thereby evoking profound emotional resonance among her listeners. When faced with a crisis in her career, Margaret does not conceal her vulnerability. Such emotional openness is not a sign of weakness, but rather a natural human response to adversity, underscoring the authenticity and complexity of her character. More importantly, she neither succumbs to despair nor shirks her responsibilities; instead, she demonstrates psychological resilience and moral steadfastness in the face of difficulty. By portraying Margaret as a figure who moves fluidly between reason and emotion, Strout deconstructs the traditional gender stereotype that associates women with irrational emotionality, while simultaneously challenging the rationalist bias that excludes emotion from the public sphere. Margaret's character illustrates that emotional intelligence is not antithetical to leadership, but rather an essential component of it. Empathy, compassion, and emotional awareness are not liabilities, instead, they deepen interpersonal connections and enhance moral authority.

In her novel, Strout masterfully deconstructs traditional gender roles and challenges the patriarchal norms that have long defined literature and society. By

portraying male characters like Bob as nurturing and emotionally expressive, and female characters like Lucy, Olive, and Margaret as strong, capable leaders, she subverts conventional expectations and highlights the importance of emotional intelligence and empathy in both genders. Through these characters, Strout advocates for a more inclusive and compassionate world, where individuals are free to express their full range of emotions and capabilities, regardless of gender.

V. CONCLUSION

This paper conducts a systematic narrative analysis of Elizabeth Strout's *Tell Me Everything* from the perspective of feminist narratology, revealing how the author employs unique narrative strategies to grant women narrative authority and deconstruct the androcentric literary tradition. Strout's creative practice demonstrates that female writers can employ distinctive narrative strategies—the control of narrative voice, the use of narrative gaps, and breakthroughs in character portrayal—to both present the existential dilemmas women face and endow these dilemmas with due complexity and dignity. More importantly, her work reveals the power of female narrative which is not simply about competing with men for discursive power, but about creating a more inclusive and empathetic narrative possibility, allowing those experiences long excluded by mainstream discourse to finally find shelter within the fissures of the text.

Tell Me Everything is not merely a novel about female experience, but a feminist experiment in narrative form. It tells us that changing the way we narrate is changing the way we understand the world, enabling different voices to be heard is enabling different lives to be seen. This is precisely the contemporary value of feminist narratological research—to arrive at the possibility of liberation at the level of content through the analysis of the politics of form.

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Appropriating and Inheriting Trauma: A Second-Generation Holocaust Survivors' Perspective in Helen Epstein's *Children of the Holocaust: Conversations with Sons and Daughters of Survivors*

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Abstract— *The Holocaust terrors perpetuated pain across generations as the second generation victims were traumatized by their parents' sufferings under the Nazi occupation. The memories of the Holocaust pervaded in the domestic spheres of the victims, triggering emotional outbursts and affected personal temperament. The memories inherited by the generational victims haunted their psychic spheres, resulting in abnormal personality and affected interpersonal and social relationships. The descendants encountered troubles in their domestic spaces as their tormented parents overburdened them to act as emotional shield to counter the continued agonies. The Holocaust memoir, *Children of the Holocaust: Conversations with Sons and Daughters of Survivors*, recorded the Holocaust horrors agonizing the second generation victims, induced by the inherited memory accounts of the Holocaust horrors.*



Keywords— *Holocaust trauma, Inheritance of memories, Generational torments*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Holocaust horrors traumatized the Jewish survivors in the aftermath of the catastrophe, resultant of the frequent haunting triggered by the latent play of the horrifying memories persisting throughout the lifetime of the victims. The Jewish horror transmitted the torments to the descendants of the survivors, perpetuating the pain to the generational victims since they inherited the memories and the pain triggered by the acquired memories. The second generation victims recognized the presence of mysterious pain and troubles hovering in their families during their childhood and they actively engaged to acquire the repressed accounts triggering the troubles. Some of the descendants acquired the memories from their parents through explicit communication while others acquired the memories by pressurizing the survivors to

articulate the horrors. The acquired memories victimized the second generation descendants in multiple dimensions including being subjected to continued psychic haunting resulting in marred personal attitude, troubled by witnessing their parents' agonies, and burdened by the nebulous void produced by the uncommunicated or partially communicated memories of their parents' sufferings. The second generation victims exhibited intense inclination to experience sufferings personally as a psychic reaction to identify themselves with the torments of their parents and they intended to travel back to the sites of the Holocaust horrors and the native places of their parents as they engaged to assimilate into the Jewish domain. Alan L. Berger and Naomi Berger presented the second generation legacy as,

The legacy of the Holocaust is present in a variety of ways for the second generation, issues of the intergenerational communication, parental enmeshment, and separation concerns. This legacy also undergirds their identity, their sensitivity to multicultural issues, and their concern for social justice. (Berger 1)

II. THE PERSISTENCE OF HOLOCAUST TRAUMA

This article attempts to explore the trauma experienced by the second generation victims through the Holocaust memoir, *Children of the Holocaust: Conversations with Sons and Daughters of Survivors* (1988), written by Helen Epstein. The memoir presents the second generation perspective on Holocaust horrors by recording the numerous personal accounts of the second generation victims and it traces the Holocaust horrors conducting its terrorizing impression to the descendants and their approach towards the excruciating Jewish terrors. Any incident marked with terrorizing outcome is capable of triggering pain and psychic stress to the victims in the aftermath. The Holocaust tormented the Jewish victims during the course of the catastrophe and in the aftermath. It inflicted numerous brutal abuses to the victims during the Nazi occupation including stripping their human essence and subduing them to subhuman status, the evils of concentration camps and the mass annihilation resulted in the murder of one third of European Jews. In the post Holocaust period, the victims were haunted by the resurfacing images of the horrors affecting their psychic performance and thereby ruining the normalcy of the victims' domestic spaces. The prolonged torments triggering intense pain and marred psychic performance in the aftermath of the terrorizing event were the indications of continued Holocaust trauma. The traumatic event inducing the torments in the aftermath is pathologically defined as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Cathy Caruth defined PTSD as,

There is as a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviours stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event. (Caruth 4)

The traumatized Holocaust victims were distressed by the frequent appearance of the images pertaining to the horrifying incidents of the past. The Holocaust horrors affected the victims in the aftermath as they were anguished by the latent presence of the horrors leading to

emotional outbursts and anger issues. Their sleeps were troubled by the nightmares as they were waking from their sleeps, crying and screaming the names of the Nazi perpetrators and they also developed pessimistic attitude of anticipating possible negative outcomes for any event. The realm of Holocaust horrors retained immense anguish and distress which insisted the victims to restrain the active engagement with Holocaust memories as psychic reaction to shield their vulnerability. The survivors inhibited the active and explicit communication of the memories due to the pain generated by the free articulation of the Holocaust horrors. Laura. S. Brown stated the symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder as,

reexperiencing symptoms, nightmares, and flashbacks; avoidance symptoms, the marks of psychic numbing; and the symptoms of heightened physiological arousal: hypervigilance, disturbed sleep, a distracted mind. (Brown 100)

III. HOLOCAUST HORRORS INHERITED BY GENERATIONAL VICTIMS

The Holocaust horrors tormented the survivors which resulted in troubled relationship in the familial spheres, and thereby transmitting the anguish to the second generation victims. The victims were shattered in the aftermath of the Holocaust as most of the family members were murdered in the Nazi execution, deprived of land to live, confronting the personal identity marred due to the inhuman treatment afflicted. The survivors in the aftermath inclined to establish new families as a moral responsibility to revitalize the shattered Jewish community and to compensate the mass annihilation. The progeny of the Holocaust survivor was symbolized as the "new leaf" (Epstein 13), ascribed of hope and reassurance and signified as, "the leaf was as different from death as good was from evil and the present from the past" (Epstein 13). As the children of the survivors were regarded as the sprouts emerging out from the burnt out Jewish tree, they were overprotected and overburdened to counter the Jewish ruins. The descendants encountered the condition of playing as the protection shield to safeguard the vulnerability of the victims and to compensate the miseries suffered by their parents.

The families of the Holocaust victims displayed the marks of turbulence caused by the latent presence of the Holocaust trauma and their domestic spaces were permeated by the persisting agonies, unnatural fear, pessimistic attitude, underlying mystery, emotional outbursts, troubled inter personal relationships, and the demand for the close affinity in the family to shield against the Holocaust sufferings. The article, "Family Approach

with Grandchildren of Holocaust Survivors" traced the conditions of the Holocaust survivors as, they were "described as presenting high levels of emotional disorders, psychological symptoms, posttraumatic symptoms, and an achievement motivation based on the fear of failure" (Fossion 519). The Holocaust trauma affected the descendants with intense degree of anguish resulting in transformation of descendants of the Holocaust survivors to the second generation victims and affixing the Holocaust barbarity into their personal identification to their Jewishness. The Holocaust horrors haunting the survivors affected their attitude towards their children which resulted in imparting undefinable fear and scepticism to the descendants. "The wounded descendant is said to be a product of defective parenting, which is in turn a product of Holocaust" (Kidron 533). The second generation victims were distressed by their parents' terrifying encounters of the past, which ruined the normality of their domestic conditions. Unlike the regular domestic affairs, the descendants of the Holocaust survivors encountered tumultuous temperament pervading in their families due to the memories haunting the survivors as it was described as, "high level of anxiety and depression results in major difficulties in providing an adequate maturational environment for their children" (Fossion 520).

The survivors displayed the collective attitude of forming close affinity with the family members as a consequential effect of the ruptures engendered by the Holocaust and the excessive affinity was developed to counter the emotional distress induced by the Holocaust trauma. The descendants reciprocated with close bonding in order to shield their vulnerable parents against the emotional damage caused by the Nazi affliction and the affinity also suppressed the normal functioning of their personal spirit by preferring the parents' interests over the personal inclination. Though the intimacy appeared as the emotional shield reinforcing the familial bonding, it was the result of the devastated psychic space of the victims insisting them to develop mutual overattachment in the family. The expected excessive closeness in the familial sphere had subdued the individual significance of the second generation victims. It was mentioned as "closeness, like protectiveness, is not always a positive characteristic, it may be very negative and need not imply warmth" (Kidron 523).

Helen Epstein was affected by her parents' agonies impacting her psychic space, which she mentioned as, "for years it lay in an iron box buried so deep inside me that I was never sure just what it was" (Epstein 9). The torments of Holocaust prevailed in indiscernible structure, operating latently, induced anguish and anxiety in the second

generation victims. Helen Epstein recorded the Holocaust horrors resurfacing the psychic space during the quite times of the day with the images of the Holocaust crimes portraying the "blood and shattered glass" (Epstein 9), "piles of skeletons and blackened barbed wire with bits of flesh stuck to it the way flies stick to walls after they are swatted dead" (Epstein 9), "hills of suitcases, mountains of children's shoes," and "whips, pistols, boots, knives and needles" (Epstein 9). "Though she had not encountered the horrors personally, the haunting was transferred to her psychic sphere as the torments generated by the Holocaust memories were inherited from her parents. She was subjected to indiscernible anxiety during her childhood, triggered by the acquired traumatic memories of the Holocaust, which she recorded as,

Burglars and murderers might enter our apartment at any time and catch us unprepared. I made my brother lieutenant and marched him off to the kitchen to be armed. I chose a potato masher, wooden spoons and two long knives from the drawer, and we stood vigil by the door until the scare paled or I was too tired to stand guard anymore. (Epstein 10)

Helen Epstein displaying the attitude of abnormal vigilance to counter the unknown opponents, delusions of being attacked by unknown enemies were explicit reflection of the Jewish torments executed by the Nazis in the grounds of false accusations and the Jewish plight of helplessness in the Nazi regime.

Rochelle, daughter of Holocaust survivors, was troubled by incomprehensible burden distressing her and she treated the unarticulated haunting with art therapy. The art therapy supported her to foreground the repressed and concealed anguishing memories performing in the inner surface of the psyche. Rochelle's painting rendition explicated the underlying impact of the frightful Holocaust images consisting, "one big symbol" (Epstein 44), painted in "two feet by one and a half. It was mostly black and red. Blood and barbed wire. There was one little yellow star of David in it. Ghostly figures" (Epstein 44). The memories of the Jewish agonies troubled her psychic space and the images of the Nazi atrocities reflected the latent haunting triggered by the Holocaust trauma.

Deborah, the second generation victim to the Holocaust trauma, recorded that she was troubled by the "nightmares of men chasing her and her family" (Epstein 305). The morbid fear of being hunted by the unknown enemies, the murder and death of family members executed by those enemies, operated in the subconscious space, streamed and articulated as nightmares. She also experienced the illogical fear of enemies attacking her, from which she protected her home by "lining up glass

bottles in a row before the front door- an early warning system that would allow her time to escape" (Epstein 305).

The Holocaust memories formed a potent tormenting base into the personal psychic structure of the second generation victims which reflected in their attitude of developing morbid anxiety, being affected by resurfacing images of the Jewish sufferings, and excessively vigilant to attack the unknown enemies. These were the indication marks which confirmed the performance of Holocaust trauma, operating in the subconscious sphere of the second generation victims. The torments induced by the Holocaust trauma reflected the Jewish predicament under the Nazi occupation, the Jewish community segregated and identified with Star of David, the Jewish victims incarcerated in the concentration camps, the helpless condition of Jewish victims who were reduced to subhumans and incapable of counter attacking the perpetrators, the physical violence, and the Final Solution which aimed at the mass persecution of Jewish victims.

Robert Eli Rubinstein, a second generation victim, was anguished by the Holocaust trauma, which he acquired from his parents and, he recorded that his familial space appeared mysterious, exhibiting the underlying tension associated with the families of the Holocaust survivors in the aftermath. Though the horrors about the Holocaust sufferings were not communicated in the families of the survivors in an explicit manner due to the immense pain and agonies associated with the plighting memories, the Holocaust tended to traumatize the Jewish victims through its latent presence.

"I always had a feeling of something different in our house," Eli said, "but I couldn't ever really pin it down. I sensed there was something mysterious, something peculiar about the past, about the place where I was born but I didn't know what. (Epstein 24)

He also noted that his father remained opaque towards communicating the terrors of the Jewish sufferings, whereas his mother revealed the repressed past impressions of the Jewish plight perpetrated by the Nazis. Eli was tormented to witness his mother being victimized to the haunting memories of the Holocaust, which in succession transmitted to his psychic space and agonized him. Eli inherited the agonies of his mother's trauma into his personal memory structure, which facilitated the temporal passage of the traumatic memories of Holocaust to the next generation.

It was very painful to listen to. These were things that had happened to my mother and who's close to me than my mother? Sometimes I cried but I was embarrassed to have her see me doing that. I certainly

didn't want to hurt my mother further by upsetting her. (Epstein 26)

The second generation victims were "trapped within the symbiotic relationship with their parents, essentially unable to separate and individuate completely" (Kidron 530). Joseph, a descendant of Holocaust survivors, was victimized by the Holocaust trauma. He established an intimate and faithful bonding with his parents and siblings as he regarded "family was the first loyalty: it was always in our house" (Epstein 182). His course of life was centred on his parents' dominion including choosing his living place nearing his parents' home, his parent's selection of the furniture in his home, his personal preference towards engaging in relationship with woman matching his family's distress, his frequent telephonic conversations with the family members, and his responsible attitude towards his siblings.

His loyalty to family appeared extreme to Joseph's friends. He lived in a neighbourhood his parents had chosen for him. His mother had chosen his furniture. He was readily available to his older sister's family as driver, confidant or babysitter (Epstein 178).

The descendants shared a serious relationship with their parents, as Rochelle recorded that unlike the kinship shared among the regular families, the affinity formed in the domestic spheres of the Holocaust victims was marked with extreme care and sincerity. The trauma haunting the survivors demanded the utmost care and protection to be exhibited from the second generation descendants. Fossion presented the emotional attachment as, "CHSs were a source of reassurance and confirmation of survival. They were submitted to role reversal, becoming parents to their own parents, and to an intense emotional overinvestment" (Fossion 522). Rochelle's parents were vulnerable, requiring careful approach and intense affection, and she was troubled to fulfil her parents' demand to remain intact to the domestic sphere. The Holocaust had imprinted the survivors with a terrible mark of inerasable horror which induced the gloomy conditions prevailing in their familial spaces. Unlike her brother, who exhibited intensive loyalty towards their parents, she was burdened by the strong bonding which required the role reversal between her and her parents which she mentioned as, "it was not as if they were parents and we were the children. We became the parents sometimes and I didn't like that" (Epstein 37). The close bonding formed in the familial spheres were intended to act as protective shield against the haunting memories of the Holocaust, which subdued the personal scope of the second generation victims and burdening them to fit into the frame of "good son or good daughter" (Fossion 522).

The Holocaust trauma haunted the survivors through frequent appearance for the entirety of their lifetime and it extended its distressing dominion over the second generation victims, as they inherited the trauma from their ailing parents. The descendants of the Holocaust survivors exhibited unnatural inclination to experience the suffering which their parents had encountered during the Nazi occupation. Helen Epstein recorded that she had fervent inclination to experience the impression of hardships and pains as an approach to integrate into the realm of her parents' agonies. She mentioned that "I dreamed of finding ways to suffer, to confront, feel and vanquish pain" (Epstein 255). She determined to move from her sophisticated livelihood in Canada to Israel which could be regarded as the prominent shift to encounter the Jewish agonies personally, so as to merge with the sufferings of her parents and acquire her Jewish identity. Against her parents' refusal, she moved to Israel and assimilated into the Jewish spheres which facilitated to ingrain the Jewishness into her personal spaces. The second generation approach towards the identification with Jewish sufferings was described as, "the child, longing for unfamiliar figures and chapters in the survivors' life, imagines him or herself to have actually been with their parents in their war experiences" (Kidron 518). The descendants' attitude to experience the sufferings to equalize the Holocaust horrors endured by their parents was the psychological effect triggered by the acquired Holocaust trauma merging into the personal spheres of the second generation victims.

IV. HOLOCAUST TRAUMA AND THE JEWISH IDENTITY

The second generation victims inclined to incorporate the Holocaust trauma and torments into their personal framework of identity construction. The descendants endeavoured to merge into the Jewish realm by attempting to own the torments of the Holocaust. The descendants exhibited the curiosity for travelling back to the European countries where their parents encountered the Nazi atrocities and visiting the homeland established in Israel. Helen Epstein travelled to Israel and she lived there for three years, which she mentioned as, "In Israel, it seemed, all the troublesome questions of Jewish identity were resolved" (266). She integrated into the social and cultural spheres of the Israel yielding her enthusiasm which she recorded as, "Jews were normal in Israel" (266). She mingled into the social sphere of the nation which provided her the required sense of Jewishness which filled the void in her personal identity. Robert Eli Rubinstein travelled back to Hungary, where his parents lived during the prewar times. Despite his parents' disapproval, he

undertook his journey to his father's hometown in Hungary. His parents were worried by his inclination to travel back to Hungary, one of the European countries which doomed the Jewish community with mass destruction which Epstein mentioned as, "they couldn't understand what would drive their son, who had been born outside, to go back" (30). Eli visited the town, where he experienced mixture of reactions from the native citizens as some of them were "excited" (30), and "nervous" (30), and his visit to the hometown induced rage against the Nazis, which subdued his human attitude and transformed him to a violent person fantasizing to "torture and mutilate" (31) the Nazi perpetrators.

V. CONCLUSION

Despite the times of Holocaust had receded, the traumatic memories of the Jewish torments continued its haunting due to its gruelling magnitude. The Holocaust horrors continued its haunting to the second generation as the memories and torments generated by the Nazi affliction were inherited by the descendants. The second generation victims collectively inherited the Holocaust trauma as they sensed the underlying troubles generated by the Holocaust horrors, haunting and altering the familial engagement and their psychic performance was altered by the transferred Holocaust trauma triggering unnatural fears and pessimistic attitude. The Holocaust victims exhibited the signs of torments as they were affected by the frequent resurfacing of the memories causing emotional troubles, distrust in social relationships, and affected personal temperament. They also developed the moral responsibility to establish closely bonded families to confirm the continuation of the Jewish flow and thereby passed the Holocaust trauma to the second generation in both conscious and unintentional manner. The generational victims were burdened by their parents' demand to form close affinity in the families and to act as substitute members for the dead relatives and, the void caused by the uncommunicated memories concealing the torments enduring the Nazi atrocities. The Holocaust horrors were immensely horrifying and intense, capable of transmitting and incorporating the torments to the generational flow of the Jewish community.

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Marketing of Library Products and Information Services: A Review of Literature

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Abstract— *In a university library, the main strength lies in the information products and services they provide to satisfy the information needs of their user community. For marketing, it is an essential component for libraries to promote their products and services and to apply marketing strategies in the library context to better utilise information resources and services. The main purpose of this study is to examine the significant role of marketing in library products and services and to explore the various marketing strategies libraries use to promote their offerings. and to check Social media help the libraries in promotion of product and services and building a strong relationship with user and increase the awareness about the library resources and services among the users community, and finally suggest that Users centred marketing strategies need to apply for the better understanding about users need, behaviour; Marketing concept, tool and techniques are helpful to maintain the relationship with the user and help the libraries to improve their overall image.*



Keywords— *Marketing of Library Products and Services, Marketing Strategy, Information Services, Marketing Tool, and Techniques.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In today's digital world, libraries are not limited to four walls; they offer services through a dynamic approach, including websites, remote access, logging, and e-resource access. There is no doubt that libraries are doing their best to provide maximum library products and services. Through marketing strategies, libraries can promote their services to ensure maximum utilisation of library products and services. Marketing applies to all platforms for libraries and helps them build a strong relationship with users by understanding user needs and behaviour, and by offering appropriate information. Marketing helps to bring awareness among the users about the collection of the library, such as Books, journals, newspapers, magazines, current awareness list, theses, and dissertations, etc. Marketing of library products and services must follow a systematic plan to promote library materials and disseminate information resources to users. Social media is an online platform and tools that "facilitate communication,

networking, and content sharing in virtual communities. It allows individuals and organisations to create, share, and exchange information in real time, providing opportunities for engagement and interaction with a wider audience." (Sada, 88)

II. NEED OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of this study is to understand the need for marketing library products and services in academic libraries and to raise awareness of them. Although libraries are shifting their traditional services to digital platforms, the main objective is to promote their services and maximise the utilisation of library resources. If the university applies effective marketing strategies, it will help libraries build strong relationships and enhance user engagement, ensuring optimal utilisation of the library collection and services.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine the significant role of marketing in library products and services.
- To explore the different marketing strategies used by libraries for promoting their products and services
- Examine the role of social media and digital technologies in the marketing of library products and services to optimise the utilisation of the library collection and services.

IV. METHODOLOGY FOR THE STUDY

A proper methodology is the key element for a research study. No study can be conducted without proper direction; for that purpose, methodology guides the researcher to work in the right direction. For this study, I have reviewed 29 previously published articles on the marketing of library products and services from 1985 to 2025.

V. REVIEW OF SELECTED ARTICLES FOR THE STUDY

5.1. MARKETING OF INFORMATION PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

Borman, Ratan, Ibemcha Chanu Ayekpam, and Ratan Singh, in their paper "Marketing of Library and Information Services in the Higher Educational Institutions" think Academic institutions, libraries, information centers play an important role to provide accurate information to the student, researcher, teachers and non-teaching staff they also focused present condition of the library and information centers and what kind of problem faced by academic libraries and information Centre. The study also suggested for using marketing mix, tools and techniques for fulfilling the information needs of the users. **Chandratre, Shripad V., and Meghana S. Chandratress**, in "Marketing of Library and Information Services," explain the better utilisation of information sources. The study explains that nowadays libraries are producing services rather than quality-based services. To provide the information, the 24/7 library needs to regularly update its services. **Garoufallou, Emmanouel, et al.**, in their work "Marketing Applications in Greek Academic Library Services," analyse various marketing methods and applications, as well as the tools and techniques that Greek academic libraries use to promote library services. The study suggested that marketing should use such an evaluation method. **Kanaujia, Shiva**, in "Marketing of Information Products and Services in Indian R&D Library and Information Centres," explores how to apply the

marketing concept and the kinds of gradual changes needed in libraries to provide better services to library users. In this study, they discuss the marketing approach and its application, and observe that, for efficient marketing services, financial support is much required and that user awareness programs should be conducted. **King, Donald W.**, in his study "Marketing Secondary Information Products and Services." He explains the information products and services and discusses the different aspects of marketing, such as marketing to consumers, new product development strategies, and the roles of sales and advertising in promotion. explain that marketing is a challenging task, and discuss the marketing mix, marketing segmentation, marketing tools, and techniques. **O'ktam Nosirov**, in "Methods for Determining Target Consumer Groups of Library Products and Services," discusses the need of the target consumer and essential for libraries to understand the needs, interests, and behaviour of the users before offering the services. The study also mentioned the importance of a feedback mechanism for better understanding the target user's expectations and needs.

5.2 MARKETING STRATEGY

Adeyoyin, Samuel Olu, in "Strategic Planning for Marketing Library Services," explains the role of marketing in terms of services and explores building a relationship to support management and marketing. The study focused on how traditional marketing methods should be changed into modern marketing modes. Also, focus on marketing awareness and educate users about library resources so they can find authentic information on their own. **Fichter, Darlene, and Jeff Wisniewski**, in "Content Marketing and Strategy for Libraries," see the use of e-resources, and explain how to find information effectively on the website, books, articles and so on and in today's environment, and in this study, focus on how marketing strategy needs to be applied for all the platforms of the library. **Makintami**, in "Marketing Strategies and User Satisfaction in the University Libraries," explains library marketing tools and techniques that help promote services and ensure user engagement. This study highlighted the core concepts of marketing in the academic field, including marketing strategies, the challenges libraries face in implementing effective marketing strategies, and recommendations for a feedback system. **Sisodia, Rajendra S.**, in "Marketing Information and Decision Support Systems for Services," explains that marketing should be managed alongside other operational methods to better utilise products and services, with the primary objective of focusing on the operational method in marketing and increasing product quality.

5.3 MARKETING APPROACH

Korobili, Stella, and Irene Tilikidou, in their work “The Necessity of Information Literacy Education in a Marketing Department,” describe how information literacy plays an important role in the higher education institute of Greece and observed the student point of view and expectation related to information literacy skills. **Singh, Rajesh**, in “Does Your Library Have a Marketing Culture? Implications for Service Providers,” explains the methods of marketing-oriented research, the theories of modern marketing, and quantitative and qualitative techniques for building knowledge. By analysing marketing attitudes in his study, he found three kinds of marketing cultures: strong, medium, and weak. He observed that a library's primary objective is to be market-oriented. **Tanui, Tirong arap, and Andrew S. Kitoi**, in their work “Why Marketing? The Experience of MOI University Library, Kenya,” explain the library marketing services and how they are used efficiently and provide the methods of staff motivation. And such techniques for the student to use the library resources and explain how to deal with the marketing-related problem.

5.4 MARKETING IN DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

Atkinson, Bill, in “Grand View Library to Market Indexing software,” explains the role of computers in marketing software and, through this technique, makes it easy to establish marketing methods and collaborate with users on a large scale. **Chan, Christopher**, in “Marketing the Academic Library with online Social Network Advertising,” explains the various social networking platforms and explores advertising methods for promoting academic library services, and found that the Advertising strategies are very effective. **Cihak, Herb**, in “Marketing CD-ROM and other Electronic Library Services,” explains that, with multimedia, libraries can effectively market their products and services. **Darlene Fichter**, in “Electronic Resources Won't Sell Themselves,” explains six methods to market their products and services toward librarians, viz., first one defines their market, second selects the products for promotion, third defines the target audience, fourth decides the venue, fifth delivers the accurate message, and last evaluates the entire process of efforts. **Lagrosen, Stefan** conducts a case study on “Online Service Marketing and Delivery: The case of Swedish Museums”, discovering that there are lots of services that can be delivered through the Internet, focusing on the use of the Internet for marketing purposes. **McGuigan, Glenn S.**, in “Marketing Library Services in a Digital Environment: Notes on Brand Identity, Differentiation and Informational Asymmetry,” explores marketing methods in a digital environment, the challenges of marketing, and the use of the Internet for the promotion of library resources. **Rowley, Jennifer**, in

“Information Marketing in a Digital World,” explains the role of information in marketing, incorporates the term “marketing” into the digital world, explores marketing towards new demand, and analyses the many products of marketing, focusing on understanding the different methods of marketing. **Sada**, in his work “Role of social media in Library Information Marketing: Opportunities and Challenges” explains the role of social media in the promotion of library products and services and highlights the importance of social media in terms of communication, building relationships, and promoting and sharing content online. The study also suggested that marketing strategies should be used for the better utilisation of the resources. **Schmidt, Janine**, in “Promoting Library Services in a Google world,” explains that the change is occurring in the information environment and tries to find out the methods of marketing to use the library services effectively and focus on the user should have a clear understanding of the products and explore the promotional strategies which are normally used in libraries.

5.5 MARKETING TOOL AND TECHNIQUES

Battiato, Sebastiano, et al., in their work “Using Visual and Text Features for Direct Marketing Mickey on Multimedia Messaging Services Domain” discuss pre-testing methods; also analysed which methods should be used for the wider population and which methods should be used for the small population, and improvement of the marketing methods is the Multimedia Messaging Service. **Biggs, Helen F., and Philip Calvert**, in “Marketing to Teens: A Study of Two New Zealand Public Libraries,” describe various marketing methods and explore the marketing mix and marketing concepts to help identify a marketing plan. **Fleisher Craig S., Sheila Wright, and Helen T. Allard**, in their work “The Role of Insight Teams in Integrating Diverse Marketing Information Management Techniques” explains the viability of marketing planning and provide their opinion about four independent techniques of marketing the first one is CI which called competitive intelligence and second build the relation with customer and third data mining and the last research the market and also explore the strategic planning of the marketing and collaborate management with marketing. **Fourie, Ina, and Liezl**, in “Promotional strategies for Information Products and Services,” explain that libraries spend a large amount on services and should use Web 2.0 methods and collaborate with users as much as they market products and services. **Holt, Glen**, in “Library Branding for Young Adolescents: Learning from Barbie and Mickey,” explains that library marketing techniques can be useful for young adolescents. **Hua, Xiaoqin, et al.**, in their work “Investigations about New Methods of Library Marketing in Chinese “985” Project Universities,” explain that the

modern environment, academic library competition, and marketing are essential and viable solutions. **Ojala, Marydee**, in "Databases have the information You Need for marketing" describes the importance of the database to connect the users in several platforms, discusses many kinds of databases, e.g., American Statistical Index, Statistical Resource Index and discusses the most important extensive version of CACI's database, and think database has all the information necessary for marketing.

VI. FINDING OF THE STUDY

- The study found marketing is an essential component for libraries to promote their resource and services; therefore, marketing needs to be applied in libraries.
- Social media helps libraries promote products and services, build strong relationships with users, and increase awareness of their offerings among the user community.
- Libraries faced many challenges in implementing marketing tools and techniques, such as limited budgets and a lack of trained staff.
- User-centred marketing strategies need to be applied to libraries to better understand users' needs and behaviours and to satisfy their information needs.

VII. SUGGESTION FOR THE STUDY

- The marketing concept needs to be applicable across all sectors of libraries for maximum Optimisation of library resources.
- A separate marketing unit should be established within the libraries to better promote resources and services.
- Implement the feedback machine to understand the behaviour and needs of the user's community, ensuring that the services provided by libraries satisfy the user's desires.
- University libraries should regularly host seminars on marketing library products and services to raise awareness of library resources.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Marketing is an essential component of libraries' efforts to promote their services because, in today's scenario, libraries are offering a wide range of products and services, moving towards e-resources to enhance user satisfaction, yet raising awareness about these products and services remains a prime objective of libraries. Marketing, in general terms, refers to the sale and purchase, but in libraries it involves

building a strong relationship with the user community to satisfy information needs and optimise resources, which directly enhances libraries' image. The study has gone through various levels of marketing and, based on its major findings, has made some strong suggestions to help libraries strengthen their marketing products and services.

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Attention Retention and Engagement Enhancement Techniques in Short News Videos

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Abstract— *The article presents a comprehensive analysis of attention retention mechanisms and audience engagement enhancement in short news videos within algorithmic short-video platforms. The study is based on the systematization of cognitive mechanisms of media consumption, the comparison of audiovisual characteristics of video content, and the interpretation of motivational factors influencing user interaction with news materials. The analysis shows that attention retention in short-video platform environments is formed through the combination of perceptual flow states, the architecture of algorithmic feeds, and the characteristics of the initial phase of user interaction with video content. It is established that audience engagement is determined both by the content of the news message and by the parameters of media presentation, including sensory characteristics of image and sound, the dynamics of visual storytelling, and emotional strategies of information presentation. Special attention is given to motivational mechanisms of news sharing in social networks, where user activity becomes an important element of the secondary circulation of media content and the expansion of information reach. It is shown that the effectiveness of short news videos emerges as a result of the interaction between cognitive mechanisms of attention retention, structural characteristics of video materials, and social motivations of user behavior. The practical significance of the results lies in their potential application in the development and adaptation of news video content for short-video platforms, as well as in the formation of editorial strategies for media companies operating in algorithmic media environments. The study demonstrates that attention retention and audience engagement in short news videos should be considered as an interconnected system of cognitive, media-production, and social factors.*



Keywords— *short videos, attention retention, audience engagement, news video content, algorithmic platforms, audiovisual characteristics, news sharing.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of short-video platforms has altered the news consumption model, shifting it toward dynamic audiovisual formats distributed via algorithmic social media feeds. TikTok, Instagram Reels, and similar services create an environment where news competes for limited user attention within a continuous stream of videos [6]. Under these conditions, attention retention becomes a key factor in the effectiveness of news content, as viewing duration and the level of user reactions directly impact the algorithmic

distribution of materials. The architectural features of short-video platforms intensify stimulus competition and accelerate attention switching, thereby raising the requirements for the structure and delivery of news videos [2].

Cognitive mechanisms of short-video consumption play a significant role. User attention retention is associated with the emergence of states of concentration, enjoyment, and time distortion, which sustain continuous content viewing [8]. Simultaneously, audience engagement depends on the

audiovisual characteristics of the videos and their ability to elicit an emotional response and stimulate user reactions, including comments, likes, and content sharing [10]. As a result, the effectiveness of short news videos is determined by a combination of cognitive attention retention mechanisms and the specific features of audiovisual information delivery.

The objective of this study is to identify and systematize the primary mechanisms of attention retention and audience engagement enhancement in short news videos within algorithmic media platforms. To achieve this goal, the following tasks are addressed:

- identify the main cognitive mechanisms of user attention retention during short-video consumption;
- analyze the impact of the audiovisual characteristics of video content on audience engagement;
- systematize the motivational factors of news content sharing on social media;
- determine the structural parameters of short videos that influence audience interaction with news content.

The research hypothesis posits that the effectiveness of short news videos is determined by a combination of cognitive attention retention mechanisms, the audiovisual characteristics of the video, and the motivational factors of user interaction. The isolated use of engagement enhancement techniques without their integration fails to ensure a sustainable growth of audience interaction within algorithmic feeds.

The scientific novelty of this work lies in examining attention retention and engagement as an interconnected system of cognitive and media-production factors, integrating flow states of perception, audiovisual parameters of video content, and motivational drivers of news sharing.

The scope of the study encompasses the mechanisms of attention retention and engagement enhancement in short news videos on short-video platforms. The analysis focuses on behavioral and content-related factors of audience interaction, excluding issues of media companies' editorial policies and the technical specifics of recommendation algorithms. The empirical base of the research is predominantly associated with the TikTok platform and similar services.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research methods employed include the theoretical generalization of scientific publications, a comparative analysis of audience attention retention and engagement

factors on short-video platforms, a structural interpretation of cognitive media consumption mechanisms, and the systematization of empirical data concerning short video characteristics and user reactions. The combination of these methods enabled the identification of primary attention retention mechanisms and audience engagement factors in short news videos, interpreting them as interconnected elements of media-production and behavioral processes.

The study was conducted in the format of a systematic review analysis of open-access publications from 2022 to 2025, indexed in international peer-reviewed journals. The search strategy was based on combinations of keywords: short-form video, TikTok engagement, attention retention, scroll immersion, short video addiction, news sharing behavior, audiovisual characteristics, short video information quality, and short video engagement model, utilizing AND/OR logical operators.

During the identification phase, 53 publications were discovered. Following the removal of duplicates and an initial analysis of titles and abstracts, studies unrelated to short-video platforms or user attention were excluded. During the full-text assessment phase, works lacking empirical data on audience engagement or short video characteristics were further excluded. The final sample comprised 12 studies.

The inclusion criteria were: the presence of an analysis of user behavior on short-video platforms, the investigation of cognitive mechanisms of attention and engagement, the examination of video content characteristics affecting user reactions, and the modeling of content sharing factors on social networks. Publications devoid of reproducible empirical results or those failing to analyze audience interaction with short videos were excluded.

The study by Al-Leimon et al. [1] analyzes the link between short-video addiction and attention and memory among youth, whereas Alruwaili [2] examines the impact of scroll immersion on user attention, working memory, and cognitive fatigue. Chung et al. [3] explore the influence of short-video exposure on audience engagement through cognitive mediators, while Le and Xiong [4] identify the motivational factors for news sharing on social networks. Li et al. [5] investigate the effect of short-video application addiction on academic engagement via the mechanism of mindfulness, and Maroto-González et al. [6] analyze the use of TikTok by news organizations. Ming et al. [7] consider video characteristics and their impact on user interaction; Qin et al. [8] detail the effect of information quality and platform system characteristics on users' flow states. Ta et al. [9] study the engagement factors of Generation Z with TikTok news content, Wang and Li [10] analyze the influence of audiovisual characteristics of short videos on

audience reactions, Wang et al. [11] compare information quality and video content engagement on TikTok and BiliBili, and Wu et al. [12] propose a model for identifying success factors of short videos on social media.

The selected body of publications facilitated the structuring of attention retention and audience engagement factors on short-video platforms across several dimensions: cognitive mechanisms of attention and flow states, audiovisual characteristics of videos, motivational factors of news sharing, and structural parameters of short video content. The obtained results were utilized for the subsequent analysis of techniques for retaining attention and enhancing audience engagement in short news videos.

III. RESULTS

The analysis demonstrated that user attention retention on short-video platforms is formed through a combination of cognitive and emotional states emerging during interaction with the algorithmic video feed. Under conditions of high information stimulus density, user attention is distributed differently than in traditional media environments. A short-video feed is organized as a sequence of autonomous videos, generating a model of fragmented yet sustained interaction with content. Within this structure, attention retention is determined by the informative content of the videos and the states of cognitive user involvement that arise during continuous viewing [5].

It was established that a central mechanism for stabilizing user attention is the formation of a flow state of interaction with the video platform. This state is forged through a combination of attention concentration, subjective viewing enjoyment, and altered time perception [8]. Concurrently, attention retention is supported by the user's individual cognitive characteristics and the specifics of media consumption behavioral models. The continuous scrolling

of the video feed establishes a stable fixation of attention on a sequence of short videos, progressively engrossing the user in a media viewing session [2]. This mechanism is amplified by the characteristics of the initial phase of user interaction with the video content. Within an algorithmic video feed, the decision to continue watching is made within the first few seconds after the video begins. Consequently, the structural organization of the video's introductory segment gains particular significance. The rapid formation of cognitive interest enables the fixation of user attention, preventing an immediate switch to the next media item. Therefore, attention retention in short news videos depends on the content of the message and the video's capacity to generate an instantaneous stimulus for continued viewing. Simultaneously, there is a decline in subjective control over the duration of platform interaction, accompanied by a time distortion effect, which facilitates continued video consumption [1].

A comparison of attention retention factors reveals that the components of the flow state exert varying intensities of influence on user behavior. Concentration ensures the cognitive fixation of attention on the video material and sustains the viewing sequence. However, the emotional reaction to the content fosters subjective enjoyment of interacting with the video feed, serving as a more robust mechanism for prolonging the media session. Consequently, attention retention is shaped as a result of the interaction between cognitive and emotional components of video content perception. A substantial role is played by the architecture of the algorithmic feed, which curates a sequence of videos matching the user's interests, thereby maintaining viewing continuity and reducing the probability of exiting the media session [9]. Figure 1 examines the explained variance of flow state factors related to attention retention during short video consumption.

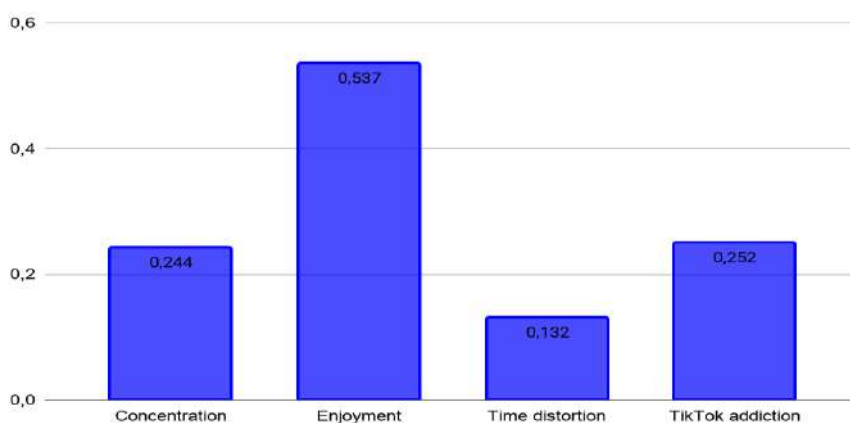


Fig.1: Explained Variance (R^2) of Flow State Factors in Short Video Consumption (compiled by the author based on source: [8])

The presented values demonstrate the diverse explanatory power of the flow state components. The largest portion of explained variance is recorded for the variable enjoyment ($R^2 = 0.537$), indicating the structural dominance of the emotional component of user interaction with video content. The concentration indicator stands at 0.244, reflecting the contribution of cognitive attention fixation on the video material. The R^2 value for the TikTok addiction variable is 0.252, demonstrating the connection between flow states and the formation of stable short-video consumption models. The minimal share of explained variance is observed for the time distortion variable ($R^2 = 0.132$), pointing to a more limited contribution of this mechanism to the attention retention structure. The ratio of indicators shows that in the architecture of attention retention, the user's emotional engagement exerts a stronger influence on media session duration than cognitive concentration, reflecting the specifics of media consumption in the short-video platform environment.

The analysis revealed that audience engagement in short news videos is built through cognitive mechanisms of attention retention alongside the characteristics of the media delivery itself. In the short-video platform environment, the user interacts with content under conditions of highly competitive visual stimuli; therefore, the video's structure emerges as an independent factor influencing user reactions. Under such conditions, the audiovisual parameters of the video exert a direct impact on the intensity of audience interaction with the content, including viewing reactions, likes, and the sharing of video materials [10]. In addition to the sensory characteristics of image and sound, the structural dynamics of information delivery within the video play a crucial role. Editing pace, the frequency of visual shot changes, and the sequencing of key messages establish the rhythm of video content perception. On short-video platforms, such a dynamic structure assists in maintaining the user's cognitive interest and diminishes the likelihood of premature viewing termination. Consequently, audience engagement is determined by discrete audiovisual parameters and the overall organization of visual storytelling within the video. Concurrently, research indicates that the characteristics of information delivery in short videos can either amplify or attenuate user engagement depending on the cognitive load and emotional impact on the viewer [7].

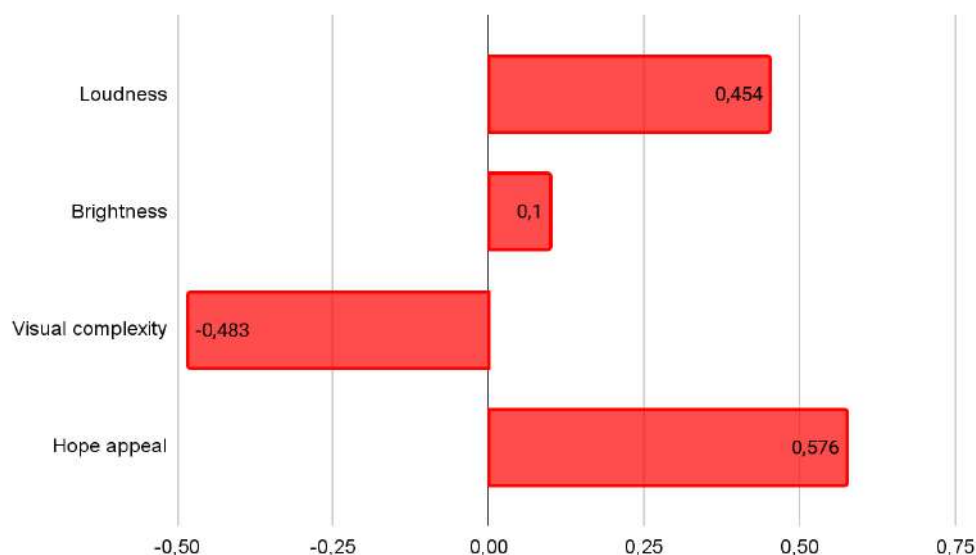
It has been proven that audience engagement is augmented by employing audiovisual elements capable of rapidly capturing the user's attention in the initial seconds of viewing. On short-video platforms, it is this initial interaction phase that determines the probability of

continued video viewing. In this regard, parameters of visual brightness and audio signal serve as instruments for enhancing the sensory impact of video content on the user. More pronounced visual and audio signals increase the likelihood of attention fixation and stimulate further audience interaction with the video. Simultaneously, the emotional strategy of content delivery exerts a noticeable influence on user reactions. The utilization of positive emotional frames linked to hope or optimism yields a higher probability of audience interaction with the video material [3].

A comparative analysis of engagement factors indicates that an increase in the visual complexity of the video can depress the intensity of user reactions. A high density of visual elements elevates the cognitive load on the viewer and complicates the rapid comprehension of the video's key message. Under the constraints of short-video platforms, where the user decides whether to continue watching within a limited timeframe, such an overloaded visual structure diminishes the probability of subsequent interaction with the content [7]. Figure 2 illustrates the impact of the audiovisual characteristics of short videos on audience engagement metrics.

The displayed values demonstrate the varying intensity of the impact of audiovisual characteristics on audience engagement. The highest coefficient value is observed for the appeal to hope variable ($\beta = 0.576$), pointing to the significant role of the emotional content delivery strategy in shaping user reactions. The loudness indicator is 0.454, reflecting the influence of the auditory signal in capturing user attention. The brightness value stands at 0.100, showing a more limited contribution of this parameter to the audience engagement structure. The negative coefficient value for the visual complexity variable ($\beta = -0.483$) shows that increasing the visual complexity of the video is accompanied by a decline in user reactions. The aggregate of these metrics reflects the varying intensity of audiovisual characteristics' influence on audience behavioral reactions, allowing the media delivery structure to be viewed as an essential element of the engagement architecture in short news videos [10].

The presented results permit the interpretation of audience engagement in short news videos as an outcome of the interaction between cognitive attention retention mechanisms and the structural characteristics of media delivery, which concludes the analytical examination of user interaction factors in the short-video platform environment.



Note: A positive value indicates an increase in engagement; a negative value indicates a decrease.

Fig.2 – Influence of Audiovisual Characteristics of Short Videos on Audience Engagement Metrics (Compiled by the author based on source: [10])

The mechanisms of attention retention and engagement enhancement identified in the analysis can also be observed in the production practices of independent short-form video creators on digital platforms. Short videos produced by independent authors demonstrate similar structural solutions aimed at capturing audience attention within algorithmic feeds.

For instance, the video “Where Did Edward Bil Come From?” employs a rapid entry into the narrative, based on posing a question already in the initial phase of viewing. The headline is integrated into the visual composition and supported by contrasting imagery, allowing the viewer to instantly identify the subject of the video. Such a structure corresponds to the attention trigger mechanism, where the first seconds perform the function of fixing attention by reducing the time required to interpret the content.

A different strategy is implemented in the video “Olya Tykva or How to Make Money from Hype,” where the key role is played by a combination of explanatory delivery and a moderate emotional accent. The visual composition and topic framing are designed to quickly engage the viewer through a recognizable situation and a clear context, without relying on conflict-driven or evaluative rhetoric. This format supports sustained interest through cognitive accessibility and a transparent message structure.

A similar principle can be observed in the video “Shoulder Workout with Yuri Spasokukotsky,” where attention is maintained through an immediate transition to the core content and a high density of visual information. The

absence of an extended introduction and the consistent presentation of key elements help minimize cognitive load and sustain continuity of perception.

The examined examples demonstrate a consistent pattern: the effectiveness of short video content is ensured through the combination of a rapid initial trigger, visual clarity, and a compressed narrative structure. These characteristics directly correspond to the cognitive and media-production factors of attention retention and audience engagement identified in this study.

IV. DISCUSSION

The analysis of audience engagement factors demonstrates that user interaction with short news videos is not limited to viewing content. Within algorithmic video platform environments, the active dissemination of information by users plays a pivotal role, transforming the audience from a passive content recipient into an element of media distribution. In platform-based media environments, such forms of interaction gain particular significance, as it is user activity that generates an additional layer of news message dissemination. Consequently, audience engagement should be considered both an indicator of attention to the video material and a mechanism for expanding the informational reach of news content [9]. In the digital platform ecosystem, user activity becomes a supplementary tier of news media distribution. Comments, reactions, and reposts foster the secondary circulation of video content within social networks. These modes of interaction allow news materials

to transcend their initial audience and integrate into broader information flows. As a result, user engagement performs a media distribution function, amplifying the algorithmic visibility of news video content.

It has been determined that the motivational mechanisms of news sharing differ from the factors dictating the primary consumption of video content. While attention retention is governed by the cognitive and audiovisual characteristics of the videos, the intention to share news is formed through

social and informational motives of user interaction. Within this framework, a vital role is played by the social value of the information, its perceived relevance to the audience, and the users' desire to demonstrate their own awareness on social networks. Such mechanisms forge a distinct model of news content dissemination, in which user actions become an extension of media consumption and simultaneously an element of social interaction [4]. Table 1 examines the impact of various motivational factors on users' intention to share news on social media.

Table 1 – Influence of Motivational Factors on News-Sharing Intention (PLS-SEM) (Compiled by the author based on source: [4])

Relationship	β	t	p
Social value → sharing intention	0.126	4.009	0.000
Audience relevance → sharing intention	0.084	2.350	0.019
Information seeking → sharing intention	0.140	4.481	0.000
Socialization → sharing intention	0.088	3.284	0.001
Status → sharing intention	0.183	4.970	0.000
Pass-time → sharing intention	0.026	0.714	0.475

Note: β – standardized path coefficient indicating the strength and direction of the relationship; t – t-statistic used to test the significance of the path coefficient; p – p-value indicating the statistical significance level of the relationship.

The presented metrics reflect the varying intensity of motivational factors' influence on users' intent to distribute news content. The most pronounced impact is demonstrated by motives associated with social status and the users' aspiration to position themselves as informed participants in digital discourse. In this context, news sharing acts as a form of information transfer and a tool for social self-presentation in the online environment. Of comparable significance is the information-seeking motivation, which reflects users' desire to broaden their own informational space through the exchange of news materials.

A distinct role is played by the perceived social value of news. Users are more likely to share information they deem important for other network members or for public discussion. However, the personalized relevance of the content exerts a more moderate influence, pointing to the role of individual news perception in the decision to share information. A similar function is fulfilled by the socialization motivation, wherein news messages are utilized as a means of sustaining communication within digital communities and social groups.

In contrast to these factors, motives related to the passive consumption of content and the use of videos as a form of leisure are practically unassociated with users' intention to distribute news information. This distribution of factors reveals that news sharing on social networks is driven predominantly by users' active social and informational

motivations, whereas recreational models of media consumption have a significantly more restricted impact on news-sharing behavior.

The analysis of audience interaction with short news videos revealed that the structural organization of the video material serves as an independent factor in user engagement. In the environment of short-video platforms, the video duration dictates the volume of transmitted information and the nature of the user's interaction with the content. Within an algorithmic video feed, attention is allocated under conditions of high scrolling speed and constant shifting of visual stimuli. Hence, the structural parameters of the video begin to perform the function of managing audience attention. In this context, a short news video can be regarded as a distinct form of platform-adapted media content. Its structure is formulated with consideration for the algorithmic logic of the video feed, the nuances of user behavior, and the constrained timeframe for information perception. A compact message composition, the rapid delivery of key facts, and a high density of visual stimuli enable the adaptation of news content to the conditions of short-term media consumption. Video duration in this context becomes an element of media strategy, allowing for the regulation of the intensity of user interaction with the content.

Additional analysis suggests that news organizations employ disparate structural logics for publishing video

content depending on the objectives of the account. Corporate profiles are more frequently oriented toward the institutional presence of the media company and exhibit a more extended form of video materials. Conversely, news profiles display a more compact video structure, which better aligns with the dynamics of an algorithmic video feed. This distinction reflects the existence of two media

communication strategies: presentational and informational. In the former case, the video performs the function of brand representation; in the latter, it fulfills the function of rapid news message transmission. Table 2 presents a comparison of the total combined duration of videos published by public broadcasters on the TikTok platform.

Table 2 – The total length of videos published by public broadcasters on TikTok (Compiled by the author based on source: [1])

Platform / profile type	Total duration of sampled videos (h:mm:ss)	Total duration of sampled videos (seconds)
BBC (corporate)	2:12:09	7929
BBC News (news)	0:48:39	2919
France Info (news)	1:33:57	5637
France TV (corporate)	1:21:09	4869
SVT (corporate)	0:47:12	2832
SVT Nyheter (news)	0:42:27	2547

The structure of the presented data demonstrates a stable differentiation in video content formats between the news and corporate accounts of media companies. News profiles systematically utilize a shorter form of video materials, which allows the news message to be adapted to the pace of content consumption in the algorithmic feed. The more compact video structure facilitates the assimilation of key information and lessens the cognitive load on the user amidst the rapid switching of video content.

In contrast, corporate profiles exhibit a more prolonged publication structure. Such a format is geared toward an expanded presentation of content and the institutional context of the media company. In this instance, the video material serves an informational and representative function, accounting for the greater duration of the videos. The difference between these formats indicates that video content duration is leveraged by media companies as an instrument for the strategic management of user attention.

This structural differentiation of formats points to the fact that the effectiveness of audience interaction with short news videos is determined by the information's content and the degree of the video material's adaptation to the platform feed's architecture. Following this logic, video duration acts as an element of editorial video content construction and impacts the capacity of a news message to retain user attention within an algorithmic media space. Thus, the effectiveness of short news videos is built through a combination of cognitive attention mechanisms, the audiovisual structure of the video content, and the motivational factors of user interaction.

V. CONCLUSION

The conducted analysis revealed that audience attention retention in short news videos is determined by a combination of cognitive perception mechanisms and the specifics of media delivery within an algorithmic video feed. A pivotal role is played by the formation of a flow state, wherein attention is sustained by concentration, emotional engagement, and altered time perception. The resilience of viewing largely relies on the initial phase of interaction with the video, given that the decision to continue watching is made in the first few seconds. Under these conditions, the effectiveness of a short news video is dictated by the material's ability to swiftly cultivate cognitive interest and retain user attention.

The obtained results demonstrate that audience engagement depends on the content of the news message, alongside the audiovisual and structural organization of the video material. Image and sound parameters, visual storytelling dynamics, and emotional information delivery strategies amplify user reactions and sustain interest in the video content. Here, engagement manifests in the form of viewing and through active forms of interaction, including news sharing. The intention to share content is predominantly linked to the informational and social motives of users, whereas passive consumption plays a significantly smaller role. It was additionally established that video duration and message composition are utilized by media companies as an instrument for adapting news content to the dynamics of the algorithmic video feed.

The research results validate the proposed hypothesis that the effectiveness of short news videos is governed by a

combination of cognitive attention retention mechanisms, the video's audiovisual characteristics, and the motivational factors of user interaction. The examined factors do not operate in isolation but function as an interconnected system in which production decisions regarding the structure and delivery of video content interact with the psychological traits of media consumption and the social motives for information dissemination.

Prospects for further research involve a more detailed study of the production techniques for creating short news videos and their impact on various forms of user activity. Of particular interest is the analysis of the structural elements of video material—including the introductory phase of the video, editing rhythm, and the density of visual stimuli—and their connection to the algorithmic distribution of content on short-video platforms. An additional direction could be a comparative study of news video production strategies across different social media platforms and an evaluation of their influence on the dynamics of user attention and audience engagement.

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Negative Capability and the Ethics of Uncertainty in Keatsian Poetics

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Abstract— This article reinterprets John Keats's concept of Negative Capability as an ethical as well as poetic response to epistemic uncertainty within Romantic poetics. Moving beyond readings that treat the concept as merely aesthetic tolerance for ambiguity, the study argues that Keats articulates a disciplined form of epistemological humility grounded in sustained openness to doubt, alterity, and experiential complexity. Drawing on moral philosophy, cognitive literary theory, and contemporary ethical discourse, the paper situates Keats's letters and major odes as sites where poetic indeterminacy becomes an ethical practice of attentive engagement rather than evasive irresolution. Through close readings of *Ode to a Nightingale*, *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, and *Lamia*, the analysis demonstrates how the suspension of premature certainty fosters imaginative responsibility and resists reductive modes of knowing. By positioning Negative Capability as an ethics of uncertainty, the article bridges Romantic literary studies with current debates in moral epistemology and the philosophy of literature, proposing Keatsian poetics as a continuing resource for thinking ethically within conditions of ambiguity.



Keywords— Negative Capability, Keatsian poetics, ethics of uncertainty, Romantic epistemology, moral imagination, poetic indeterminacy

I. INTRODUCTION: THE PERSISTENT PROVOCATION OF DOUBT

In a letter written in December 1817, John Keats offered what would become one of the most celebrated and contested formulations in the history of aesthetic thought. Describing a conversation with his friend Charles Wentworth Dilke, Keats observed that several things dovetailed in his mind, arriving at the insight that "at once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in Literature & which Shakespeare possessed so enormously—I mean *Negative Capability*, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any *irritable reaching after fact & reason*" (Keats, 1817/2002, p. 41). This brief, seemingly casual passage has generated an extraordinary volume of critical commentary across two centuries, not merely because it illuminates Keats's own

creative practice, but because it touches something philosophically fundamental about the relationship between knowledge, imagination, and ethical conduct. The concept's resonance has only deepened in the contemporary moment, as literary scholars, cognitive scientists, moral philosophers, and cultural critics find in Keatsian uncertainty an unexpected resource for thinking through the epistemic challenges of a world saturated with competing truth-claims, ideological certainties, and algorithmic imperatives towards resolution.

Yet despite its canonical status, Negative Capability has often been treated as a purely aesthetic principle—a theory of poetic composition concerned with the suppression of the poet's rational ego in favour of empathetic identification with objects and characters. Such readings, while illuminating, have tended to underestimate the concept's ethical dimensions. This paper does not seek to

replace existing aesthetic readings of negative capability but rather to extend them by demonstrating their implicit ethical and epistemological dimensions. This paper argues that Keats's valorization of irresolution is simultaneously a poetic and a moral achievement, one that demands serious engagement from contemporary ethical theory. The capacity to dwell in uncertainty without the *irritable reaching* that Keats diagnoses as the besetting fault of lesser minds is not mere passivity or aesthetic detachment; it is, as this analysis will show, a demanding form of moral attentiveness, a practice of what Martha Nussbaum (2003) has called "narrative imagination" extended to its most rigorous and uncomfortable implications.

The ethical dimensions of Keats's poetics have received renewed attention in recent scholarship, particularly in the wake of cognitive literary theory's investigations into empathy and perspective-taking (Zunshine, 2006), affect theory's reappraisal of emotion as epistemically significant (Ngai, 2020), and posthumanist philosophy's insistence on the moral importance of vulnerability and openness. Reading Keats alongside these contemporary frameworks reveals not an anachronistic projection of modern concerns onto a nineteenth-century poet, but a genuine philosophical affinity—a convergence of insights about what it means to inhabit uncertainty honestly and to refuse the seductions of premature certainty. The present study engages this convergence systematically, moving through close readings of the major odes and *Lamia* to argue that Negative Capability constitutes what we might call an ethics of epistemic humility, a discipline of suspended judgment that carries profound implications for how literature imagines human moral life.

The paper proceeds in seven sections. Following this introduction, Section 2 traces the philosophical genealogy of Negative Capability, situating it within both the Romantic intellectual context and contemporary moral epistemology. Section 3 examines the odes as laboratories of sustained uncertainty, attending to their formal strategies for enacting irresolution. Section 4 addresses the ethics of aesthetic suspension, arguing against the common conflation of Keatsian detachment with moral indifference. Section 5 reads *Lamia* as a critical test case for the limits and responsibilities of Negative Capability. Section 6 turns to the broader ethical implications of Keatsian uncertainty, synthesizing insights from the preceding analyses to demonstrate how Negative Capability functions as a model of epistemic humility and moral attentiveness applicable beyond Romantic poetics. Section 7 offers a conclusion that assesses the concept's ongoing philosophical productivity.

II. PHILOSOPHICAL GENEALOGY: FROM ROMANTIC EPISTEMOLOGY TO MORAL PHILOSOPHY

2.1 The Intellectual Context of Negative Capability

To appreciate the distinctiveness of Keats's formulation, it is necessary to situate it within the broader intellectual landscape of the Romantic period. The early nineteenth century was, among other things, a moment of intense epistemological anxiety. The Kantian revolution in philosophy had unsettled confident empiricist accounts of knowledge, replacing the transparent world of Locke and Hume with a phenomenal realm constitutively shaped by the structures of mind. German Idealism, in Fichte, Schelling, and the early Hegel, responded to this unsettlement with increasingly ambitious attempts to recuperate certainty through the dialectical movement of spirit. British Romanticism occupied an equivocal position relative to these Continental developments—aware of the Kantian challenge, resistant to Idealist resolution, drawn both to empirical particularity and to visionary aspiration (Christensen, 2000). Keats, who read philosophy more widely than is sometimes supposed and whose circle included figures with serious intellectual interests, was attuned to these tensions without being systematically committed to resolving them.

What distinguishes Keats from contemporaries like Wordsworth and Coleridge is precisely his refusal to convert epistemological difficulty into a narrative of recovery or transcendence. Wordsworth's *spots of time*, as Alan Liu (1989) has argued, perform a careful management of perceptual crisis, converting the shock of natural encounter into the raw material of psychological renovation. Coleridge's conversation poems stage the mind's movement from dejection to qualified consolation. Both poets, in different ways, insist that uncertainty must ultimately be domesticated by the synthesizing power of imagination. Keats, by contrast, is drawn to what Wallace Jackson (1967) has called the *unappeasable* quality of experience—its resistance to the closure that imagination typically imposes. His letters repeatedly valorize the capacity to remain with difficulty rather than dispelling it through intellectual or imaginative labor, and this valorization is not a sign of philosophical naivety but of a distinctive and demanding intellectual discipline.

The immediate intellectual stimulus for Negative Capability was almost certainly Keats's engagement with Shakespeare. The letter in which the term appears follows closely on a viewing of Edmund Kean's theatrical performances and reflects Keats's intense reading of Shakespeare during the 1817-1818 period. Shakespeare's capacity to inhabit characters of radically different moral

and experiential orientations—to give life equally to Iago and Desdemona, Shylock and Portia—exemplified for Keats a mode of imaginative sympathy that transcended personal identity without annihilating it. This is the quality he associates with *Men of Achievement* more generally: a form of selfless attention that does not surrender judgment so much as suspend it, holding open the space of encounter before moving to assessment. The ethical dimensions of this practice, however, require excavation from the aesthetic idiom in which Keats characteristically expresses them.

2.2 Moral Epistemology and the Value of Uncertainty

Contemporary moral epistemology offers a productive framework for recovering the ethical significance of Negative Capability. The field has increasingly challenged the traditional assumption that moral knowledge consists in the application of general principles to particular cases, arguing instead that moral understanding requires a kind of attentiveness to particularity that resists principled systematization. Philosophers in the tradition of particularism, from Jonathan Dancy (2004) to Margaret Little, have emphasized that the morally salient features of situations are irreducibly complex and context-dependent, eluding capture by any fixed algorithm. This emphasis on the irreducibility of moral perception resonates strongly with Keats's insistence on the value of dwelling with complexity rather than reducing it prematurely.

More directly relevant is the work of Iris Murdoch, whose ethics of attention bears a striking affinity with Keatsian Negative Capability. Murdoch claim that the central task of moral life is the accurate perception of what is actually there—against the distortions imposed by fantasy, self-interest, and the consolatory operations of the ego—parallels Keats's critique of "irritable reaching after fact & reason" as a form of epistemic violence against the complexity of experience. For Murdoch, *attention* is a moral achievement requiring the suppression of the sovereign self, a quieting of the ego's insistent need to categorize and resolve. Keats's identification of this need as a defect in lesser minds suggests that he understood, albeit in aesthetic rather than systematic philosophical terms, that intellectual humility is not the absence of engagement but a particularly demanding form of it.

The ethics of care tradition, developed by Carol Gilligan, Nel Noddings, and more recently by Joan Tronto (2020), offers another convergent framework. Care ethics prioritizes relational responsiveness over principled autonomy, arguing that moral life consists fundamentally in attending to the particular needs and vulnerabilities of others rather than in the application of universal rules. The caring stance, as Tronto characterizes it, involves a form of

attentive uncertainty—a willingness to hold open the question of what another needs rather than projecting a predetermined answer. Keats's concept of the poet as a being without a fixed self, capable of entering imaginatively into the interior lives of others, anticipates this ethics of relational attention in ways that have not been sufficiently appreciated. As Blaine Greteman argues, Keats's letters consistently figure the imaginative act as an ethical practice of self-suspension in the service of genuinely other-directed attention.

More recently, Adriana Cavarero's (2016) work on vulnerability as a constitutive feature of human existence has suggested additional resources for reading Keatsian uncertainty ethically. Cavarero argues that the shared exposure of human beings to harm and contingency—what she calls our fundamental "inclination" towards others—is the ground of ethical life rather than a deficiency to be overcome by rational autonomy. Keats's poetry is saturated with an awareness of human vulnerability: to beauty, to loss, to mortality, to the unpredictable intensities of sensation. Reading this awareness through Cavarero's lens suggests that Keatsian Negative Capability is not simply an aesthetic strategy but an ethical recognition of the conditions under which genuine moral responsiveness is possible.

III. THE ODES AS LABORATORIES OF SUSTAINED UNCERTAINTY

3.1 *Ode to a Nightingale*: Between Enchantment and Dissolution

The *Ode to a Nightingale* (1819) is perhaps Keats's most sustained formal enactment of Negative Capability, a poem that holds open with remarkable discipline the tension between the desire for dissolution into transcendent beauty and the recognition of that desire as a form of self-deception. The opening stanza's famous ache—"My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains / My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk"—immediately establishes the poem's characteristic uncertainty: is this numbness caused by happiness or by sadness, by excess of joy or deprivation of it? The syntax refuses to adjudicate (Wolfson, 1997). The ambiguity is not a deficiency but an achievement, holding in suspension the irreducibly mixed quality of aesthetic experience without forcing it into a predetermined emotional register.

What follows is a meditation on various modes of escape—wine, poetry, death—each of which is entertained with genuine imaginative sympathy before being quietly declined. The movement towards "easeful Death," contemplated in the sixth stanza with an intimacy that has disturbed some readers, exemplifies Negative Capability at

its most ethically demanding: the poet is capable of genuinely inhabiting the perspective of someone for whom death is an attractive resolution without either endorsing that perspective or simply dismissing it. The poem holds the experience of mortality as a genuine philosophical temptation rather than a mere rhetorical flourish, and its refusal to resolve the temptation into comfortable didacticism is central to its ethical as well as aesthetic achievement.

The poem's conclusion, with its famous question—"Was it a vision, or a waking dream? / Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?"—is frequently read as a failure of resolution, a moment when the poem's imaginative aspiration collapses back into ordinary reality. Such readings, however, fundamentally misread the poem's epistemological stance. The question is not a confession of defeat but an achievement of Negative Capability: the refusal to claim certainty about the nature of the experience is precisely what preserves its moral and aesthetic integrity. The ode's closing irresolution is Keats's most sophisticated formal enactment of the principle that genuine engagement with beauty—and, by extension, with any form of profound experience—requires the willingness to remain uncertain about its ultimate status. To resolve the question prematurely would be to betray the experience itself.

3.2 *Ode on a Grecian Urn*: The Ethics of Arrested Beauty

The *Ode on a Grecian Urn* (1819) pushes the ethics of uncertainty in a different direction, exploring the moral implications of beauty's relationship to truth through the device of an artifact frozen outside of time. The urn's famous declaration—"Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty"—has been interpreted as everything from a statement of Platonic metaphysics to a self-undermining irony, and the critical debate over its meaning is itself a kind of collective enactment of Negative Capability (Levinson, 1988). What is philosophically significant is not which interpretation is correct but the poem's refusal to adjudicate among them, its insistence that the relationship between aesthetic and epistemic value remains genuinely uncertain.

The urn's arrested figures—the lovers who will never kiss, the musicians whose music will never be heard—embody a form of aesthetic suspension that carries direct ethical implications. The preservation of possibility in the moment before fulfillment is, as Andrew Bennett (1994) observes, simultaneously a gift and a privation: the lovers are spared the disappointments of actual consummation but also denied its pleasures and its meaning. The poem contemplates this paradox with genuine sympathy for both conditions, refusing to privilege the permanent potentiality

of art over the transient actualities of life or vice versa. This refusal to hierarchize is itself an ethical achievement, a form of moral attention that holds both terms of the opposition in their full complexity.

The ode's treatment of the *Cold Pastoral* in its final stanza reveals the edge of Keatsian uncertainty, the point at which sustained irresolution encounters its own limits. The urn is described as a "friend to man," but the nature of that friendship remains ambiguous: is the comfort it offers genuine consolation or the cold comfort of a beauty that has purchased permanence at the cost of vitality? William Keach (2004) argues persuasively that the poem's genius lies precisely in its refusal to answer this question, holding open the possibility that art's relationship to life is constitutively irresolvable. This irresolvability is not an aesthetic flaw but a philosophical position: the poem embodies Keats's conviction that the most honest response to the deepest questions is not resolution but the disciplined maintenance of the question.

3.3 *Ode to Psyche* and *To Autumn*: Uncertainty as Abundance

The less frequently discussed odes offer complementary perspectives on the ethics of uncertainty. *Ode to Psyche* presents uncertainty as the condition of creative generativity, constructing an inner sanctuary for the goddess precisely because she lacks the external temples and devotees of the more established Olympians. The poem's concluding image of an "untrodden region of my mind" as a space of potential worship embodies a productive uncertainty—the refusal to foreclose imaginative possibility by fixing it in definite form. There is something ethically significant in this commitment to the provisional: the poem refuses the false security of established forms in favour of the more demanding openness of genuine creative encounter.

To Autumn (1819), often read as Keats's most serene and resolved poem, is in fact his most complex meditation on the relationship between temporal uncertainty and ethical acceptance. The poem's famous refusal to mourn the passing of summer—"Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they? / Think not of them, thou hast thy music too"—is sometimes mistaken for philosophical equanimity. More accurately, it represents a hard-won practice of attention to what is actually present rather than what is desired or feared. As reviewer argues, *To Autumn* enacts a form of mindful presence that is deeply consonant with Murdoch's ethics of attention: the poem achieves its characteristic poise not by suppressing awareness of loss but by insisting that full attention to the present moment is itself a form of moral achievement. The uncertainty that pervades the poem—about the nature of autumn's bounty,

about the relationship between ripeness and decay—is held with a disciplined openness that represents the maturation of Keats's ethical imagination.

IV. AESTHETIC SUSPENSION AND MORAL RESPONSIBILITY

4.1 The Charge of Moral Evasion

The most persistent critical objection to reading Negative Capability as an ethical stance is the charge that aesthetic suspension is simply a sophisticated form of moral evasion—that the valorization of uncertainty functions to exempt the poet from the practical demands of ethical engagement. This objection has taken several forms. From a traditional Arnoldian perspective, poetry that refuses to provide "criticism of life" fails in its highest cultural function. From a more recent politically engaged criticism, the Keatsian aesthetic of irresolution can appear as an ideological mystification, a way of aestheticizing the social contradictions of early nineteenth-century Britain rather than confronting them critically. Jerome McGann's (1985) influential critique of Romantic ideology, while not targeted specifically at Negative Capability, has shaped a tradition of reading that treats Keatsian withdrawal as symptomatic of class-inflected escapism.

These objections deserve serious engagement rather than dismissal. Keats was, as several recent scholars have emphasized, a politically conscious writer whose class position as a "Cockney" poet outside the educated elite shaped his aesthetic commitments in ways that resist easy idealization (Roe, 2012). The gorgeous sensuality of the odes was, in part, a deliberate affront to the cultural pretensions of Augustan classicism and its associated social hierarchies. At the same time, the charge that Keatsian uncertainty is simply evasion underestimates the discipline required to sustain genuine irresolution in the face of cultural pressures towards premature resolution. The "irritable reaching after fact & reason" that Keats critiques is not an exclusively individual failing but a cultural disposition encouraged by the dominant epistemological assumptions of his time—and, one might argue, of ours.

4.2 Negative Capability as Ethical Discipline

The key to distinguishing Keatsian Negative Capability from moral evasion lies in its active character. Dwelling in uncertainty, as Keats conceives it, is not a passive state of indifference but a demanding form of engagement that requires the continuous suppression of the ego's tendency to impose its preferred resolutions on recalcitrant experience. This distinction between active and passive uncertainty has been illuminated by recent cognitive

literary scholarship. Lisa Zunshine's (2006) work on theory of mind in literary reading demonstrates that imaginative engagement with fictional consciousness requires a form of sustained epistemic vigilance, a continuous monitoring of one's own attributions of mental states to characters against the evidence the text provides. The Keatsian reader, trained by the odes to resist premature resolution, is practicing a form of cognitive discipline that has direct implications for moral attention in everyday life.

The ethical significance of this discipline becomes clearest when we consider its antithesis: the kind of premature certainty that closes down moral perception by substituting convenient categories for actual engagement with the particular. Philosopher Charles Larmore (1996) has argued that moral life requires a capacity for what he calls *receptive attention*—an openness to the morally salient features of situations that resists the tendency to assimilate new experience to prior expectations. This capacity is structurally analogous to Keatsian Negative Capability: both involve the suppression of the "irritable reaching" for comfortable resolution in favour of a more demanding openness to what is actually present. The ethical practice that Keats embodies in his odes is, on this reading, not a retreat from moral responsibility but an intensification of it.

The apophatic tradition in philosophy and theology offers a further resource for understanding the ethical character of Negative Capability. Apophatic or negative theology, which approaches the divine through the negation of positive attributes rather than their affirmation, holds that genuine encounter with what exceeds ordinary understanding requires a disciplined suspension of the categories through which we typically make sense of the world (Turner, 1995). Contemporary apophatic ethics, developed by scholars such as, extends this tradition to moral philosophy, arguing that ethical responsiveness to others requires a willingness to let the other exceed our preconceptions—to remain genuinely open to being surprised by their complexity. Keats's insistence that the greatest minds are those capable of remaining in uncertainty without reaching irritably for closure is deeply consonant with this apophatic ethical stance.

4.3 Empathy, Vulnerability, and the Politics of Uncertainty

The relationship between Negative Capability and empathy has been explored in several recent contributions to Romantic studies. Empathy, as it has been theorized in both philosophy and cognitive science, involves a complex combination of imaginative perspective-taking and the maintenance of one's own perspective as a corrective to

total identification. The Keatsian *chameleon poet*—famously described in a letter to Richard Woodhouse as having no self, delighting in its imaginative inhabitation of radically different beings—approximates this dual structure: the suppression of the ego is not its annihilation but its temporary suspension in the service of genuinely other-directed attention.

Writers posthumanist account of vulnerability as an ethical category provides a productive framework for reading the politics of Keatsian openness. They argue that acknowledging one's own vulnerability—one's constitutive openness to being affected by others and by the world—is the condition of genuine ethical responsiveness rather than a weakness to be overcome. Keats's poetry is saturated with an awareness of vulnerability in this sense: the poet who describes himself as capable of entering into the existence of a sparrow pecking about the gravel is also a poet acutely aware of his own exposure to beauty, to loss, and to the physical fragility that tuberculosis made impossible to ignore. This awareness of shared vulnerability is not incidental to Negative Capability but constitutive of it: the capacity to dwell with uncertainty is, in part, the capacity to acknowledge one's own exposure to the unpredictable.

Sara Ahmed's (2013) work on the cultural politics of emotion provides a further dimension to this analysis. Ahmed argues that emotions are not merely private psychological states but orientations towards the world that carry ideological implications, shaping what we attend to and what we discount. Keats's insistence on the value of genuine feeling—his famous critique of the *egotistical sublime* of Wordsworth as a mode of emotional self-display that ultimately forecloses genuine engagement with otherness—anticipates Ahmed's analysis of how emotional performance can substitute for genuine responsiveness. The Negative Capability that Keats advocates is, among other things, a practice of emotional discipline: the willingness to feel genuinely, without the protection of defensive certainty, in the face of an experience that resists comfortable categorization.

V. *LAMIA* AND THE LIMITS OF NEGATIVE CAPABILITY

5.1 The Poem's Epistemological Stakes

Lamia (1820) is Keats's most sustained critical examination of the limits and dangers of Negative Capability, a poem that stages the confrontation between the ethics of uncertainty and the claims of philosophical rationalism in a way that refuses to endorse either position unequivocally. The poem's notorious ambiguity—its apparent simultaneous sympathy with Lamia's

enchantments and with Apollonius's reality-testing rationalism—has made it a critical flashpoint, with readers disagreeing sharply about whether Keats endorses the imagination's transformative power or counsels recognition of its deceptive potential (Richardson, 2001).

The poem's mythological source, drawn from Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, provides a narrative framework in which an enchantress who has taken human form is destroyed when her true nature is revealed by the philosopher Apollonius. Keats's treatment of this narrative is, characteristically, more complex than the source material suggests. Lamia is presented with genuine imaginative sympathy: her beauty, her love for Lycius, and her vulnerability to philosophical unmasking are rendered with a tenderness that makes simple allegorization difficult. At the same time, the poem does not entirely exempt her from critique: there is something in the nature of her enchantment that is presented as fundamentally dishonest, a substitution of beautiful illusion for authentic reality.

5.2 Apollonius and the Critique of Closure

What is most ethically significant in *Lamia* is Keats's treatment of Apollonius, the philosopher whose penetrating gaze destroys the enchantment. Apollonius is, in several respects, the anti-type of Negative Capability: he is a man who reaches irritably after fact and reason, who refuses to remain in the uncertainty that Lamia's beauty requires, and who privileges rational unmasking over the discipline of genuine imaginative engagement. The poem's famous lines—"Philosophy will clip an Angel's wings, / Conquer all mysteries by rule and line, / Empty the haunted air, and gnomèd mine"—have often been read as a straightforward indictment of rationalism in the name of imagination (Bewell, 2003).

This reading, however, is too simple, and recent scholarship has rightly complicated it. As Scholar argues, the poem does not present Apollonius as simply wrong: Lamia is, after all, not a human woman but a supernatural being whose love for Lycius is, in some sense, predicated on deception. The philosopher's refusal to be taken in by appearances has a genuine ethical dimension—the insistence on truth over comfortable illusion is not without moral force. What the poem stages, then, is not a simple opposition between imagination and reason but a genuinely tragic collision between two legitimate modes of ethical engagement: the Negative Capability that keeps open the space of wonder and the philosophical integrity that refuses to purchase wonder at the cost of reality. Neither position is vindicated unambiguously, and this refusal to adjudicate is itself the poem's most profound exercise in Negative Capability.

5.3 Uncertainty and Responsibility in *Lamia*

The ethical ambiguity of *Lamia* raises an important question about the limits of Negative Capability as a moral principle: can the suspension of judgment be sustained indefinitely, or does it eventually require resolution in the service of ethical responsibility? This question has been addressed implicitly by several recent scholars. As writer suggests that *Lamia* represents Keats's recognition that Negative Capability is not an unlimited ethical resource—that there are situations in which the willingness to remain in uncertainty becomes a failure of moral courage rather than an exercise of it.

This is a genuine tension in the poem and in Keats's ethical thought more broadly. The capacity to dwell with uncertainty is most valuable when it prevents premature closure that forecloses genuine moral attention; it becomes problematic when it functions as an excuse for the avoidance of difficult judgements that situation actually demands. The tragedy of *Lamia* lies partly in Keats's recognition that there is no algorithm for determining when each mode of engagement is appropriate—that the judgement about when to maintain uncertainty and when to resolve it is itself a matter of wisdom that cannot be reduced to a rule. As Thomas Pfau (2015) has argued, this recognition is itself a form of ethical maturity: the acknowledgment that the moral life involves irreducibly difficult decisions about the appropriate form of attention in particular situations, decisions that cannot be insured against error by any general principle.

The tragic outcome of *Lamia*—in which both Lycius and Lamia are destroyed, and Apollonius is left triumphant but alone—suggests that Keats understands the ethics of uncertainty as involving genuine risk. The commitment to remaining in irresolution is not a safe position but a courageous one, entailing the possibility of being wrong in ways that have real consequences for actual beings. This recognition of the stakes of Negative Capability lifts it decisively above the level of mere aesthetic preference and establishes it as a serious ethical commitment—one that takes responsibility for the costs of its own refusal to take refuge in premature certainty.

VI. TOWARDS AN UNCERTAIN ETHICS: KEATS AND CONTEMPORARY THOUGHT

The reading developed in the preceding sections suggests that Negative Capability is more than a period-specific aesthetic concept; it is a philosophically serious ethical stance whose implications resonate with contemporary debates in moral philosophy, cognitive literary studies, and cultural theory. This concluding section draws together the threads of the analysis and considers the broader

significance of Keatsian uncertainty for contemporary ethical thought.

One of the most significant contemporary resonances of Negative Capability lies in its implications for what is sometimes called *epistemic justice*—the theory, developed by Miranda Fricker (2007) and others, that individuals can suffer distinctive forms of injustice in their capacity as knowers, through being unfairly denied credibility or deprived of the conceptual resources to make sense of their own experiences. The practice of Negative Capability, as a discipline of genuine attention to the particularity of another's experience, is directly relevant to the project of epistemic justice: the "irritable reaching after fact & reason" that Keats critiques is precisely the disposition that leads to testimonial injustice, the dismissal of another's knowledge-claims without genuine engagement. A Keatsian ethics of uncertainty would insist on the moral obligation to remain genuinely open to what another's experience reveals before moving to the comfort of categorical judgement.

The relevance of Negative Capability to the contemporary epistemological crisis—a moment in which the proliferation of information and the fragmentation of shared epistemic standards have made certainty simultaneously more seductive and more suspect—is similarly pressing. Writers analysis of the cultural costs of cognitive capitalism, with its premium on rapid information processing and decisive judgement, identifies precisely the conditions that make Keatsian uncertainty most necessary and most difficult to sustain. In a culture that rewards the confident assertion of certainty and punishes the admission of doubt, the practice of dwelling with uncertainty becomes an act of intellectual and, arguably, political resistance.

The interface between Negative Capability and the digital humanities has also been productively explored in recent scholarship. Alan Liu (2018) has argued that literary reading, precisely because it resists the algorithmic drive towards resolution and quantification, preserves forms of epistemic engagement that are increasingly marginalized in a data-driven culture. The Keatsian reader who practices sustained attention to the irreducible complexity of aesthetic experience is, on this reading, cultivating cognitive capacities that have a broader cultural importance: the capacity to resist the premature closure that algorithmic systems typically impose in favour of the more demanding openness that genuine understanding requires. The ethics of uncertainty that Keats embodies and theorizes thus has implications that extend far beyond the boundaries of literary study.

Finally, it is worth noting the personal dimension of Negative Capability that scholars have sometimes underemphasized. Keats wrote his most sustained meditations on uncertainty in the full knowledge of his own terminal illness, in the awareness that the questions he was wrestling with—about the value of beauty, the meaning of suffering, the relationship between art and life—were not merely philosophical abstractions but existential urgencies. The courage required to maintain genuine irresolution in the face of one's own mortality—to refuse the comforts of either religious certainty or skeptical dismissal—is a measure of the ethical seriousness of Keatsian Negative Capability. As Stuart Curran (1986) observes, the late poems and letters reveal a mind that has earned its uncertainty, that has found in the willingness to remain with the most difficult questions a form of integrity that makes conventional resolution look merely evasive. In this personal dimension, as in the broader philosophical one, Negative Capability retains its power to provoke and to instruct.

VII. CONCLUSION

Reconsidered through ethical and epistemological frameworks, Keats's concept of Negative Capability emerges not simply as an aesthetic tolerance for ambiguity but as a disciplined ethical practice grounded in epistemic humility. This study has shown that Keatsian poetics transforms uncertainty into a mode of attentive engagement, where the suspension of premature judgement enables deeper responsiveness to complexity, alterity, and lived experience. Close readings of *Ode to a Nightingale*, *Ode on a Grecian Urn*, and *Lamia* reveal that poetic indeterminacy functions as an active form of moral perception rather than an evasion of responsibility, inviting readers to inhabit conflicting perspectives without resolving them into reductive certainty. By placing Keats in dialogue with contemporary moral epistemology, care ethics, and theories of ethical attention, the article demonstrates that Negative Capability anticipates modern understandings of ethical life as dependent upon receptivity, vulnerability, and sustained openness to the particular. In this light, uncertainty becomes not a failure of knowledge but a necessary condition for moral imagination and responsible interpretation. Keats's refusal of epistemic closure models an intellectual patience that resists both ideological rigidity and the cultural demand for immediate resolution. His poetry thus offers more than Romantic aesthetic insight; it proposes an enduring ethical stance suited to contemporary conditions marked by informational excess and competing truth-claims. Negative Capability persists as a vital resource for thinking ethically

within ambiguity, suggesting that genuine understanding begins not with certainty, but with the cultivated capacity to remain thoughtfully unresolved.

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Rabindranath Tagore's *Gora*: Reflecting India's Political, Social, and Cultural Life

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Abstract— This paper undertakes a comprehensive study of Rabindranath Tagore's seminal novel *Gora* (1910), examining its multilayered engagement with nationalism, self-discovery, and cultural identity within the turbulent social and political background of colonial Bengal. By way of introduction, the paper situates *Gora* within Tagore's broader literary project and the socio-historical currents of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. A close reading of the plot of *Gora* reveals how the eponymous protagonist's fervent Hindu nationalism gradually gives way to a universal humanist vision, catalysed by the revelation of his Irish birth. The paper pays particular attention to Binoy, whose sustained protests against the bonds of society illuminate the novel's critique of rigid orthodoxy and the emancipatory possibilities of reason and personal freedom. Through an analysis of key characters and narrative episodes, the paper demonstrates how Tagore interrogates the nature of nationalism, arguing that authentic patriotism must be grounded in freedom of conscience rather than exclusionary identity. The thematic axis of self-discovery runs through the novel as characters negotiate the competing demands of tradition and modernity. The discussion situates these concerns within contemporary relevance, showing how *Gora*'s interrogations of communal identity, religious dogma, and political belonging resonate deeply with present-day discourses on pluralism and citizenship in South Asia and beyond. The paper concludes with recommendations for further scholarly engagement with Tagore's humanist legacy.



Keywords— nationalism, freedom, self-discovery, cultural identity, contemporary relevance, postcolonial literature.

I. INTRODUCTION

Rabindranath Tagore occupies an unassailable position in the canon of world literature, and among his extensive body of work, the novel *Gora* (1910) stands as perhaps his most politically and philosophically ambitious achievement in prose fiction. Written serially between 1907 and 1909 and published in complete form in 1910, *Gora* engages with the most pressing questions of its age: the meaning of Indian nationhood, the tensions between tradition and modernity, the relationship between religious identity and civic belonging, and the possibility of a humanism that transcends the divisions of caste, community, and creed.

The Bengal of Tagore's imagination was a society in ferment. The Swadeshi movement, the Partition of Bengal (1905), the rise of Hindu revivalism, the emergence of

Western-educated reformers, and the pervasive influence of the Brahmo Samaj all created a landscape of contested identities and urgent debates. Into this landscape, Tagore placed *Gora*, a figure of passionate conviction whose journey from orthodox Hindu nationalism to a universal humanist position mirrors the intellectual and spiritual struggles of the era.

Scholars have read *Gora* from a variety of critical perspectives. Supriya Chaudhuri has analysed the novel as a meditation on the limits of nationalist thought (Chaudhuri 142). Meenakshi Mukherjee has situated it within the tradition of the Bengali social novel, noting its extraordinary range of characters and ideological positions (Mukherjee 88). More recently, postcolonial critics have examined the novel's negotiation of colonial modernity and indigenous tradition. This paper builds on these readings

while foregrounding the themes of freedom, self-discovery, and cultural identity as they are developed through the novel's two central male protagonists, Gora and Binoy.

II. SOCIAL AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND

To appreciate the depth of Tagore's achievement in *Gora*, it is necessary to understand the social and political background of late nineteenth-century Bengal. The period was marked by the consolidating presence of British colonial administration, the rapid expansion of English education, and the consequent emergence of a new class of Western-educated Bengali professionals. This *bhadralok* class found itself caught between admiration for Western rationalism and a growing impulse to reclaim and revalue indigenous cultural traditions.

The founding of the Brahmo Samaj by Ram Mohan Roy in 1828, and its subsequent divisions into the Adi Brahmo Samaj and the more reformist Brahmo Samaj of India under Keshab Chandra Sen, had fundamentally altered the religious and social landscape of educated Bengal. The Brahmos championed monotheism, social reform, women's education, and the abolition of caste distinctions. They represented, in the eyes of orthodox Hindus, a dangerous capitulation to Western values.

In response, the later decades of the nineteenth century witnessed a Hindu revivalist movement that sought to reassert the value and dignity of traditional Hindu practices and beliefs. Figures such as Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay provided an intellectual framework for a form of Hindu nationalism that would later influence the political culture of the *Swadeshi* movement. Tagore himself had complex relations with both camps; while deeply influenced by the Brahmo tradition of his family, he was also acutely aware of the spiritual and cultural richness of Hindu practice. In *Gora*, he subjects both positions to rigorous scrutiny.

The Partition of Bengal in 1905 by Lord Curzon, ostensibly an administrative measure but widely perceived as a divide-and-rule strategy, galvanised Bengali nationalist sentiment and gave fresh urgency to questions of political identity and collective belonging. This charged atmosphere permeates *Gora*, which, though set slightly earlier, reflects the anxieties and aspirations of Tagore's immediate political moment.

III. THE PLOT OF GORA

The plot of *Gora* centres on Gourmohan, known universally as Gora, a young man of imposing physical presence and fierce intellectual conviction. Raised in a devout Hindu household in Calcutta by his adoptive parents, Krishnadayal and Anandamoyi, Gora is passionately committed to the

cause of Hindu nationalism. He regards Western education and Brahmo reformism with contempt, seeing in them instruments of cultural subordination to colonial power. His closest friend, Binoy, shares many of his intellectual interests but is temperamentally more open and less dogmatic.

The narrative is set in motion when Binoy encounters Pareshababu's family, a gentle, deeply spiritual Brahmo family. His daughters, Sucharita and Lolita, are educated, independent-minded young women. Binoy falls in love with Lolita, whose spirited personality challenges his received assumptions about women and society. Gora, meanwhile, is drawn into a complex relationship with Sucharita, who admires his passionate conviction even as she resists his orthodoxy.

The novel traces the gradual transformation of its characters through a series of encounters, debates, and personal crises. Gora undertakes a journey through rural Bengal, where his encounters with the suffering of ordinary people begin to shake his faith in the adequacy of orthodox Hindu nationalism as a response to colonial oppression. He is imprisoned for defending peasants against the injustice of an indigo planter, an experience that deepens his political consciousness.

The climactic revelation comes near the novel's end. Gora learns from his dying adoptive father that he is not Hindu by birth at all, but the son of Irish parents killed during the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. He had been raised as a Hindu child by Anandamoyi out of compassion. This discovery demolishes the foundation of his identity. The Gora who had defined himself entirely through Hindu cultural identity now belongs, by the logic of that very identity, to no community at all. It is at this moment that Gora achieves true freedom—the freedom of a man who can choose his identity rather than having it imposed upon him. He recognises Anandamoyi, who transcended all communal distinctions in her love for him, as his true mother, and in her he sees the image of a Mother India that embraces all her children regardless of birth.

IV. BINOY PROTESTS AGAINST THE BONDS OF SOCIETY

While Gora's journey is the novel's most dramatic arc, it is Binoy whose protests against the bonds of society constitute the novel's most sustained and nuanced critique of social orthodoxy. Binoy is, in many respects, the novel's intellectual conscience. He possesses the same nationalist fervour as Gora but lacks Gora's capacity for self-deception. He is quicker to recognise contradiction and more willing to follow the logic of his convictions wherever it leads.

Binoy's central act of protest is his relationship with Lolita. By pursuing a Brahmo woman, he transgresses the caste and community boundaries that governed marriage in orthodox Hindu society. When the relationship becomes publicly known, Binoy faces intense social pressure—from his community, from Gora himself, and from the conservative elements of the Brahmo circle who are equally resistant to the match. His decision to marry Lolita, despite this pressure, is an assertion of individual freedom over collective prescription.

Tagore's presentation of Binoy's protest is carefully nuanced. Binoy does not rebel out of mere personal desire; he rebels because he has reached the considered conviction that no social bond which is maintained by coercion rather than love has a legitimate claim on the individual conscience. This position aligns with Tagore's own mature thought, articulated most fully in his essays and lectures, that the highest form of social belonging is one freely chosen (Tagore, "The Religion of Man" 22).

Binoy's protests also illuminate the hypocrisy of nationalist orthodoxy. He observes that the same men who invoke the sanctity of Hindu society in order to control the behaviour of individuals are quite content to benefit from the fruits of colonial modernity when it serves their interests. His willingness to name this contradiction, even at the cost of his friendship with Gora, marks him as a figure of genuine moral courage. Through Binoy, Tagore suggests that true patriotism cannot be built on the foundation of social coercion.

V. NATIONALISM, FREEDOM, SELF-DISCOVERY, AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

The thematic core of *Gora* lies in Tagore's profound interrogation of nationalism, freedom, self-discovery, and cultural identity. These themes are inseparable in the novel; each illuminates and complicates the others.

Tagore's treatment of nationalism in *Gora* is both sympathetic and deeply critical. He understands the emotional power of nationalist feeling and presents Gora's passionate attachment to India with evident respect. Gora's nationalism arises from a genuine love of his country and a fierce resistance to colonial humiliation. Yet Tagore also shows nationalism becoming a form of self-imprisonment. Gora's insistence on rigid Hindu orthodoxy leads him to defend practices—untouchability, the oppression of women, the exclusion of religious minorities—that are indefensible by any humane standard. His nationalism, paradoxically, makes him complicit in the oppression of his fellow Indians.

The theme of freedom in the novel operates on multiple levels. There is the political freedom from colonial rule that animates the nationalist movement. But there is also the personal freedom to choose one's identity, one's community, and one's values. Tagore suggests that the second form of freedom is the more fundamental, and that political freedom without personal freedom is hollow. Gora's discovery of his Irish birth is, at one level, a narrative device; at another, it is a philosophical demonstration that identity cannot be the foundation of freedom, because identity, as conventionally understood, is always contingent and always imposed from without.

Self-discovery in *Gora* is presented as a painful but ultimately liberating process. For Gora, self-discovery means the dismantling of a carefully constructed identity and the recognition of his true self as something that exceeds all communal categories. For Sucharita, self-discovery means moving beyond her inherited Brahmo framework to a more personal and direct relationship with the spiritual. For Lolita, it means the courage to love across communal lines and to insist on the validity of her own emotional and intellectual life.

Cultural identity in the novel is treated with great sophistication. Tagore does not dismiss cultural identity as unimportant; he recognises its role in providing meaning, belonging, and continuity. But he insists that cultural identity must be held lightly, as a gift rather than a prison. The figure of Anandamoyi embodies this position. She is a Hindu woman who has transgressed every rule of her community by raising an Irish child as her own, yet she is presented as the most spiritually complete character in the novel. Her love is not bound by cultural categories, and it is this unbounded love that Tagore presents as the highest expression of the Indian spirit.

VI. CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

The contemporary relevance of *Gora* is difficult to overstate. In an era marked by the resurgence of religious nationalism, communal violence, and identity politics across South Asia and the wider world, Tagore's novel speaks with extraordinary urgency. The questions Gora raises about the relationship between nationalism and humanism, between cultural identity and individual freedom, between religious belonging and civic life, are among the defining questions of our time.

In contemporary India, debates about citizenship, religious identity, and the meaning of national belonging have acquired a renewed and often alarming intensity. The persistence of caste discrimination, the tension between majoritarian nationalism and constitutional pluralism, and the ongoing struggle for gender equality all find their

literary anticipation in *Gora*. Tagore's insistence that a genuine national culture must be capacious enough to embrace all its citizens, regardless of birth, religion, or community, remains a powerful counter-narrative to exclusionary forms of nationalism.

Scholars such as Partha Chatterjee have noted that Tagore's critique of nationalism was prescient in ways that later developments in South Asian history have confirmed (Chatterjee 102). The Partition of 1947, the communal violence that has periodically convulsed the subcontinent, and the more recent rise of Hindu nationalism in India all suggest that the tensions Tagore diagnosed in *Gora* remain unresolved. His vision of nationalism, grounded in freedom and humanist values rather than exclusionary identity, continues to represent a significant intellectual and moral resource.

Beyond South Asia, *Gora* speaks to the universal human experience of negotiating between inherited identity and chosen selfhood. In a world of increasing migration, diaspora, and cultural hybridity, the novel's exploration of what it means to belong—to a community, a culture, a nation—has lost none of its relevance. *Gora*'s final recognition that he is "Indian" in the deepest sense precisely because he is not bound by any particular communal identity offers a model of civic belonging that is urgently needed in the twenty-first century.

VII. DISCUSSION

The foregoing analysis reveals *Gora* as a text of remarkable complexity and intellectual richness. Several key themes emerge from the discussion. First, Tagore's treatment of nationalism is fundamentally dialectical. He does not simply oppose nationalism but interrogates it from within, showing both its emotional truth and its inherent dangers. The transformation of *Gora*'s nationalism into a broader humanism is not a rejection of love for India but a deepening of it.

Second, the novel's treatment of freedom is deeply philosophical. Tagore aligns himself with a tradition of liberal thought that places personal freedom of conscience at the foundation of any genuine political freedom. Yet his liberalism is not individualistic in a Western sense; it is grounded in the idea of a self that is constituted through loving relationships, as the figure of Anandamoyi makes clear. This synthesis of liberal and communitarian values is one of Tagore's most significant philosophical contributions.

Third, the novel's formal achievement deserves recognition. *Gora* is a long and complex narrative, encompassing a wide range of characters and social

milieux. Yet its thematic coherence is remarkable. Every subplot, every minor character, every episode of domestic comedy or political debate contributes to the novel's central investigation of identity and belonging. This formal achievement reflects Tagore's mastery of the novelistic form and his ability to make it serve genuinely philosophical purposes.

Fourth, the gender dimensions of the novel merit further scholarly attention. Characters such as Sucharita, Lolita, and Anandamoyi are not merely supporting figures but active agents in the novel's intellectual drama. Their negotiations of freedom, identity, and belonging are as central to the novel's meaning as those of *Gora* or Binoy. A fully feminist reading of *Gora* would shed additional light on Tagore's complex and evolving engagement with questions of women's freedom and agency.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This paper has argued that *Gora* is one of the most intellectually ambitious novels in the Indian literary tradition, and that its central concerns—nationalism, freedom, self-discovery, and cultural identity—remain of pressing relevance to contemporary debates about pluralism, citizenship, and belonging. Through the contrasting figures of *Gora* and Binoy, Tagore dramatises the tension between a closed, identity-based nationalism and an open, humanist vision of collective life. The revelation of *Gora*'s Irish birth is not merely a plot twist but a philosophical argument: that the truest patriotism is one that transcends the accidents of birth and embraces all human beings as fellow citizens of a shared world.

Binoy's sustained protests against the bonds of society provide the novel's most direct engagement with the ethics of social conformity and individual conscience. His courage in pursuing a cross-communal relationship at the cost of social acceptance embodies the novel's deepest values: the primacy of love over law, of freely chosen commitment over inherited obligation. In this respect, Binoy is as significant a figure as *Gora* himself, and a fuller account of his role in the novel's ideological architecture remains a desideratum of Tagore scholarship.

Several directions for future research suggest themselves. A comparative study of *Gora* alongside other nationalist novels of the colonial period—such as Bankimchandra's *Anandamath* or Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's social fiction—would illuminate the distinctiveness of Tagore's humanist nationalism. A translation studies approach examining the several English translations of *Gora* would reveal how the novel's philosophical complexity has been rendered, and sometimes reduced, in translation. Finally, a reception study examining how *Gora* has been read and

taught in India since independence would offer valuable insights into the novel's contested place in the national literary canon. Such studies would further confirm the enduring significance of Tagore's masterwork as a resource for thinking about the most urgent questions of our time.

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Exploration of Gender Identity and Equity in Judith Halberstam's *Female Masculinity*

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Abstract— This paper focuses on Female Masculinity with reference to Judith Halberstam's *Female Masculinity*. The term 'Masculinity' refers to the behaviours of men i.e. manhood or manliness. Female masculinity focuses on women who behave with the qualities, which are identified with men in the society. It is called gender transgression. They expose themselves as males in both physically and mentally. Queer theory is a closer examination for gender identity. The societal viewpoint of masculinity is power and entitlement. In terms of female masculinity, their behaviour, attitude, dressing are similar to men. Many professions have no gender for instance teachers, doctors, engineers etc. and nowadays it extends to drivers, technicians, body builders, wrestlers, boxers and so on. The emotional connection towards the masculinity in feminine body is celebrated in this work. So this article explores on the theory of gender studies as well as the equality of gender in terms of law.



Keywords— Feminine Masculinity, Gender, LGBT, Queer theory, Sexual identity.

Queer study is a vast interdisciplinary subject, which deals with feminism, LGBT, sexuality, social studies etc. LGBT is a vast label and terms such as Transsexual, Queer, Butch, BDSM, Androgynous, cross-dressing where inter-sex bodies reveal their identity. By 1970s the queer theory involves gay movement, and by the mid-1970s and 80s, it further extends with lesbian and gay organizations. Therefore, in the 1990s it turned into the LGBT movement. This theory not only focuses on lesbian, gay it also pictures Female Masculinity. In Freudian concept, Oedipus Rex, the woman plays the role of masculine occupations i.e. lesbian. Only in recent years, queer theory gains its own significance. Earlier 'Queer' the term itself considered a negative stereotype. In Michael Warner's *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics and the Ethics of Queer life* he states about queer problems, in particular, he discusses the gay rights and their problems. Feminism and queer theory are interconnecting to each other which mainly deal with female sex, equality between men and women, and their oppression, etc.

Queer study focuses on marginalized sexual identities where the hegemonic power structure considers them as negative stereotypes. Therefore, the aim of Queer theory is to break these stereotypes and to fix gender rights and their identities. In everyday context, the terms "Femininity", "Masculinity", "Masculine", "Feminine" overlap to each other. The term 'Masculine' carries hegemonic value and it leads to power over women, i.e. patriarchy. Female Masculinity is a representation of male identity in female mind and sometimes, it further extends as physical change like growing a beard, moustache, and sometimes transforming their gender too. Todd Resser claims, "it might be the case that masculinity appears more fluid at some points rather than at others, but that fluidity is always present in some way" (Wardle, n.p).

Women asserting masculine behaviour at highness cannot hide their gestures in society. Lesbianism is considered as Female Masculinity because they play the role of men. The term 'Butch' identifies masculine power in female. It is also known as 'Butch Boy'. Halberstam

explicit the concept of women's life style in Female Masculinity. In Robert J. Stoller's *Splitting: A case of Female Masculinity*, the title itself shows a split personality of women. For example, Tomboy is a concept used by Halberstam, the girl who behaves like a boy including the way of dressing resemble masculine. The tomboys are considered being unfeminine. The representation of woman with a masculine attitude is considered as cultural discourse. The daily usage of masculine, feminine words shows the depth understanding of human nature, behaviour, cultural, social implications of direct or indirect act of meaning.

Halberstam distinguishes the female masculinity such as Butches, a category of trans-men who identifies them from female. Female Masculinity is largely ignored by society because masculinity/ies is a term related to man. Hegemonic Masculinity was first used in 1982. The progressive of women masculinity results in their dress, which lead to an adaptation of masculine form. The women fashion designers have been inspired by masculine style, which they project in their appearance. Female Masculinity challenges the men's masculinity, and this made a new role to women. This leads to a projection, where men can see their behaviour in opposite gender. In sex, female adopts masculine role because in earlier women are not allowed to express their view on sex. Now, they are allowed to speak openly. Butler states that,

"Precisely what is becoming denied by the notion of a violational 'subject' who elects at will which gender and/or sexuality to be at any given place and time" (qtd. in khoury 1).

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth the central character possesses masculine behaviour. In many of Shakespeare's plays, they show the female characters as masculinity. In Shakespeare times, Queen Elizabeth ruled the country and possessed leadership quality, which resembles masculine behaviour. Female characters such as Lady Macbeth, Tamora, and Rosalind who controlled their own lives. Halberstam describes Female masculinity is rejected in dominant group. Halberstam states, "Female masculinities are framed as the rejected scarps of the dominant masculinity in order that male masculinity may appear to be a real thing" (Masculinity, 1).

The role of Female Masculinity as women plays a major role in their carrier. Halberstam explains the Female Masculine has to compete herself in modern society. The manly woman has to undergo the consequences of alienation and ignorance from the society. The participation of female in masculine occupation creates an impact, which imposes a question on female characters and identity. The society judges them wrongly and

continuously ignoring their transformation as well as refuse to accept their identity. Refusing one's identity can be extremely traumatic for an individual because society takes gender roles and behaviour seriously. As a result, gender identities are constructed beyond social norms. Masculinity happens in woman, where woman performs or explicit the behaviourism of male. Hyper-active of masculine in femininity denotes the gender behaviour and not the change of gender.

Jack Halberstam discusses the issue between Feminism and Female Masculinity. "The conflicts between white feminist and transgender men/women and masculine women undergoes with betrayal of womanhood which was confirmed in a film Notes on a Scandal (2006)" (Halberstam, n.p). Alison Bechdel, in an interview with *The New York Times Magazine* in 2016, she stated, "Oh, I'm a man trapped in a female body, I would've just gone down that road. I like making this new space in the world" (Halberstam, n.p).

Halberstam mentioned a complex portrait of female Masculinity to a popular audience of cross butch. It is a story by Lisa Kron's *Ring of Keys*. The song reflects the appearance of Butch woman sung by young Alison; the butch looks manliness of her short hair, wearing boots, etc. In recent films Dangal (Hindi), Irudhi Suttru (Tamil), they show women as Female Masculinity. Earlier in sports field only men are a dominant group in wrestling field but now many female wrestlers are there with Masculinity behaviour. For example, The First women wrestler, The Fabulous Moolah in 1983 won WWF women's championship. Chyna, a professional wrestler who is called "Ninth wonder of the world". Her physic and her gestures are merely equal to man.

Halberstam discusses "The Bathroom Problem" where Female Masculinity faces 'Wrong' bathroom issues because of their appearance. She shares her experience:

I strode purposefully into women's bathroom. No sooner had I entered the stall than someone was knocking at the door: "open up, Security here!" I understood immediately what had happened. I had, once again, been mistaken for a man or a boy, and some woman had called security. As soon as I spoke, the two guards at the bathroom stall realized their error, mumbled apologies, and took off. (Masculinity, 20)

The statement highlights the denial of basic rights and the brutality towards an individual. In contrast, Judith Halberstam's experience reflects her struggle to endure within a society that constantly forces her to explain and justify her gender to others.

Some masculine women encounter these issues in the airport where they have to prove themselves as women by raising their voice or physis (raising their breast). It is a challenging one especially the women who have less voice and breast less. If they failed to prove themselves, they have to face the 'Bathroom problem'. The Female Masculine has to prove their voice is the only way to get out from instant problems or difficulties they encounter. The problem of gender appearance emphasise the gender disparity. In general, masculinity defines as an attitude of male with ego centric where it shows a hegemonic power and dominance which symbolise it as normal.

According to Indian Constitution the law states that all are equal in the article 14 as, "The State shall not deny to any person equality before the law or the equal protection of the laws within the territory of India." (6). This highlights the right to equality irrespective of gender. On the other side, in reality the individual is cornered, forced to live in an alienated life. This happens because of brutal, unfair treatment of a gender.

The psychological problems they face when people mock at them. Halberstam too faced this issue and she focuses on the fear of women, which they encountered in bathrooms. The masculine women get beatings in the public sphere and they face physical violence. This pushes them to the margin. In Nice Rodriguez story *Every Full Moon*, the character Remedios faces physical violence and her father cautioned her to be more careful. While she was facing physical violence, she thinks, "She realized that being cautions means swaying her hips and parading her boobs when she enters any ladies room" (qtd in. Halberstam 23).

Halberstam discusses 'Minority Masculinities and the Art of Gender' Minority Masculinity focuses on Black Women. Black Masculine Women have high manliness moves and it projects them as both attractive and dangerous. Halberstam talks about Drag King shows it is a queer performance. The Drag Kings are female performer whose appearance is masculine. For example, a queer performance known as, *you're Just like My Father* by Peggy Shaw (1995). It is a single woman's performance shows her masculinity. The performer is Shaw herself. The posture in drama reveals her identity as female who have masculine behaviour. She covers her breast by using ace bandage. This shows her more masculine. However, Shaw is lesbian and her masculinity plays a major role. Shaw say,

This is my face, sharp. I look like my father.
'You look just like your father,' my mother said.
I look like my father when I'm in a good mood.
Most lesbians I know really like their father, me

included. My father.... had a heart condition... I got the same condition simply 'cause I knew him so well. He had big hands, I have big hands ... My father told me that his father knocked out Joe Louis with his bare hands (YJLMF, 6:10-6:30).

From the above analysis of Judith Halberstam's *Female Masculinity*, Queer theory has its depth focusing on identity issues. The terms used by Halberstam shows how the female facing difficulties and gain support for their identity in the hegemonic society. Halberstam has discussed thoroughly on Feminine Masculine growth, physical change, economic status, etc. In 'Bathroom Problem', she brings out the two things. Firstly, it shows them as an odd gender and secondly, the bathrooms are only for the single-gendered which makes them to feel inferior and it affects them psychologically. The author explicit the butch women emotions by the performer Peggy Shaw. However, Female Masculinity projects themselves as men, but in public atmosphere, they are discriminated which is unacceptable in the society.

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Freedom from Nausea: An Existential Reading of *Nausea* in Sartrean Ethics

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Abstract— *The present paper aims to elucidate the notion of freedom in Sartrean ethics. Jean-Paul Sartre is as much a philosopher as a novelist, a rare synthesis of philosophy and literature that, otherwise, are said to be two different disciplines. In this regard. He is closer to Jacques Derrida, who sought to bring about a play and thereby refused to privilege one discipline over the other, and Matthew Arnold, in his essay, The Function of Criticism at the Present Times, said that literary genius does not principally show itself in new ideas, that is, rather the business of a philosopher. It is because Sartre's existential psychoanalysis reveals to him that values are not written in things, but created by man. Nausea is a story of Antoine Roquentin, a French writer who is frightened at his own existence: viscous, slimy, to be precise. The novel is an impressionistic diary wherein he records date-wise details of his confrontation with the nausea of the time, which, having corrupted him, is now at the receiving end, as Roquentin spreads it further. Thus, by fusing the philosopher and the artist in him, Sartre paved the way for the moral agent to be born, the being by whom values exist (Sartre's italics). That is why he aligns existentialism with humanism. It is in this context that we can appreciate his freedom of nausea as an expression of self-loathing. Sartre seems to ask why man should not resist being sucked up by the slimy, i.e., the world.*



Keywords— *Existentialism, Humanism, psychoanalysis, repugnance, self-loathing, seriousness.*

Jean-Paul Sartre is as much of a philosopher as a novelist, a rare synthesis of philosophy and literature, which otherwise are said to be two different disciplines. In this regard. He is closer to Jacques Derrida, who sought to bring about a play and thereby refused to privilege one discipline over the other, and Matthew Arnold, in his essay, *The Function of Criticism at the Present Times* said that literary genius does not principally show itself in new ideas, that is rather the business of a philosopher. Sartre also hits at the spirit of seriousness by saying that "all human activities are equivalent, and all are doomed to failure..." (*Critical Theory Since Plato*, 585) precisely because they suffer from some lack or the other. It is because Sartre's existential psychoanalysis reveals to him that values are not written in things, but created by man. Thus, by fusing the philosopher and the artist in him, Sartre paved the way for the moral agent to be born, the *being by whom values exist* (Sartre's italics). That is why he aligns existentialism with

humanism. It is in this context that we can appreciate his freedom of nausea as an expression of self-loathing. Sartre seems to ask why man should not resist being sucked up by the slimy, i.e., the world. Nausea, as the hero of the novel says,

...spreads the bottom of the viscous puddle, at the bottom of our time, the time of purple suspenders and broken chair seats, it is made of wide: soft instants, like the oil stains. No sooner than born, it is already old. It seems as though I have known it for twenty years. (Nausea, 21)

Nausea is a story of Antoine Roquentin, a French writer who is horrified at his own existence: viscous, slimy, to be precise. The novel is an impressionistic diary wherein he records date-wise details of his confrontation with the nausea of the time, which, having corrupted him, is now at the receiving end, as Roquentin spreads it further. As a

child, for example, he and his fellows would see a retired schoolmaster as if he were a crab "shaping thoughts of crab or lobster in his head..." (9) Nausea seizes him under multiple conditions, in things obnoxious, in things that he lacks, in things full and dense, sickly, in short, the entire world, including himself. Indeed, Roquentin says, "The Nausea is not inside me," (19) but outside him, in the world surrounding him. It catches him, for example, when he looks at Adolphe in the café wearing his blue shirt against the backdrop of the chocolate coloured wall. He feels out there in the wall, in the suspenders, everywhere around him. It makes him one with the café, he is the one, as he says, "who is within it." (20)

Nausea is what sucks Roquentin in, anything for that matter-- people spending their "time happily, exploring, realizing happily that they agree with each other," (8) talking about the same things altogether, a boy seeing together in the head of the retired schoolmaster a crab or a lobster, or when the waitress of the cafe asks him; What will you have, Monsier Antoine? (18) She holds his overcoat and smiles. "A handshake..., a smile, a thought, a feeling, for that matter, can be slimy," (*Being and Nothingness*, 70) says Sartre in *Being and Nothingness*. He adds, certainly for the European adult it signifies a host of human and moral characteristics which can be easily reduced to relation of being. All relationships, even a casual glance, could be slimy; they could be symbols of a whole class of human feelings and attitudes. However, there may be nothing slimy in them but what we project upon them. The slimy is not originally charged with an affective meaning, nor does it enrich our experience of human baseness. All the same, sliminess, according to Sartre, when considered "in its isolated state, will appear to be harmful in practical (because slimy substances stick to the hands, and clothes, and because they stain), but sliminess then is not repugnant." (771) In fact, as Sartre adds; "the disgust which it inspires can be explained only by the combination of the physical quality and moral qualities," (70) for example, even young children show evidence of repulsion, or taught so by adults in the presence of something slimy, such as ugly, smelly, flabby and so on.

There are, of course, many things that leave Roquentin terribly, deeply bored, including his own odd dress, his lack of passion, leaving him empty. Nevertheless, he was not the worst for them. It's rather good that ideas no longer enthuse him. He has changed a lot. This is what he records in his first diary entry, "undated pages." This shows his progression towards the Sartrean ethical position, because to be passionately attached to things and ideas is not only to possess, but also to be possessed by them.

The second entry dated Monday, 29 January 1932, Roquentin further records sudden changes in him, as for example. He could not understand why he was in Indo-China. People argued that it was his whim that made him leave France, and again it was his whim that brought him back. In Sartre's contingent world, there is no reason for being and not being. However, since Roquentin is the protagonist of a novel, we should suppose him to be above human weaknesses. That is why he could not understand the changes within himself. He is equally afraid of what will take hold of his life and drag him and that he will, in that happens, we have to abandon his research. All the same, he would like to see how it turns out, though we know that in Sartre, there is no teleology, finality. The end is yet to come.

Roquentin, however, has enough insight in this regard, though his thoughts are still nebulous most of the time, as he writes in the diary, dated Tuesday, 30 January, 1932. He, for one, lives alone, without much attachment, except a casual handshake or a smile, though he remains close to the people, on the surface of solitude. His solitude among people around is part of his philosophy of nothingness. He cannot be like other young men who avoid nothingness, for it lies like a hole in his being. A glass of beer on his table means nothing to him. "Almost nothing," (Nausea, 8) he says. He cannot take up the glass and drink. Others may find him queer, and though he also cannot explain, he knows that the slimy reveals to for-itself, Sartre says, as a project of appropriation:

It (appropriation) compels the slimy to reveal to being, since the upsurge of the for-itself into being is appropriative; the slimy, when perceived, is "a slimy to be possessed," that is, the original bond between the slimy and myself is that I form the project of being the foundation of its being, since it is myself ideally. (*Being and Nothingness*, 772)

Roquentin's nausea, the sense of sliminess and his disgust on account of it, is nothing but his aversion to possessing, of appropriating things, even persons, as if the latter were also things. Objects of appropriation bear psychic and symbolic things; excreta, for instance, are nauseating. He, on the other hand, feels nauseated when things touch him. That is what is unbearable. It could be a stone that he picked up one day at the seashore, as he wrote on 30 January, just because he held it in his hand. It was a simple act of appropriation. It is, as Sartre says, "precisely within the limits of this appropriative project that the slimy reveals itself and develops to sliminess." (773)

Roquentin is so afraid of the project of appropriation that he has lost even the direction of his face.

He cannot even decide whether it is handsome or ugly. At heart, as he says, he feels shocked that "anyone can attribute qualities of this kind to it...." (Nausea, 16) Except for his hair, he finds nothing firm about his face, nor his nose, nor his eyes, nor even his mouth; none of them make sense. In fact, there is not even an expression. This has made him so unstable, stranded, coupled with this is his nausea of seeing, as Charles Darwin did, the monkey and the jellyfish behind his human free — nothing strong, nothing new; soft, flaccid, stale. According to Sartre, Slimy lets itself be apprehended as something which he lacks. Roquentin is not happy with himself, with what he is. Nausea seizes him when he was expecting to make love, but is told the patronne, the owner of the café, was not there. Sartre has told us, as per his view of phenomenology, that consciousness is consciousness of something. To illustrate this, he says that he went searching for his friend at a café, and finding him not there, said, 'Peter is not there.' However, one cannot announce any other negative judgment without a situation. Peter's absence haunts a particular café. It comes into being when we expect to see a friend in the café. It is for Sartre that Peter is absent. In all our judgements, however, we annihilate. But it should be a felt judgment, not an abstraction. It lies at the heart of being.

Roquentin writes in his next entry of 31 January: "I am beginning to believe that nothing can ever be proved." (13) But instead of taking nothingness positively as freedom, as Sartre would like him to take, he develops self-repugnance, self-loathing. Sartre perhaps began writing this novel with the view that his hero, if one may call him one, suffers from not the contempt of others so much as from his self-contempt; he suffers far more tragic-comic and disabling consequences of accepting his rejection as legitimate, as self-evident. Sartre probably knew that some victims of powerful self-loathing turn out to be despicable in their own eyes, blaming the time and space they inhabit. Roquentin's problem is that he finds himself sucked into the viscous world, i.e., he is not able to come out of the adhesiveness of the world. As John Passmore put it, "If Wittgenstein hopes to show the fly the way out of the bottle into which it has flown, Sartre hopes to release him from the fly-paper." (*A Hundred Years of Philosophy*, 505) Elaborating this analogy, Passmore says that sliminess is a characteristic not only of things, but also of human beings, of that handshake or smile which entices into friendship and which turns out to be a deadly entanglement—of our own thoughts, even in so far as they strictly hold us to the past. This is exactly the situation of Roquentin, and though he is not entangled in any serious affair, according to Sartre, Roquentin's absorption in the life of Rollebon was enough of an entanglement. What he got involved in was whether Rollebon murdered Paul I. He found it absurd to believe that

Rollebon disguised himself as a midwife to get as far as the place, though he was not at home on the night of the assassination. This is the hole in the history of Rollebon which he tries to fill. But he attempts to fill up gaps in the life of Rollebon, disgusts him. The man now possessed him.

Nevertheless, he knows that "Nothing happens while you live. The scenery changes, some people come and go, that's all." (Nausea, 39) This is the beginning or end. All places are alike. There are moments—rarely—when one makes a march. It is only a flash. In the rest of life, we go on adding up hours and days. These abortive attempts, as Sartre would say, stifle freedom, which coincides with nothingness. Nothingness comes in the rupture of being-for-itself. From being-in-itself, i.e. for-itself simply finds itself there, separated and at a distance from the absolute fullness of the in-itself. Roquentin has an awareness of this rupture, that life, when questioned in fullness and fixity, turns out to be vacuous, characterized by incompleteness and lack of determinate structure. It is no more solidified world of objectified reality; one gets conscious that life and the world have nothingness lying coiled in the heart of being, like a worm. Roquentin finds nothing firm about himself. "Human reality", as Sartre says, "is free because it is not enough," (*Being and Nothingness*, 568) which "made-to-be at the heart of man and which forces human reality to make itself instead to be." (568) However, to be is mostly taken *to have*. It is thus that the slimy enters our life; *to be, albeit to have*, becomes appropriative, i.e., to possess and to be possessed. Both give birth to certain moral attitudes, which displease us, and we condemn ourselves. This possessing-possessed relationship is nauseating. At heart, Roquentin at times feels inflated after having gone drunk. It pleases him, as he records, but then soon he feels sick as if he "had awakened a bed full of vomit." (Nausea, 56) He had chosen to be drunk. For Sartre, human reality is free to the exact extent that it has to be its own nothingness, and a choice is free of it is such that it could have been other than what it is; to choose is to nihilate ourselves, that is, "to cause a future to make known to us what we are by conferring a meaning on our part. Thus, there is a succession of instants by nothingness." (*Being and Nothingness*, 549)

Roquentin is conscious of the nothingness of passing time. He knows that there is nothing in the world to cling to. He takes it as an adventure. In fact, he is on his way to recovery from nausea. Nevertheless, he still feels that such moments of grasping nothingness and freedom are short-lived, giving him the feeling that he has wasted his life. (Nausea, 56) However, short-lived, the feeling of adventure of growing old, i.e., the irreversibility of time, is good because it frees one from the slimy. Roquentin's association with Anny was another entanglement he had, next to his passion for writing the history of Rollebon. But it was

always Anny who started the game, while he had to shake himself out of it. In one instance, when both of them were together, Anny holding his hand, he got up as soon as she let go of his hand, as it was the time for his departure, he "got up and left without saying a word to her." (57) That was a good job, he said.

Rollebon also annoys him, particularly when Roquentin finds him "mysterious in small things." (57) In Sartre, the mysterious and the ambiguous are forms of the slimy; they also suck us in, as holes do. They are in-between forms of liquids and solids, a possible fusion of the for-itself as pure temporality and the in-itself as pure eternity," (*Being and Nothingness* 774) says Sartre. There is a kind of stick thickness in liquidity in the mysterious and the ambiguous. They inhibit human freedom, in addition to giving a bad feeling of nausea. About Rollebon, Roquentin asks: "What could he have been doing in the Ukraine in 1804? He tells of his trip in veiled words." (*Nausea* 57) Roquentin lets himself be caught. He lost a month verifying Rollebon's assertions. However, in the end, our historian found out that Rollebon impregnated the daughter of one of his tenant farmers. In Roquentin's view, Rollebon was nothing more than a lowly comedian. The word 'low' is one among such words as 'soft', 'dull', having psychic meaning "which renders them repugnant, horrifying, alluring, etc." (57)

After learning about Rollebon's treachery, Roquentin developed repugnance for him. He, as he wrote, "feels full of ill-will towards this lying little fop; perhaps it is spite... I don't have a high enough opinion of historical research to lose my time over a dead man whose hand, if he were alive, I would not deign to touch..." (*Being and Nothingness* 772) This was enough to disenchant Roquentin with Rollebon. It is thus that Roquentin seeks his form, slowly though, but steadily. His reflections, even in times of thick entanglement, show sparks of his quest for freedom, of course, through nothingness. If he still pursues his research, it is because it got mixed up with existence. He has to gather enough strength to break away from Rollebon. As for his attachment to Anny, he knew that it was also fragile, marred by nothingness. But he should "not be afraid anymore," (*Nausea*, 81) he wrote. The world weighs heavily upon human beings; nonetheless, the world of attachment to duties caught Roquentin alike. They are between facts and the contingency of life. But if, like our hero, we face it courageously, there is room for us to breathe. Roquentin not only recognizes the contingency of the world, but also, as Passmore put it, "his disconnectedness with the past" (*A Hundred Years of Philosophy* 504). Roquentin gave up, finding fault with people he is casually in contact with. Not contact, not even sexual relationships, can bind people together. Passmore's remarks on human relationships in the Sartrean context are pertinent:

Again and again, as Sartre writes, we feel ourselves forced into Freudian interpretations of his metaphysics... But Sartre has forestalled us... if the Freudians see sexual symbolism everywhere in Sartre's ontology, this is only because Sartre suggests that the Freudian is trying to disguise his ontological loneliness - the loneliness of a self which exists only in free acts, in an obscene, contingent, godless world, with no values, except those which he himself creates. (510)

Roquentin knew Freudian psychology, which he said is written in books, a psychology that not only disguises ontological loneliness, but also avoids mentioning nothingness, i.e., which questions our right to exist, including his right. And it was true, as he records, "I had always realized it; I hadn't the right to exist. I had appeared by chance, I existed like a stone, a plant, or a microbe..." (*Nausea* 84) Existence in Sartre, as we have noted, is contingent, *de trop*, superfluous. It is not a possession by right, encompassing all other rights and duties. It is seldom, Sartre says, that "play is pure of all appropriation tendency." (*Being and Nothingness* 742) Our play could be for achieving a good name, beating a record, or possessing a handsome body. In reality, as Sartre adds, "... there is always in sport, an appropriative component." (742) That is what traps us, some adhesive, giving sickness, boredom.

That is why Roquentin had a bare existence, or tried to have one. He was neither a father, nor a grandfather, nor even a husband. He did not have a vote. He hardly paid any taxes. He wondered whether he was a simple spectre. There is nothing dismal in his philosophy, nor that of his creator. Unfortunately, Sartre's emphasis upon such unpalatable features of the world as sliminess has won him the reputation of being dismal and depressing. But it is the bourgeois, he replies, who is gloomy. What could be more dismal, he asks in *Existentialism and Humanism*, published in 1946, than such bourgeois aphorisms as 'charity begins at home?'

Sartre's attack on the bourgeois is taken by many critics as his leap of faith, in the writing of Emmanuel Kant's *Critique de la Raison Pure* (1960), but doubted whether it was good or bad faith. Mary Warmock doubted whether the later book was moral or political, for not only *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre's *magnum opus*, but also *Nausea* refuted politics, and looked forward to his writing on ethics, as per his promise in the last sentence of *Being and*

Nothingness: we shall devote to them (questions of ethics) in a future work.

The ethics of choice indeed involve our responsibility for what we choose for ourselves; we also choose for others, and Sartre's experience with the French Resistance left him, as Passmore also speculates, with a feeling for human solidarity, postulated by Marx. It does not mean that Sartre's earlier philosophy was devoid of ethics and politics. We can trace within *Being and Nothingness* and even in *Nausea* Sartre's unsaid premises for founding ethics. For instance, Roquentin has all along been urging upon himself, as upon us, to accept nothingness, which, as he finds, is key to ethics. But he also knew, as he feels, "we have so much difficulty in imagining nothingness" (*Nausea* 95) and speaking straight in Sartrean language, he adds: "things are entirely what they appear to be—and behind... there is nothing." (1)

In Sartre's phenomenological ontology, there is nothing concealed behind the phenomena or the appearances. The appearances embody full reality. In that case, we find we should not look for a transcendental ago; instead, we should see what happens right before our eyes—the changes as we grow old and die, friends part, never to return, etc. Roquentin resorted to diary-writing, not simply arbitrarily but as a technique, as he stated on the first page, "I must determine the exact extent and nature of this change" (1) so that "more of the nuances or small happenings escape even though they seem to mean nothing. (1) Small or big, changes bring home to him that nothing remains of the parts. 'Each event, when it has played its part, puts itself politely into a box and becomes an honorary' event." (96) In such an event, there is nothing to stick to—neither holding others, nor being held captive by others by temptation or force. Such a companionable world is always on the way; it is always to come. No political form, not communism, and in essence, not even the best of democracy is short of this genuine communication, precisely in the context of radical freedom threatened first by bad faith, secondly by sense of shame in the presence of other giving way to conflicting relation and through the difficulty in realizing that the slimy, a relationship of sucking and being sucked with persons or things of the world is always being neither solid nor liquid, is always sliding, slipping out of fingers, besides giving nausea. Even a thought, like the one we quoted above, about things entirely being appearance, so absorbed him that "sickness flooded" (46) over Roquentin, and the pen fell from his hand. "What happened?" "Did I have nausea?" he asked. No, it was not nausea, because nausea is sticky, when this thought was liberating in the context of Rollebon, whose history he was searching.

The historical figure was no longer a mystery. He was a mystery. He was a murderer and a betrayer. The latter fact brought about his second death in the eyes of Roquentin. He realizes that it was his fault for keeping Rollebon alive as a mysterious figure. Once he realizes this, "Rollebon returns to his nothingness." (1) The great Rollebon affair was over for Roquentin, like the great passion. Man himself, according to Sartre, is a useless passion. Roquentin needed Rollebon to exist, and vice versa. Rollebin was his mainstay, his whole life: he was Roquentin's reason for living. Now that the passion is over, he does not know what to do. This freedom now weighs on him. He needs someone to replace Rollebon: he needs some passion to exist. He thinks of Anny, whom he will meet in four days. But suppose as it is very likely. He hopes she will not leave him, though he knows that people play with one another, as does the Self-Taught Man. He tries to befriend people, but at heart, Roquentin says, the fellow is as lonely as he himself is. He does not realize it. The Self-Taught Man tries to be a humanist and even asks Roquentin to love people. "Men are admirable," (Ibid., 122) he says. But Roquentin likes to vomit—and "suddenly there is: the Nausea." (122) Roquentin would like to be free from nausea. Indeed, the novel itself is an exercise in seeking freedom from nausea. What gives him nausea besides his entanglement with people, things—things as insignificant as a knife on the table. The knife is also slimy. Why should he touch it? "Objects, as Sartre put it, are 'mute demands'" (*Being and Nothingness* 796) and man "is nothing in himself but the passive obedience of these demands." (798) Nausea is part of our existence, as of Roquentin, with the difference that while he knows its source, we pursue life blindly by hiding from ourselves our free project. The Self-Taught Man is one of us. Nausea originates when we play ducks and drakes in life, as Roquentin would say. Such a play is seldom pure, as we have already noted, for it is not free from appropriative tendency. It becomes creative when sports is "a free transformation of the worldly environment into the supporting element of the action." (742) Short of this is egoism and utilitarianism, or even disinterestedness or so-called detachment. According to Sartre, "man making himself in order to be God" (742), and all these variants—egoism, utilitarianism, and disinterestedness from this point of view appear to be an egoism, he precisely because there is no common measure between human reality and man's attempt to become God, his self-cause, to put it in Sartrean language.

Human reality, on the other hand, and indeed all things are silently passing out, whether they will or not. There is no room for will-power and struggle for life. Take, for example, trees as they keep on existing, against the

grain, simply because they were weak to die...carry their own death within themselves like an internal necessity; only they don't exist." (*Nausea* 133) Sartre's preoccupation with death should not be misunderstood; it is the ultimate vision of nothingness, which provides Roquentin a foundation for freedom. To quote him, "You couldn't even wonder where all that sprang from, or how it was that a world came into existence, rather than nothingness. (134) He finds no reason for the world to exist or not to exist: it holds him fast, though — "sticky filth," (134) or what should he call it? He decides to pack up and leave for Paris, leaving behind his project of writing the history of Rollebon. He must go to Paris. She, of course, receives him with open arms, but retains her distance. They meet as strangers do. Nevertheless, he still thinks he will be in his ministry, his polestar fixed. It is his mistake, his bad faith, that she is the same person he left four years ago. He is being trapped by his own weakness, not by her sliminess. He is mistaken to think that while he has changed, she is still the same, waiting for him. However, he soon wakes up, as he realizes that there is no good in holding her in his arms, for she was as solitary as he was. Still, he is not as desperate as she was because he did not expect much. She was going with a German painter. She told Roquentin to go, as she was expecting the fellow. She even refused to oblige him with a meeting between Saturday and next Friday, the day of leaving Paris, as she said, she had a lot to do. She said that she would write to him, but he knew she would not. It was a play. And yet she could not resist the temptation of eavesdropping, whether she was really going or it was merely a trick to put him off. He went to the railway station only to find them boarding the train.

This was enough to clutch at his freedom. Could he start it again - some entanglement or the other? What forgiveness after this knowledge? He declares his part as dead — Anny is dead, so is Rollebon. But the past retains itself. In Sartre, the past is still real, existentially real. The past remains bound to Roquentin's present, but he is always already separated from it. This is what he has been learning right from the first page of the diary, i.e., the change. Nothing stays; however, we clutch at it, i.e., the it-self. In contrast to the past, which has become the it-self, the present remains a full-embodied for, the in-itself. Roquentin's present, his coming to the Railway station, seeing her depart, is a flight from being that he was toward the being that he will be. His future is a lack which is constitutive of his subjectivity. As his past provides the foundation for his factivity, so his future provides the foundation for his possibility.

CONCLUSION

By the end of the novel, He comes back from the Railway station and goes to sleep. On waking, he decided to go back to Bouville from where he came, not of course to stay there, but to pack up and come back to Paris. But he knew that he would gain nothing by this change. Paris, for him, is the same city, full of smelly odours and deafening noises. All cities are alike, he says, without vegetation. They suck one in. Bouville, in this regard, is better than Paris. Back in Bouville, Roquentin feels free. But the question, as noted above, is: can he start his life again? He had counted on Anny to save him. He lost the game, besides learning a lesson that one always loses. Now onward, he would live like Anny—vegetate, eat, sleep, sleep, eat. But this is also nauseating, though this thought gives him a breathing spell. At least, it is better than the life of the Bourgeois, performing customary actions; they feel at home. Sartre's critique of the bourgeoisie is well-known. All that Roquentin desired was to be. It was his error to make Rollebon come alive, i.e., to write another kind of book, not so much for Rollebon, but for himself, so that he could remember himself, his life without repugnance, his past. This would be "accepting himself" (*Ibid.*, 178) to save himself from self-loathing.

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A Gamble on Meaning: How Translation, Readership, and Authorship Shape the Living Text

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Abstract— *This paper argues that literary meaning is not a static property embedded within a text but a dynamic event that unfolds at the volatile intersection of translation, readership, and authorship. It frames interpretation as a hermeneutic wager, positing that the perceived instabilities within these domains are not deficiencies but the very conditions that grant a text its enduring vitality. The inquiry is threefold. The first section analyses translation as a secondary authorial act, using the manifold translations of the Ramayana and the King James Bible to illustrate how cultural and ideological choices create new literary works. The second section employs reader-response theory, using The Little Prince as a case study to demonstrate how a text functions as a hermeneutic mirror, reflecting the reader's evolving consciousness. The final section reframes the debate on authorial intent through Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the polyphonic novel, arguing that authors like Dostoevsky perform an intentional abdication of monologic authority. The paper concludes that literature lives not despite its ambiguities and instabilities, but because of them, perpetually renewed by the interpretive gamble.*



Keywords— *Hermeneutics, Translation Studies, Reader-Response Theory, Polyphony, Authorial Intent, Literary Meaning, Bakhtin*

I. INTRODUCTION

Literary meaning is not a static property embedded within a text, waiting to be unearthed like a buried artifact. Rather, it is a dynamic and contingent event—an occurrence that unfolds at the volatile intersection of translation, readership, and authorship. The perceived instabilities within these domains, often framed as failures or limitations, are not deficiencies to be lamented but are the very conditions that grant a text its enduring vitality and cultural resonance. This paper advances the thesis that the act of interpretation is a gamble, a wager placed on the unstable ground of language and consciousness, and it is through this perpetual risk that literature lives, breathes, and evolves. This approach consciously positions itself within the intellectual lineage that moved literary studies beyond the formalist confines of New Criticism, which treated the text as a self-contained, autonomous object. The project of this paper is to affirm and explore the post-New Critical understanding that meaning

is not immanent *in* the text but is generated *through* the text's complex and unending interactions with the agents who produce, transmit, and receive it.

To explore this central problem, this paper is structured into three interconnected inquiries. "The Translator's Wager," examines the act of translation as the quintessential hermeneutic gamble. It posits that translation is not a simple linguistic transfer but a high-stakes interpretive negotiation, a process of calculated loss and gain shaped by the translator's own cultural and ideological horizon. Using the manifold English translations of the *Ramayana* and the politically charged history of the King James Bible as case studies, this section will demonstrate how every translation is a new creation, a secondary authorial act that redefines the source text for a new audience.

"The Reader's Mirror," shifts the focus from the creation of the text to its reception, arguing that certain literary works function as hermeneutic mirrors, reflecting the cognitive

and emotional development of the reader. Through a detailed case study of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince*, this analysis will demonstrate how the novella's meaning is actualized in profoundly diverse ways by readers at various life stages—child, adolescent, and adult—revealing the text as a vessel for the reader's own evolving consciousness.

"The Author's Abdication," confronts the contentious debate over authorial intent. It proposes that Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the "polyphonic novel," exemplified by the works of Fyodor Dostoevsky, offers a sophisticated alternative to the binary of authorial tyranny versus the "death of the author." This section will argue that Dostoevsky's narrative strategy represents a deliberate and intentional abdication of monologic authority, a sophisticated authorial choice to create a dialogic world where no single voice—including the author's own—holds a monopoly on truth.

Underpinning this entire investigation is the philosophical framework of hermeneutics, the theory of interpretation that acknowledges the inescapable role of the interpreter's own context, prejudices, and subjectivity in the generation of meaning. By examining these three critical junctures—translation, readership, and authorship—this paper will construct a holistic model of the literary text not as a fixed object but as a living, unstable, and co-created event, perpetually renewed by the interpretive gamble.

II. THE TRANSLATOR'S WAGER

The act of translation is arguably the most explicit and high-stakes form of literary interpretation. It lays bare the fundamental hermeneutic problem: how to carry meaning across the chasms of language, culture, and time. Far from a mechanical process of substitution, translation is a profound wager where perfect equivalence is an illusion, and every choice precipitates a calculated loss and a potential gain. This process is not a failure to achieve an ideal but the very engine of cross-cultural dialogue, shaped at every turn by the translator's own interpretive horizon.

Modern hermeneutical thought reframes translation from a task of replication to an act of engagement. Philosopher Paul Ricoeur characterizes translation as a "dialogical act," a gesture of "linguistic hospitality" wherein the target language must stretch and adapt to make room for the foreignness of the source text. This is not a seamless transfer but a continuous negotiation, a series of compromises born from the inherent opacity between different linguistic and cultural worlds. The goal is not perfect transparency but a meaningful encounter. This perspective finds a deeper, more metaphysical resonance in Walter Benjamin's seminal essay, "The Task of the Translator." For Benjamin,

translation's ultimate purpose is not to convey information but to gesture toward a "pure language" (Reine Sprache), a messianic state in which all languages, in their distinctness, complement one another to reveal a higher truth. The translator's fidelity, in this view, is not to the reader or the literal meaning, but to this unrealized linguistic potential, an act that "releases" the original text from its own language into a more expansive afterlife.

Central to this understanding is the realization that the "impossibility of synonymy is not a defeat, but rather constitutes the condition of the act of translation itself as an infinite process." Because no two words in different languages carry the exact same constellation of connotations and cultural baggage, the translator is forced into a creative role. This inherent gap prevents the text from becoming a static artifact and necessitates a dynamic, interpretive engagement. This dynamic is best understood through the concepts of "loss" and "gain." "Loss" refers to the inevitable disappearance of source-text features—be it a poetic meter, a cultural allusion, or a wordplay—in the target language. "Gain," conversely, occurs when a translator clarifies an ambiguity, adds a necessary explanation, or enriches the text through their own creative choices. The translator's task, therefore, is not to eliminate loss, which is impossible, but to manage it through conscious compromise and compensation, making deliberate decisions about which features to preserve and which to sacrifice. This dynamic is psychologically potent; the discourse surrounding translation is often marked by "loss-aversion," a tendency to perceive the losses in translation as more significant than the corresponding gains.

This leads to a paradoxical but crucial conclusion: the concept of "untranslatability" is the very engine that drives translation forward. An untranslatable term or concept is not a dead end but a "constant provocation to creative ways of accessing" the text. It forces the translator to move beyond literalism and employ strategies of paraphrase, adaptation, and explanation, thereby creating a new work that enters into dialogue with the original rather than merely attempting to replicate it. The untranslatable is what generates the desire to understand, making the act of translation a necessary and unending hermeneutic pursuit.

III. CASE STUDY I: THE RAMAYANA AND THE WAGER ON FORM VS. FIDELITY

The long history of translating the Valmiki *Ramayana* into English provides a powerful illustration of the translator's wager. Composed in Sanskrit by the sage Valmiki, revered as the *Adi kavi* (first poet), the epic is celebrated for its sublime poetry and lyrical beauty, qualities that are notoriously difficult to render in another language. A

comparison between the colonial-era verse translation by Ralph T.H. Griffith and the contemporary prose translation by Bibek Debroy reveals how different interpretive gambles, separated by time and ideology, produce radically different literary artifacts.

Griffith, writing in the late 19th century, wagered on form. He attempted a full verse translation, aiming to preserve the epic's poetic grandeur for a Victorian English audience accustomed to the formal structures of classical Western epics like the *Iliad* and the *Aeneid*. The gain from this choice is a text that feels aesthetically epic to its intended reader, a "literary" interpretation that prioritizes artistic enjoyment. The loss, however, is significant: fidelity to the literal meaning is often sacrificed for the sake of meter and rhyme, and complex cultural concepts are filtered through a distinctly colonial and Christianized lens. This approach exemplifies what the translation theorist Lawrence Venuti would call "domestication." Griffith's translation smooths over the cultural and linguistic foreignness of the Sanskrit original, making it fluent and familiar to the Anglophone reader, but at the cost of erasing its cultural difference.

Debroy, translating in the 21st century, makes the opposite wager. Working from the Baroda Critical Edition of the text, he opts for a literal prose translation, explicitly acknowledging that "it is impossible to capture the beauty of this poetry in an English translation." His stated goal is not to replicate the aesthetic experience but to provide a transparent "bridge" to the original Sanskrit for a modern, scholarly-minded reader. The loss is the poetic form and lyrical flow of the original. The gain is an unprecedented level of fidelity to the source text's narrative content, structure, and cultural specificity. Debroy's work forces the reader to confront the text on its own terms, rather than through the familiarizing filter of English poetic convention. This strategy aligns with Venuti's concept of "foreignization," a method that deliberately retains the strangeness of the source text, challenging the target culture's dominant values and compelling the reader to recognize the text's otherness.

This divergence is starkly visible in their handling of the central, "untranslatable" concept of *dharma*. This single Sanskrit word encompasses a vast semantic field, including duty, righteousness, cosmic law, and social order. Griffith consistently attempts to find an English equivalent, rendering *dharma* as "piety," "duty," or "law," thereby assimilating it into a Western moral and theological vocabulary that strips it of its unique cultural resonance. Debroy, in contrast, frequently leaves the word *dharma* untranslated in the text, relying on extensive footnotes to explain its specific meaning in each context. Griffith's choice prioritizes readability at the cost of cultural nuance;

Debroy's choice prioritizes cultural fidelity at the cost of seamless reading, compelling the audience to grapple with the concept's foreignness.

Furthermore, Debroy's reliance on the Baroda Critical Edition represents a monumental interpretive gambling before the first word is even translated. This scholarly edition was produced by sifting through thousands of manuscripts to create a standardized version, a process that involved excising many passages and episodes believed to be later interpolations. Consequently, Debroy's translation presents a *Ramayana* that may differ significantly from the versions Griffith would have known, and from the popular retellings that have shaped cultural understanding of the epic. As A. K. Ramanujan has famously argued, there is not one *Ramayana* but "three hundred Rāmāyaṇas," a vast ecosystem of tellings and retellings across different languages, regions, and religions. The choice of a source text is itself a powerful act of interpretation that redefines the very object being translated, elevating one version to authoritative status while marginalizing others.

IV. CASE STUDY II: THE KING JAMES BIBLE AND THE WAGER ON AUTHORITY

The King James Version (KJV) of the Bible, often perceived as a timeless and authoritative text, is in fact a product of a series of profound political and theological gambles. Its creation and legacy demonstrate how translation can serve as a powerful tool for consolidating authority, shaping doctrine, and defining a culture's relationship with its most sacred texts.

The first gamble was one of manuscript selection. The KJV's New Testament translators worked primarily from the *Textus Receptus* ("Received Text"), a compilation of Greek manuscripts that were readily available in the early 17th century but were predominantly late-medieval in origin. Since that time, biblical scholarship has unearthed a wealth of much older and more reliable manuscripts. Modern translations, based on this superior textual evidence, often differ from the KJV, leading to significant controversy among those who hold the KJV to be inerrant. A prime example is the "Johannine Comma" in 1 John 5:7. The KJV includes the explicit Trinitarian formula: "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one." This verse is absent from the earliest and best Greek manuscripts and is now widely accepted by scholars as a later scribal addition intended to bolster Trinitarian doctrine. The inclusion of this verse in the *Textus Receptus*, and thus in the KJV, was a theological wager that solidified a specific doctrinal interpretation by embedding it directly into the

scriptural text, giving it an authority it did not originally possess.

The second gamble was ideological, centered on the philosophy of translation. King James I commissioned the latest version with explicit instructions to create a text that would conform to the episcopal structure and ecclesiology of the Church of England, thereby reinforcing his own authority as head of the church. The translators adopted a methodology of formal equivalence, striving for a word-for-word rendering of the original Hebrew and Greek wherever possible. This was a direct political move against the then-popular Geneva Bible, a translation favored by Puritans. The Geneva Bible included extensive marginal notes promoting Calvinist theology and, in a direct challenge to monarchical authority, had translated the word "king" as "tyrant" in certain contexts. The KJV, with its formal, majestic prose and avoidance of controversial annotations, was designed to be a unifying text, "Appointed to be read in Churches," that would quell dissent and consolidate the power of the established church and crown.

A final, unforeseen gamble was that of time itself. The very formal equivalence that gave the KJV its authority in the 17th century has, over four hundred years, created a new set of hermeneutic challenges. The English language has evolved, rendering much of the KJV's vocabulary archaic and prone to misinterpretation by modern readers. A well-known example is Matthew 19:14, where the KJV reads, "Suffer the little children, and forbid them not, to come to me." The verb "suffers" in Jacobean English meant "to permit" or "to allow," but to a contemporary reader, it implies causing pain or distress. This linguistic drift demonstrates that a translation's meaning is never fixed. The text itself may remain unchanged, but as the target language evolves, the reader is forced into a new interpretive act, a new gamble to recover a meaning that has been obscured by the passage of time.

In both the *Ramayana* and the Bible, the act of translation reveals itself not as a neutral transfer of information but as a deeply authorial process. The choices made by translators—whether to prioritize poetic form or literal accuracy, which manuscript tradition to follow, how to render culturally specific concepts—are guided by a distinct purpose and ideological framework. This process, where an interpretive agent makes deliberate choices to shape a new textual artifact for a specific audience, is functionally indistinguishable from authorship itself. The translator, therefore, is not a transparent conduit but a secondary author, and their translation is not a copy but a new voice entering into a dialogic relationship with the original. This understanding of the translator's active, authorial role

provides a crucial bridge to the broader questions of authorial intent and textual meaning that will be explored later in this paper.

V. THE READER'S MIRROR

While translation reveals the instability of a text as it moves between languages, the act of reading reveals its instability within a single language, as it is processed by the evolving consciousness of the reader. Certain texts, particularly those rich in allegory and archetype, function as hermeneutic mirrors, reflecting not a fixed, objective meaning but the cognitive and emotional landscape of the person reading them. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's 1943 novella, *The Little Prince*, stands as a paramount example of this phenomenon. It is not simply a book with multiple meanings; it is a text deliberately constructed to yield different layers of significance depending on the reader's stage of life, making it a powerful case study in age-dependent interpretation.

The foundation for this analysis lies in reader-response theory, a school of literary criticism that shifts the focus of inquiry from the text as an autonomous object to the reader's experience of that text. This approach posits that a literary work does not possess a self-contained meaning but comes to life only in the dynamic interaction between text and reader. The reader is a co-creator of meaning, actively "activating" the text by filling in its narrative gaps (*leerstelle*), connecting it to personal experiences, and making sense of its ambiguities. Meaning is therefore not something to be extracted, but something that is produced in the event of reading.

A reader's interpretation is profoundly shaped by their "interpretive community"—the shared assumptions, values, and strategies of a particular group. Crucially, one of the most fundamental interpretive communities we belong to is defined by our age and stage of psychological development. As an individual matures from childhood through adolescence to adulthood, their cognitive abilities, emotional concerns, and life experiences change, altering the lens through which they read. This framework of assumptions is sometimes called a "horizon of expectations." A text like *The Little Prince* can therefore be read by the same person at ages seven, seventeen, and forty, and be experienced as three fundamentally different books.

This developmental perspective is enriched by the insights of psychological and archetypal criticism, particularly the work of Carl Jung. Jung proposed that the human psyche contains a "collective unconscious," a reservoir of shared, universal images and patterns known as archetypes. *The Little Prince* is replete with such archetypes: the wise child

(*puer aeternus*), the journey, the desert as a space of spiritual trial, the rose as a symbol of love and the *anima*. The central narrative can be read as a dialogue between the narrator's adult persona (the Pilot) and his repressed inner child, which is projected onto the figure of the Prince. The resonance of this internal dialogue for any given reader depends heavily on their own relationship with these archetypal forces at their particular stage of life. The power of these archetypes is precisely what allows for the "gap-filling" described by Wolfgang Iser; the archetypal symbol (the rose, the fox) is an indeterminate structure that invites the reader to project their own psychic content onto it, thereby co-creating its specific meaning within the act of reading. The child fills the gap of "the rose" with a simple concept of a treasured pet, while the adult fills it with the complex history of their own romantic relationships.

VI. AGE-DEPENDENT READINGS OF *THE LITTLE PRINCE*

Analyzing the novella through the distinct lenses of a child, an adolescent, and an adult reader reveals how its core symbols and themes are radically reconfigured at each developmental stage. For a young child, *The Little Prince* is primarily a whimsical and enchanting fable, read on a literal level. The Prince is a real boy from a tiny planet, the animals talk, and the journey through space is a straightforward adventure. The central conflict is the clear and relatable opposition between the imaginative, sensible world of children and the baffling, nonsensical world of "grown-ups." The child reader readily identifies with the narrator's frustration that adults cannot see the elephant inside the boa constrictor, recognizing it as a hat instead. The story's moral lessons are understood in direct and concrete terms. The relationship with the rose is a simple story about love and the importance of taking care of something special. The process of "taming" the fox is a lesson in how to make a friend. The fox's famous secret, "what is essential is invisible to the eye," is interpreted as a straightforward maxim: friendship and love are more important than toys or other possessions. The ending of the story is deeply sad, but in a comprehensible way: the Prince, a beloved friend, has been bitten by a snake and has gone away, leaving the narrator lonely. The child's reading is characterized by emotional immediacy, a focus on the narrative of friendship, and a clear identification with the Prince's perspective.

For the adolescent reader, who is in the liminal space between childhood and adulthood, the story deepens into a poignant and bittersweet allegory of alienation, identity, and loss. The literal fable gives way to a metaphorical reading. The Prince's journey is no longer just an adventure; it is a symbolic departure from the innocence of home to confront

a confusing and often hypocritical adult world. The satirical portraits of the adults on the various planets—the King with no subjects, the Vain Man who craves empty admiration, the Businessman who obsessively counts stars he cannot own—resonate powerfully with the adolescent's own developing critique of societal norms and adult absurdity. These characters are no longer just silly; they are emblems of a world that has lost its way, a world the adolescent feels alienated from but is being pressured to join. The fox's secret acquires a new layer of profound sadness. "Taming" is now understood not just as making a friend, but as the process of creating a unique, irreplaceable bond, which makes the inevitability of separation all the more painful. The discovery that there are thousands of other roses is a devastating blow, a metaphor for the loss of childhood's sense of uniqueness and the dawning awareness of a larger, more indifferent world. The novella's melancholy tone becomes its dominant feature. The ending is no longer just the departure of a friend; it is an existential meditation on the transience of life, the pain of growing up, and the irretrievable loss of childhood innocence.

For the adult reader, the novella undergoes a final transformation, becoming a profound philosophical and psychological text about existential responsibility, authenticity, and the arduous work of spiritual integration. The focus of the narrative shifts from the Prince to the Pilot. The story is no longer about the Prince's journey, but about the Pilot's spiritual crisis and recovery. The plane crash in the desert ceases to be a mere plot device and becomes a powerful symbol for the breakdown of the adult's structured, rational world, forcing a confrontation with the barrenness of a life lived without meaning. From this perspective, the Little Prince is not an external character but an archetypal projection of the Pilot's—and by extension, the reader's—own lost inner child. The Prince's arrival represents the return of a repressed part of the self—the capacity for wonder, imagination, and emotional honesty—which must be re-integrated for the adult to achieve psychic wholeness. The entire story becomes an internal dialogue between the pragmatic, jaded adult, and the wise, demanding child within.

The story's philosophical lessons become paramount. The fox's secret is now understood as a complex statement on the existential creation of value. Nothing in the world has intrinsic meaning; meaning is generated through the deliberate investment of time, attention, and love. The Prince's rose is unique not because of any inherent quality, but because "it is the time you have wasted for your rose that makes your rose so important." The rose itself becomes a more complex symbol, representing not just pure love but a real, difficult relationship, complete with vanity, demands, and misunderstanding, for which one is nonetheless

responsible. Finally, the Prince's death is reinterpreted as a necessary symbolic sacrifice. The physical body, the literal self, must be shed for a spiritual rebirth and a return to "what is essential." The adult reader understands that the Pilot's ultimate sadness is the recognition that this perfect integration is fleeting, and the work of keeping the inner child alive is a constant, lifelong struggle.

The genius of *The Little Prince* lies not in having a single, hidden meaning, but in its deliberate construction as a "hermeneutic machine" designed to evolve with its reader. Saint-Exupéry populates his narrative with simple, open-ended archetypal symbols—a prince, a rose, a fox, a desert—that resist narrow definition and thus serve as blank canvases for the reader's projections. The central conflict is explicitly framed as a clash between the child's way of seeing and the adult's, which immediately primes readers to align themselves based on their own life stage. The novella's core philosophical statements are abstract enough to function on multiple levels of complexity, from a simple moral for a child to a profound existential axiom for an adult. In this way, Saint-Exupéry's authorial achievement was not in authoring a book for children or for adults, but in engineering a textual structure that anticipates and leverages the reader's own psychological and hermeneutic development across a lifetime. The text remains a constant, but the reader is an ever-changing variable, and the meaning of *The Little Prince* is the living product of their ongoing interaction.

VII. THE AUTHOR'S ABDICATION

The question of meaning, having been explored through the lenses of translation and readership, culminates in the most contentious debate in modern literary theory: the role of the author. For centuries, the author was considered the sovereign of the text, the sole guarantor of its true meaning. The 20th century saw a dramatic rebellion against this notion, famously culminating in the declaration of the "Death of the Author." This section argues that the work of Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin, particularly his concept of the "polyphonic novel" as realized in the works of Fyodor Dostoevsky, offers a powerful third way. It is not the death of the author, but rather the author's intentional abdication of absolute authority—a deliberate choice to create a dialogic world where no single voice, including the author's own, holds a monopoly on truth.

The traditional model of literary interpretation is rooted in authorial intentionalism. In this view, the author's intended meaning is the ultimate standard by which any interpretation should be judged. The critic's task is to reconstruct the author's historical context, biographical details, and stated purposes to arrive at the one "correct"

reading of the text. The author is the origin and final arbiter of meaning.

This position came under sustained attack in the mid-20th century from two influential schools of thought. First, the Anglo-American New Critics, in their seminal 1946 essay "The Intentional Fallacy," argued that the author's intent is "neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art." Intent, they claimed, is a private psychological state that cannot be definitively recovered; all we have is the public text itself. The work must be analyzed on its own terms, as a self-contained aesthetic object. Two decades later, the French post-structuralist Roland Barthes delivered the final blow in his 1967 essay, "The Death of the Author." Barthes argued that the very concept of the "Author" is a modern invention designed to impose a limit on a text, to give it a "final signified." Once writing is released into the world, it becomes a "tissue of quotations" drawn from innumerable centers of culture, and its unity lies not in its origin but in its destination: the reader. The "death of the Author," Barthes proclaimed, is the necessary condition for the "birth of the reader," who is now free to play with the text and generate a multiplicity of meanings. This critique effectively severs the text from its creator, rendering authorial intent irrelevant.

While Barthes was writing the author's obituary, Mikhail Bakhtin's work, written decades earlier but only then being discovered in the West, offered a more nuanced and generative alternative. Bakhtin identified in the novels of Dostoevsky a radically new artistic form he termed the "polyphonic novel." Unlike the traditional "monologic" novel, in which every character, plot point, and idea serves to articulate the author's single, overarching worldview, the polyphonic novel is defined by "a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices." Bakhtin's model provides a crucial corrective to the binary opposition set up by the New Critics and Barthes. Where they see only two options—authorial tyranny or authorial irrelevance, Bakhtin reveals a third: an author who is intensely present, not as a dictator of meaning, but as the master architect of a dialogic structure. The author's intention is not to be found in any single character's voice, but in the masterful orchestration of the entire polyphonic design.

The key innovation of polyphony is the creation of the truly autonomous character. In Dostoevsky's world, Bakhtin argues, major characters are "not only objects of authorial discourse but also subjects of their own directly signifying discourse." They are not mere mouthpieces for ideas the author wishes to explore; they are fully-formed consciousnesses with their own coherent and powerful

ideologies. Their voices carry a weight equal to that of the narrator and, crucially, equal to the author's own ideological position. This structural innovation reflects a deeper philosophical principle Bakhtin call "dialogism." For Bakhtin, truth is not a static proposition that can be possessed by a single mind (a monologic truth). Instead, truth is an event that emerges in the process of dialogue between distinct, unmerged consciousnesses. It is inherently open-ended and "unfinalizable." The world is not yet finished, and the final word has not been spoken. The role of the polyphonic author, then, is not to provide definitive answers or to prove a thesis. The author's role is to stage "the great dialogue," to create the conditions under which these autonomous voices can confront one another in a state of maximum tension, without predetermining the outcome. This is not an absence of authorial intent; it is a higher-order authorial intent—the intent to represent reality itself as fundamentally dialogic.

VIII. DOSTOEVSKY'S POLYPHONIC ART

Dostoevsky's major novels serve as the primary evidence for Bakhtin's theory, demonstrating how a master author can intentionally relinquish monologic control to create a world of ideological equals. In *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880), the entire narrative architecture is built upon the irresolvable ideological conflict between radical faith and radical doubt. This conflict is embodied in the voices of the brothers Alyosha and Ivan. Alyosha and his elder, Father Zosima, articulate a worldview of mystical faith, active love, and universal responsibility. In direct opposition, Ivan Karamazov presents one of the most powerful arguments for atheism in all of literature, culminating in the parable of "The Grand Inquisitor," a searing indictment of a God who would create a world founded on the suffering of innocent children. Dostoevsky, a devout Orthodox Christian, gives Ivan's rebellion such intellectual and emotional force that it cannot be easily refuted or dismissed by Zosima's teachings. The author refuses to stack the deck. He does not provide a final, authoritative answer to the "accursed questions" his characters pose. Instead, he allows these two "fully valid voices" to clash in an eternal dialogue, leaving the reader suspended in the unfinalized space between them. The novel's ultimate thesis is not a statement for or against God, but the very dialogue itself—the recognition that this struggle is the defining condition of human consciousness.

A similar process occurs within the mind of a single character in *Crime and Punishment* (1866). The novel is a masterful depiction of internal polyphony, with Raskolnikov's consciousness serving as the battleground for competing, unmerged "voice-ideas." On one side is the voice of his rational, utilitarian theory—the idea of the

"extraordinary man" who has the right to transgress moral law for a higher purpose, which justifies the murder of the pawnbroker. On the other side is the voice of his innate empathy and Christian conscience, which drives him to irrational acts of charity and, ultimately, toward Sonia and the possibility of confession. Dostoevsky's third-person omniscient narration does not simply report on Raskolnikov's thoughts from a finalizing, external perspective. Instead, it immerses the reader directly into the cacophony of his "inner dialogues," allowing each voice to speak with its own logic and passion. Raskolnikov is not a unified character with a single motive; he is the living event of these voices in conflict. As the great Dostoevsky biographer Joseph Frank argues, the novelist's genius was to transform philosophical ideas from abstract propositions into the very fabric of his characters' personalities, making the drama of the novels an "amalgam of the most abstract problems of human existence with the most concrete details of a contemporary social scene." The polyphonic method is the engine of this transformation.

In creating such works, Dostoevsky performs a radical authorial abdication. A monologic novel, by its very nature, subordinates all its elements to the author's singular, ultimate truth, reflecting a structure of thought that is fundamentally authoritarian. The author, in this model, acts as the final arbiter of reality. Dostoevsky, in stark contrast, intentionally creates characters who are "subjects of their own directly signifying discourse," allowing voices that directly challenge his own deeply held religious beliefs to exist with their full ideological power. This is not merely an aesthetic choice; it is a profoundly ethical one. It demonstrates a deep respect for the "otherness" of his characters, a refusal to "finalize" them or reduce them to mere pawns in a didactic game. Dostoevsky's authorial intent, therefore, is not to preach a specific doctrine but to create a literary model of an ethical universe—a universe where individual freedom, the integrity of consciousness, and the open-ended, dialogic search for truth are the highest possible values. Polyphony is the aesthetic form of this ethical commitment.

IX. CONCLUSION

This paper has traversed three critical sites of literary interpretation—translation, translating readership, and authorship—to argue for a unified understanding of the literary text as a dynamic and living event. The analysis of the translator's "gamble," the reader's evolving "mirror," and the author's polyphonic "abdication" reveals these are not disparate phenomena but three facets of the same fundamental principle: the inherent and productive instability of meaning. The text is not a monument to be

preserved but a score to be performed, and its vitality is located precisely in the interpretive risks taken at each performance. The translator's wager, as seen in the divergent English renderings of the *Ramayana* and the Bible, demonstrates that a text is reborn with every cross-linguistic encounter. The "untranslatability" of Valmiki's poetry or the concept of *dharma*, and the linguistic decay of the King James Version's Jacobean English, are not failures. They are invitations—gaps in the textual fabric that demand creative intervention, forcing the translator to become a secondary author whose own cultural and ideological commitments are inscribed into the new work. Each translation is a new voice entering the great dialogue of literary history.

The age-dependent hermeneutics of *The Little Prince* illustrate that even within a single language, a text is never static. It is a vessel that is filled and refilled by the evolving consciousness of its readers. The novella's transformation from a child's fable of friendship, to an adolescent's allegory of alienation, to an adult's philosophical treatise on existential responsibility shows that meaning is not an attribute of the text alone, but a product of the interaction between its symbolic structures and the reader's own developmental stage. The text acts as a mirror, and its meaning shifts as the face reflected in it changes over a lifetime. Finally, Dostoevsky's polyphonic art provides a masterful resolution to the problem of authorial intent. By intentionally relinquishing absolute authority and creating a world of ideologically autonomous characters, Dostoevsky models a universe where truth is not a monologic decree but a dialogic process. The unresolved debates in his novels are not a sign of authorial indecision but a profound ethical and artistic choice to represent human consciousness as fundamentally free, open-ended, and unfinalizable.

In synthesizing these three inquiries, a clear picture emerges. The perceived flaws of literature—its ambiguity, its resistance to definitive translation, its susceptibility to varied interpretation, its refusal to provide simple answers—are, in fact, its greatest strengths. These are the tensions that invite our engagement, which compel us to participate in the co-creation of meaning. The ultimate gamble of literature is this act of release: from the original language to the translator, from the author to the character, and from the completed text to the endless succession of readers. It is in this continuous, open-ended hermeneutic process that a work transcends its historical moment and becomes a living, breathing part of human culture, forever unstable and forever new.

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From Deformity to Diversity: The Evolution of Disability Narratives

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Abstract— This paper aims to explore how the idea of disability has been historically constructed, structured and concretized throughout history through myths, cultural practices and literary narratives and how in the contemporary era the notion of disability is questioned, interpreted and somewhat reinterpreted. Rather than understanding disability as merely a biological or medical condition, Disability Studies reinforces that societies actively produce meanings around bodily difference. This study takes the texts from ancient to postmodern works chronologically as its main reference. The main framework of the study is portrayed by The Disability Studies by Ed Robert and Irving Kenneth Zola along with the theory of Ideological State Apparatus by Louis Althusser and Michael Foucault's idea of biopower.



Keywords— Biopower, Disability, Evolution, Inclusivity, ISA

I. INTRODUCTION

न पृथ्वी न जलं नाग्निं वायुर्द्यौर्न वा भवान् ।

एषां साक्षिणमात्मानं चिद्रूपं विद्धि मुक्तये ॥

यदि देहं पृथक्कृत्य चिति विश्राम्य तिष्ठसि ।

अधुनैव सुखी शान्तो बन्धमुक्तो भविष्यसि ॥

("You are neither earth, nor water, nor fire, nor air or space. To liberate, know the witness of all these as conscious self. /If you detach yourself from the body and rest in consciousness, you will become content, peaceful and free from bondage immediately.")

-Ashtavakra Samhita Chapter 1 Verse 2 - Cultivating spiritual qualities

What is a human being, originally? Is our existence confined within the body we posit or is there something within us that remains beyond all of these? Everything in this universe that remains changing, is not true. Truth never changes. And if that is so, then neither the body nor the mind can be really true because, both keep changing from infant

to youth to old-age. The body is temporary, fragile, and destined to disappear in death - no matter whether the body is 'normal' or 'abnormal' according to society. These labels, after all, belong only to the eyes that judge, not to the essence that exists. But what remains unchanged is the consciousness - while the observed or "Kshetra" is sleeping, the observer or "Kshetrajna" always remains awake. (BG - ch 13 -13.2,13.3) Perhaps, then, to understand a human being is not to look at the body at all, but to listen to that inner stillness which has always been there, untouched, complete and eternal.

Yet, throughout ages, human societies have done precisely, the opposite - they have always been defined individuals though their bodies only. They connected someone's worth, morality and capability through their bodily appearances. It is within the "tension" ¹ - between what are told and what are made to become- that this research situated itself.

The paper begins with a simple yet intriguing question: if the self is beyond the body, why has the body been such a

powerful site of stigma? Or an object to control? From the bents of Ashtavakra himself, to the figures like Manthara and Dhritarashtra (whose bodies were the abodes of their moral cruelty); from the limping God Hephaestus to the monstrous Cyclops, or the Spartan tradition of abandoning deformed child, early narratives and social practices of different cultures were often allegorized bodily differences into a sign of cosmic curse, moral failure or social threat. They shaped the idea that to be physically different is equal to less capable, less beautiful and even less human. Over time, such ideas were carried forward into literature, where the so-called not so normal characters like Richard III² of William Shakespeare or the satirical world of *Gulliver's Travels* continued to tie the body to deeper anxieties about identity and power. Later in the Victorian age, the authors' projection of the cunning and corrupted goblins from *The Goblin Market* or the morally corrupted character of Dorian Gray from *The Picture of Dorian Gray* actually concretized those stigmas that deformity equals to corrupt nature or something that needs to be avoided. Even in the modern era also, the depiction of the character of Gregor Samsa, in *The Metamorphosis*, who turned into a vermin cockroach overnight, immediately excluded metaphorically from the society he inhabited. Even in the eyes of his parents and sister, he became a disgusting animal who should not have any place in the house.

But, in the postmodern narratives, something has begun to change. From *The Metamorphosis* to the lived experiences of Malini Chib - the body is no longer just a symbol imposed from outside. It becomes a voice from within.

This is exactly the shift that the paper seeks to trace. In order to do that it draws on the theories of Ed Roberts and Irving Kenneth Zola along with Louis Althusser and Michael Foucault. This paper argues that disability is something the society shaped through stories, institutions and ideologies that decides which body is normal and which is not.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The existing scholarship that contributed to this paper are, at first the classical works such as *Enforcing Normalcy* by Lennard Davis and *Extraordinary Bodies* by Rosemarie Garland-Thompson which stressed at the representations of disability in culture, art and not to mention literary narratives which challenge the societal barriers and the traditional classification of normal and abnormality. Dr. Ratan Sarkar's *Depiction of Disability in English Literature* which contributed to this paper with the understanding of representation of disability stereotypes in English literature. These representations offered important perspectives on how society views people with disabilities and alongside that, fights for inclusivity and representation in English

literature. This study also extends the existing knowledge of Dr. Rashmi Nagwanshi's work *The Representation of Disability in English Literature* where the characters with disability in selected English literary works have been studied and explored the implications of these portrayals on societal understanding and inclusion. Geethu Vijayan's *Disability Studies: A Path Breaking Approach to Literature* helped this paper to know its worth and to understand the need of the hour. In recent years the world has witnessed the drastic change in the way disabled people are treated and how disability studies promoted inclusion of disabled individuals globally. For instance, Michael Davidson's *Invalid Modernism: Disability and the Missing Body of the Aesthetic* and Clare Barker, Stuart Murray's *The Cambridge Companion: To Literature and Disability* focuses on the challenges in the way of studying disability in literature, which is narrow and not global. Last but not the least Mike Oliver's *Understanding Disability* helped this paper to understand, interpret and reinterpret disability as a social construct, not an individual's problem but a global one, shifting focus from medical impairment to social barriers.

This paper deviates from the existing literature in its approach to trace and track the evolution of the representation and understanding of disabled individuals. This paper tries to present that the idea around disability has been interpellated collectively not from a few decades or a few centuries but from ancient times. This evolution of disability narratives illustrates a gradual shift from deformity to diversity.

III. METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative, historical, and analytical approach situated within the broader paradigms of literary and cultural studies, specifically engaging with the critical discourse of Disability Studies. Moving away from rigid empirical structures, the methodological trajectory is driven by a close, contextual reading of selected literary and cinematic texts arranged chronologically. The primary textual analysis spans from ancient myths and classical narratives to postmodern works. By analyzing character depictions, from Shakespeare's Richard III and Swift's Gulliver to Kafka's Gregor Samsa and the lived experiences documented by Malini Chib, the study traces how bodily differences have been allegorized or represented across different epochs.

To decode these representations, the textual analysis is anchored by a dual theoretical framework that bridges systemic power dynamics with ideological conditioning. Utilizing Michael Foucault's concept of biopower, the study examines how the disabled body is historically regulated, marginalized, or controlled within institutional structures.

Complementing this, Louis Althusser's theory of Ideological State Apparatuses is applied to unravel how societal norms surrounding normalcy and deformity are culturally reproduced and deeply ingrained in public consciousness through stories and media. The foundational perspectives of Ed Roberts and Irving Kenneth Zola further guide this lens, ensuring that disability is evaluated not merely as a biological reality, but as a meaning actively produced by society. Through this combined theoretical lens, the research investigates the narrative transition from early depictions of disability as a moral failure or metaphor to contemporary narratives that demand authentic representation and systemic critique, effectively tracking the evolution from deformity to diversity.

IV. DEFORMITY AS PUNISHMENT - ANCIENT TO RENAISSANCE PERIOD

Building on the methodological framework established, the textual analysis of this paper begins from the earliest depictions of Sage Ashtavakra, probably the first ever conceptualization of disability in the ancient era. In that period, physical appearance has been linked to allegorical meanings, for instance, if a person doesn't have a perfect physique or if they are suffering from some kind of disability or impairment, it was to be believed that they are having cosmic curse or some kind of punishment due their bad past karmas although as presented in Ashtavakra Gita where, the conversation between Raja Janak and Ashtavakra Muni reveals that the true self is distinct from the temporary fragile gross³ body. Foremost, this paper discusses Sage Ashtavakra whose body presents a paradox within ancient Indian thought. According to traditional accounts, while still in his mother's womb, Ashtavakra corrected his father Kahola as his father mistook reciting Vedas. As a result, his father cursed him out of anger that he will be born with eight bends. Even his name laid upon his physical deformity. But why did his father give this particular curse? He could have given another one. It is deeply symbolic and culturally meaningful. This is a form of punishment which will stay permanently and can be seen and discriminated against by society. That's how deformity becomes a socially legible punishment. A son correcting his father, even though the son is right, was considered as 'adharma' as it was a form of violation of hierarchy. Despite all these, Ashtavakra achieved the highest spiritual dimension, understanding and teaching the society, the true self is beyond the body. That is how he first suffers by the stereotypes but later transcends it. From Althusser's perspective, the narrative reveals how ideology naturalizes bodily hierarchy and the then dominant cultural institutions (the sages were considered the supreme Gurus at that time) actually produced the categories of 'normal' and 'abnormal'

as if they were self-evident truths. From a psychoanalytical point of view, his body marks as a reservoir where the ego, that is often related to the visible, is shattered so that a deeper self, closer to Jung's notion of "Self", may emerge. His conversation with King Janaka symbolizes the process of individuation in which the conscious and the unconscious mind fuse into a unified whole.

In epics like *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, disability is frequently aligned with moral ambiguity or ethical failure. The character of Manthara, the hunchbacked maid of Rani Kaikeyi in *Ramayana* is portrayed as manipulative and malicious. She remained the main 'daasi' of the queen since childhood. She brainwashed the mind of Kaikeyi to force the king to send Rama, the elder son of king Dasharath and the future king of Ayodhya, in vanavas through the power from a previous promise by the king that he will fulfil any wishes of the queen. The main motive of her was to designate Bharat, the son of Kaikeyi, as the next king of Ayodhya. When the character is read through the triangulated lens of Jungian psychoanalysis, Althusser's ISA and disability studies, the character is not only cunning but a reservoir where psyche, power and embodiment mingle together. She is a projection of "shadow archetype"⁴, representing the repressed anxieties and the dark side of human being which sometime overpowers the public self. In the case of Manthara, maybe it is the result of the continuous fear of losing power, as she was the main servant of Kaikeyi, if instead of Bharat, Rama gets the throne, Kaikeyi will not be so influential and as a result Manthara will lose the minimum security she has. The text does not show she has any kind of hatred towards Rama. but still she manipulated Kaikeyi out of her fear of losing the identity of her and her beloved queen. In this case she cannot be labelled as an antagonist fully; in fact, she herself is a victim of discrimination. In Althusserian terms, Manthara acts as a micro agent of the Ideological State Apparatus, not through any institutional authority but an internal commanding household voice that has emerged by constant ideological interpellation which has been injected in 'manthar gati' (literal meaning of 'Manthara') or a slow manner. Her crookedness is read as both corporeal and ethical that reveals how the text encodes ideological bias onto the disabled body, making an instance how the social stigmas have been created and justified.

Another example of such a shadow archetype is the character of Dhritarashtra in the *Mahabharata* as his inborn blindness operates simultaneously at the levels of power and social construction. His blindness, through the discriminations he faced from childhood, becomes internalized as a lack, which eventually creates hatred for his own brother Pandu who, according to him, was the king just because he was physically normal. This internalization

made him commence grave adharmas throughout his life. Even after being the working king or 'karyakari raja' throughout many years, he did not want to leave the throne to the actual successor which is Yudhisthira; and in order to make Duryodhana (eldest son of Dhritarashtra) the king of Hastinapur forcefully, he did numerous wrong acts including the worst one that is the disrobing of Draupadi who was the 'Samragyi', 'Kuru Kula Vadhu' and the wife of the five Pandavas. He internalized his blindness so concretely that even when Rishi Vyasa and Shree Krishna both offered him cosmic vision or 'Divya Drishti' twice, he rejected both the offers as he could not 'see' the result of his own injustices. Yet, unlike Manthara he was not disabled but impaired and a crucial character who was the working King himself meaning he was situated at the center of power, passively reproducing and legitimizing it where his blindness became a tool of a public mask and from within his shadow self was dominating.

The reference of Kubja, who has a three-bent body, from *Mahabharata* is another example of deformity. Unlike Dhritarashtra or Manthara, she was not portrayed as evil; rather she silently suffered through her entire life until Krishna came to Mathura and by the touch of him, she transformed into a beautiful maiden. This shows that no one except God can cure deformity and deformed humans have to wait for God regardless of how much time it takes. But who determines what body is perfect and what not? From Althusserian point of view, Kubja's transformation into a "straight" and beautiful body reveals the deep operation of ideological conditioning, where the only imaginable redemption for a disabled body is its normalization, thus reproducing dominant aesthetic and bodily norms through a divine apparatus rather than dismantling them.

This bodily discrimination is not confined only within Indian mythology but worldwide. For instance, the Spartan tradition of abandoning deformed children.

In Greek mythic consciousness, figures such as the Cyclops and Hephaestus, alongside the Spartan infanticide of abandoning deformed infants, together reveal a tightly interwoven ideological structure that can be sharply illuminated through Jungian psychoanalysis, Louis Althusser's concept of ISA, and Disability Studies. From a Jungian perspective, the Cyclops operates as an embodiment of the collective unconscious's repressed "shadow," where bodily abnormality is projected as monstrosity, encoding society's fear of deviation into a singular, grotesque eye that symbolizes both excess perception and primitive lack, while Hephaestus represents a more conflicted archetype—the wounded creator—whose impaired body is simultaneously marginalized and instrumentalized, revealing an unconscious attempt to reconcile deficiency with productivity without ever

normalizing it. This psychic structuring seamlessly aligns with Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses, where myth functions as a cultural ISA that interpellated subjects into accepting a normative bodily order: the Cyclops is expelled as the absolute other, Hephaestus is conditionally accepted only through utility, and Spartan infanticide emerges as the most material enforcement of this ideology, where the state directly inscribes normativity onto the population by eliminating bodies that disrupt the ideal. Disability Studies exposes this entire formation as neither natural nor inevitable but as a historically produced regime of meaning, where bodily difference is systematically transformed into a site of fear, control, or conditional value; thus, what appears as myth or tradition is in fact a coordinated epistemic violence that constructs disability as deviance, legitimizes its exclusion, and normalizes the erasure of non-conforming bodies under the guise of cosmic order, divine hierarchy, or civic necessity.

The study further incorporates the instances of deformity in the Renaissance period. It takes the example of the famous play by Shakespeare. In *Richard III*, the main character King Richard III reveals a fractured Jungian psyche where failed individuation produces a hyper-conscious self that converts exclusion into calculated performance. He was never an inborn villain, rather he was self-aware. He openly stated that, "I am determined to prove a villain" and then stages himself differently for different audiences—pious before the citizens, submissive before Lady Anne, loyal before the court. That's how he is also another example of the Jungian Shadow archetype. Through Louis Althusser's lens, he is a subject constituted by ideology that codes bodily deformity as moral deviance, which he both exposes and exploits. His villainy thus emerges not as innate evil but as a strategic negotiation between psychic rupture and ideological conditioning.

V. DEFORMITY AS CONCRETIZED SOCIAL TABOO - NEO CLASSICAL TO VICTORIAN ERA

Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* construct an example of bodily difference, where each society Gulliver enters not only reacts to his body but builds different meanings through their social customs. When Gulliver first woke up on the island of the Lilliput, he saw lots of tiny cords by which he was bound. It is an ideology where they want to control the non-normative body, they measure his body, climb on it and want to know about his body and make a list of the things he carries in his pocket which is also new to them. When seen through the lens of Althusser's Ideological State Apparatus, the body which does not fit in the established norms, people try to control it in different

ways through imposing conditions upon them. The emperor gave Gulliver freedom after he agreed upon loyalty and obedience. After looking at Gulliver's body the reaction of Lilliputians reflects on the politics of 'power', precisely, Foucault's concept of biopower - where the body is controlled and observed by the authority of the society. The Lilliputians' acts of chaining, measuring, counting his belongings and consulting with others on what to do with him. The emperor always keeps a safe distance from Gulliver and observes him how he reacts, does things and instructs others because he is the political authority that controls not only an individual but also society itself. Disability Studies make the argument stronger. Gulliver is not disabled; he became one when he entered into a different society. He is labelled as a giantlike figure and when he went to the society of Brobdingnag, he became so small and the farmer made him an economical entertainer and displayed to the audience what his non-normative body looks like in exchange of some fortune. But Ed Roberts and Irving Zola state that the concept of disability is not just a medical problem but what society makes them by giving them lack of opportunities and also through ideology that makes the disabled person an evil one. Next, the paper brings the example of Struldbrugs who are immortal but aging. Swift portrays them as disgusted people, pity them, as well as mock them about what exactly society looks towards the disabled people. The concept of the dependent body is not only applicable for the disabled people but also to the aged people.

"Come buy, come buy" Christina Rossetti's *Goblin Market* opens with this seductive cry of goblins which seduce the female body to break the rule and do something transgressive and gradually the poem instructs how this transgression turns into punishment. Lizzie's statement "We must not look at goblin men" not only symbolizes temptation of the goblin about their grotesque body and nature but also this is the ideological sign of breaking the Victorian societal norms prescribed for women. Rossetti describes goblins with features like cat faces, rat tails, snail paced movement with large ears, a monster-like figure which shows bodily deformity on one hand and on the other the moral corruption. They do not possess the 'normal' body and are presented as untrustworthy and dangerous for society. From the perspective of Disability Studies, constructed by Ed Roberts and Irving Kenneth Zola, presents how literature shapes society's mind about everything and teaches how to connect a disabled body with evil spirit rather than just describe it as the other form of the human body. After eating the goblins' seductive fruit Laura deteriorates physically. Her hair turns gray, she cannot hear the sounds of goblins anymore and decay day by day, this is not a biological coincidence for her, it is a moral and

physical as well as psychological punishment for her. It is a punishment in the eyes of Victorian society as she tried to break the rules imposed upon women at that time but ideologically women shouldn't need to question boundaries imposed upon them. Here Althusser's idea of Ideological State Apparatuses comes and represents how the poem impacts the ideology of the audience about the Victorian morality of female obedience and confinement. Through the lenses of Biopower by Michael Foucault where he simply said that power is not only to castigate people but they control or manage the people's body and make sure that all people act 'normal' as society expects. When Laura eats the forbidden fruits of goblin and acts abnormal in the terms of society, Lizzie goes, faces the goblins and brings the juice to restore Laura in her normal position – her power acts as a healing process. A comparison of – the serpent in the Garden of Eden tempting Adam and Eve for consuming the forbidden fruit of knowledge, in the poem goblin tempts Laura in all the ways for their exotic fruits – in both examples fruit is the main medium of temptation. According to the Archetypal Criticism from the works of Carl Jung & Northrop Frye, some characters and symbols repeated across human culture through universal history are called Archetypes. In this poem, Goblin or the Serpent act as a universal archetype. Their disabled body has survived beyond the norms which signify the moral decline which paved the way for destruction.

The Picture of Dorian Gray is a novel about a man named Dorian Gray who trades his soul to the evil for eternal youth while a painted portrait ages in accordance with his moral corruption - shows how the natural phenomenon of aging is connected with moral vanity. The portrait here stands for a metaphorically disabled body. The society not only controls through law but through culture, religion and education, which, according to Althusser, is an Ideological State Apparatus and teaches them about their morality, beauty and body. These institutions teach people what is good, what is not good, what is appreciated, what is not appreciated and most importantly what is normal and what is not normal about the body. Victorian society always wants people to be beautiful, presentable and physically refined, for them beauty is a sign of moral goodness. If there is anyone who is not beautiful or normal according to them, they must be abandoned from society. The main character has grown up with the same perspective. Lord Henry Wotton constantly told him about the youth & beauty one should possess for their whole life. He does not force Dorian about this idea but he slowly injects it in a way people absorb the ideology then he curses his own picture. In this regard, the concept of "Disciplined body" by Foucault can be relatable where society teaches individuals how to behave with obedience without even realizing it. Gray

thinks that like the guard of the Panopticon⁵, someone always keeps an eye on him. Ed Roberts and Irving Kenneth Zola argued that disability is not a medical and biological condition rather it is a social phenomenon that constructed the word 'disabled' and rejected those who are actually suffering from this. Society should provide them more opportunities so they can grow in different ways. Similar to the story, where society states that the picture must be hidden in some corner because Victorian society is not ready to face their own flaws like ugly faces, moral declination and bodily decay but they try to hide their mistakes through their beauty. Here again the archetype of a crooked body linked with an evil soul is repeated and marked by the 'shadow archetype'. In order to protect the 'persona' or a perfect public self, which was a most important factor in the Victorian era, his moral corruptions are projected into the portrait itself. Here the portrait functions as a horcrux of Gray. As soon as he stabs the picture, the real Gray dies and the distortion that was previously seen in the picture, immediately imposes upon the face of Gray and the portrait becomes youthful as it was. Here Gray's inner cruelty and repressed desires are presented by the distorted picture. This separation reinforces the cultural idea that deformity becomes the visible mark of inner evil, aligning with the paper's argument that bodily distortion is historically used to symbolize moral degeneration.

VI. DEFORMITY - PHYSICAL CONSTRAINT OR MENTAL CHAIN? STEPPING TOWARDS SUBVERSION- MODERN TO POST MODERN ERA

Moving on to modern literature the representation or rather the stripping of human status due to the physical inability is widely captured in Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*. Louis Althusser's lens of Ideological state apparatus, when used to read the text, reveals how identity is constructed and shaped by capitalist production. The economics apparatus comes into play when the chief clerk visits Gregor Samsa as soon as he is late for work. This invasion of the private sphere suggests the loss of identity soon after losing the production ability. Gregor's loss of "normal" communication ability instantly raises the question if he is a normal functioning human or not. Once the ability to earn is lost the family apparatus completes the ideological erasure, which is physically manifested when Grete and the mother removed most of the furniture belonged to the human Gregor to give him "room to crawl", and act that reshapes the environment to enforce a non-human individual. Gregor's desperate attempt to save the picture on the wall symbolizes a last, futile resort against this erasure of his human status. Lastly, the father's apple attack, that

gets the apple lodged deep into his back, leaves Gregor permanently tainted. This symbolizes society's physical, emotional and violent rejection of the disabled body. This destruction of Gregor's identity gets the last knell on his coffin, when his sister states "We must try to get rid of it...If he could understand us, then it would be possible to come to some agreement". The family entirely rejects Gregor the human by referring to him as "it". This family apparatus actively erases the individual who no longer fits into the institutional norms of basic communication, economic utility and inability to produce.

If Kafka illustrates the vastness and force of normative ISAs, Malini Chib's autobiography *One Little Finger* focuses on standing against all of them. Chib's memoir documents a constant battle against society from the birthing bed. Her medical condition called cerebral palsy has got her into struggles for acceptance in any Indian educational institutions, constructing with this experience her later interactions in the UK, exposes the educational Ideological State Apparatuses as an obstacle that forcefully rejects entry to those who are "not fit" or "non-functionable" for a capitalist society. This permute of education in Malini Chib's life has been presented as a protest against a society that hastily generalizes a disabled person, a passive patient. Overall, she criticizes the medical gaze, established through constant encounters and interactions with doctors and therapists, which views disability just through a pathological lens and reduces her to a "broken machine" that needs fixing, threatening to destroy her individual identity. However, Malini Chib reclaims her identity overtly by the symbolic title of the book *One Little Finger*, which is everything she uses to type and tell her story to the readers. By using technology to get past her physical limitations, she firmly revokes the erasure of her identity. Here she symbolically states that the world will reshape itself to accommodate not only her but also any individual with limitations, rather than allowing the world to reshape one's own identity to fit its "rigid normativity".

Whether it is Kafka's allegorical tragedy or Chib's lived experiences that resist established norms, the theoretical underpinning of them or found in Michael Oliver's *Understanding Disability*. Oliver presents a critical eye towards the Apparatuses that disable individuals, changing the focal point from individual impairment to institutional and social barriers. He argues that different professionals such as social workers, medical staff or institutional administrators are often ideologically devoted to reinforce power and control over individuals with impairments. Here Oliver reconstructs the lens of the society where disability is showcased as a deficit requiring management, the welfare committees and medical service providers promote structural dependency. They interpellated impaired

individuals as passive receptors of care rather than active and autonomous citizens. Michel Oliver through this theoretical lens perfectly brews and enhances the previous mentioned literally examples and exposes the institutional rigidity that forced Gregor Samsa into a dependent helpless “non-human” status within his own room and it exhibits the very hierarchical power structure that Malini Chib consistently combats to achieve and independent, “self-written” life.

VII. CONCLUSION

The trajectory traced throughout this paper—from the bent body of Ashtavakra to the voice-claiming subjects of contemporary narratives—reveals not merely a shift in representation, but a profound transformation in the very epistemology of disability. What begins as a culturally inscribed mark of curse, punishment, or moral deviation gradually unfolds into a site of resistance, selfhood, and plurality. Across myth, epic, classical literature, and modern texts, the disabled body has been persistently read, interpreted, and controlled by dominant ideological structures that sought to stabilize the fragile boundary between the “normal” and the “abnormal.” Through the frameworks of Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault, it becomes evident that these boundaries were never natural but systematically produced—through narratives, institutions, and cultural conditioning that normalized exclusion while masking it as truth. Yet, as the analysis demonstrates, this imposed meaning is neither fixed nor inevitable. The figure of Ashtavakra already disrupts this paradigm at its origin, offering a philosophical counterpoint that refuses to reduce the self to bodily form. His teaching—that the essence of being lies beyond the mutable body—quietly destabilizes the very logic upon which stigma is constructed. However, for centuries, literature continued to reinscribe the body as a visible index of inner corruption or lack, from Manthara and Dhritarashtra to Richard III and Gregor Samsa. These figures expose how deeply ideology penetrates the psyche, transforming social prejudice into internalized identity.

The modern and postmodern turn, however, marks a decisive rupture. Disability begins to speak rather than be spoken for. It is no longer confined to metaphor or allegory but emerges as lived reality, demanding recognition beyond pity, fear, or correction. Narratives foreground embodied experience, not as deviation from a norm, but as an equally valid mode of existence. In doing so, they challenge the long-standing assumption that normalization is the only path to acceptance, instead proposing diversity as the fundamental condition of human life.

Thus, the movement from deformity to diversity is not

simply historical—it is philosophical and political. It calls for a reimagining of the human itself, no longer anchored in bodily perfection or conformity, but in the multiplicity of forms through which life manifests. In returning to Ashtavakra at the end, the paper completes a conceptual circle: what was once articulated as a spiritual truth now resonates as a socio-cultural imperative. If the self is indeed beyond the body, then the hierarchies imposed upon bodies lose their ultimate legitimacy. What remains, then, is not the correction of difference, but its acknowledgment—an ethical recognition that everybody, in its uniqueness, already participates in wholeness.

VIII. NOTES

[¹ Tension - Tension in Poetry (1938) by Allen Tate defining tension as the crucial balance between a poem's literal(denotative) and metaphorical(connotative) meanings, representing the total meaning of a poem]

[²Richard III - King Richard III (1452–1485) was the last Plantagenet and English king to die in battle, killed at the Battle of Bosworth Field, ending the Wars of the Roses. Ruling from 1483 to 1485, he seized the throne from his nephew, Edward V. His remains, discovered under a Leicester car park in 2012, showed scoliosis and severe battle injuries.]

[³Three types of body – Gross (tangible), Subtle (Jivatma) and causal (cause of birth)]

[⁴Shadow archetype - the unconscious, depressed, dark side of human being, elaborated by Carl Jung]

[⁵Panopticon - A panopticon is a circular prison design featuring a central surveillance tower surrounded by cells, allowing a single guard to observe all inmates without being seen. Conceived by Jeremy Bentham in the 18th century, it is a metaphor for total surveillance and self-regulation]

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An Existential Study of Isolation, Unrequited Love, and the Search for Meaning in *White Nights*

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Abstract— This paper examines *White Nights* by Fyodor Dostoevsky through an existentialist framework, focusing on isolation, meaninglessness, and the fragile construction of human connection. The unnamed Dreamer, who exists on the margins of social life, embodies a form of existential alienation shaped by his retreat into imagination and his inability to engage with reality. His brief but emotionally intense relationship with Nastenka becomes a crucial site for examining the possibility of meaning within an otherwise indifferent world. While the Dreamer interprets love as an idealized, self-contained experience, the novella exposes the limitations of such a perspective by revealing its roots in passivity and emotional detachment. In contrast, Nastenka's eventual movement toward a real and reciprocal relationship highlights the importance of action and lived experience in overcoming isolation. The paper argues that the text challenges the romanticization of unrequited love and presents meaning as ephemeral, contingent upon authentic engagement rather than fantasy. Ultimately, *White Nights* suggests that although moments of connection may be transient, they remain central to the human effort to create meaning in an uncertain existence.



Keywords— Alienation, existentialism, imagination and reality, *White Nights*

I. INTRODUCTION

White Nights by Fyodor Dostoevsky offers a subtle yet profound exploration of human isolation and the longing for emotional connection within the modern urban environment. Set in St. Petersburg, the novella centers on an unnamed narrator, commonly referred to as the Dreamer, whose existence is defined by solitude, introspection, and an excessive reliance on imagination. His chance encounter with Nastenka initiates a brief but emotionally intense relationship that disrupts his habitual detachment from reality. However, this connection ultimately proves transient, returning him to a state of isolation that underscores the instability of human fulfillment.

The thematic concerns of the text align closely with existentialist thought, particularly in its treatment of alienation, meaninglessness, and the individual's struggle to construct purpose in an indifferent world. Existentialism, as articulated by thinkers such as Jean-Paul

Sartre and Albert Camus, emphasizes that meaning is not inherent but must be created through conscious action and engagement with reality. Within this framework, the Dreamer's withdrawal into fantasy represents a refusal to confront the uncertainties of existence, while his understanding of love reflects an idealized and ultimately unsustainable mode of being.

This paper argues that *White Nights* critiques the romanticization of unrequited love and exposes the limitations of imagination as a substitute for lived experience. Through the contrasting trajectories of the Dreamer and Nastenka, the novella demonstrates that while fleeting emotional connections may offer temporary meaning, lasting fulfillment depends on active participation in reality. By situating the narrative within an existentialist framework, this study highlights how Dostoevsky presents isolation not merely as a condition imposed by society, but as a consequence of individual choices that shape one's engagement with the world.

II. THE DREAMER AS AN EXISTENTIAL FIGURE

The unnamed narrator of *White Nights*, commonly referred to as the Dreamer, embodies a distinctly existential condition marked by alienation, passivity, and a profound disconnection from lived reality. His lack of a personal name is significant, as it reflects not merely narrative anonymity but a deeper absence of stable identity. Rather than existing as a fully realized individual within a social framework, the Dreamer occupies a marginal position, defined more by his internal states than by meaningful external relationships. This detachment aligns closely with existential concerns regarding the individual's struggle to assert identity in a world that offers no inherent structure or meaning.

The Dreamer's self-identification as a "dreamer" further reinforces his existential predicament. He openly acknowledges his tendency to withdraw from reality into a self-constructed world of imagination, where experiences are idealized and controlled. In this imagined realm, he forms connections, experiences emotions, and constructs narratives that compensate for the deficiencies of his actual life. However, this reliance on fantasy ultimately reveals an evasion of existential responsibility. Rather than engaging with the uncertainties and risks inherent in real human interaction, he chooses the safety of illusion, thereby limiting his capacity for authentic existence.

This pattern of withdrawal reflects what existential thought identifies as inauthentic living. Although thinkers such as Jean-Paul Sartre emphasize the necessity of action in defining one's essence, the Dreamer resists such engagement. His life is characterized not by decisive action but by observation and reflection. He watches others from a distance, inventing stories about their lives, yet he rarely participates in the social world himself. This passive mode of existence prevents him from forming genuine relationships and reinforces his sense of isolation.

Moreover, the Dreamer's emotional life, while intense, lacks grounding in reality. His feelings are often directed toward imagined figures or idealized versions of real individuals, suggesting that his experiences are mediated by literary and aesthetic influences rather than direct interaction. This tendency becomes particularly evident in his relationship with Nastenka, where his rapid emotional investment reflects not a gradual development of mutual understanding but the projection of pre-existing fantasies onto a real person.

In this sense, the Dreamer's condition illustrates the limitations of an existence dominated by imagination. While his inner world provides temporary solace, it ultimately functions as a barrier that separates him from

authentic experience. His inability to reconcile his imaginative life with the demands of reality results in a persistent state of alienation, highlighting the existential tension between the desire for meaning and the reluctance to pursue it through concrete action.

III. ISOLATION AND ALIENATION

The Isolation constitutes a central condition shaping both the psychological and existential realities of the characters in *White Nights*. For the Dreamer, isolation is not merely circumstantial but deeply internalized, reflecting a sustained disengagement from social life. Despite having lived in St. Petersburg for several years, he remains entirely without meaningful relationships, a condition that underscores his inability to integrate into the social fabric of the city. His solitude is thus not accidental but indicative of a broader existential alienation, wherein the individual exists in proximity to others yet remains fundamentally disconnected from them.

This form of alienation is intensified by the Dreamer's habitual retreat into imagination. Rather than seeking to alleviate his loneliness through interaction, he constructs an internal world that substitutes for real experience. Over time, this withdrawal becomes self-reinforcing: the more he relies on fantasy, the less capable he becomes of navigating the complexities of actual human relationships. His isolation, therefore, is both a cause and a consequence of his psychological disposition. In existential terms, this reflects a failure to engage with the world in a manner that allows for the creation of meaning through lived experience.

The Dreamer's encounter with Nastenka briefly disrupts this condition. Their conversations, marked by emotional openness and mutual vulnerability, offer him an experience of connection that he has long lacked. For a short period, he is able to step outside the confines of his solitary existence and participate in a shared emotional reality. This interaction suggests the possibility of overcoming alienation through human connection, aligning with existential thought that emphasizes relational engagement as a means of constructing meaning.

However, the fragility of this connection reveals the persistence of the Dreamer's isolation. Even within his relationship with Nastenka, his tendency to idealize and project limits the authenticity of their interaction. He interprets her kindness as a deeper emotional commitment, thereby imposing his own expectations onto the relationship. This misalignment highlights the extent to which his isolation has shaped his perception, rendering him unable to fully apprehend the reality of the other person.

In contrast, Nastenka's isolation, though equally pronounced, arises from external constraints rather than internal withdrawal. Her grandmother's strict control confines her physically and socially, restricting her opportunities for interaction. Yet, unlike the Dreamer, Nastenka actively seeks to overcome her isolation. Her decision to wait for the lodger, to communicate with him, and eventually to commit to a relationship demonstrates a willingness to engage with reality despite uncertainty and risk.

The juxtaposition of these two forms of isolation underscores a key thematic concern of the novella: the distinction between imposed and self-sustained alienation. While both characters experience loneliness, their responses diverge significantly. Nastenka moves toward connection through action, whereas the Dreamer retreats further into himself. This contrast highlights the existential implication that isolation, while often unavoidable, can be either confronted or perpetuated through individual choice.

IV. UNREQUITED LOVE AND EMOTIONAL ILLUSION

One of the most significant aspects of the Dreamer's existential condition in *White Nights* is his identification with the figure of the unrequited lover. Traditionally, unreciprocated love has often been represented in literature as ennobling, capable of refining the individual through emotional devotion and self-sacrifice. However, the novella resists this romanticized notion by presenting unrequited love not as a source of growth, but as a mechanism that reinforces isolation and emotional stagnation. In doing so, it offers a critical re-evaluation of a well-established literary trope.

The Dreamer's understanding of love is deeply shaped by literary conventions rather than lived experience. He recounts how he has previously "fallen in love" with distant, idealized women whom he has never truly known. These imagined attachments are characterized by their lack of reciprocity and their dependence on fantasy. For the Dreamer, the mere act of expressing his feelings—and receiving even minimal acknowledgment—appears sufficient to produce a sense of fulfillment. This conception of love is fundamentally one-sided, transforming it into a self-contained emotional performance rather than a mutual relationship grounded in reality.

His relationship with Nastenka initially appears to challenge this pattern, as it involves direct interaction and emotional exchange. Yet, the underlying structure of his attachment remains unchanged. Despite Nastenka's explicit admission that her affection belongs to another

man, the Dreamer allows himself to develop deep feelings for her. His emotional investment is less a response to the actual dynamics of their relationship than a projection of his pre-existing ideals. As a result, his love for Nastenka becomes another instance of unrequited longing, shaped more by imagination than by reciprocity.

The novella critiques this mode of loving by exposing its limitations. When Nastenka ultimately returns to the lodger, the Dreamer attempts to frame his experience as meaningful, asserting that even a brief moment of happiness justifies his emotional suffering. However, this interpretation is implicitly undermined by the narrative. Rather than presenting his devotion as admirable, the text invites a reading of it as misguided and self-defeating. His willingness to accept emotional fulfillment in such minimal and fleeting terms reveals a diminished expectation of what love can and should be.

Nastenka's perspective further reinforces this critique. She does not perceive the Dreamer as inherently unworthy of love; instead, she encourages him to seek genuine, reciprocal relationships. Her actions suggest that fulfillment lies not in passive longing but in active engagement with reality. By choosing to reunite with the lodger and pursue a concrete future, she embodies a more pragmatic and grounded approach to love.

Through this contrast, the novella dismantles the ideal of unrequited love as an ennobling force. Instead, it presents such love as symptomatic of a deeper existential failure—the inability or unwillingness to pursue meaningful connection in the real world. The Dreamer's emotional illusion, sustained by literary fantasy, ultimately leaves him more isolated, reinforcing the text's broader critique of escapism and passive existence.

V. IMAGINATION AND REALITY

The tension between imagination and reality constitutes a central thematic concern in *White Nights*, functioning as a key lens through which the existential condition of the Dreamer is revealed. Imagination, in the novella, is presented both as a source of comfort and as a mechanism of self-deception. While it allows the individual to escape the limitations of lived experience, it simultaneously prevents meaningful engagement with reality, thereby reinforcing isolation and existential dissatisfaction.

For the Dreamer, imagination is not merely an occasional retreat but a dominant mode of existence. He constructs elaborate internal narratives that replace direct experience, enabling him to inhabit a world shaped entirely by his desires and ideals. Within this imagined realm, relationships are harmonious, emotions are intensified, and

disappointments can be controlled or avoided. However, this idealization comes at a significant cost. By privileging fantasy over reality, the Dreamer relinquishes the unpredictability and complexity that define authentic human interaction.

This reliance on imagination reflects an existential evasion. Rather than confronting the inherent uncertainty and potential pain of real-life relationships, the Dreamer chooses a safer, self-contained alternative. Yet, this choice ultimately undermines his capacity to experience genuine fulfillment. His imagined experiences, however vivid, lack the reciprocity and grounding necessary for sustained meaning. As a result, his existence remains marked by a persistent sense of incompleteness.

The relationship with Nastenka momentarily disrupts this pattern by introducing an element of reality into the Dreamer's life. Their conversations, shared confidences, and emotional exchanges provide him with an opportunity to move beyond the confines of his imagination. For a brief period, he participates in a form of connection that is not entirely self-generated. However, his tendency to interpret this interaction through the lens of fantasy limits its transformative potential. He quickly assimilates the experience into his pre-existing framework of idealized love, thereby diminishing its grounding in reality.

Nastenka's relationship with imagination, while present, differs significantly in its function and implications. Her fantasies serve as a temporary means of coping with the restrictions imposed by her grandmother, rather than as a permanent substitute for reality. She engages with literature and entertains imaginative scenarios, yet she does not allow these to replace her desire for a tangible, lived future. When the opportunity arises, she chooses to act, pursuing a relationship that offers the possibility of real change in her circumstances.

This contrast highlights the novella's critical stance on the role of imagination in human life. While it acknowledges the aesthetic and emotional value of fantasy, it ultimately underscores its limitations as a foundation for existence. Imagination, when detached from action, becomes a form of self-imposed confinement. The Dreamer's failure lies in his inability to transition from imagining life to living it, whereas Nastenka's relative success stems from her willingness to engage with reality despite its inherent uncertainties.

In existential terms, the opposition between imagination and reality reflects the broader tension between avoidance and engagement. The novella suggests that meaning cannot be sustained within the confines of fantasy alone; it must be grounded in lived experience, shaped by choices that carry both risk and consequence. By illustrating the

consequences of excessive reliance on imagination, *White Nights* ultimately affirms the necessity of confronting reality as the basis for authentic existence.

VI. NASTENKA AS EXISTENTIAL CONTRAST: ACTION AND ENGAGEMENT

Within *White Nights*, Nastenka functions as a crucial counterpoint to the Dreamer, embodying an alternative mode of existence grounded in action and engagement with reality. While both characters experience isolation and emotional vulnerability, their responses to these conditions diverge significantly. This contrast allows the novella to explore the existential implications of choice, responsibility, and the possibility of overcoming alienation.

Nastenka's isolation, unlike that of the Dreamer, is largely imposed by external circumstances. Her grandmother's strict supervision restricts her movements and limits her social interactions, creating a form of confinement that is both physical and psychological. However, despite these constraints, Nastenka does not internalize her isolation in the same manner as the Dreamer. Instead, she actively seeks avenues of escape and connection, demonstrating a willingness to confront and alter her circumstances.

Her relationship with the lodger exemplifies this orientation toward action. Rather than retreating into fantasy, she invests in a real, albeit uncertain, relationship that offers the possibility of change. Even during the period of waiting, when the lodger's absence creates doubt and emotional distress, Nastenka continues to act—writing letters, seeking reassurance, and maintaining hope. Her actions reflect an engagement with reality that contrasts sharply with the Dreamer's passivity.

This distinction becomes particularly evident in her interaction with the Dreamer. Although she forms an emotional bond with him and briefly considers the possibility of a future together, her decision-making ultimately aligns with her commitment to the lodger. When he reappears, she responds immediately, prioritizing a tangible and reciprocal relationship over the more ambiguous and emotionally mediated connection she shares with the Dreamer. While this shift may appear abrupt, it underscores her orientation toward concrete action rather than prolonged indecision or emotional abstraction.

At the same time, Nastenka's behavior is not without complexity. Her reliance on the Dreamer during moments of uncertainty reveals a degree of emotional inconsistency, as she seeks comfort without fully acknowledging the implications of his growing attachment. In this sense, she

participates, albeit inadvertently, in the dynamics that lead to his suffering. However, unlike the Dreamer, she does not remain immobilized by her emotions. Her actions, even when flawed, are directed toward shaping her future within the real world.

From an existential perspective, Nastenka represents the possibility of authentic engagement. Her choices illustrate the principle that meaning is constructed through action, even when such action involves risk, uncertainty, or potential harm. In contrast, the Dreamer's reluctance to move beyond imagination results in a static existence, defined more by reflection than by transformation.

The juxtaposition of these two characters thus reinforces the central argument of the novella. While both are initially situated within conditions of isolation, their differing responses determine their outcomes. Nastenka's willingness to engage with reality enables her to move toward a more stable and fulfilling existence, whereas the Dreamer's continued reliance on fantasy leaves him trapped in a cycle of longing and solitude.

Through this contrast, *White Nights* underscores the existential imperative of action. It suggests that while emotional experience and imagination have value, they must be accompanied by a readiness to confront reality and assume responsibility for one's choices. In the absence of such engagement, the search for meaning remains incomplete, confined within the boundaries of illusion rather than realized within the world.

VII. CONCLUSION

White Nights offers a nuanced exploration of existential concerns, particularly the tension between isolation and the human desire for meaningful connection. Through the figure of the Dreamer, Fyodor Dostoevsky presents an individual who is acutely aware of his loneliness yet remains unable to transcend it due to his reliance on imagination and passive modes of existence. His retreat into fantasy, while providing temporary emotional solace, ultimately reinforces his alienation by preventing genuine engagement with reality.

The novella challenges the romanticization of unrequited love by exposing its limitations as a source of fulfillment. The Dreamer's understanding of love, shaped by literary ideals rather than lived experience, confines him to a cycle of longing that lacks reciprocity and permanence. His brief relationship with Nastenka momentarily disrupts this pattern, offering a glimpse of connection and purpose. However, his inability to sustain or act upon this experience results in a return to isolation, underscoring the fragility of meaning when it is not grounded in concrete

action.

In contrast, Nastenka's trajectory illustrates a more engaged and pragmatic approach to existence. Despite her own constraints and emotional uncertainties, she demonstrates a willingness to act, to make decisions, and to pursue a future within the real world. Her choices, though imperfect, enable her to move beyond the limitations of her circumstances, highlighting the existential principle that meaning emerges through action and commitment.

Ultimately, *White Nights* suggests that while moments of emotional intimacy may be fleeting, they are nonetheless significant in the human search for meaning. However, such moments cannot substitute for sustained engagement with reality. The Dreamer's tragedy lies not simply in his loneliness, but in his failure to transform experience into action. By presenting this contrast, the novella affirms that authentic existence requires the courage to confront uncertainty, to accept the risks inherent in human relationships, and to participate actively in the shaping of one's own life.

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An acknowledgement section may be presented after the conclusion, if desired.

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The Forsaken Garden: Racial Capitalism and the Ecological Violence of Plantation Logic in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*

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Abstract— *A close reading of Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness, highlighting the motif of the "forsaken garden" at the Central Station, reveals the novella as a dynamic archive of plantation logic and racial capitalism. While many ecocritical interpretations depict the Congo as an untamed wilderness, this study foregrounds cultivated spaces that are rendered sterile and dead. Drawing on Cedric Robinson, Katherine McKittrick, and Jason W. Moore, this article argues that colonial cultivation was not just a historical phenomenon but an enduring socio-ecological logic of expendability—one that renders both land and labor disposable. Conrad's horticultural imagery—especially the withered garden and the adjacent grove of the dead, vividly illustrates what Rob Nixon calls slow violence: harm that builds up time and space. The novella's silence on rubber harvesting, contrasted with the Casement Report, positions ivory as an ideological stand-in for rubber. Conrad's use of fog, impressionistic description, and atmospheric uncertainty generates an aesthetics of whiteness— affective strategies that obscure the brutality of racial and environmental violence. By bringing the abandoned garden to the forefront, Heart of Darkness stands out as a literary record of plantation dynamics—a structure that continues to shape the contemporary climate crisis and racial injustice.*

Keywords— *Racial capitalism, plantation logic, slow violence, ecocriticism, Congo Free State, environmental humanities, affect theory, postcolonial ecology.*



I. INTRODUCTION

Few English literary works have attracted as much critical scrutiny as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Since its publication in 1899, the novella has been interpreted variously as a modernist experiment in narrative, a psychoanalytic exploration of repressed desire, and, following Chinua Achebe's influential 1977 critique, as a touchstone for debates about colonialism and race. In recent years, ecocritical scholars have engaged the text as an early Anthropocene narrative, exploring its portrayals of tropical nature and imperial resource extraction.

Ecocritical readings often dwell on striking images: the serpentine river, the encroaching jungle, or the wilderness that quietly beckons to Kurtz. The Congo is typically treated as untamed and sublime—a force that both resists colonial intrusion and exposes its moral contradictions. For George Griffith, the landscape acts as a character, absorbing and reflecting the psychological turmoil of European agents. Robert Marzec, meanwhile, views the Congo as a postcolonial frontier that unsettles European cartographic certainties.

Another, less conspicuous landscape—the derelict garden at the Central Station—has largely escaped sustained scholarly attention. Ian Watt briefly notes its decay, and Marzec mentions "failed cultivation," but neither takes this garden as a synecdoche for agro-industrial logic or connects it to racial capitalism and gradual violence. Marlow's understated sketch—a path winding back to the station, a modest garden with withered plants in a row—captures this overlooked site. This patch of withered vegetation and disturbed earth, where cultivation collapses into ruin, encapsulates the plantation framework that underpinned the Congo Free State, even in the absence of formal estates.

Reading *Heart of Darkness* through Cedric Robinson's concept of racial capitalism brings to light how the novella intertwines environmental destruction with the realities of colonial power. In the Congo, the extraction of rubber and ivory was not just a matter of individual greed, but part of a larger system that treated both land and people as expendable. Conrad's storytelling hints at this system indirectly: through horticultural imagery, silence about rubber, and a narrator who circles around truths he cannot fully face. In this light, the novella becomes a literary record of what Rob Nixon calls slow violence—the gradual, often invisible harm that imperial resource extraction inflicts on both environments and human lives.

This article unfolds in four sections. First, it reimagines the colonial cultivation estate as a way of organizing land, people, and nature—not just as a thing of the past. Second, it looks closely at Conrad's description of the Central Station to show how the forsaken garden brings together the failure of colonial farming and the ongoing dream of orderly extraction. Third, it sets the novella in the context of the Congo's rubber history and argues that the absence of rubber in the story speaks volumes. Finally, it explores how Conrad's style and narrative techniques help readers process and sometimes distance themselves from environmental and social violence. At its core, this article argues that *Heart of Darkness* is not only a critique of imperialism but a work that records the logic of plantations still shaping our world today.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The critical reception of *Heart of Darkness* has shifted dramatically, yet the novella's relation to ecological harm and race-based capitalism remains undertheorized. Three converging scholarly trajectories reveal a gap: no sustained attention has been paid to plantation rationale in the Congo Free State as represented through Conrad's horticultural imagery. The forsaken garden has been consistently overlooked because wilderness-focused ecocriticism dominates the field and treats cultivated spaces as marginal.

Postcolonial Interventions and the Question of Violence

The most influential intervention remains Chinua Achebe's 1977 lecture "An Image of Africa." Achebe charged Conrad with depersonalizing a portion of the human race through a rhetorical strategy that reduces African people to limbs, shadows, and a prehistoric backdrop for European psychological dramas. Even ostensibly anti-imperialist texts, Achebe shows, reproduce racial hierarchies through formal and linguistic choices. Edward Said extends this inquiry in *Culture and Imperialism*, situating Conrad within a structure of attitude and reference that makes imperial domination thinkable and narratable. For Said, the novella is deeply contradictory: it condemns specific brutalities but cannot conceive of a world outside the imperial frame. Benita Parry argues that the novella's silences around African subjectivity are not oversights but ideological necessities: the narrative cannot grant interiority to colonized people without collapsing its own epistemological premises. What these postcolonial readings have not addressed is the environmental dimension of race-based brutality. Achebe mentions the Congo River as a "watery snake" but does not theorize how the landscape produces racialized subjects. This article builds on their foundational critiques while turning attention to the material conditions of colonial harm that the novella registers only indirectly.

Ecocritical Approaches: Wilderness, Sublimity, and the Tropical Environment

When ecocriticism emerged in the 1990s, it brought fresh attention to *Heart of Darkness*, though largely within frameworks emphasizing the Congo as wilderness or sublime nature. George Griffith argues that the Congolese landscape functions as a character that absorbs and mirrors the psychological states of European protagonists. The jungle's "primeval" quality externalizes Kurtz's regression and Marlow's moral uncertainty, turning the environment into a mirror rather than a material reality. Robert Marzec reads the novella's environmental imagery as a disruption of European cartographic certainty: the unmapped Congo resists the totalizing gaze of imperial administration. Marzec gestures toward "failed cultivation" at the Central Station but does not develop this into a systematic reading of agricultural estate operations. Other ecocritical works have framed *Heart of Darkness* as an early Anthropocene text, reading its atmosphere of impending collapse as an anticipatory register of planetary crisis. These readings universalize the novella's brutality, treating the Congo as a synecdoche for all human-nature relations rather than a specific site of racialized appropriation. Kathryn Yusoff has argued that framing the Anthropocene as a species-level phenomenon obscures racial capitalism's role in producing

planetary crisis. This article follows Yusoff: the novella's environmental dimensions are inseparable from its racial ones.

Racial Capitalism and Plantation Studies: Toward a New Framework

The theoretical architecture for connecting environmental and racial harm is drawn from the Black radical tradition, as synthesized by Cedric Robinson in *Black Marxism*. Robinson argues that capitalism doesn't exploit preexisting racial differences but actively produces racial hierarchies as a condition of its own emergence. This insight, that race is constitutive of capital accumulation, has generated a vibrant literature on racial capitalism over the past few decades. Within this tradition, Katherine McKittrick reconceptualizes the plantation as a technology of racial domination that produces spatial hierarchies and racialized subjects simultaneously. For McKittrick, the plantation is not just a historical site but an ongoing operating principle organizing Black geographies beyond former slave societies. Jason Moore places the plantation at the center of capitalism's development as a world-ecology. The plantation, in his account, is a commodity frontier enlisting human bodies and nonhuman natures as "cheap" inputs to be used up and discarded. Exhaustion is not a side effect but the operational logic.

These theorists have mostly focused on the Atlantic plantation complex, but the Congo Free State is a different case. As Adam Hochschild documents, Leopold's colony did not rely on plantation agriculture in the strict sense because its wealth came from wild rubber and ivory extracted through forced labor. Yet the plantation's rationale, including systematic expendability of land and bodies, racialized distinction between European managers and expendable Africans, and transformation of complex ecologies into extractive frontiers, operated in the Congo regardless. The absence of formal estates makes the plantation framework harder to see. That is why Conrad's forsaken garden becomes significant. The withered plants in a row are the ghosts of a colonial cultivation system that never materialized, exposing the underlying dynamic that would have organized farming if farming had been possible.

Slow Violence and the Problem of Representability

All these critical traditions circle the same problem: how a literary text can represent harm that is slow, diffuse, and accretive rather than dramatic and event-based. Rob Nixon's *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* supplies a crucial vocabulary. Nixon defines slow violence as destruction occurring gradually and out of sight, a harm of delayed devastation dispersed across time and space, an attritional brutality typically not viewed as brutality at all. Slow violence lacks the narrative clarity of

an explosion or assassination. It is hard to witness, hard to narrate, hard to mobilize against. *Heart of Darkness* registers slow violence precisely through its difficulty. The grove of the dead, where men were "dying slowly, it was very clear," exemplifies Nixon's framework: no single event produces these deaths. Instead, they accumulate through malnutrition, exhaustion, and environmental degradation. Conrad's prose, with its passive constructions, clinical tone, and absorption of destruction into atmospheric description, does not fail to represent slow violence. On the contrary, it represents the experience of slow violence from the perspective of an observer who cannot fully recognize what he sees. The novella's formal evasions constitute not a failure of political imagination but a faithful record of how slow violence operates: the text's difficulty is diagnostic, not defective.

The Present Contribution

By weaving together these critical perspectives, this article suggests that *Heart of Darkness* is best understood through the lens of plantation logic. The forsaken garden stands as a powerful symbol for the environmental and social harms of the Congo Free State. Looking closely at Conrad's imagery, the story's silences about rubber, and its narrative strategies for dealing with destruction, it becomes clear that *Heart of Darkness* is more than a critique of imperialism—it is a record of plantation dynamics that still shape our world today.

a) Theorizing the Plantation: From Site to Socio-Ecological Logic

The conventional image of the plantation is a bounded geographical site with monocrop agriculture, enslaved or coerced labor, and a violent racial hierarchy. Recent scholarship in Black geographies, ecological economics, and critical race theory pushes toward a different conception: not a place but a framework. McKittrick describes the colonial cultivation estate as a technology of racial domination that dispossesses land and produces racialized subjects simultaneously. The plantation is not where racism happens but an apparatus generating the categories of Blackness, property, and fungibility that underwrite capitalist modernity. Clyde Woods traces how the plantation system created a blues epistemology: a form of knowledge rooted in resistance to the spatial control exercised by planter elites. For Woods, the plantation's legacy extends far beyond emancipation and continues to shape the political economy into the twentieth century. For ecocritical purposes, Moore's formulation is most useful. Moore places the agro-industrial estate at the center of capitalism's development as a world-ecology. The plantation is a commodity frontier enlisting nature,

including soil, trees, and human bodies, as cheap inputs to be used up and discarded. Exhaustion is the business model. The plantation's operational principle is expendability: soils mined rather than tended, laborers expended rather than sustained, both abandoned once their value has been extracted.

This reconceptualization has direct consequences for reading *Heart of Darkness*. The Congo Free State was not, historically, a classic plantation colony because Leopold's wealth came from wild rubber and ivory extracted through forced labor rather than enslaved agricultural labor. Yet the novella is haunted by the imagery and infrastructure of plantation agriculture. Marlow finds, when he arrives at the Central Station, that a heavy and dull detonation shakes the ground, a puff of smoke comes out of the cliff, and that is all. No changes are observed on the rock surface. They built a railway, but the cliff was not in the way, and this objectless blasting is all the work. The blasting is objectless because it produces nothing: no cleared space, no usable land, no measurable progress. This is pure performative brutality: labor expended not for production but for the appearance of production. Right after this description, Marlow turns to the garden. The withered plants in a row are the ghosts of a plantation, an attempt at rationalized cultivation that has already failed. The geometry of the row, the aspiration to orderly monoculture, and the fantasy of European horticulture transplanted to African soil have all collapsed into sterility. Marlow's deadpan irony underscores the pathos.

This failure is emblematic of how Conrad sees the colonial project as a whole. As Marlow observes, "The work was going on. The work! And this was the place where some of the helpers had withdrawn to die." The garden and the grove of death are side by side: land worn out, people worn out. Those dying in the grove are not victims of a single tragedy, but of slow, ongoing negligence. They have been used up by a system that takes what it wants and leaves nothing behind. Even without an official plantation, the same logic of disposability rules over both land and labor. Robinson's idea of racial capitalism helps explain this: race is not just added to class; it is central to how the system works. In the Congo, plantation dynamics existed even without plantations, because the division between European managers and African workers made the latter expendable. Africans were forced to gather rubber under conditions that broke their bodies and devastated their environments. The forsaken garden shows this dynamics clearly: the land can't grow crops, and the workers can't survive. Both are used and abandoned.

b) A Forsaken Garden: Reading Failed Cultivation

Conrad's prose at the Central Station leans heavily on horticultural language but inverts the usual associations of growth and fertility. The garden is only "a bit of" a garden: incomplete, abortive, not deserving the name. The plants are "in a row," a leftover trace of rationalized geometry from the plantation system's earliest days, but these plants have withered. Order has collapsed into sterility. The garden is paired with the blasting of the cliff: one represents the fantasy of farming, the other the reality of extractive destruction. Neither yields anything of value. Marlow's characteristic irony, detached, weary, and self-protective, mirrors the inefficacy.

As DeLoughrey has shown in her work on Caribbean and Pacific island literatures, the linear geometry of plantation agriculture is not a practical arrangement alone but a spatial ideology. The row imposes Euclidean order onto the perceived chaos of tropical nature, disciplining the land into legibility for European accounting practices. The row also enables surveillance, making each plant and, by extension, each laborer visible to the managerial gaze. When Conrad's plants wither in their row, the failure is not merely agricultural but epistemological: the colonial fantasy of making the Congo legible, predictable, and profitable has failed. The row remains, but it marks only absence.

The grove of the dead intensifies this pattern. Marlow describes it with clinical, almost botanical attention: "They were dying slowly, it was very clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now, nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom." Ecocritical readers have often focused on the "greenish gloom" as a sign of the jungle reclaiming human habitation, but the location matters: these bodies are found in spaces intended for farming. The grove is contiguous with the garden, the residue of failed plantation agriculture. Here Conrad records what Nixon calls slow violence: destruction that accumulates gradually through ordinary operations of appropriation. The men are not shot or hanged. They are not killed in any dramatic event. Instead, they are worn down by forced labor, malnutrition, and environmental ruin. The grove's stillness and "greenish gloom" constitute the aesthetic form of slow violence in the novella. Marlow's syntax performs the erasure: the passive construction and negative catalog turn forced labor into something almost natural, almost meteorological. The men become "black shadows," a phrase that registers their presence while reducing them to insubstantial phenomena. This is not a failure of empathy but a structural feature of the telling's ideological position. To name the brutality as brutality, to say these men have been murdered by the system of

appropriation, would require a political analysis that the novella consistently refuses.

Elsewhere, Conrad uses botanical metaphors to describe European agents. The manager, Marlow notes, "inspired uneasiness. That was it! Uneasiness. Not a definite mistrust, just an uneasiness, nothing more. You have no idea how effective such a . . . a kind of vegetable creature." The manager is a vegetable: rooted in the colony, absorbing resources, producing nothing. His sterility mirrors the garden's sterility. Kurtz, by contrast, is described in terms of monstrous, excessive growth: "The wilderness had patted him on the head, and, lo, he had grown to the size of a monstrous plant." Where the manager is withered, Kurtz is overgrown; where the manager is anemic, Kurtz is hypertrophic. Both figures are rendered through horticultural imagery, but in each case, the colony fails to achieve the orderly cultivation the plantation promised. It yields either sterility or monstrosity, two sides of the same extractive coin. This dual failure suggests plantation rationale cannot succeed on its own terms. The fantasy of rational control, the transformation of diverse ecologies into uniform monocrops, and the conversion of complex social relations into simple hierarchies keep collapsing into their opposite. The garden becomes a graveyard. The vegetable manager governs a kingdom of death. The brilliant Kurtz degenerates into a savage parody of civilization. Conrad's horticultural language operates as an immanent critique: the metaphors of farming expose the impossibility of farming under racial capitalism.

c) Rubber, Soil, and the Extractive Imperative

When plantation agriculture fails in the Congo, the harvesting of wild rubber and ivory succeeds, at least in generating enormous profits for King Leopold and his concessionary companies. *Heart of Darkness* is a story about ivory: Kurtz's obsession drives the plot; the company's goal is ivory accumulation; ivory serves as the novella's central engine. Yet the environmental dimensions of rubber extraction, including systematic forest exploitation, forced labor, destruction of food-producing lands, and demographic collapse, are almost absent from the text. This absence requires sustained attention.

Rubber requires a different landscape than plantations. The *Landolphia* and *Funtumia* vines that produced the Congo's wild rubber grew scattered throughout the equatorial forest. No laborer gathered rubber without spending weeks in the forest, subsisting on whatever they could forage or carry. To ensure quotas, concessionary companies held hostages, usually women and children, and punished shortfalls with flogging, mutilation, or execution. The *Casement Report* of 1904, commissioned by Britain and based on interviews with Congolese witnesses, documented how the rubber

regime devastated human populations and the environment. Villages emptied. Food supplies collapsed. The forest itself was transformed by the pressure of harvesting.

Conrad substitutes ivory for rubber because of the differential symbolic weight of the two commodities. Ivory, unlike rubber, has a long history in European art and luxury. It signifies the exotic without forcing the readers to understand the industrial mechanics of its extraction. The substitution is not a literary choice alone but an ideological operation. By centering ivory, Conrad preserves the Congo as a space of mythic quest, a "dark place" where Europeans confront the limits of civilization. The rubber economy, more industrial, bureaucratic, and environmentally destructive, recedes into the background.

Reading the text against the historical archive illuminates what remains unsaid. Photographs taken by missionaries and journalists during the Congo reform movement show landscapes denuded of trees, emptied villages, and severed hands collected as proof of work. These photographs expose the forsaken garden as part of a continent-wide transformation of ecologies. As environmental historian John MacKenzie notes, the harvesting of wild rubber and ivory in the Congo represented one of the most intense episodes of environmental exploitation in African history. *Heart of Darkness* gestures toward this history in the withered garden and the grove of death, but it never names it. Naming is left to the readers, who must bring the historical archive to bear on the literary text. The novella's silence is both a limitation and a strategy: a limitation of Conrad's political horizon and a strategy forcing readers to confront the gap between aesthetic representation and material violence.

This silence is not a failure. The novella is not a documentary and has no obligation to represent every aspect of colonial exploitation. Yet the silence tells, exposing the limits of Conrad's critique. The novella can represent Kurtz's moral degradation, the company's hypocrisy, the overseers' cruelty, and the suffering of African bodies in the grove of death. What it cannot represent, or can only represent indirectly through absence and indirection, is the systemic structure connecting these phenomena to everyday capital accumulation. The rubber economy required an infrastructure of accounting, surveillance, and brutality that does not lend itself to the adventure-narrative form. Conrad's impressionism, for all its power, is better at representing the empire's psychological effects than its material mechanisms. This limitation makes *Heart of Darkness* valuable to the environmental humanities because the novella shows what happens when plantation logic meets a landscape that resists plantation agriculture. The result is not orderly appropriation but environmental and racial entropy: soils exhausted, bodies expended, forms

collapsed. The forsaken garden is the signature of this entropy, what remains after the fantasy of rational cultivation has been exposed.

d) Affect, Atmosphere, and the Aesthetics of Whiteness

If plantation rationale operates through disposability, then the problem of how the novella's form mediates that operation becomes central. The historical archive supplies what the text withholds, yet the novella's formal features—the fog, impressionism, and narrative delays—actively manage the brutality the archive makes visible. This inquiry yields atmospheric whiteness and raises the further problem of whether aesthetic form can be complicit in racial violence. Affect theory offers tools for thinking about narrative atmosphere as a site of ideological production.

In *Heart of Darkness*, the fog, narrative delays, and Marlow's persistent uncertainty create a defensive structure of feeling that protects the European subject from confronting the brutality of appropriation. Sara Ahmed writes that whiteness is not a skin color but an orientation: a way of inhabiting space that makes certain bodies and objects feel at home while rendering others out of place. Whiteness, in Ahmed's account, is an affective economy organizing what can be seen, felt, and acknowledged. The fog enveloping the steamer as it approaches Kurtz's inner station figures this orientation. When unseen figures from the forest attack the crew, Marlow describes the experience as "an atmosphere of tremulous uncertainty." The attack is never fully seen but felt as a disturbance in the air, a ripple in the affective field. The fog turns the forest into an impalpable threat, a wilderness that seems to strike out on its own rather than a site of organized resistance by people with every reason to resist.

Effectively, the fog allows Marlow to narrate brutality without confronting its agents or material causes. The attackers remain unseen, their motivations unexamined, the destruction absorbed into the atmosphere. This is not merely a narrative technique but an ideological operation. By rendering the Congo as atmospheric rather than political, Marlow and Conrad preserve the fantasy that the brutality of appropriation is a product of the environment itself, the "darkness" of the title, rather than a deliberate system of racialized exploitation. Marlow's impressionistic style, with its "haze of uncertainty," its "glimmer," its "shadows," does similar work. He describes the grove of death not as an atrocity but as a natural phenomenon. The passive construction and clinical tone turn forced labor into something meteorological. The men are not killed; they die, the way leaves wither, or rivers dry up.

This rhetorical strategy is what Lauren Berlant calls cruel optimism: attachment to an object, here the civilizing mission or the aesthetic of adventure, that prevents

flourishing. Marlow stays attached to a vision of the Congo as a place of mystery and moral testing even as he documents horrors. That attachment lets the destruction continue without full acknowledgment. To acknowledge the brutality as brutality, to say this is murder, torture, or crime, would require Marlow to abandon the aesthetic frame that gives his telling coherence. Whether an ethics of form could resist such absorption remains an open problem. The novella provides no answer, but the problem itself becomes a provocation for the reader.

The novella's formal features, including its inconclusiveness, irony, framing structure, and reliance on a narrator reporting another narrator, are not merely modernist innovations but strategies for managing environmental and racialized harm, rendering it tolerable and even aesthetic. The frame narrative distances the reader from Marlow and Marlow from the events. The irony lets the narrator register horror while maintaining weary detachment. The inconclusiveness, the famous "horror" that signifies nothing particular, lets the reader fill the void with meanings that need not include the specific material history of the Congo Free State. These strategies create an atmosphere that makes the plantation's slow violence survivable for the narrator and, perhaps, for the readers. They let readers see *Heart of Darkness* as a tragedy of the European soul rather than a record of genocide. The novella is not an apology for empire; it is too dark, too critical, too aware of hypocrisy. Yet the critique operates within limits determined by the racial and aesthetic ideologies of Conrad's time. The forsaken garden is the trace of what the novella cannot fully represent: the systematic transformation of African land and African bodies into disposable inputs for European accumulation.

III. CONCLUSION: READING THE PLANTATION IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

Heart of Darkness may be productively reread through the frameworks of plantation logic and racial capitalism. The abandoned garden plot at the Central Station functions not as a minor detail, but as a synecdoche for the broader environmental brutality of the Congo Free State—a violence enacted through the simultaneous exhaustion of land and human bodies. Attention to the novella's horticultural imagery, its silences regarding rubber, and its affective atmospheres reveals how literary form participates in the ideological operations of racial capitalism, even when it purports to serve other purposes.

Several tasks remain. If the forsaken garden is the whole story, attentive reading is only the first step. The next step is to trace continuities between Conrad's Congo and our extractive present. This rereading matters beyond Conrad studies because the plantation framework that shaped the

Congo persists today in the extractive economies of the Global South, the racialized distribution of environmental risk, and the ongoing dispossession of Black and Indigenous lands. The Anthropocene concept, for all its usefulness, has been criticized by scholars like Kathryn Yusoff for obscuring racial capitalism's role. The Anthropocene is not a geological event but a political-economic one, forged through the expropriation of Black and Indigenous lives and lands. Plantation dynamic, as theorized here, is a key mechanism of that expropriation.

The potential for literary criticism to intervene in material processes such as resource extraction must be carefully qualified. While reading Conrad cannot halt extractive practices, understanding the aesthetic management of violence is a necessary precondition for resisting its contemporary manifestations. For the environmental humanities to address the intertwined crises of climate change and racial injustice, it is essential to engage with cultural texts that have historically encoded and normalized these connections. *Heart of Darkness* remains a vital text in this endeavor, as its forsaken garden continues to symbolize enduring forms of violence. Approaching the novella through the lenses of ecocriticism and racial capitalism offers a means to uncover the origins of the current precarious moment.

IV. FINAL COMMENT: THE PHILOSOPHICAL GROUND OF THE FORSAKEN GARDEN

To return one last time to the abandoned garden plot is not to decode a metaphor but to stand on the literal ground of the novella's philosophical critique. That small patch of failed cultivation—a row of withered plants, a mound of earth where order was promised and decay delivered—condenses the machinery of the Congo Free State: forced labor, rubber quotas, hostage-taking, severed hands, villages emptied and left to rot. The forsaken garden is a garden that is not a garden: a plantation that never grew, a space of farming transformed into a space of death.

This image invites a more precise lesson about aesthetics and violence. The aestheticization of violence is not incidental but structural to racial capitalism's self-representation. Philosophically, the forsaken garden operates as the material sign of an internal contradiction: plantation rationality promises the systematic transformation of nature into value through orderly appropriation, yet it yields only exhaustion and sterility. This is not a failure of execution but a structural necessity. Racial capitalism cannot sustain the conditions of its own reproduction; it treats land and labor as disposable inputs rather than participants in a regenerative ecology. The garden's withered row literalizes this impossibility. The

geometric order imposed by the plantation system remains, but it now marks only absence—and that absence proves that the fantasy of rational control was always a fantasy of brutality.

What kind of reading does such an image demand? Not a puzzle to solve, but a wound to witness. Recognizing the forsaken garden means understanding that modernism's aesthetic strategies—the fog, the impressionism, the narrative detours—function as emotional techniques for making harm tolerable. The novella's most haunting moment may not be Kurtz's final word but the silence of the garden: the row of withered plants pointing only to broken promises. If the garden could speak, it might say what it already shows: under racial capitalism, cultivation is always on the brink of ruin. One is left to wonder whether any literary form that renders such a scene beautiful does not thereby betray it—and whether the only honest response is a reading that refuses to look away.

The forsaken garden is not a detail but the whole story. Learning to recognize it in Conrad, in the colonial archive, and in the supply chains that pass through our own hands is the first step toward acknowledging what has always been known but refused: nothing grows there, and that, precisely, is the point.

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EFL Teachers' Beliefs and Instructional Practice of English Pronunciation at Rural Primary Schools

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Abstract— This study adopts a mixed-methods approach to investigate pronunciation teaching beliefs, instructional practices, and their internal mechanism among 131 EFL teachers in rural primary schools of Nanning. Results reveal that teachers hold positive beliefs about the foundational role of pronunciation but demonstrate narrow cognition focusing on segmental features and exam-oriented goals. Their teaching practices are characterized by mechanical drills, fragmented content, and insufficient feedback, showing a clear belief-practice gap. Structural equation analysis indicates that teaching beliefs positively predict practices, with self-efficacy playing a full mediating role. The disconnection is affected by professional competence, dialect interference, resource shortage, and exam pressure. These findings enrich the understanding of rural EFL teachers' pronunciation instruction and provide implications for rural English teacher development.



Keywords— rural primary schools; EFL teachers; pronunciation teaching; teachers' beliefs; teaching practice

I. INTRODUCTION

With the advancement of globalization and the growing demand for cross-cultural communication, the instrumental value of English as a global lingua franca has become increasingly prominent (Hu, 2023; Wang, 2025). Currently, English is not only a compulsory course in primary, secondary, and tertiary education in China but also plays a critical role in the national college entrance examination, postgraduate entrance examination, and various professional and technical title evaluations (Zhang, 2024). As the material form of language, pronunciation serves as the fundamental prerequisite for realizing the communicative function of English.

Despite the growing importance of English for communication, pronunciation teaching has long been marginalized in second and foreign language education worldwide (Baker, 2013; Reid, 2016). In the Chinese context, pronunciation teaching has not received due attention in daily primary and secondary teaching, teacher

professional development systems, textbook compilation, or related research (Tian & Wang, 2025; Xie & Bi, 2024). Based on frontline teaching practice, it can be observed that rural students generally have weak foundations in English pronunciation, are significantly influenced by dialect accents, and lack sufficient opportunities to access and learn standard pronunciation. This has, to a certain extent, restricted their English learning outcomes and oral communicative competence.

As organizers and implementers of teaching activities, teachers' instructional beliefs—defined as teachers' perceptions and judgments about teaching objectives, content, methods, and their own teaching abilities (Borg, 2003)—are the core internal factors driving their teaching practices. As the internal basis for instructional decision-making, teachers' beliefs about pronunciation teaching directly shape the direction of their classroom practices (Mulyah & Aminatun, 2020; Williams & Burden, 1997). The relationship between teachers' beliefs and teaching practices is not a simple linear correspondence but a

complex system jointly shaped by internal factors such as individual cognition, educational background, and teaching experience, as well as external contextual factors including curriculum requirements, time constraints, and high-stakes examinations (Borg, 2009, 2017; Mora Viveros, 2022; Phipps & Borg, 2009).

However, existing research has mostly focused on Europe, America, or other Asian countries, and empirical studies on pronunciation teaching beliefs of primary school EFL teachers in mainland China, especially in rural areas, remain scarce (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017). As a typical representative of southern China's ethnic minority regions, Nanning's rural primary schools are mainly located in the southwestern Guangxi ethnic minority settlements, facing unique dilemmas such as a shortage of educational resources, a prominent exam-oriented orientation, significant interference from Zhuang, Cantonese, and other dialects, and an unbalanced professional structure of teachers. Accordingly, this study takes EFL teachers in rural primary schools of Nanning as research subjects and adopts a mixed-methods approach to systematically explore the current status and internal correlations of their pronunciation teaching beliefs, self-efficacy, and teaching practices.

To achieve this goal, this study is further divided into the following specific objectives: to comprehensively and deeply investigate the existing English pronunciation teaching beliefs of EFL teachers in rural primary schools of Nanning; to conduct a comprehensive and in-depth investigation into the English pronunciation teaching practices of EFL teachers in rural primary schools of Nanning; and to analyze the relationship between pronunciation teaching beliefs and teaching practices of EFL teachers in rural primary schools of Nanning.

Centering on the above objectives, this study intends to address three core research questions:

RQ1: What are the pronunciation teaching beliefs of EFL teachers in rural primary schools of Nanning?

RQ2: What are the pronunciation teaching practices of EFL teachers in rural primary schools of Nanning?

RQ3: What is the relationship between pronunciation teaching beliefs and teaching practices of EFL teachers in rural primary schools of Nanning?

To address these research questions, this study will conduct an in-depth analysis of the beliefs of rural primary school EFL teachers in China, examine their teaching practices, and explore the relationship between their beliefs and classroom practices in pronunciation teaching.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Pajares (1992) pointed out that teachers' core beliefs about teaching, students, and knowledge are the fundamental factors driving teaching behaviors. For rural primary school EFL teachers in China, their pronunciation teaching beliefs profoundly influence their teaching judgments and practical choices. In recent years, teachers' beliefs have gradually become a research hotspot in the field of teacher professional development. The academic community generally recognizes their key role in teaching practice, student learning, and educational reform (Ahmad, Hussain, & Radzuan, 2017; Fojkar & Skubic, 2017; Vartuli, 2005). Relevant studies have not only revealed the correlation between beliefs and teaching effectiveness but also promoted an in-depth exploration of the cognitive mechanisms of the teaching process (Bai & Yuan, 2019; Dignath, Rimm-Kaufman, van Ewijk, & Kunter, 2022; Gorter & Arocena, 2020; Hajovsky, Chesnut, & Jensen, 2020).

When beliefs are consistent with practices, teachers often have higher job satisfaction and motivation for professional development (Baker & Burri, 2016; Shah, Othman, & Senom, 2017; Tran & Nguyen, 2020; Yulia & Saukah, 2021); while disconnection between the two may lead to decreased teaching efficacy and even hinder the improvement of teaching quality (Abdul-Abbas et al., 2021; Bai & Yuan, 2019; Mulyah & Aminatun, 2020). Therefore, exploring the relationship between the two should not be limited to a superficial judgment of consistency but requires analyzing the interaction of internal and external factors combined with specific teaching scenarios (Hofer, 2010; Quoc, Thanh, Dang, Mai, & Nguyen, 2021).

However, existing research has not fully paid attention to the group particularity of rural primary school EFL teachers, especially the realistic characteristics such as the high proportion of non-English major teachers, weak professional pronunciation competence, and difficulties in accessing teaching resources (Bai & Yuan, 2019; Burri & Baker, 2019). In terms of research depth, most studies only focus on the simple correlation between beliefs and practices, failing to systematically explore the internal mechanism and moderating factors of their correlation in rural teaching contexts, making it difficult to explain the core causes of the disconnection between beliefs and practices among rural primary school EFL teachers (Jafari, Karimi, & Jafari, 2021; Üstünbaş, 2018). This research gap highlights the necessity and unique value of this study.

The theoretical foundation of this study is built on the integration of three complementary theoretical perspectives: Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), Teacher

Beliefs Theory (TBT), and the MPF (Model – Practice – Feedback) framework by Celce-Murcia, Brinton & Goodwin (2010). First, Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) (Bandura, 2001), as the dominant theoretical framework, emphasizes the triadic reciprocal determinism among individual factors, self-efficacy, and behavioral factors. Second, Teacher Beliefs Theory (TBT) (Borg, 2003, 2009), as a supplement to Social Cognitive Theory, focuses on the role of teachers' domain-specific beliefs in their instructional decision-making. Finally, the MPF framework (Celce-Murcia, Brinton & Goodwin, 2010), as the core analytical framework for examining teachers' pronunciation teaching beliefs, self-efficacy, and teaching practices, decomposes pronunciation teaching into three interdependent and cyclical core links, which can systematically reflect teachers' teaching beliefs, self-efficacy, and teaching practices.

Based on Bandura's (2001) Social Cognitive Theory, this study provides a fundamental theoretical support for analyzing the internal correlations among teachers' beliefs, self-efficacy, teaching practices, and environmental factors. Within this framework, this study selects teachers' beliefs as the independent variable, AI pronunciation teaching practices as the dependent variable, and self-efficacy as the mediating variable. The rationale for selecting and demonstrating the relationships among variables is as follows.

Regarding the direct relationship between teachers' beliefs and teaching practices, existing studies have fully confirmed a significant positive correlation between the two (Abdul-Abbas, Rashid, & RasimYounus, 2021; Bai &

Yuan, 2019; Jafari, Karimi, & Jafari, 2021; Mora Viveros, 2022). In the field of language education, Borg (2006) proposed that the teacher belief system acts as a cognitive filter that directly influences classroom teaching decisions, providing a solid basis for the hypothesis of this study that rural primary school EFL teachers' pronunciation teaching beliefs positively predict pronunciation teaching practices.

The selection of self-efficacy as a mediating variable is consistent with theoretical logic and fully supported by literature. According to Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory, teachers' beliefs influence the formation of self-efficacy by affecting their pursuit of mastery experiences in teaching. Meanwhile, the predictive effect of self-efficacy on teaching practices has been confirmed by many studies (Akman, 2021; Burić, Jakšić, & Balaž, 2024; Priajana & Umaemah, 2025). It can be seen that self-efficacy plays a core transmission role in the transformation of teachers' beliefs into teaching practices, serving as a key mediating mechanism connecting internal cognition and external behavior. The rationality of this mediating effect is also fully supported by Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 2001).

As shown in Figure 1, based on the above integrated theoretical framework and combined with the unique context of pronunciation teaching of EFL teachers in rural primary schools of Nanning, this study constructs a specific conceptual framework to visualize the core variables and their relationships, clarify the core analytical path of the study, ensure a high degree of consistency between the research design and the theoretical framework, and connect the subsequent research methods and findings.

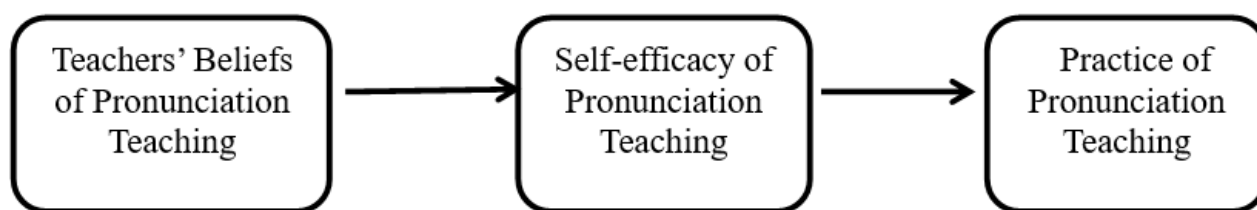


Fig.1 Conceptual Framework of the Study

III. RESEARCH METHODS, SUBJECTS AND INSTRUMENTS

This study adopts a quantitative research method and collects data through three methods: questionnaire survey, semi-structured interview, and non-participatory classroom observation, so as to achieve triangulation and ensure the authenticity, reliability and validity of the research data, and comprehensively and deeply respond to the research questions.

The questionnaire adopts a mixed sampling strategy of

offline targeted sampling and online group recruitment to determine the sample, and the whole process is carried out around the group of EFL teachers in rural primary schools of Nanning. A stratified targeted sampling framework is built based on the administrative division of Nanning to clarify the sampling proportion in each district. In this study, GPower 3.1 software was used for a priori sample size estimation. Referring to existing studies in the field of education and pre-experiment results, the medium effect size $f^2=0.15$, significance level $\alpha=0.05$, statistical power $1-\beta=0.90$, and the number of predictive variables is 3. The

calculation results show that the minimum sample size required is 109. Considering that the structural equation model will be used for data analysis later, which has higher requirements for sample size, according to the recommendations of Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson (2019), the sample size should be no less than 5 times the number of model parameters. To improve the robustness of the model, this study increases by 20% based on the estimated results, and finally determines the effective sample size to be 131. To further verify the adequacy of the sample size, this study conducted a post-hoc power analysis. With an effective sample size of 131, effect size $f^2=0.15$, number of predictive variables 3 and $\alpha=0.05$, GPower 3.1 calculated a statistical power of 0.95, higher than the recommended standard of 0.80. Overall, the sample size of this study is sufficient, the statistical test power is ideal, and the results are robust and reliable.

For qualitative research, using the maximum variation sampling method, combined with the candidates obtained through the above mixed sampling channels, after

qualification review, background matching screening and research feasibility assessment, 10 voluntary EFL teachers in rural primary schools of Nanning who participated in the questionnaire survey were finally determined as qualitative research subjects, covering different teaching ages, professional backgrounds and school types, ensuring that qualitative data can fully reflect the current situation and dilemmas of teachers in different groups. Then, multiple rounds of non-participatory classroom observations and multiple rounds of semi-structured interviews were conducted on 10 EFL teachers in rural primary schools of Nanning, and in-depth case analysis was carried out combined with observation and interview data, to further explore the internal correlation and influencing factors between teachers' pronunciation teaching beliefs and practices, and make up for the limitations of quantitative research.

The demographic characteristics of the research subjects are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 The Demographic Characteristics of the Research Subjects in the Questionnaire Survey

Demographic Variable	Category	Number of Participants (n=131)	Percentage (%)
Teaching Experience	2-5 years	25	19.1
	6-10 years	31	23.7
	10-20 years	43	32.8
	More than 20 years	32	24.4
Educational Background	English Education	74	56.5
	Non English Education	57	43.5
Highest Education Attainment	Associate Degree	47	35.9
	Bachelor's Degree	84	64.1

Both questionnaire surveys and interviews obtained informed consent from the subjects. All data were kept strictly confidential and used only for this study, and personal information was anonymized. Classroom observations have been approved by schools and teachers to avoid affecting the normal teaching order.

The questionnaire of this study refers to the EFL Teachers' Pronunciation Teaching Beliefs and Practices Questionnaire by Szyszka (2016), the Language Teacher Self-Efficacy Beliefs about Pronunciation Instruction Questionnaire by Zhang and Faez (2024) and Zhang, B. (2018), combined with the study of Candrawati and Purbani (2025) and the rural teaching situation in Guangxi

and the operational indicators of all variables, adopting the Likert 5-point scoring method. After testing, the S-CVI of the questionnaire is 0.92, and each I-CVI exceeds 0.80. To ensure the scientificity and validity of the questionnaire, 50 EFL teachers in rural primary schools of Nanning were selected for a pre-survey before the official distribution, and finally a formal questionnaire containing 39 items was formed.

The reliability test of this questionnaire was tested by Cronbach's α coefficient. All Cronbach's α coefficients of the questionnaire are greater than 0.8, indicating that the internal consistency and item reliability of the questionnaire meet academic requirements. The validity

test of the questionnaire shows that the average KMO value is greater than 0.75, and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity is $p < 0.001$.

On the basis of the questionnaire survey, in order to further explore the internal logic, practical dilemmas and cognitive deviations of teachers' pronunciation teaching beliefs and practices, and make up for the limitations of the questionnaire survey, the researcher designed a semi-structured interview outline for qualitative data collection. The interview outline is designed around the three core research questions of this study. According to the dimensions and operational indicators of each variable, it includes 9 core interview questions, mainly covering teachers' cognition of the importance and teaching objectives of pronunciation teaching, evaluation of their own pronunciation teaching ability and self-efficacy, and the specific implementation and environment of pronunciation teaching practices. After expert review, the S-CVI of the interview outline is 0.93, and each I-CVI exceeds 0.80.

To objectively capture the true behavior of teachers in classroom pronunciation teaching and make up for the limitations of questionnaires and interviews, the researcher designed a non-participatory classroom observation record form to observe the implementation of teachers' pronunciation teaching practices. The observation record form is designed around three dimensions of pronunciation teaching practice, including core modules such as observation items, observation content, implementation frequency and implementation effect, focusing on observing teachers' demonstration and practice of segmental and suprasegmental features, and feedback and personalized guidance on students' pronunciation. After expert review, the S-CVI of the observation record form is 0.92, and each I-CVI exceeds 0.80.

In this study, quantitative and qualitative data are processed separately and then integrated and analyzed to ensure the scientificity, rigor and systematicness of data processing, realize triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data, and enhance the persuasiveness of research conclusions. For quantitative data processing, jamovi 2.6 software is used for data processing, in strict accordance with the data processing specifications of quantitative research. For qualitative data processing, thematic analysis is adopted, and Taguette is used for data processing. For the consistency test of coding, Cohen's Kappa coefficient is 0.77. Then, the statistical results of quantitative data and the thematic analysis results of qualitative data are deeply integrated to realize triangulation and ensure the authenticity and reliability of research conclusions.

IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS

Centering on the three core research questions, this study systematically presents the research findings from three aspects: the current status of teachers' pronunciation teaching beliefs, the current status of pronunciation teaching practices, and the correlation mechanism between beliefs and practices, combined with quantitative and qualitative data through triangulation.

4.1 Current Status and Characteristics of English Pronunciation Teaching Beliefs of EFL Teachers in Rural Primary Schools of Nanning (Based on RQ1)

The English pronunciation teaching beliefs of EFL teachers in rural primary schools of Nanning present an overall pattern of positive attitude but one-sided cognition, emphasizing foundation but leaning towards examination-oriented education. From the quantitative results, the overall score of teachers' pronunciation teaching beliefs is at the upper-middle level, indicating that the vast majority of teachers cognitively recognize the fundamental position of pronunciation teaching in primary school English curricula, acknowledge the irreplaceable role of pronunciation ability in students' word reading, oral expression and listening comprehension, and are willing to carry out basic pronunciation demonstration and practice activities in class. At the same time, teachers' pronunciation teaching self-efficacy is at a medium level, reflecting that teachers can complete basic pronunciation teaching tasks but lack confidence in carrying out systematic and professional pronunciation teaching. Combined with qualitative data, it can be further found that teachers' pronunciation teaching beliefs show distinctive situationality and limitations. On the one hand, teachers generally regard pronunciation as the introductory foundation of English learning, emphasizing the importance of accurate pronunciation in helping rural students overcome the fear of speaking and build learning confidence. On the other hand, most teachers' understanding of pronunciation teaching stays at the segmental level, mainly focusing on vowels, consonants and word pronunciation, lacking awareness of the teaching value of suprasegmental features such as intonation, stress, rhythm and pauses, and even the concept of integrating pronunciation teaching with communicative competence. In terms of teaching objectives, teachers generally hold the belief of basic adequacy and moderate standard, mostly requiring students to read words and textbook sentences correctly, without pursuing pronunciation standardization and communicative naturalness. In addition, influenced by the rural teaching environment, teachers' beliefs show obvious exam-oriented and environmental compromise

tendencies. Most teachers believe that pronunciation has not become a core content in the primary school English evaluation system, so there is no need to invest too much class time. Meanwhile, facing the realistic conditions of significant dialect interference among students, a large number of left-behind children and lack of family tutoring, teachers generally form adaptive beliefs of lowering teaching expectations and simplifying teaching requirements. Overall, the pronunciation teaching beliefs of EFL teachers in rural primary schools of Nanning have a positive background, but are characterized by incomplete structure, low target positioning, and vulnerability to external environmental constraints.

4.2 Current Status and Characteristics of English Pronunciation Teaching Practices of EFL Teachers in Rural Primary Schools of Nanning (Based on RQ2)

The English pronunciation teaching practices of EFL teachers in rural primary schools of Nanning are characterized by single form, fragmented content, teacher-led and mechanical practice, and serious lack of feedback and emotional support. Quantitative results show that the overall score of teachers' pronunciation teaching practices is at a medium level, and the practice frequency is mostly occasional, far from reaching the level of systematization and normalization, with a significant gap from the recognition level of teachers' beliefs. Classroom observation and interview data further show that rural primary school pronunciation teaching practices are highly dependent on teacher demonstration and student repetition, with teacher reading, group reading and repeated imitation as the main classroom forms. There are almost no inquiry-based, game-based or situational pronunciation learning activities, and students are in a passive acceptance state for a long time. In terms of teaching content, practices show obvious structural deficiencies. Teachers generally equate pronunciation teaching with word pronunciation teaching, only carrying out simple demonstration and reading incidentally in vocabulary teaching links, lacking independent, coherent and structured practice time. Suprasegmental contents such as intonation, liaison and stress are almost blank in class, making it difficult to support the development of students' fluent oral competence. Teaching resources and methods are highly single. Most classrooms only rely on textbook supporting audio for pronunciation input, lacking multimodal support such as mouth shape diagrams, pronunciation aids, multimedia materials and interactive exercises, and classroom environments also lack arrangement and immersion related to English pronunciation learning. At the same time, classroom feedback and emotional support are seriously absent. Teachers rarely systematically correct and give specific feedback on students' pronunciation

errors, lack effective intervention on recurring negative dialect transfer phenomena, and seldom help students reduce pronunciation learning anxiety through encouraging evaluation, especially targeted support for left-behind children and ethnic minority students with weak foundations and low willingness to speak. In addition, the exam-oriented tendency in practice is also prominent. Class time is prioritized to vocabulary, sentence patterns and grammar training, and pronunciation teaching is compressed into a secondary or even marginal link, showing a typical feature of attaching importance to beliefs but weakening practices. Overall, the pronunciation teaching practices of EFL teachers in rural primary schools of Nanning are characterized by mechanical, fragmented, low-feedback and exam-oriented, with a significant gap from the requirements of systematic, communicative and developmental pronunciation teaching.

4.3 Correlation Mechanism between English Pronunciation Teaching Beliefs and Practices of EFL Teachers in Rural Primary Schools of Nanning (Based on RQ3)

Quantitative and qualitative results jointly show that there is a significant positive correlation between pronunciation teaching beliefs and practices of EFL teachers in rural primary schools of Nanning, but the transformation efficiency from beliefs to practices is low with obvious blocking factors, and self-efficacy plays a key full mediating role. Quantitative results show that teachers' pronunciation teaching beliefs can significantly and positively affect teaching practices, and the indirect path of pronunciation teaching beliefs affecting teaching practices through self-efficacy is also significant, indicating that self-efficacy is the core mediating mechanism connecting beliefs and practices. This means that teachers' recognition and attention to pronunciation teaching cannot be directly transformed into real classroom behaviors; only when teachers have corresponding teaching confidence and ability judgments can positive beliefs promote high-quality practices. In realistic situations, the relationship between beliefs and practices is not a simple linear correspondence, but a universal disconnection state of high recognition and low implementation. Although teachers cognitively recognize the importance of pronunciation teaching, they are restricted by multiple factors such as insufficient professional ability, lack of systematic training, complex dialect interference, shortage of teaching resources, time shortage and exam pressure, making it difficult to translate internal beliefs into sustained, standardized and effective teaching behaviors. Qualitative data further reveal that this disconnection stems from the structural constraints of the rural education ecosystem. Rural EFL teachers have weak professional pronunciation foundations and lack long-term

targeted training, leading to rigid teaching methods and insufficient error correction abilities. Rural students have uneven foundations, significant dialect influences and limited after-class practice conditions, further reducing teachers' willingness to carry out systematic pronunciation teaching. The shortage of school resources and evaluation orientation biased towards written scores strengthen the disconnection between beliefs and practices from the external environment. Overall, teachers' pronunciation teaching beliefs have a significant positive predictive effect on teaching practices, but their transformation process highly relies on the support of self-efficacy, and is jointly constrained by multiple factors such as teachers' professional ability, rural teaching environment and exam orientation, finally forming a correlation pattern of positive beliefs, weak practices and obvious gaps between the two.

V. DISCUSSION

This study finds that EFL teachers in rural primary schools of Nanning generally recognize the fundamental position of pronunciation teaching, and cognitively affirm its promoting effect on word reading, oral expression, listening comprehension and learning interest. This conclusion is consistent with the research results of Buss (2015) and Bai & Yuan (2019), that is, English teachers generally regard pronunciation as a key gateway to language learning and attach importance to its supporting role in communication and academic performance. From the formation mechanism of teachers' beliefs, this consensus stems from the essential attribute of pronunciation as the material form of language, and is also in line with the view put forward by Gimson (1970) that pronunciation occupies a core position in language learning.

However, different from foreign and urban teacher groups, rural teachers' pronunciation teaching beliefs in this study show obvious characteristics of one-sidedness, exam-orientation and low expectations. Most teachers only focus on the segmental level, lacking awareness of the teaching value of suprasegmental contents such as intonation, stress, liaison and rhythm, which is highly consistent with the conclusions of Couper (2017) and Nguyen & Newton (2020). Due to the lack of systematic phonetic training and teaching knowledge, teachers prefer easy-to-operate and observable segmental contents and avoid more difficult suprasegmental teaching. At the same time, this study further reveals the unique goal displacement phenomenon in rural areas: teachers place the instrumental goal of examination scores above the ultimate goal of communicative intelligibility, and weaken teaching

investment even if they recognize the importance of pronunciation because it is not directly tested. This finding expands the hierarchical theory of teachers' beliefs proposed by Phipps & Borg (2009), indicating that in the high-stakes examination environment in rural areas, the influence of exam-oriented beliefs on practices may surpass that of beliefs about the importance of pronunciation.

In addition, rural teachers' pronunciation teaching self-efficacy is generally low, and they tend to attribute difficulties externally to insufficient resources, dialect interference, and weak student foundations, which is mutually confirmed with the studies of Bai & Yuan (2019), Couper (2017), and Marion (2022). Lack of special pronunciation training, insufficient professional ability, and few opportunities for demonstration and feedback directly reduce teachers' teaching confidence and then avoid complex teaching tasks. Combined with Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, rural teachers' low efficacy is not simply a matter of ability, but the result of long-term lack of successful experience, professional support and environmental support, which also makes their beliefs more vulnerable to environmental constraints and show passive compromise characteristics.

At the level of teaching practice, this study shows that rural primary school pronunciation teaching is characterized by teacher-led, mechanical repetition, fragmentation, low feedback and single resources, and classroom forms are highly dependent on demonstration and group reading, lacking communicative, situational and multimodal activities. This is in sharp contrast to the explicit pronunciation teaching, communicative pronunciation teaching and multimodal input advocated abroad. The MPF framework and communicative pronunciation teaching concept proposed by Celce-Murcia et al. (2010) both emphasize that pronunciation teaching should combine meaning and form, integrate tasks and interactions, and provide systematic corrective feedback, but rural classrooms are almost unable to implement.

This study further confirms that rural pronunciation teaching practices have structural deficiencies: almost no suprasegmental contents, serious lack of corrective feedback, and teaching resources only relying on textbook audio. This is similar to the conclusion of Tiwari (2023) on rural education in Nepal, that is, resource shortage, insufficient training and exam pressure jointly lead to the marginalization of pronunciation teaching. Meanwhile, this study supplements the special influences of Chinese rural dialects and left-behind children: the negative transfer caused by Zhuang, Cantonese and other dialects has not been intervened for a long time, and left-behind children lack family tutoring and after-class practice,

further solidifying pronunciation errors and forming a cycle of insufficient practice, solidified errors and decreased confidence, which echoes Odlin's (1989) language transfer theory and Bronfenbrenner's ecosystem theory.

Quantitative and qualitative results jointly confirm that there is a significant positive correlation between pronunciation teaching beliefs and practices of EFL teachers in rural primary schools of Nanning, but with obvious disconnection, and self-efficacy plays a full mediating role. This conclusion not only verifies the triadic interaction between individual-behavior-environment in Social Cognitive Theory, but also is highly consistent with Borg's (2003, 2009) teacher belief system theory: beliefs have a predictive effect on practices, but the transformation process is doubly constrained by internal ability and external context.

The core contribution of this study is to clarify the key mechanism of disconnection between beliefs and practices in the rural context: beliefs cannot directly drive practices, but must be transmitted through self-efficacy. Rural teachers' low efficacy, exam-orientation, resource constraints, dialect interference and weak student foundations together constitute barriers to the transformation of beliefs into practices. This finding expands the explanatory boundary of existing studies: foreign studies mostly focus on the consistency or simple contradiction between beliefs and practices, while this study reveals a unique fault model of high recognition and low implementation in the rural field, that is, teachers recognize in beliefs, weaken in actions, and are blocked in transformation.

Meanwhile, this study is consistent with the conclusions of Shah et al. (2017), Tran & Nguyen (2020), and Yulia & Saukah (2021) that teachers' beliefs and practices are affected by multiple factors such as educational background, training experience, classroom environment, examination policies and school culture. However, this study further points out that the constraints in the rural field are systematic and cyclical: lack of training leads to insufficient ability, low efficacy, conservative practices, and poor effects, finally forming an unbreakable closed loop. This finding goes beyond single-factor explanation and provides a systematic perspective for understanding the dilemma of rural pronunciation teaching.

This study enriches and verifies the applicability of teacher belief theory in the rural foreign language teaching field. The study confirms that there are core-peripheral hierarchical differences in the teacher belief system, and under exam-orientation, the influence of peripheral beliefs may surpass that of core beliefs, supplementing localized

evidence for the hierarchical theory of beliefs. This study deepens the application of Social Cognitive Theory in pronunciation teaching. The study clarifies the full mediating role of self-efficacy, reveals the dynamic interaction among individual beliefs, teaching ability and rural ecosystem, and provides a more complete explanatory framework for the transformation mechanism of beliefs and practices. This study makes up for the research gap of English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools in China. Existing literature mostly focuses on cities, middle schools or universities, and there is a lack of empirical research on rural primary schools, dialect environments and left-behind children backgrounds. This study provides localized evidence from southern China's rural areas for this field. This study expands the ecosystem view of pronunciation teaching. Integrating teacher development, classroom practice and rural education ecosystem into a unified framework, it reveals that the dilemma of pronunciation teaching is a systematic problem rather than a single teacher attitude or ability problem, providing an integrated analytical perspective for subsequent studies.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study show that the pronunciation teaching beliefs of EFL teachers in rural primary schools of Nanning are generally positive, recognizing the fundamental role of pronunciation teaching. However, in teaching practices, they are still dominated by mechanical repetition and exam-orientation, with fragmented content, insufficient feedback and unsystematic training, and there is an obvious disconnection between beliefs and practices. Self-efficacy plays a key mediating role, and is simultaneously restricted by structural factors such as professional ability, teaching resources, dialect interference and class time, presenting a typical characteristic of attaching importance to cognition, insufficient action and unsmooth transformation.

Combined with the findings of this study and the development needs of rural English teaching under the background of rural education revitalization, further research can be carried out in the following aspects in the future to improve the research system of pronunciation teaching beliefs and practices of rural primary school EFL teachers, and enhance the practical and theoretical value of the research.

In the future, the scope of samples can be expanded to cover rural primary schools in various parts of Guangxi, and even extended to rural primary schools in other provinces across the country, increasing the sample size and sample diversity. Meanwhile, urban and rural teachers,

and teachers with different teaching ages and educational backgrounds can be included in a comparative study to explore the differences and correlations between beliefs and practices of teachers with different regional and individual characteristics, further verify the universality of the conclusions of this study, and fill the gap in cross-regional research on rural primary school pronunciation teaching. A long-term follow-up study can be adopted to observe teachers' beliefs and practices for a long time and capture the dynamic change process of teachers' beliefs. Combined with classroom observation, students' pronunciation ability test, parent interview and other multi-source data, the current status and correlation of teachers' beliefs and practices can be cross-verified.

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The Trio of Resistance: On the Musical Writing in Coetzee's *The Pole*

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Abstract— In J. M. Coetzee's novel *The Pole*, the portrayal of the protagonist Witold as a Polish pianist specializing in Chopin's works underscores the central role of music in the text. Music is used in the novel as a medium whereby Witold faces the fear of growing old and dying, as well as a tool of reaction to the marginalization of the cultural identity in the environment of exile. Finally, it is a protest against commodification of art in consumerist systems, an aesthetic protest. The aesthetic tension that Witold attributes to the music of Chopin as an externalization of his own will, is the counter-mainstream aesthetic of Said's "late style". It shows his attempt to restore national memory by way of music, and the obdurate tradition of the artistic subject in the culture industry which Adorno criticizes. Music in the novel serves both as a mode of experience of duration in time, a process of expressing cultural identity, and an exercise of maintaining artistic dignity. The three dimensions are interwoven to develop a multilayered form of resistance.

Keywords— Adorno, J. M. Coetzee, Musical writing, Said, *The Pole*.



I. INTRODUCTION

The Pole is the latest work by Nobel Prize-winning author John Maxwell Coetzee (1940 -), published in 2023. It is a typical "music novel"[1] that involves musicians. The protagonist, Witold, is a 70-year-old Polish pianist renowned for playing Chopin's music and traveling around the world to give performances. Coetzee has a deep passion and expertise for classical music[2]. In his writing, music has always been the core of the text construction. *The Pole* also continues the previous narrative logic and involves musical elements. However, unlike other music novels, the protagonist of this work is directly set as a musician, highlighting the important position of music in the novel even more. The choice of "Chopin" as the entry point is not accidental; it contains profound implications. Currently, the music research on Coetzee's novels mostly focuses on the "musicality" analysis of the text, that is, the corresponding relationship between music and literature at the levels of rhythm, structure, and other forms. However, compared to the question of how the novel and music are similar, the question of why the novelist directly or indirectly mentions music, musicians, instruments, music events, or music scenes in the novel, and what role and significance these various embedded music within the novel actually play, is actually more worthy of exploration[3]. Therefore, this article focuses on the

functional role of music in *The Pole*, proposes the innovative perspective of "Resistance Trio", and argues that music in *The Pole* constitutes a "trio" field of resisting aging and the passage of life, the dissolution of cultural identity, and the commercialization of art. Witold uses music to resist physical aging, and his life is transformed into cultural self-expression through the persistent interpretation of Polish sounds. However, this cultural expression is once again suppressed under the regulation of capital logic, forcing his musical practice to further turn to a clear resistance against the cultural industry. The three resistances are nested and intertwined with each other.

II. RESISTING THE PASSAGE OF TIME: MUSICAL EXPRESSION IN THE LATER LIFE

In Coetzee's works, aging is ubiquitous. According to the classification of life stages by age critics, 72-year-old Witold belongs to the third age, and people in this age group, as they grow older, experience physical decline, the onslaught of diseases, and the gaze from others, will realize that "old age" is nowhere to hide[4]. Witold has overly white hair, puffy lower eyelids, sagging neck skin, hands with age spots, and shiny white false teeth, being "a man at the end of his career" and "a man from another era" [5]. Beatriz's most frequent evaluation words for Witold

are “withered” and “flat”, which not only negate his unique musical presentation method but also represent a stereotypical gaze at his elderly body. However, Witold’s response method is to construct the text of life and positive narratives of old age [4]. He did not respond with silence or withdrawal but actively resisted aging through continuous playing, using music as a weapon. According to Arthur Schopenhauer, music is the most direct manifestation of will [6], and the core of this resistance lies in music becoming the “externalization of will”. Although the novel does not elaborate on Witold’s playing skills, Beatriz’s statement “He undoubtedly plays the piano with his soul”[5] reveals the essence of his performance. This performance is not simple showmanship but a highly individualized spiritual expression. He does not rely on language but uses melody to express the inner self. In an email, he confessed: “I cannot express what’s in my mind in English, so I wrote it in music”[5]. This is a way to continue the vitality of the subject through music. The CD selections Witold sent to Beatriz also confirm this, including nocturnes, a minor sonata, and mazurkas, all of which are highly emotionally charged and structurally regressive pieces by Chopin. Through the changes in scales and harmonies, music can directly represent the alternation of desires and satisfaction[7]. These Chopin pieces all create suspense through leading tones and then release emotions with the return of the tonic. Witold releases, regulates, and reshapes himself within this structure. As he said to Beatriz: “Because Chopin allows us to see ourselves and understand our desires”[5], music becomes the most direct medium for his self-expression. Therefore, for Witold, music is not only a medium for emotional expression but also the externalization of his individual will, and it is an effective weapon against the decline of life.

The end of aging is death, and what music can resist is not only aging but also the loss of life. Witold achieved the “continuity” of his own life through the embodied performance on stage. Henri Bergson divides time into “spatialized time” and “durative time”[10], and music is not only a form of “durative” but is itself an expression of the continuation of life. Every performance of Witold perfectly confirms this “durative”, and all of this points to an ultimate goal - life is continuous and never stops[11]. The deep power of music to resist death is rooted in this form and spirit of presenting eternity in motion. Therefore, the value of music lies not only in its sound reproduction but also in its unique temporality and irreducibility. Music is an art concerning time, and to understand music, one must acknowledge the inevitable temporal form of music in the auditory sense, that is, instantaneity or one-timeality[12]. The live performance relies on this immediacy and one-off nature, making music a dynamic

and living process. In the continuous movement, each performance carries the flow of time, and music is no longer a mechanical reproduction of Chopin’s works, but a re-creation of the meaning of the works in the present. Theodor Adorno pointed out in his aesthetic criticism that as a medium technology, recording solidifies artistic works into undifferentiated standardized copies, depriving music of its original “aura” and individuality [13]. While in the novel, each “this moment and this place” of Witold’s live performance can reveal more natural emotions of the performer rather than being technical and standardized like the recording, thus preserving the naturalness of musical art. It is precisely in this embodied world of “this moment and this place” that each continuous duration of playing constitutes Witold’s resistance to the passage of life. Each performance is an unrepeatable existential instant, not only giving new meaning to the works, but also enabling the performer to achieve the perpetual existence in music. Richard Poirier pointed out: “The reason why interpretation is curious is because it has such wild self-questioning, even narcissism, and then because it craves public attention, love, and a place in history”[14]. Beatriz’s words confirm this: “You should be proud of yourself, not everyone can be recorded in history, how many people throughout their lives want to be remembered by history but fail”[5]. Through his repeated live performances, Witold pursues a similar realm to Chopin’s - after the death of the physical body, his name and spirit are able to be continued through musical art. This trait makes the performance of Western classical music a highly concentrated, extremely pure, and even approaching the limit, live event[12], becoming what Said described as “even the only once situations or performances that are the core of the musical life can still be recalled by people to return to the time”[12]. Even if those unique situations and performances as the core of the musical life have disappeared, they can still be “revisited” through the memory of the audience, being experienced again on the spiritual level, thus achieving a certain form of eternity. Witold’s performance is both the strong externalization of his individual will and realizes a certain transcendence through the form of music in time. Together, they act on his practice of resisting aging and death.

Witold’s performance breaks free from the constraints of technical replication and standardized procedures, embodying a highly individualized and uncompromising artistic attitude. From temporal awareness to style awareness, his performance style also reflects the “late style” feature proposed by Said, being a concentrated manifestation of his rebellion and self-exile through art. His “correctional interpretation” of Chopin[5] did not cater to the aesthetic tastes of the general public. Whether it was professional music critics, serious concert audiences, or

Beatriz as an outsider, none could agree with his “alternative interpretation”[5]. Many people regarded him as “an outsider in the concert circle”[5], but Witold always persisted in himself, resolutely performing without submitting to the aesthetic standards of the times, thereby resisting aging and the gaze of others, and fully expressing the most faithful self. This attitude coincides with the “late style” described by Said. Said believes that the experience of the late style “contains an inharmonious, restless tension, and most importantly, it contains a deliberate, non-creative, and opposing creativity”[8]. Witold, by adhering to his “correctionist” interpretation of Chopin and using an “outdated” performance style to rebel against the trend of the times, is a vivid portrayal of an individual’s late resistance to the aesthetic hegemony of the era. He does not gain recognition by relying on popular styles and pleasant sensations, but rather expresses the self that is not regulated by time and not subjugated by the era in the music, embodying a posture of refusing to be domesticated by time. His “letting the masses down” music is full of individual creativity and presents an outmoded aesthetic: “Many people think Chopin is made of air, and I want to correct their views”[5]. Witold engaged in self-exile in art, no longer attempting to reconcile with the outside world, but choosing to maintain a distance from the era and his own past. This self-exile is a form of rebellion expressed through art, being a distinct manifestation of his late “death-oriented” style. Said believes that as artists approach old age, they neither pursue the imagined calm and maturity nor desire any false praise from the outside world. Their late style is entirely the product of death as a mode of existence, although they do not deny or evade death. The late works are always closely related to the theme of death, and this theme also elevates the language and aesthetic style of the works[9]. This death consciousness not only appears in Witold’s piano performances but also in Coetzee’s late works. Coetzee created *The Pole* in his later years, telling the story of an elderly musician’s adulterous relationship with a middle-aged woman. The words and sentences are filled with rebellious meaning, and Coetzee also uses Witold’s image to present the theme of death, achieving the effect of “living towards death”. Witold resists death through music performance, while Coetzee realizes self-exile through novel creation. The “late style” of both intertwine and merge, jointly presenting the themes of life rebellion and death.

III. RESISTANCE TO IDENTITY DISSOLUTION: MUSICAL EXPRESSION IN IDENTITY RECOGNITION

The significance of music for Witold goes far beyond being a tool for resisting physical aging and the end of life. In his performance practice, music also carries a deeper cultural identity. His dedication to performing Chopin’s music is also based on his insistence on national memory and cultural belonging. Thus, musical expression becomes a profound cultural symbol, serving as an important medium for him to defend his identity in an alien world.

Coetzee’s designation of Witold as a pianist specializing in performing Chopin’s music, rather than other renowned pianists, has a unique and profound connotation. Any artist’s creation cannot exist independently of the era and cultural background in which he or she is situated [15]. After leaving his homeland, Chopin’s works gradually matured due to the influence of the Warsaw Uprising and the loneliness of living abroad, making his romantic art more marked by the imprint of national crisis. His love for his homeland became the most important direction in his creative work, and he became the most talented spokesperson for the liberation of the Polish nation’s ideology[15]. His love for the oppressed homeland was the unchanging ideological content of his art throughout his life, and his music was always closely linked to Polish folk creations[16]. Chopin once summarized the emotional tone of his music with the word “zai”, a Polish word that is difficult to translate and carries multiple complex emotions such as melancholy, sorrow, suppressed anger, and irreparable loss. These emotions are the spiritual soil of his artistic temperament and also the inherent scars of the Polish nation[15]. The national symbolic meaning of music is magnified and complicated by its cross-media expression, and music has transformed into a tool for cultural self-representation.

However, the Chopin national music that Witold wanted to express was not understood by the “West”, and even led to misinterpretation and exclusion. As a Spaniard from Western Europe, Beatriz’s character setting is not only Witold’s “lover”, but also a key role in the novel to reveal the barriers of cultural understanding and the unequal discourse power. Her misinterpretation of Witold’s music and Chopin’s music reflects how Western centrism constructs “Eastern Europe” as an object otherized through everyday language, aesthetic taste, and knowledge power. Beatriz believes that “the love for Chopin she has is able to bring her to an ancient country villa in the distant Polish plain, where the summer is coming to an end, the breeze blows through the curtains, and the room is filled with the fragrance of roses”[5]. She tends to understand Chopin’s works as “tranquil and quiet” music, while ignoring the

national tragedy and historical trauma contained within. When Witold sent CDs to her twice, her reaction was either dislike or confusion. She was only interested in Chopin's mazurkas, because these pieces have a lively rhythm and lively melody, suitable for entertainment rather than contemplation. Her association was only "How strange: I can't think of him dancing"[5], completely ignoring the national spirit behind the mazurkas: "The patriotic spirit of Chopin's mazurkas lies in its deep-rooted connection with folk art, national dances, and the life scenarios of Poland; it expresses 'the soul of the people'"[16]. In this selective listening, the complex cultural memories unique to Eastern Europe are submerged as simple exoticism, and the political significance of the cultural expression is completely erased. Such misinterpretation is not an accidental individual expression; it reflects a similar logic in Said's "Orientalism" proposition. "Eastern Europe" was constructed in the Enlightenment era as "the Eastern part of Europe", a semi-Orientalized discourse structure[17]. The non-Western cultural entities were shaped as politically disengaged objects, not only resulting from the misinterpretation of music itself, but also reflecting the neglect of Witold as a representative of the Polish nation. The superficial conflicts in cultural exchanges were actually the hidden symbolic representation of the cultural identity crisis.

Misinterpretation also contained a certain degree of listening intention. Witold was more frequently encountered with a deeper rejection. He was denied in the music criticism circle, marginalized in performance opportunities, and rejected in personal relationships. From the London music reviews to the Barcelona performance, and to Beatriz's various responses to him, it was the systematic rejection of "the voice of Eastern Europe" by the Western mainstream society. After Witold's performance in London, he did not receive cheers but criticism and derogatory music reviews. They believed that "Witold's tough percussion-style interpretation of Chopin's works was long outdated"[5]. This criticism did not focus on technical or interpretational reasonable disputes, but rather denied his overall performance value in an almost arrogant tone. In the European music criticism system, the German-Austrian tradition had long occupied the orthodox position, and the judgment order in the standards had unconsciously formed a centering on Western European aesthetics. The novel also specifically mentions "The performer invited to the concert circle next month is the tenor Thomas Kociv, who will perform Handel, Pergolesi, and Philip Glass"[5]. They respectively come from Germany, Italy, and the United States. Moreover, Beatriz deliberately ridiculed: "Perhaps Thomas Kociv will become the true pole that can connect with her,

overshadowing that fake Pole (Polish person)"[5]. Beatriz used a pun to mock Witold, suggesting that he was inferior in music, emotion, and attractiveness to "the real pole" Kociw. Originally, "pole" signified Witold's cultural identity as a Pole, but in her words, it was emptied out and entered the superficial emotional domain. Language here became an invisible tool of cultural exclusion, through this pun-like word game, she completed another weakening and exclusion of Witold's cultural identity. Similar rejections also occurred in the interaction between Witold and the performance institutions. The organizers of the Barcelona performance were "not willing" to invite Witold from Poland; Witold sent a letter, hoping that the concert circle would invite him, but was politely refused by Beatriz. The lack of performance opportunities not only meant economic and professional difficulties, but also a symbolic cultural rejection, which was a concrete manifestation of the systematic rejection of Eastern European music by the Western mainstream society. Moreover, Beatriz's personal attitude more detailedly demonstrated how this rejection permeated into daily cultural interactions. On the one hand, she showed curiosity about Witold, but on the other hand, she constantly revealed subtle rejection and indifference in details. "I don't plan to go to Valldemossa to listen to a Pole playing the piano"[5], "I'm not curious about Poland at all"[5]. Such indifference left Witold with no place to express himself in reality, and his cultural identity lost its space to exist in life, with no place to take refuge. This cultural misreading and exclusion together constituted the external resistance to Witold's identity expression. However, in the face of this external resistance, Witold still expressed his holding and reaffirmation of his self-identity and cultural foundation through music, through the national melodies of Chopin. Apart from misinterpretation and rejection, Coetzee also endeavored to highlight the "exile" identity shared by Witold, Chopin, and himself. Although these three "exiles" belonged to different eras, they all demonstrated a profound sense of "rootlessness" in terms of cultural identity. Chopin's exile to Paris was a response to the national disaster; Coetzee's migration from South Africa to Australia was a rebellion against racial policies; but Witold embodied a more contemporary "active exile" identity. He did not merely flee passively, but actively left the globalized world, refusing assimilation and attempting to re-establish the possibility of resistance through cultural mobility. In front of Beatriz, he repeatedly played Chopin's music, not for showy performance skills, but as an "organ" for transmitting identity through memories. Said, when discussing the fate of exiles, pointed out: "Exile is one of the most tragic destinies... but it is also an indispensable experience for intellectuals"[18]. Exiles have a "historical, dual perspective"; "exilic

intellectuals respond not to the conventional logic, but with boldness and fearlessness; they represent change, progress, rather than stagnation"[19]. They do not accept reality as natural, but constantly question "conventional" in their art, and continuously tell the truth to power in their expressions. Witold's refusal to play music to please the audience, and his repeated performance of Chopin's "zai" sound, precisely embody this aesthetic spirit. And Coetzee's portrayal of Witold's failure and silence, yet his insistence on performing, is a continuation of his consistent "exile-style literature", that is, resisting silence through aesthetic means, resisting oblivion with an understood voice, and realizing the metaphorical situation of exile seen by late Said from Adorno, who had also experienced exile, a posture of "remaining outside the mainstream, not adapting, and refusing incorporation"[19]. The writing of the identity of exiles also conceals Coetzee's self-reflection. As a white South African writer, after winning the Nobel Prize, he chose to migrate to Australia, which was both an active departure from the racial political context and a self-exile-like posture like Witold's. In the global literary system, he was also in a position of "no place to belong". Witold's persistent performance of Chopin to preserve cultural memory, and Coetzee's insistence on "non-mainstream" music writing to defend the critical nature of literature, both in different fields, yet exhibit similar resistance logic. This makes the musical writing in *The Pole* not only about the artistic expression of the characters, but also reflects Coetzee's deep reflection on exile, identity, and resistance. Although Witold was repeatedly misunderstood and rejected in *The Pole*, his performance never returned to the narrow nationalist position; instead, it demonstrated an open and inclusive attitude. In a solo music concert, in addition to playing Chopin's preludes, he also chose the sonatas of the Austrian composer Haydn and a set of dances by the Polish modern composer Lutosławski. This arrangement of the program is a highly symbolic artistic choice - Haydn, who represents Austria, was historically one of the aggressors and partitioners of Poland, while Lutosławski symbolizes the spirit of contemporary Polish cultural resistance. Witold did not use historical opposition as the exclusion criterion for the selection of pieces, but allowed these three sounds, which should have been placed in opposing positions, to be juxtaposed and resonated in one performance. What he practiced was not only the contrapuntal spirit of "granting each voice equal speaking rights" as described by Said[20], but also a rebuttal to the deeply rooted binary opposition logic of culture. Through establishing artistic dialogue, he challenged the stereotypical Western perception of the Polish national identity. What he pursued was a universal language that could transcend borders, classes, and prejudices, allowing

different historical memories and cultural identities to be "heard" in resonance. This is precisely the true spiritual heritage of Chopin's music, not striving for a certain voice to gain a dominant position, but rather striving to create the possibility of equal voices for all historical voices, transcending narrow nationalism and achieving the ultimate ideal of "harmony for all under heaven".

The ethnic symbolic significance of music has been further magnified. Its function in the novel goes far beyond aesthetics and lyricism; it is a political cultural self-representation tool. This way of interpreting politics from music, Said calls it the deviant element of music, that is, "describing the overall picture of political and social intervention, incidental connection, and deviant crossover in music"[12], which also corresponds to the "contrapuntal reading method" he advocated for revealing the political ideology in aesthetic texts[20]. Witold's interpretation of Chopin's music is not only the awakening of memories of the homeland, but also the resistance stance of the exiled in the mainstream aesthetic context of the West. His performance itself constitutes a kind of sound politics, an artistic response to the historical trauma and cultural identity of Poland. Therefore, the musical text in the novel should be regarded as a cultural event that requires contrapuntal interpretation. It is both the audible expression of Polish identity and a correction of Western aesthetic hegemony. This "interpreting politics from music" approach not only demonstrates the complexity of music carrying history, but also echoes the deep relationship between aesthetics and politics emphasized by Said.

IV. RESISTING ART ALIENATION: MUSICAL EXPRESSION WITHIN INDUSTRIAL LOGIC

Music, as a symbol of identity and cultural memory, has not received the due understanding and respect in the real society. Witold's performance practice in the Western context has often been misinterpreted, ignored and rejected, which also reveals the systematic alienation of art in the modern social structure. Music is no longer a purely aesthetic practice but has increasingly become an appendage under the logic of commodity and consumption mechanism. Witold's persistence is thus not only a response to the disintegration of identity, but also a resistance against the manipulation of the cultural industry and the trend of art commodification.

In *The Pole*, the art represented by music has been marginalized, profoundly reflecting the transformation of the overall values of modern society. In modern society, people's focus has shifted away from art and towards "practical" fields such as economic development. Just as Max Weber proposed "instrumental rationality", which

means following the logic of efficiency and emphasizing “fact-based judgment”, through rational “calculation”, to find the optimal solution for means and maximize benefits [21]. The cold attitude towards art is first reflected in the value orientation of proponents of “practical disciplines”, such as Beatriz. When Witold invited Beatriz to a concert in Brazil, her focus was on examining Brazilian agriculture, and she specifically mentioned her eldest son, who worked as a chemical researcher in an agricultural company. Her husband’s identity as a banker symbolizes the core area of modern rationality and economic interests, “never participating in the activities of the concert circle”[5], also indicating his disdain for the art domain. Secondly, the marginalization of music is also reflected in the objective fact of the reduction of art spaces and funds. The Felipe Pedrell Music Academy “is located in an unremarkable building in the old city”[5], Witold’s “performance venue is an old monastery with poor sound transmission”[5], “the funds allocated by the government to the music circle are about to be cut in half, so they also have to reduce the number of performances from ten a year to six”[5]. Under the pressure of modern rationalization, cultural life has declined. With “old audiences being unable to function properly and fewer people attending events”, Adorno’s statement that “modern music quietly died away, even without a echo”[22] has been verified. All these reveal the marginalized situation of art within the framework of modern rationalization. Art is no longer regarded as a means for self-actualization and spiritual elevation, but has become an “useless thing” disconnected from utility.

Music not only needs to give way to “practical disciplines”, but the remaining part of the music art has also become completely different, being alienated and commodified. Concerts have become a “commodity”, their existence and form more consider profit and market demand rather than pure artistic creation and cultural exchange. Before the 18th century, music was a spontaneous and self-oriented artistic state, without music stores or packaging companies for music products, music was purely an activity based on self-survival value[23]. However, the production of music now submits to the production logic of Adorno’s “cultural industry”, “subjected to countless social selection processes and constrained by theories such as industry, fixed agents, festival arrangements, and other groups. Everything enters the preferences of the audience, their needs are completely dragged along”[24]. The novel begins by introducing that “concerts are handled by the board”[5], music activities are no longer for artistic expression, but have become a commercial activity pursued by market operation and profit. The attitude of Margarita, who represents the board, further reveals the phenomenon of music

commodification, she is indifferent to music and considers everything as a commercial process. At this point, the “music festival” has become an alienated structure, where highly specialized musicians, barbers, and lighting technicians maintain a distance from the public through this structure. The public, on the other hand, “consumes” rather than “appreciates” the music[25].

The music event is regarded as a process and product, rather than an expression of emotions and thoughts. The commercialization of music has led to the degradation of hearing, and the audience in this environment becomes “blind” and “unautonomous”. Adorno, in his paper “On the Fetishistic Features of Music and the Degradation of Hearing”, mentioned: “This is the already degraded, suppressed in its infancy contemporary hearing. They listen atomically, this ability does not have much in common with the concepts of traditional aesthetics, and is similar to football matches and driving”[26]. Industrialization, mechanization, and commercial production have made the audience reject the ability to autonomously understand music, and more inclined to waste their leisure time for music entertainment and relaxation. They refuse to use their minds and to think autonomously[23]. Beatriz’s aesthetic choice vividly reflects Adorno’s criticized “negative audience” trait. She prefers “music with singing and dancing”, which is usually mechanical and thoughtless, more in line with the market’s demand for rapid consumption. And her rejection of “up-and-down, dramatic works” and “works with philosophical speculation”[5] reflects the auditory degradation in the cultural industry criticized by Adorno, that is, the audience has given up the deep understanding and thinking of music and instead pursued easy, recreational, and entertainment-oriented musical forms. The emergence of “negative audiences” is not only a phenomenon of cultural consumption, but also a part of social control. Under the drive of industrialization and commercialization, culture and art are simplified as a means of entertainment and relaxation, causing the audience to lose their perception and thinking ability of music.

The emergence of “negative audiences” proves Adorno’s cultural industrial theory that individuals are passively accepted, that is, the “audience idiot theory”[27], which ignores the subjective initiative of individuals. However, the Birmingham School pays great attention to the agency shown by the audience when facing the cultural industry, such as Stuart Hall who believes that the audience can decode the information released by the publisher in their own way[28], which gives Witold the hope of resistance. Witold’s “correctional interpretation” can be regarded as an “encoding” practice. He intentionally avoids the romanticized, feminized image of Chopin promoted by the cultural industry and instead encodes in a voice that is

more in line with historical reality. However, the “decoding” result of the audience for Witold’s transmitted information presents a highly divided situation. A few critics adopt a negotiated position, that is, the audience partially accepts the dominant encoding of the information, but combines their own experience and viewpoints to propose reservations or corrections. To a certain extent, they recognize the historical depth in Witold’s performance, but criticize that it is “too rational and lacks emotional appeal”[5], adopting a hesitant attitude to partially accept. While the majority of the audience adopt an oppositional position, directly rejecting his performance style, regarding it as “hard and obscure” “unconforming to emotional expectations”[5], and even feeling uncomfortable. Almost no one enters the dominant position expected by Witold and truly understands the historical truth he intends to express. In “encoding”, Witold upholds the resistance will of the individual, while the audience in “decoding” constantly ignores his efforts with entertainment ears. This failure of communication reflects Adorno’s criticism of the logic of the cultural industry: the sound of serious music is destined to be misinterpreted, undermined, or even suppressed. The isolation of Witold is not accidental but rather a systematic suppression of his resistance through music in the consumer society structure. This also indicates that Witold’s practice is not a complete denial of Adorno’s proposition of “individual passivity”, but rather a complex response in reality to his resistance. An individual can code and resist, but such resistance is often lonely, marginalized, and not understood. His performance is a challenge to the aesthetic norms of the cultural industry, but this persistence does not bring immediate transformative effects.

In addition to active coding, Witold’s “correctional interpretation” of Chopin’s music is also a fundamental resistance to the logic of the cultural industry. He does not view the performance as a commercialized display of virtuosity, but rather reinterprets Chopin’s works through personalized analysis to achieve the re-creation of individual aesthetics. Under the logic of the cultural industry, “the more the music is objectified, the more romantic it is for the alienated ears”[26]. Standardized cultural products constantly stimulate the senses of the masses, bringing immediate pleasure experiences, and works that cater to the tastes of the masses are often more likely to trigger collective frenzy. While Witold’s serious music interpretation is a rigorous performance, it inevitably encounters the rejection of mainstream audiences. His “percussive” performance style seems stiff, obscure, and even perplexing to the masses, but truly critical art should not be easily understood or accepted. Witold’s alternative interpretation breaks the aesthetic

expectations of the cultural industry, thus maintaining the resistance of art. However, despite Coetzee’s attempt to resist the homogenizing logic of the cultural industry through Witold’s image, he still arranges the plot where the protagonist sends CDs in the novel. CDs, as a typical product of the cultural industry with standardized replication, circulation, and distribution, seemingly represent a compromise and dependence on the cultural commodity mechanism. But this is not the case. Witold’s behavior is not motivated by commercial dissemination, nor does it rely on any mainstream channels. Rather, it is more like a private and individualized transmission. He sends the recording not for market exposure, but out of a desire for understanding, and this transmission is made in the gap of the industrial logic. Therefore, this is not an active participation in the commodity circulation system, but borrowing the shell of industrial media to retain a pure artistic transmission at its periphery. This paradoxical action precisely reveals the limitation of the cultural industry structure on individual voices, and precisely within this paradox, the complexity of artistic resistance is manifested. On the one hand, it attempts to reject the logic of the cultural industry and maintain the autonomy of art; on the other hand, in the contemporary media expression system, individual artistic expression almost cannot completely escape the industrial technology system. CDs, recordings, circulation - these are themselves part of the existence of modern art. Therefore, Witold’s behavior, although resistant, is inevitably dependent on industrial mechanisms. This resistance form of being marginalized in the process of persistence, misunderstood in the expression, and consumed in the act of sending further reveals the difficult position of art in the cultural industry system. Even so, Witold still chooses to persist in expressing through the means he can master, even if it is destined to receive no response, it constitutes a dignified non-marketized expression. From an overall perspective, Witold’s musical expression exists only in a narrow marginal space and is difficult to truly influence the aesthetic direction of the mainstream society. Therefore, under the control of commercial logic, this non-conformist performance will ultimately only be a private expression that cannot form wider dissemination and response. His persistence is more like a doomed counterflow, although it has strength, it ultimately cannot change the entire cultural environment. In *The Pole*, Coetzee, through Witold’s perseverance, not only affirms the pessimistic conclusion that resistance within the system is mostly futile, but also simultaneously showcases an alternative kind of courage known as persisting in the face of certain futility. This also reflects Coetzee’s aesthetic intention and the tragic sentiment presented in the text, because the value of resistance lies precisely in the process rather than the

outcome. If resistance is ultimately regarded as successful, it will be assimilated into the heroic narrative, while failure retains the complexity and tension of resistance.

V. CONCLUSION

In *The Pole*, Coetzee does not merely present the story of a stubborn old man. Instead, through the prism of music, he reflects on the multiple predicaments faced by individual lives, cultural identities, and artistic values in modern society. Witold, through his musical practice, not only responds to aging and death, but also resists the dissolution of cultural identities and the alienation of art. He transforms the performance into an existential narrative that resists the passage of time, persistently performing Chopin in the Western context, maintaining the cultural memory of Eastern European voices, and refusing the trend of commercialization, insisting on the individual expression of serious music. These three resistances coalesce into resistive musical practice in Witold. Music, as a manifestation of the will of the body, a powerful expression of national voice, and an aesthetic tool against industrialization logic, interweaves individual ethics, cultural politics, and artistic forms, completing a rare event-based resistance practice in Coetzee's novels.

Coetzee's novel creation has always been closely linked to music, and the uniqueness of *The Pole* lies in its breaking through the form dimension of music writing in previous works, giving music an unprecedented event-based resistance mission. In *Diary of a Bad Year*, he uses Bach's "polyphonic" structure to create a multi-voice text experiment, achieving a form dialogue between music and words; in *Dusklands*, he juxtaposes the Vietnam War and South African notes through "counterpoint" to serve the narrative structure with musical thinking; and in *The Pole*, music first appears as an event rather than a form, through the image of the musician Witold, concretely presenting the ethical identity and social critical power that music carries in the late capitalist society. Against this backdrop, *The Pole* not only inherits Coetzee's original intention of using literature to intervene in reality and reflect on the times, but also constitutes a turning point in his musical writing lineage. This "turning point" not only means that music in Coetzee's novels shifts from a formal metaphor to a practical event, but also marks the deepening of his late thoughts. Coetzee extends his critical focus from the aesthetic level to the cultural marginalization under globalization, the existential anxiety in an aging society, and the erosion of art by the consumerist system. Therefore, *The Pole* is not only a turning point in his musical novel writing, but also an important window for understanding Coetzee's late style. In an era when serious art is marginalized by the market, Coetzee raises a

fundamental question: Are we still capable of persisting in those "outdated" artistic forms? When fast-paced, emotionally shallow entertainment products replace profound, resonant art works, when fast food culture and algorithmic logic constantly undermine the depth of human spirit, *The Pole* does not propose nostalgia for art, but rather an ethical warning for contemporary society. Coetzee points the music's predicament to the social structure, pushes the ethical reflection back to the readers' life context, and ultimately reaches our hearts: In this era, are we still willing to listen attentively?

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Systematic Dilemmas in English Pronunciation Teaching in Rural Primary Schools in China: A Grounded Theory Study of Nanning

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Abstract— Constrained by multiple factors such as the examination-oriented education orientation, unbalanced distribution of educational resources, and limitations in teachers' professional capabilities, English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools in China has long been trapped in a development bottleneck. Taking 10 EFL teachers from rural primary schools in 5 counties of Nanning as the research objects, this study adopted a qualitative research method combining non-participatory classroom observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews and grounded theory to systematically explore the practical status quo, core problems and deep-seated dilemmas of English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools. Through a three-level analysis process of open coding, axial coding and selective coding, the core category of systematic dilemmas in English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools was extracted, and its closed-loop cycle mechanism formed by the mutual nesting and dynamic reinforcement of three secondary categories, teachers' development dilemmas, English pronunciation teaching dilemmas and educational ecology dilemmas, was revealed. Insufficient professional capabilities of teachers lead to inefficient teaching implementation, which further weakens the willingness of external environmental support and ultimately exacerbates the lag in teachers' development. The study found that the pronunciation classrooms of EFL teachers in rural primary schools in Nanning generally present a rigid model of teacher-led plus mechanical drilling, and problems such as the lack of suprasegmental feature teaching, the scarcity of effective feedback mechanisms, and the insufficient response to the negative transfer of mother tongue among ethnic minority students are particularly prominent.



Keywords— rural primary schools; English pronunciation teaching; systematic dilemmas; grounded theory; EFL teachers

I. INTRODUCTION

English pronunciation teaching in Chinese primary schools plays a crucial role in the early English learning of Chinese EFL (English as a foreign language) learners (Yang, 2022). It helps Chinese EFL learners establish an accurate English pronunciation foundation, improve their listening comprehension and oral expression abilities, and lay a solid foundation for learning other linguistic knowledge in English (Liu & Fang, 2022).

However, like many other regions in Asia, primary schools in China measure students' academic performance by examination scores. The main focus of English examinations in China is on vocabulary, grammar and reading. This leads to the lack of attention paid by Chinese EFL learners and EFL teachers in primary schools to English pronunciation teaching (Feng, 2023). This phenomenon is particularly prominent in rural areas of China. Therefore, when most EFL learners in rural primary schools in China learn English, they do not have

sufficient real English environment to learn correct pronunciation (Yang, 2022). EFL teachers in rural primary schools focus on English grammar and vocabulary phrases, and English pronunciation teaching is the weakest link in English teaching in rural primary schools, leading to a significant gap in English pronunciation teaching between rural and urban primary schools in China (Zhou, 2021). The prominent challenges faced by English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools in China urgently need to be solved (Yao, 2021).

In recent years, more and more researchers have begun to pay attention to issues related to English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools in China (Bao, 2019; Lou, 2019; Tian & Wang, 2022; Wu, 2019; Yang, 2022; Yao, 2021; Zhou, 2019; Zhou, 2021). However, current studies mainly examine the teaching methods and strategies chosen by EFL teachers (Ding, 2020; Guo, 2019), and lack a systematic analysis of the formation mechanism of dilemmas. In particular, there is a lack of special research on pronunciation teaching dilemmas in multi-ethnic rural areas such as Nanning, leading to the difficulty of existing research conclusions in adapting to the complex teaching situations of rural primary schools and failing to provide accurate theoretical support and practical guidance for solving dilemmas. These research gaps represent the need for a large amount of research data to solve the practical problems of the quality of English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools in China.

Based on the above research background and research gaps, this study takes rural primary schools in Nanning as the research context. As the capital of Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, Nanning has many rural areas inhabited by ethnic minorities, with diverse dialects and a high proportion of left-behind children. The problems faced by English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools, such as dialect interference, lack of resources and weak teaching staff, are typical and representative. Its research conclusions can provide reference for English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools in ethnic minority areas in southern China. This study aims to systematically investigate the practical status quo of English pronunciation teaching by EFL teachers in rural primary schools in Nanning, deeply analyze the core problems and deep-seated dilemmas they face, clarify the formation mechanism of the dilemmas, and ultimately provide targeted suggestions for improving the pronunciation teaching capabilities of EFL teachers in rural primary schools and optimizing pronunciation teaching practices.

To explore the deep-seated reasons for the difficulties and contradictions in English pronunciation teaching in

rural primary schools in China, this study aims to conduct a comprehensive and in-depth investigation and analysis of EFL teachers' pronunciation teaching, and provide valuable insights and help for improving the actual effect of English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools in China. To achieve this research goal, this study will be further divided into the following specific objectives: to comprehensively and in-depth investigate the current status of English pronunciation teaching by EFL teachers in rural primary schools in Nanning, to analyze the problems existing in the pronunciation teaching of EFL teachers in rural primary schools in Nanning, and to analyze the core problems and deep-seated dilemmas faced by EFL teachers in rural primary schools in Nanning in the process of English pronunciation teaching.

In response to the predetermined research objectives outlined above, the researcher intends to investigate the following three research questions:

RQ1. What is the actual situation of EFL teachers' pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools in Nanning?

RQ2. What problems exist in their pronunciation teaching practices?

RQ3. What dilemmas do they face in the process of English pronunciation teaching?

Based on Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 2001) and Topal's (2022) theoretical framework, this indicator system closely focuses on the three research questions, divides three core dimensions: EFL teachers' cognition, teaching environment and pronunciation teaching practice, and sets secondary dimensions and clear operational indicators under each dimension to ensure that the indicators are observable, measurable and applicable to research and analysis.

II. RESEARCH METHODS

To comprehensively and in-depth respond to the three core research questions proposed in this study and accurately analyze the systematic dilemmas in English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools, this study adopts an interpretive qualitative research design, focusing on the real scenarios, internal contradictions and deep-seated dilemmas of English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools. Through triangulation of multi-source data, it reveals the interaction mechanism between teachers' beliefs and teaching practices, and provides empirical evidence for analyzing the deep-seated reasons for pronunciation teaching difficulties. Among them, the researcher conducted one pre-class interview and one post-class interview for each participating EFL teacher, totaling

2 interviews. Two classroom observations were conducted for each EFL teacher, with an interval of one year between them, aiming to capture the stability and dynamic changes of teachers' pronunciation teaching practices, avoid the contingency of a single observation, and ensure that the teachers' actual teaching situation and dilemmas can be comprehensively and truly reflected.

The research objects were selected by Maximum Variation Sampling. Ten EFL teachers were selected from rural primary schools in 5 counties of Nanning as the research objects. The sampling process fully considered the teachers' educational background and teaching years. Among them, 3 teachers had an English major background, and 7 teachers did not have an English major background. There were 3 teachers with 1-5 years of teaching experience, 5 teachers with 5-15 years of teaching experience, and 2 teachers with more than 15 years of teaching experience. This study has been approved by the Ethics Review Committee, all participating EFL teachers have signed the informed consent form, and the interview data have been anonymized.

The interview outline adopted a semi-structured design, focusing on the three research questions, guided by the two theories, strictly corresponding to the two core dimensions of teachers' cognition of pronunciation teaching and pronunciation teaching practice and their subordinate operational indicators. It was divided into two parts: pre-class interview and post-class interview, both focusing on the core cognition, actual behaviors and practical dilemmas of teachers' pronunciation teaching, to ensure the pertinence and systematicness of the interview content. The S-CVI of the interview outline was 0.81, and each I-CVI was greater than 0.7. The pilot study showed that EFL teachers in rural primary schools recognized the validity and comprehensibility of the interview outline. The classroom observation outline adopted a structured observation design, focusing on non-participatory observation, strictly based on the two theoretical frameworks and the operational indicators of teachers' beliefs and practice dimensions, clarifying the observation dimensions, observation content and recording standards, to ensure that the observation process is operable and the observation results are quantifiable. The S-CVI of the observation outline was 0.81, each I-CVI was greater than 0.7, and the Cohen's Kappa coefficient was 0.72.

For the qualitative research data collected in this study, Grounded Theory will be adopted and analyzed using NVivo 15. The information involved in the interviews, such as teachers' educational background, teaching experience, cognition of pronunciation teaching, teaching methods and problems faced, will be comprehensively explored and converted into independent

concepts. Two coders conducted independent coding, the Kappa coefficient was 0.71, and the divergent parts were resolved through discussions by the research team.

In the coding process of this study, the newly added interview texts and classroom observation texts were continuously coded. After coding the interview data of 8 teachers and the observation data of 17 classes, no new concepts, categories or logical connections appeared in the newly added data. The 10 cases have fully covered all core categories and correlation mechanisms of teachers' experience, teaching cognition, educational ecology and teaching practices. The explanatory power of the core category, systematic dilemmas in English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools, has reached sufficiency. Therefore, this study believes that the data have reached saturation, and the coding process is completed.

III. RESULTS

In the field of EFL education in rural primary schools, this study conducted in-depth research on pronunciation teaching practices, constructed a comprehensive and systematic analytical framework through three-level coding, and revealed many dilemmas and the underlying systematic problems existing in EFL pronunciation teaching practices in rural primary schools.

Teachers' Development Dilemmas

The researcher integrated initial concepts such as cognition of pronunciation teaching, self-efficacy, and pronunciation training, focusing on the dilemmas at the level of teachers' own cognition and abilities. Its logical chain is that due to pronunciation training, teaching experience, and educational background, teachers form a teacher-centered, examination-centered approach with insufficient pronunciation teaching, leading to inconsistencies between teaching beliefs and teaching practices, accompanied by low self-efficacy.

English Pronunciation Teaching Dilemmas

The researcher integrated initial concepts such as problems with teaching equipment, lack of teaching resources, insufficient teaching time, and insufficient pronunciation teaching, focusing on the dilemmas in the implementation process of pronunciation teaching. Its logical chain is that due to problems with teaching equipment, lack of teaching resources, insufficient teaching time, and poor pronunciation, teachers find it difficult to carry out suprasegmental teaching, emotional teaching, and pronunciation feedback, leading to insufficient pronunciation teaching, which is exacerbated by the heavy teaching tasks.

Educational Ecology Dilemmas

Integrating initial concepts such as characteristics of rural primary schools, characteristics of rural families, and rural primary school students, focusing on the constraints of the external system on pronunciation teaching. Its logical chain is that due to the large number of left-behind children and parents' inability to provide tutoring, there is

a structural disconnection in home-school cooperation. Coupled with the lack of English practice, a large number of ethnic minorities, and students' shyness, rural primary school students have a poor English foundation and do not pay attention to pronunciation.

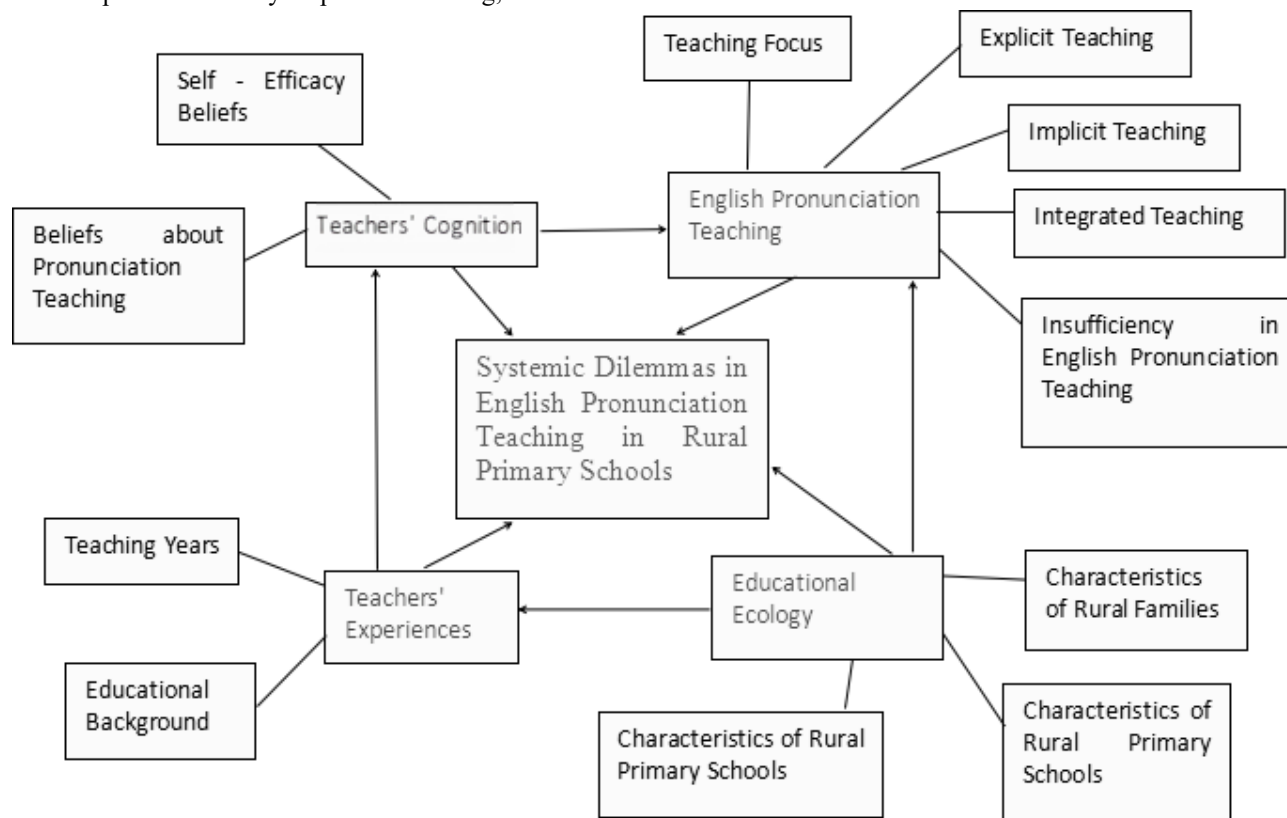


Fig.1 Grounded Theory Diagram of English Pronunciation Teaching in Rural Primary Schools

All secondary categories focus on various problems and obstacles existing in English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools, and these problems are not isolated but interrelated and mutually influential, forming an organic whole that cannot be summarized by a single secondary category or scattered concepts. Therefore, it is necessary to extract a core category that can cover all secondary categories and dominate all research information. The expression systematic dilemmas in English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools can not only include the core connotation of all secondary categories but also reflect the correlation and integrity between various dilemmas. Its explanatory power has reached sufficiency, which meets the criteria for determining the core category of Grounded Theory, which is the core data support for determining this core category. As shown in Figure 1, by analyzing the correlation between the core category and the three secondary categories, this study constructs the following theoretical framework. The systematic dilemmas in EFL

pronunciation teaching practices in rural primary schools are the result of the interaction between teachers' development dilemmas, English pronunciation teaching dilemmas, and educational ecology dilemmas. Among them, teachers' development dilemmas directly restrict the solution of English pronunciation teaching dilemmas, and educational ecology dilemmas further exacerbate teachers' professional anxiety and the lack of teaching resources, forming a vicious circle of teachers' development, teaching practices and external ecology. In addition, problems such as insufficient pronunciation teaching in English pronunciation teaching dilemmas, in turn, strengthen the inconsistency between EFL teachers' beliefs and practices, making it more difficult to break through the systematic dilemmas.

Based on the theoretical framework formed by three-level coding, the research conclusions are as follows. The dilemmas in English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools are a complex symbiotic system. This system is composed of three core dimensions: the

disconnect between teachers' cognition and practice, the limitations of teachers' professional development, and the constraints of educational ecology. These three dimensions are nested with each other and dynamically strengthened, forming a vicious circle with path dependence. This is a systematic social system composed of the interaction between internal factors including teachers' experience, teachers' cognition, teaching content and methods and external environment including family, school, and countryside.

This system has the following characteristics. First, the various elements of the system are diverse. Systematic dilemmas involve multi-dimensional elements such as teachers' cognition and abilities, teaching resources and time, external environment and national culture, and each element includes specific sub-problems, reflecting the complexity of the dilemmas. Second, there is a strong correlation between the various elements of the system. Each element does not exist in isolation but influences each other and is mutually causal. Finally, the system is stubborn. Due to the strong correlation between elements forming a closed-loop cycle, improvements in a single dimension are difficult to break the dilemmas, leading to the system having strong stability and stubbornness, which has long restricted the improvement of the quality of English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools.

The following will analyze the three research questions of this study in detail.

RQ1. What is the actual situation of EFL teachers' pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools in Nanning?

Through the analysis of the classroom practices of English pronunciation teaching by rural EFL teachers in primary schools in ten cases, there are significant commonalities in the core model of their classroom practices, but differences in detailed methods, resource utilization and other aspects.

Teaching practices generally focus on teacher-led plus mechanical drilling. All cases show that the classroom is mainly driven by teachers' demonstrations and instructions, and students' main learning methods are follow-up reading, reading aloud and repeated drilling, lacking links for independent exploration or creative application of pronunciation knowledge. The teaching content focuses on phonemes and word pronunciation, and suprasegmental teaching is almost blank. The pronunciation teaching of all teachers focuses on letter pronunciation, word pronunciation and basic phonetic rules, and the teaching of suprasegmental features such as intonation, stress and liaison is generally lacking. Teaching resources and tools rely on textbooks and supporting audio,

lacking supplementary resources. The teaching resources of all EFL teachers are limited to textbooks and supporting audio, and almost no extracurricular materials are introduced. Teaching aids are generally single, mainly multimedia plus blackboard, and most classroom observation outlines mention that teaching aids are single, which is not conducive to showing the key points of pronunciation. Effective feedback is generally lacking, and emotional motivation is insufficient. All cases have the problem of no feedback or untimely feedback, and the emotional motivation for students is seriously insufficient.

The differential characteristics of classroom practices of English pronunciation teaching by rural EFL teachers are as follows:

In terms of the depth of pronunciation knowledge explanation, rural teachers with an English major educational background are more systematic. English major teachers will take the initiative to explain pronunciation rules, while non-English major teachers mostly stay at the surface of demonstrating pronunciation and students' follow-up reading, and rarely explain or demonstrate pronunciation rules.

In terms of the application of implicit teaching, some teachers try diversified forms. Teachers who try implicit teaching will infiltrate pronunciation learning through songs, games, animations, etc. Teachers without implicit teaching do not use forms such as songs and games, and teaching only relies on follow-up reading and reading aloud.

A few teachers try peer correction and group interaction. Individual participants encourage students to form English learning groups, listen to and read each other after class, correct pronunciation, assign group leaders to record mistakes, and supplement classroom drilling through peer interaction.

There are differences in orientation between the emphasis on exams and communication. Some EFL teachers take both exams and communication into account. They not only pay attention to exam contents such as word spelling and sentence pattern mastery but also emphasize students' oral communication. However, some EFL teachers focus on exams. Because exams do not directly test pronunciation skills, they compress the time for pronunciation teaching and focus on word spelling and grammar. Although some teachers emphasize communication, the communication content is mechanical and not combined with exams or actual needs.

In summary, the pronunciation teaching practices of EFL teachers in rural primary schools are highly consistent in core models such as teacher-led, mechanical drilling, single resources and lack of feedback, but there are certain

differentiations in the depth of pronunciation knowledge explanation, the application of implicit teaching, the attempt of group interaction, and the emphasis on exams and communication due to differences in teachers' professional backgrounds and teaching concepts.

RQ2. What problems exist in their pronunciation teaching practices?

Based on the comprehensive analysis of the English language teaching practices of EFL teachers in primary schools in ten cases, the core problems are concentrated in the dimensions of teaching model, content coverage, resource utilization, feedback mechanism, student adaptability and teachers' own abilities, as follows:

The pronunciation teaching model adopted by EFL teachers is rigid, and students' subjectivity is lacking. All cases present a rigid model of teacher-led plus mechanical drilling, and students are in a state of passive imitation for a long time. The classroom is centered on teachers' demonstrations and instructions, and students mainly learn through follow-up reading, reading aloud and repeated sentence patterns, lacking opportunities for independent questioning, exploring rules or creative application of language. Primary school students are in the concrete operational stage in Piaget's cognitive development theory, and their thinking relies on the support of concrete images. The understanding of abstract pronunciation rules such as tongue position and lip shape needs to be realized through intuitive experience and interactive operation (Piaget, 1976). Primary school students are in a developmental stage dominated by concrete image thinking, with a short attention span (about 20 to 30 minutes), strong curiosity, and dependence on multi-sensory experience and interactive participation. Their learning characteristics are that they need to stimulate interest through gamified activities, rely on concrete situations to understand knowledge, desire active participation rather than passive acceptance, and need immediate feedback to strengthen learning effects (Yu, & Zhang, 2021).

The content of English pronunciation teaching is one-sided, and the cultivation of language ability is incomplete. There is a structural defect in the pronunciation teaching in the cases, which only focuses on phonemes and word pronunciation, and completely ignores suprasegmental features such as intonation, stress and liaison. All cases indicate that suprasegmental teaching is almost blank, evaluated as extremely poor. The explanation of pronunciation rules is fragmented. Non-English major teachers mostly stay at the surface of demonstrating pronunciation—students' follow-up reading, and even English major teachers do not systematically cover the integrity of the pronunciation system. In rural education,

EFL teachers should emphasize English phonemes and pay attention to suprasegmental features at the same time. These phonemes are affected by the negative transfer of learners' mother tongue, and failure to master them will lead to misunderstandings in English communication. Teachers should also strengthen the teaching of suprasegmental features such as stress, intonation and pauses (Li, 2016). Therefore, in the context of increasingly frequent global communication, English pronunciation teaching should balance segmental and suprasegmental teaching. At the same time, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emphasizes that the ultimate goal of language learning is to effectively convey meaning, and suprasegmental features are key tools for semantic expression and emotional transmission in oral communication (Hymes, 2012).

The lack of EFL teachers' feedback and emotional mechanisms leads to limited students' learning motivation. All EFL teachers have the problem of no feedback or untimely feedback. Constructivism emphasizes that feedback is a cognitive scaffold built by teachers for students to help students bridge the gap between their current pronunciation level and potential development level (Chaiklin, 2003). In pronunciation learning, students' cognition of pronunciation rules is vague, and it is necessary to make implicit mistakes explicit through feedback to advance from mechanical imitation to understanding mastery. The lack of feedback in all cases directly leads to the fracture of students' cognitive scaffolds, further leading to students' cognition of pronunciation rules staying at the surface of imitation and unable to build deep logic. At the same time, EFL teachers in rural primary schools are seriously lacking in emotional education in English pronunciation teaching. They are lacking in encouragement and personalized support for students, especially for rural primary school EFL learners who have difficulty in pronunciation, lacking targeted motivation. The particularity of rural pronunciation teaching, such as the stronger emotional needs of left-behind students and more prominent learning challenges, determines that emotional teaching is not an additional item but a basic item. Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory emphasizes that learners' intrinsic motivation comes from the satisfaction of three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci, & Ryan, 2012). The core of emotional teaching is to meet these needs through supportive interaction, transforming pronunciation learning from passive requirement to active participation. In rural pronunciation teaching, the role of emotional teaching in meeting needs is particularly crucial.

Insufficient adaptability to special student groups and weak teaching pertinence. Faced with the rural student

groups with a high proportion of ethnic minority students, greatly influenced by dialects, a large number of left-behind children, and weak family support, teachers have not designed response strategies for mother tongue pronunciation transfer, allowing students to mark word pronunciation in Chinese, forming Guangxi-style Chinglish. According to the mother tongue negative transfer theory in Second Language Acquisition, when there are differences in the phonetic systems between learners' mother tongue and the target language, active intervention through contrastive teaching is needed; otherwise, mother tongue habits will interfere with target language acquisition. The ethnic minority students mainly from the Zhuang nationality in the cases are facing such problems, but the teaching has not responded to them pertinently. Teachers have not designed tools such as contrast tables between Zhuang and English pronunciation, and only rely on the demonstration and follow-up reading model, leading students to replace English sounds with approximate mother tongue sounds, and mistakes are solidified with practice. Differentiated Instruction Theory emphasizes that teaching should design hierarchical goals and tasks according to students' abilities, backgrounds and needs (Pham, 2012). However, in the cases, teachers adopt unified teaching for students with weak foundations, left-behind children and ethnic minority students, failing to respond to their particularities.

Teachers' own abilities and development motivation are insufficient, restricting the quality of teaching. Due to the lack of systematic learning of phonetics and linguistics, non-English major teachers generally have problems such as inaccurate pronunciation and inability to analyze students' mistakes. Even English major teachers have limitations such as insufficient mastery of phonetics knowledge and barely qualified pronunciation, which affects the authority of demonstration. All cases mention that the school does not provide pronunciation training and lacks expert guidance, making it difficult for teachers to obtain systematic improvement opportunities. This ecological environment of innate insufficiency plus acquired lack of support makes the pronunciation ability of rural EFL teachers remain in a low-level solidified state for a long time. This problem seriously restricts the quality of English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools. Krashen's Input Hypothesis points out that the core of Second Language Acquisition is comprehensible and high-quality input (Krashen, 1989). The pronunciation of EFL teachers in rural primary schools is the most direct and frequent source of pronunciation input for students. If teachers' own pronunciation is inaccurate, the input received by students is itself biased, which will directly lead to the solidification of incorrect interlanguage.

The imbalance between the time and task allocation of pronunciation teaching leads to insufficient teaching depth. All teachers are faced with the problems of tight classroom time for pronunciation teaching and heavy work tasks, leading to language teaching, especially pronunciation teaching, being compressed into fragmented links, making it impossible to carry out in-depth systematic training. Second Language Acquisition, especially English pronunciation, a skill that relies on muscle memory and rule transfer, requires continuous and coherent comprehensible input. Fragmented and intermittent input will destroy the cumulative internalization of pronunciation rules, and learners cannot integrate isolated pronunciation knowledge into systematic pronunciation ability in a short time. Due to heavy teaching tasks, all teachers compress pronunciation teaching into an incidental link of vocabulary teaching, lacking continuous and special pronunciation training time. This fragmentation leads to the disconnection of the pronunciation input received by students. The rules are forgotten before they are internalized, and finally, students can only mechanically imitate individual words and cannot flexibly use them in sentences. Due to the lack of time, teachers can only cover the most basic contents such as phonemes and word pronunciation, and the teaching of suprasegmental features is completely lacking, leading to students being able to read words but unable to speak coherent sentences.

RQ3. What dilemmas do they face in the process of English pronunciation teaching?

Combined with the core characteristics of the systematic dilemmas in English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools, due to their special geographical location, the dilemmas of English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools are more unique on the basis of commonalities, which can be specifically analyzed from two dimensions: the dilemmas of internal core elements and the constraints of external environment. Various dilemmas are intertwined and form a closed-loop cycle.

Internal elements are the core of the implementation of pronunciation teaching. The dilemmas of English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools in this dimension directly lead to inefficient teaching and form negative interaction with the external environment.

At the level of EFL teachers, there are triple limitations: teachers' cognitive deviation, insufficient teaching ability, and lack of pronunciation training. The teachers' cognition of English pronunciation teaching by EFL teachers in rural primary schools is characterized by utilitarianism and marginalization. Most EFL teachers in rural primary schools, influenced by the examination-

oriented orientation, regard pronunciation teaching as a non-examination auxiliary content, only focusing on the teaching of individual phonemes required in textbooks, and ignoring suprasegmental features.

EFL teachers in rural primary schools also have the characteristics of insufficient English pronunciation and teaching ability. On the one hand, most EFL teachers in border rural primary schools are recruited locally, and some teachers have not received systematic phonetics training, and even have pronunciation deviations themselves, making it difficult to provide standardized demonstrations. On the other hand, teachers lack targeted teaching methods, only relying on the traditional model of follow-up reading and repetition, and cannot design teaching according to the characteristics of rural students.

At the level of English pronunciation teaching content and methods, there are dual constraints: being divorced from rural reality and inefficient use of resources. The content of English pronunciation teaching is completely divorced from students' lives and rural characteristics. The existing pronunciation content in textbooks is mostly based on urban life scenarios, which has nothing to do with the rural life scenarios that rural students come into contact with daily, making it difficult for students to understand the practical significance of English pronunciation learning. At the same time, teaching resources are scarce. Rural primary schools generally lack special resources for pronunciation teaching. Although schools are equipped with multimedia equipment, teachers sometimes leave the equipment idle due to insufficient operational capabilities.

Teaching time and teaching effect have a squeezed dilemma. The time for pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools is seriously squeezed. Most classrooms only use 5 to 10 minutes to explain pronunciation, mainly focusing on teachers' leading reading and students' follow-up reading, lacking time for practice and feedback. At the same time, because teachers cannot accurately judge students' pronunciation mistakes, error correction is mostly general correction, making it difficult for students to improve. Finally, a vicious circle is formed: short time for English pronunciation teaching leads to insufficient pronunciation practice, which leads to poor effect of English pronunciation teaching, and ultimately makes EFL teachers in rural primary schools more reluctant to invest time.

The external environment is the support system for primary school English pronunciation teaching. The particularity of rural primary schools makes the dilemmas in this dimension more difficult to break through, and further solidifies the limitations of internal elements.

At the family level, there is a dual disconnection of lack of support and cultural estrangement. First, the home-school cooperation system is seriously disconnected. The proportion of left-behind children in border rural primary schools is relatively large, and most guardians are grandparents who do not understand English and cannot assist in after-class pronunciation practice. Even if there are parents accompanying them, most parents do not understand English pronunciation at all due to the lack of English use scenarios in rural China, leading to the loss of classroom teaching effect of English pronunciation teaching after class. Third, rural families generally lack cognitive awareness of the cultural significance of English pronunciation, and even have the concept that learning English is useless. This attitude will directly affect the learning motivation of rural primary school students.

At the school level, there are constraints of insufficient resource inclination and deviation in management orientation. Rural primary schools have limited funds, and most resources are inclined to major subjects, with very little special investment in English pronunciation teaching. Some schools even do not include pronunciation teaching in the English teaching evaluation system, and only measure teachers' teaching effect by written test scores, leading to EFL teachers' lack of motivation to improve pronunciation teaching. The number of EFL teachers in rural primary schools is small, making it difficult to carry out special teaching and research on pronunciation teaching. Even if there is inter-school linkage, it is difficult to normalize due to long distance and inconvenient transportation. Teachers cannot solve specific problems in pronunciation teaching through peer mutual assistance, and can only maintain the traditional teaching model.

The above internal and external dilemmas are not isolated but form a negative closed loop, making it difficult for single improvement measures to take effect. The insufficient ability of EFL teachers in rural primary schools leads to traditional teaching methods, which leads to students' low interest in learning pronunciation, and then leads to poor pronunciation teaching effect. The poor teaching effect makes schools unwilling to invest in pronunciation teaching resources, and the lack of family support further weakens the effect of students' after-class practice, ultimately exacerbating the insufficient ability of teachers. At the same time, language negative transfer requires targeted pronunciation contrastive teaching, but the lack of teacher training makes it impossible to carry out such teaching, and regional development limitations make it difficult for training resources to reach rural primary schools. This strong correlation makes the dilemmas of English pronunciation teaching in rural

primary schools stable, which has long restricted the improvement of teaching quality and needs to break the closed loop from the perspective of system reconstruction.

IV. DISCUSSION

Pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools in Nanning generally adopts the teacher-led and mechanical drilling model. The classroom is mainly based on follow-up reading and reading aloud, and students lack opportunities for independent exploration. This practice is directly conflicting with the core proposition of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), and mechanical drilling can only strengthen the memory of pronunciation forms but cannot achieve meaning transmission. At the same time, this model violates the Multimodal Teaching Theory (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). In the cases, teachers only rely on listening to audio and follow-up reading, leading rural primary school students to replace English sounds with approximate mother tongue sounds because they cannot visualize the pronunciation movements of English phonemes, which confirms the view that a single input model will exacerbate mother tongue negative transfer (Li, 2016).

All teachers in this study have the problem of no feedback at all, neither correcting implicit mistakes such as insufficiently rounded vowels and misplaced stress nor tracking recurring problems. This violates Selinker's (2015) Interlanguage Theory; the lack of corrective feedback will lead to error fossilization. At the same time, the lack of feedback conflicts with Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory. Because students cannot clarify the direction of improvement, they gradually lose learning motivation, forming a cycle of blind practice leading to error solidification. Many researchers hold a positive attitude towards corrective feedback in pronunciation teaching. They believe that corrective feedback on mistakes helps language learners improve their pronunciation. Long (1996) and Swain (1995) argue that feedback can help learners recognize the gap between their own interlanguage and the target language, thereby adjusting their output and improving the efficiency and effect of target language acquisition. Darcy (2018) also put forward similar suggestions, that is, corrective feedback is very necessary for learners in the process of learning a language, and corrective feedback can help learners notice the difference between their own incorrect pronunciation and the standard pronunciation. Cooper (2019) found that teachers hold different views on the content of corrective feedback, but in actual teaching, all participating teachers gave feedback to learners at the word level. Through a large number of literatures on corrective feedback, Saito (2021)

believes that research on corrective feedback teaching to promote the development of second language pronunciation is increasing rapidly, and both teachers and learners agree that providing corrective feedback is an important part of the development of English pronunciation teaching. Especially when problematic English pronunciation errors hinder the successful communication between both parties, corrective feedback becomes particularly important. O'Brien (2021) also found through literature research that corrective feedback can effectively improve pronunciation comprehensibility.

For the first time, this study takes rural primary schools in Nanning as samples, reveals the unique contradictions of examination-oriented orientation plus mother tongue negative transfer plus lack of teaching resources in primary school English pronunciation teaching in ethnic minority areas, makes up for the insufficient attention of existing research to rural contexts, expands the systematic view of pronunciation teaching, and incorporates teachers' cognition, teaching practices and rural ecology into a unified analytical framework, providing a new perspective for understanding the complexity of educational dilemmas, which echoes the sociocultural embeddedness theory advocated by The Douglas Fir Group (2016). This study refines the application of Second Language Acquisition Theory in the diverse rural environment, enhancing the situational adaptability of the theory. The findings of this study on the mother tongue negative transfer of ethnic minority students and the lack of after-class support for left-behind children supplement the Second Language Acquisition Theory. Odlin's (1989) Transfer Theory points out that differences between mother tongue and target language will lead to negative transfer, but this study further finds that in the multi-ethnic rural context, teachers' passive adaptation to negative transfer will exacerbate error solidification, which provides a new case for the performance of Transfer Theory in the context of lack of teacher intervention. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecosystem Theory emphasizes the impact of the outer environment on the classroom, while this study specifically reveals how the nested relationship of a large number of left-behind children in rural areas, disconnected home-school cooperation and insufficient classroom time weakens the continuity of pronunciation input, making the Ecosystem Theory more targeted in explaining the inefficiency of rural foreign language teaching.

In summary, the theoretical value of this study lies in enriching the application of Educational System Theory by constructing a systematic dilemma model, refining the performance of Second Language Acquisition Theory in multi-ethnic and left-behind children groups, and

providing empirical reference for the situational implementation of pronunciation teaching theory. These findings not only verify the universality of existing theories but also supplement their unique mechanisms in rural education scenarios, providing a localized theoretical perspective for subsequent research. At the same time, this study also provides a lot of enlightenment for the practice of pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools. This study not only accurately identifies the specific dilemmas of rural pronunciation teaching but also provides solutions adapted to resource conditions, teachers' abilities and students' characteristics, avoiding the misunderstanding of directly applying urban experience, and providing an operable localized path for improving the quality of English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools.

V. CONCLUSION

Through Grounded Theory analysis, this study draws the research conclusion that the dilemmas in English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools are a complex symbiotic system. This system is composed of three core dimensions: pronunciation teaching practice dilemmas, teachers' professional development dilemmas and educational ecology dilemmas. These three dimensions are nested with each other and dynamically strengthened, forming a vicious circle with path dependence. The revelation of this systematic dilemma provides a theoretical basis for solving the problems of English pronunciation teaching in rural primary schools. It is necessary to carry out collaborative intervention from three dimensions: teachers' development, pronunciation teaching optimization and rural education ecology improvement, rather than repairing a single link.

At the same time, this study also has its own limitations. First, the research samples are only limited to rural primary schools in Nanning, not covering other regions such as rural areas in other provinces in China or other cities in Guangxi. The educational ecology of different regions will significantly affect teachers' behaviors, so the conclusions of this study are difficult to be directly generalized to other rural contexts, and the external validity is limited. Second, this study proposes that the dilemmas of rural pronunciation teaching are a system formed by the interaction of teachers' development, teaching practices and educational ecology, but it does not clarify the impact intensity of each element. In the future, quantitative research can be used to construct a system dynamics model. Convert the core elements in the qualitative conclusions into measurable variables. For example, teachers' development dilemmas can be quantified as the duration of pronunciation training and the

score of phonetics knowledge test. Educational ecology dilemmas can be quantified as the proportion of left-behind children and the score of parents' participation questionnaire. Teaching practice dilemmas can be quantified as the coverage rate of suprasegmental teaching. Structural equation modeling is used to model multi-dimensional data, test the significance of the hypothetical paths proposed in this study, such as the lack of teacher training leading to single teaching methods leading to insufficient resource utilization, calculate the standardized coefficients of each path, identify the key nodes in the system, and provide quantitative basis for targeted intervention.

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Translation Strategies of Black Myth: Wukong and the Overseas Dissemination of Chinese Culture

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Abstract— This paper collects the English translation texts of the AAA game *Black Myth: Wukong* and classifies them according to different elements of Chinese traditional culture. It analyzes the translation strategies for various cultural elements and discusses how to correctly and effectively address issues such as cultural differences, language barriers, and cultural misunderstandings. Meanwhile, we collect official data on *Black Myth: Wukong* from both domestic and international sources to evaluate the effect and influence of Chinese culture's overseas dissemination.

Keywords— *Black Myth, Wukong, translation strategy, traditional culture, cultural overseas dissemination.*



I. INTRODUCTION

Released on August 20, 2024, *Black Myth: Wukong* — China's first major AAA game — has gained wide attention both at home and abroad. As a Chinese original game with Chinese as its default language, its translation and overseas distribution are highly significant. Rooted in the classic *Journey to the West*, it blends Chinese mythology, history and architectural heritage, conveying traditional Chinese culture and aesthetic values to global players through delicate design and storytelling. The game not only inherits and innovates traditional culture but also showcases China's cultural soft power. As an important channel for cultural export, it effectively promotes international cultural communication and exchange.

II. ENGLISH TRANSLATION STRATEGIES OF BLACK MYTH: WUKONG

1. Names of Game Characters and Magic Treasures

Through the analysis of the texts of game character names and magic treasure/weapon names, their translation strategies can be divided into three categories:

(1) Transliteration

Ling Xuizi, Guangzhi

Analysis: Many culture-loaded words have no direct equivalents in the target language, making their meanings hard to convey accurately. To avoid misunderstanding and preserve cultural features, translators often use direct transliteration [1]. The translations mentioned adopt this method: terms are converted into Pinyin strictly following original Chinese pronunciation, without adding, omitting or altering syllables, ignoring literal English connotations and only retaining pronunciation. Direct transliteration preserves the original style of Chinese mythological names. Names such as “Ling Xuizi” and “Guangzhi” carry distinct traditional Chinese cultural traits. Transliterating them directly allows overseas audiences to experience unique Chinese naming conventions and the charm of Chinese mythology, facilitating the spread of traditional Chinese cultural elements.

(2) Free Translation

Black Wind King (Heifeng Dawang)

Analysis: When literal translation fails to convey the deep meaning of culture-loaded words, translators often use free translation, abandoning surface forms to focus on spiritual and cultural connotations and improve target text acceptability [2]. “Heifeng” is literally translated as “Black Wind”, clearly presenting its basic meaning and creating a mysterious, powerful tone that matches the character's

image. “Dawang” is freely translated as “King”, which corresponds to its implied authority and high status in Chinese culture. Such translated names fit English-speaking players’ linguistic and cultural habits, lower comprehension barriers, and enhance game localization. Names like “Black Wind King” help players quickly form character images, immerse themselves in the game world, and boost acceptance of the work.

(3) Mixed Translation

Lord Venatagon (Dudi Dawang)

Analysis: Translating “Dawang” as “Lord” uses free translation. The English term “Lord” conveys nobility and authority, matching the dominant status implied by “Dawang” and helping English readers recognize the character’s identity. Translating “Dudi” as “Venatagon” employs creative mixed translation. “Vena” echoes “venom” (poison), while “tagon” derives from “agon” (struggle), suggesting a poisonous antagonist. This coinage preserves the original meaning, adds mystery and uniqueness, and avoids awkwardness from direct literal or free translation. This mixed strategy accommodates English linguistic and cultural norms while retaining Chinese cultural features. Combining common English terms like “Lord” with innovative formations such as “Venatagon” helps Chinese culture integrate into the international context, lowers cultural barriers, and improves acceptance among overseas players.

2. Architecture and Place Names

The place and building names in Black Myth: Wukong are deeply rooted in ancient Chinese architecture and rich in cultural mystery. Their translation requires a balance between retaining Chinese cultural connotations and ensuring foreign readers’ understanding, so as to promote cultural exchange. The main strategies are literal translation and free translation, often supplemented by explanatory translation, which correspond to foreignization for cultural preservation and domestication for adaptive transformation.

(1) Literal Translation

Literal translation preserves the original form, vocabulary and structure while remaining faithful to the source text’s meaning and style. It is mainly used for straightforward place names like “forest”, “mountain” and “sea” with simple adjectives, which carry no special allusions. Such translations convey the literal meaning directly, maintain the intuitiveness of the original names, and aim to evoke similar imagery in English.

1. Forest of Wolves (Canglang Lin)

The translation omits the blue-gray hue implied by “Cang” (azure), yet this omission leaves greater room for imagination. The English word “forest” carries a profound

atmosphere, and pairing it with “wolves” naturally evokes a dark, primitive jungle image, achieving equivalent color implication while strengthening the link between environment and subject. Similar simplification appears in “Bamboo Grove” for “Cuizhu Lin”. The descriptive character “Cui” (emerald green) is omitted, but the combination still effectively creates the intended atmosphere.

2. Crouching Tiger Temple (Wohu Si)

The word “Crouch” vividly depicts tigers in a squatting posture. This literal translation focuses on key modifiers to accurately convey the original artistic conception. Similar examples include “Fright Cliff,” where “fright” matches the terrifying atmosphere of “Xiehun,” and “Valley of Blooms,” which uses “blooms” to fully present the lush, magnificent scenery implied by “Qianhua.”

3. Black Wind Mountain (Heifeng Shan)

This is strict literal translation that follows the original word order and structure with minimal changes. Widely used in the game, it helps English players grasp place names easily. Examples include “Snake Trail”, “Yellow Wind Ridge” and “Cloudnest Peak”.

(2) Free Translation

Free translation prioritizes target language habits and original meaning, adjusting form for better readability. It focuses on semantic fluency and naturalness, may sacrifice part of the original form, and conveys deep connotations through cultural equivalent conversion. Game place names translated this way fall into three categories: allusion-based translation, philosophical abstraction, and artistic conception reconstruction.

1. Allusion-based Translation

This translation method requires translators to trace the historical and literary origins of Chinese place names and find accurate English equivalents without losing their original implications. Examples include:

Loong Claw Grove (Chimu Jian): Derived from the classical allusion of dragons relying on wood to ascend to heaven. The translation combines “loong” and “grove” while matching the scene’s dragon-claw-shaped trees, preserving both the mythic reference and vivid imagery.

The Purifying Spring (Zhuogou Quan): Originating from Journey to the West, it signifies purifying spiritual filth rather than mere physical cleansing. “Purifying” accurately conveys its Buddhist-inspired meaning of spiritual sublimation.

2. Philosophical Abstraction

This translation type is common yet challenging, as the

game draws on the religious and magical elements of *Journey to the West*. Translators must grasp Eastern religious concepts and find compatible expressions in Western thought for accurate cross-cultural communication. Examples include:

Valley of Despair (Buji Gu): Conveys inescapable fate and Taoist-Buddhist implications. Using "Despair" echoes the Christian concept of the seven deadly sins, turning Eastern fatalism into a universally understandable emotional state.

Zodiac Village (Liuliu Cun): Corresponds to the twelve Taoist gods (Liuding Liujia). "Zodiac" matches the number twelve and creates a mysterious, fateful atmosphere.

Purge Pit (Lianmo Keng): Reflects Taoist self-cultivation of subduing inner demons. "Purge" conveys spiritual purification, with "Pit" retaining the literal sense and implying inner struggle.

3. Artistic Conception Reconstruction

This translation strategy focuses on matching the game's atmospheric conception, expanding imagery based on scene context rather than strict literal rendering, creating striking and fitting expressions. Examples include:

Snow-Veiled Trail (Chonghan Dao): Replaces the dynamic "braving the cold" with a snow-shrouded, secluded visual image, enhancing the scene's dangerous, mysterious atmosphere.

Brook of Bliss (Wuyou Jian): Uses "bliss" to convey the carefree state of "Wuyou", emphasizing spiritual peace and joy.

The Verdure Bridge (Huajian Qiao): Chooses "verdure" over literal flowers, broadening the natural imagery and fitting the game's gloomy, ethereal aesthetic, elevating textual meaning to environmental narration.

Bonevault (Qianhong Ku): Breaks from the literal "thousands of reds" and draws on the game's skeleton-filled scene, using sharp contrast to create mystery and desolation, echoing Eastern aesthetic metaphors with Western expression.

(III) Ancient Poems, Doggerel, and Shaanxi Northern Storytelling

(1) Ancient Poems

Translations of ancient Chinese poems in the game mainly rely on free translation, supplemented by amplification, creative transformation and abstract expression. Due to the implicit, concise and culturally rich nature of classical poetry, strict equivalence is hard to achieve. Free translation helps overseas players grasp the core ideas and connotations more effectively.

1.The Buddha is within one's nature; do not seek outside oneself

Translation: You seek the land of bliss? There is only abyss, and your abyss is me.

Analysis: Uses free translation and creative transformation. It rephrases Buddhist enlightenment in accessible language, using "abyss" to symbolize spiritual emptiness, conveying that true awakening lies within.

2.But if you understand the joy in the qin, why bother with the notes on the strings?

Translation: Knowing the joy within the play, why chase the notes astray?

Analysis: Adopts abstract free translation, converting concrete images into universal expressions to transcend cultural barriers.

3.Use thunderous means to show the heart of a Bodhisattva

Translation: Cleanse the world with blood, and grow lotuses in it.

Analysis: Abandons literal correspondence and uses metaphorical free translation. "Blood" and "lotus" vividly express severe measures and compassionate mercy, matching the original's rhetorical spirit.

(2) Doggerel

As doggerel belongs to poetic form, free translation is mostly used in its English version. Rooted in folk life, it reflects ordinary people's feelings and features colloquial language and catchy rhythm. In translation, priority is given to preserving its popular style, balancing cultural image transformation, and maintaining rhythm and philosophical emotion.

1.Where there is wine, every place is a fairy's mansion; without wine, even the heavenly palace is like a prison.

Translation: Where there's drink, all is bliss. Without it, the highest court is a cage.

Analysis: Free translation is adopted to convey the core meaning of joy from wine and boredom without it. Culture-specific images such as "fairy's mansion" and "heavenly palace" are converted into understandable English expressions. The neat structure and rhythm are retained, echoing the concise and rhythmic style of doggerel.

2.Walk, walk, walk; wander, wander, wander. Be willing to be an ox or horse for copper coins...

Translation: On the go, bent the toe, life of human, all for gold...

Analysis: Through free translation, concrete images

are turned into abstract expressions easier for English readers to grasp. The translator uses concise wording and structured sentences to maintain the rhyme and lively rhythm of the original doggerel, despite the difficulty of full equivalence in cross-language rhythm.

(3) Shanxi Northern Storytelling

Similar to doggerel, Shaanxi Northern storytelling is catchy and concise in language. Translators therefore focus on matching the rhyme, rhythm, diction and style of the original text. As a regional folk art popular in Yan'an and Yulin, it bears strong local and colloquial features, making its cultural connotations hard for non-native speakers to understand and posing challenges for translators. In translation, priority is given to cultural background, emotional expression, key information and philosophical connotations.

1. Yellow Wind Ridge, eight hundred li wide, was once a fertile land beyond the Great Wall... The criminal is proud of not being dead, but the lucky star lies dead, which has become a mystery.

Translation: Yellow Wind Ridge, a mighty ole' range, once buzzin' with joy and glee... The hero, he lies there dead, with the truth hidden from ye and me...

Analysis: The translation retains the place name "Yellow Wind Ridge" and uses colloquial, rhythmic expressions like "ole'" and "buzzin'" to fit the storytelling style. Words such as "barren" and "bleak" create a desolate atmosphere, while "plead", "cursed beast" and "Killin's spree" highlight the plot tension and tragic mood, preserving both the narrative and rhythmic features.

2. What a ruthless and cruel monkey! ... I, the old monk, have hands but no head, and have been empty for a long time.

Translation: Oh! Heartless monkey, vicious and vile! ... Headless, I grieve all the same.

Analysis: The translation conveys the sorrow in the original text and deepens emotional expression. "Fate's bitter game" reflects the cruelty of fate, and "Headless, I grieve all the same" vividly expresses the narrator's inner emptiness and helplessness.

3. Blood turns into wind, sand turns into rain; ownerless cats and mice gather together... only by not forcing to take the right path can there be a way out.

Translation: In a land o' bloodshed and chaos' sting, mice and rat mingle without a king... the right path may be a different thing.

Analysis: "Bloodshed and chaos' sting" reproduces the chaotic scene, and "mingle without a king" shows the unrestrained disorder. The translation accurately conveys

the irrationality of success and failure in the chaotic world, as well as the philosophy that one must break conventions to survive.

III. EVALUATION OF CHINESE CULTURE'S OVERSEAS DISSEMINATION

(1) Awards and Achievements

1. Sales and Revenue

The game achieved extraordinary sales and player figures: Steam concurrent players surpassed 2.22 million on launch day, a new record for single-player games. It sold 10 million copies globally in three days and 20 million in the first month. As of September 4, 2024, total global sales reached 18.1 million copies, with revenue over \$867 million, 25% from overseas. Annual 2024 sales are projected to exceed 28 million copies, worth 9 billion yuan.

2. Awards

2023 Gamescom: Won the "Best Visual Effects" award. 2024 Thailand Game Awards: Won awards such as "Game of the Year", "Best Action Game", "Best Game Direction", and "Best PC/Console Game". 2024 Golden Joystick Awards: Won awards such as "Best Visual Design" and "Stream Game of the Year". 2024 Steam Awards: Won awards such as "Game of the Year", "Labor of Love", and "Outstanding Story-Rich Game".

3. Market Impact

The success of Black Myth: Wukong has significantly boosted the Chinese game market. In the third quarter of 2024, the revenue of the Chinese game market reached 91.766 billion yuan, a year-on-year increase of 8.95% and a month-on-month increase of 22.96%, setting a record high. Among them, the revenue of China's independently developed games in the overseas market was 5.169 billion US dollars, a year-on-year increase of 20.75%, mainly due to the strong performance of Black Myth: Wukong in the overseas market.

4. International Media and Player Reviews

On Metacritic, the PC version of Black Myth: Wukong received an aggregate score of 82 points, with 43 out of 52 media giving positive reviews, 9 giving mixed reviews, and no negative reviews. Spanish media GamersRD gave a full score, calling it a "Game of the Year candidate", and praised its art design, graphics and soundtrack. On the Steam platform, the game has a positive review rate of over 90% in 18 out of 23 language regions, with the Italian and Thai regions having a positive review rate as high as 98%.

(2) Translation Strategies and Cultural Dissemination

Deeply rooted in Chinese traditional culture, Black

Myth: Wukong's translation strategies play a key role in balancing globalization and localization [3]. The in-depth integration of its translation strategies and cultural overseas dissemination not only realizes the cross-linguistic dissemination of Chinese traditional culture but also reconstructs the cognitive logic of global players on Chinese culture through creative translation practices. The success of this translation strategy stems not only from the accurate deconstruction of cultural symbols but also from the dual empowerment of technology and art. Its communication effect can be analyzed from the following dimensions:

1. Cross-Cultural Translation: From "Monkey King" to "Wukong"

The game uses extensive transliteration, such as Wukong, Jin Gu Bang, Yaoguai. This "decontextualized" approach actively resists Western cultural hegemony, breaking the long-term Japanized or de-Chinese narrative of Journey to the West in the West. After launch, searches for "Wukong" overseas surged 300%, with some players learning pinyin voluntarily. For culturally loaded terms, a mixed translation strategy turns the game into a "cultural code converter." For instance, transliterating Dinghai Shenzhen helps players grasp its dual connotation of artifact and geographical symbol.

2. Aesthetic Localization: From Chinese Classics to Poetic English

The highest realm of ancient poem English translation is to present its aesthetic art and inherit the poet's soul [4]. The game's classical poem translations are a model of cross-cultural narrative: for example, "The world all knows that immortals are good" is translated as "Their minds yearn to ascend", conveying the obsession with immortality and Taoist philosophy; "Use thunderous means to show the heart of a Bodhisattva" becomes "Cleanse the world with blood, and grow lotuses in it", turning Buddhist compassion into a visual image that fits Western "violent redemption" aesthetics. In character language, the team achieves cultural adaptation via dialect transplantation: Tiger Vanguard's Northeast accent corresponds to London Cockney, retaining street humor; the old monkey's classical Chinese uses archaic English grammar to fit its identity and create an epic sense. This "language style mirror transplantation" lets Western players feel Eastern narrative charm through familiar language.

3. Immersive Tech Communication: From Text Translation to Sensory Narrative

Translation extends beyond words to cross-cultural sensory symbol translation:

Visual: Game dragons use "Loong" instead of

"Dragon" (with Pinyin) to distinguish Eastern auspicious beasts from Western evil dragons, combined with ink wash textures to reshape Western cognition of Eastern auspicious symbols.

Auditory: Chinese bangzi and pipa music are converted into "oriental percussion" in English, retaining national musical timbre for easy Western recognition.

Interactive: "Jindou Yun" prompt uses Chinese bamboo flute glissando, contrasting with English "Dash" pronunciation for a novel audio-visual experience. Technical means (e.g., dynamic subtitles switching fonts by dialect) enhance cultural perception, increasing Western players' recognition of cultural differences by 40%.

4. Participatory Community Communication: From Passive Reception to Active Decoding

Translation strategies have sparked overseas players' secondary creation:

Cultural Textual Research: Reddit's "Black Myth Terminology Textual Research" column sees players comparing "Yaoguai" and Japanese "Yokai" etymologies, triggering cross-cultural academic discussions.

Fan Translation: Vietnamese team "Black Myth VN" localized in-game murals, scriptures and Shaanxi Northern storytelling, achieving a 99% positive review rate on Steam Vietnam.

Cultural Communication: TikTok's "Black Myth Translation" topic (120M+ views) has players interpreting "Golden Cudgel" and "Jingu Bang" symbolic differences, turning the game into a globally co-created cultural encyclopedia.

5. Industrial Ecology Paradigm Innovation: From Cultural Export to Standard-Setting

Black Myth: Wukong's translation practice has established three paradigms for Chinese games going global:

Technology + Art: AI-assisted translation paired with a team of archaic English scholars and digital media experts ensures cultural accuracy and artistic presentation.

Global + Local: Preserves core cultural symbols such as Wukong while enhancing acceptance through localization like Cockney-accented voice acting.

Official + Folk: Opens MOD tools for custom fan translations, building an "official release + grassroots creation" communication matrix. This paradigm greatly boosted cultural communication: within a month of launch, overseas players posted 230,000 cultural research threads on Steam, effectively creating a modern commentary on *Journey to the West*.

IV. CONCLUSION

The translation and cultural export of *Black Myth: Wukong* is essentially an implicit game of cultural sovereignty. Taking digital games as the medium, it embeds Chinese cultural codes into the Western-dominated entertainment narrative system. Through creative translation, it has achieved an identity transformation from a "cultural other" to a "co-creator of meaning", providing an important case and proposition for game translation and cross-cultural communication. The game transforms Journey to the West into interactive cultural symbols, and translation endows these symbols with the possibility of cross-cultural circulation. It enlightens us that the key to the modern transformation of traditional cultural IP lies in building a playable and experienceable symbol system. This is an attempt to rebuild the "cultural Babel" in the digital age, proving that creative translation can cross language and cultural barriers. However, it also exposes in-depth challenges: we need to guard against the risk of "meaning emptiness" of cultural symbols in global circulation and avoid the loss of cultural essence. True cultural confidence does not lie in clinging to the "original flavor", but in cultivating a new cultural form in cross-cultural collisions. This is precisely the value of *Black Myth: Wukong* — allowing the world to see the vitality of Chinese culture in the virtual world and the common imagination of global players. (This paper is an achievement of the 2024 National Innovation Training Program Project of Yangtze University, Project No.: Yz2024297).

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Reimagining the Future: Asian Futurism and Its Resonance in India with Special Reference to Samit Basu and Manjula Padmanabhan

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Abstract— Asian Futurism is an emergent intellectual and creative movement that reconfigures the futuristic imagination through the lens of Asian histories, mythologies, and contemporary realities. As a critical response to the Western-dominated visions of the future, Asian Futurism provides a platform for alternative narratives rooted in decolonial, techno-spiritual, and socio-political paradigms. This article explores the contours of Asian Futurism with a specific focus on India, examining the works of Indian authors like Samit Basu and Manjula Padmanabhan's works, like- *Turbulence*, *Resistance*, *The City Inside*, *Harvest* and *Escape*, respectively. All works embody Asian futurism by critiquing societal inequalities in dystopian futures rooted in Indian culture. Their speculative fictions critically engage with the themes of identity, technology, power, and resistance completely resonate with the theme. Indian authors reinterpret local traditions and futuristic technologies to narrate a uniquely Indian future, offering resistance to Western hegemony in global science. Asian futurism is a cultural movement envisioning futures through Asian lenses, often challenging Western narratives, with Indian literature contributing through speculative fiction.



Keywords— Asian futurism, future narratives, speculative fictions, cultural movement.

I. INTRODUCTION TO ASIAN FUTURISM

Asian futurism is a dynamic cultural and artistic movement that reimagines future possibilities through an Asian perspective, contrasting with Western-dominated science fiction narratives. It draws inspiration from Asian technological advancements, cultural elements, and histories, often addressing themes like colonialism, identity, and social inequality. In literature, it manifests as speculative fiction that integrates Asian contexts into futuristic settings, offering alternative visions of the future. Futurism has long been considered a space of imagination dominated by the West. However, the rise of Asian Futurism disrupts this trajectory by embedding future narratives within Asia's vast cultural, philosophical, and political frameworks. Rooted in the aesthetics of Afro futurism and indigenous futurisms, Asian Futurism recognises Asia not merely as a setting but as an active

agent in envisioning alternative futures. Indian literature, often tied to its colonial past and postcolonial identity, is now evolving through the infusion of futuristic themes that challenge both tradition and modernity. Asian futurism is characterised as a fluid and deictic concept, often defined in contrast to Western futurism, which tends to focus on technological progress and individualistic heroism. It encompasses various artistic expressions, including literature, inspired by Asian cultural elements such as technological advancements, anime, and sci-fi depictions of Asian societies. It challenges Western stereotypes, particularly techno-Orientalism, which portrays Asia as a futuristic dystopia, by offering narratives that integrate Asian identities, histories, and social dynamics into speculative futures. For instance, works like Liu Cixin's *The Three-Body Problem* and Indra Das's *The Devourers*

are important writings in literature for blending Asian culture with futurism, highlighting its global relevance.

The movement is not monolithic; it includes subcategories like South Asian futurism, which encompasses Indian literature, and is often compared to Afro futurism for its focus on cultural reclamation and speculative exploration. Its significance lies in providing alternative visions that address issues like colonialism, identity, and social inequality, making it a vital part of contemporary cultural discourse.

II. SCOPE IN INDIAN LITERATURE

In Indian literature, Asian futurism is expressed through works that project Indian society into the future, exploring how current trends might evolve. Authors tackle issues such as caste, religion, gender, and technology, using speculative fiction to critique contemporary realities and imagine alternatives. Notable works include dystopian narratives that reflect on global inequalities while being grounded in Indian culture, enriching global literary discourse. Asian Futurism can be broadly defined as a cultural and artistic movement that uses speculative narratives to explore Asia's future through technology, tradition, mythology, and postcolonial critique. It does not merely project Asia as a consumer of technology but reclaims the narrative as a creator and philosopher of technological and social futures. Influenced by globalisation, surveillance, artificial intelligence, climate change, and digital capitalism, Asian Futurism also challenges linear development models imposed by Western epistemologies. Writers, filmmakers, and artists from across Asia—such as Liu Cixin from China, Mamoru Oshii from Japan, and Bong Joon-ho from South Korea—have contributed significantly to this paradigm. Within the Indian context, the potential of Asian Futurism lies in reinterpreting the Vedas, epics like the *Mahabharata*, and colonial history through a speculative lens, thus constructing an indigenous vision of the future.

In Indian literature, Asian futurism finds expression through speculative fiction that projects Indian society into the future, exploring how current trends might evolve and intensify. This genre is particularly resonant given India's diverse cultural landscape and its historical engagement with colonial and post-colonial narratives. Indian authors use futurist literature to address themes such as caste, religion, gender, and technology, often critiquing contemporary realities while imagining alternative possibilities. Key themes include the impact of globalisation, as seen in dystopian visions of socio-economic disparities, and the intersection of technology with traditional Indian values. Notable motifs include the

use of Indian mythology, language, and social norms to ground futuristic settings, ensuring cultural authenticity. For example, works like Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest* and Gautam Bhatia's *The Wall* are part of anthologies like *The Gollancz Book of South Asian Science Fiction*, which highlight the genre's growth. These narratives not only engage with local issues but also contribute to global discourses on futurism, enriching the literary landscape with diverse perspectives.

The scope extends to various subgenres, such as dystopian fiction, eco-futurism, and queer futurism, reflecting the pluralism of South Asian experiences. Events like the Bangalore International Centre's discussion on "Magical Women and the Blossoming of Indian Speculative Fiction" in 2019 underscore the genre's increasing visibility, with authors like Vandana Singh and S. B. Divya also contributing significantly.

Manjula Padmanabhan, born in 1953 in Karnataka, India, is a key figure in this genre. Her works, such as the play *Harvest* (1997), set in a future where India supplies organs to the West, and the novel *Escape* (2008), depicting a dystopian society oppressing women, exemplify Asian futurism. These narratives critique societal issues through futuristic lenses, rooted in Indian contexts, and challenge Western narratives of progress. Asian futurism represents a burgeoning cultural and artistic movement that seeks to envision future possibilities through an Asian lens, distinct from the often Western-centric narratives prevalent in global science fiction and speculative literature. Her multifaceted career as a playwright, cartoonist, and novelist has seen her tackle themes of gender, power, and technology in futuristic settings, making her an ideal subject for this analysis. Her works, including *Harvest* (1997), *Escape* (2008), and *The Island of Lost Girls* (2015), are celebrated for their dystopian visions rooted in Indian contexts.

Harvest: Set in Bombay in 2010, this play envisages a future where India supplies human organs to the West, critiquing the commodification of the human body and globalisation's inequalities. It reflects Asian futurism by grounding its dystopian vision in Indian socio-economic realities, using local settings to address global ethical dilemmas.

Escape: This novel depicts a future where women are oppressed by patriarchal technology, with Meiji's escape and resistance highlighting themes of freedom and identity. It embodies Asian futurism by imagining a future where gender inequalities are amplified, rooted in Indian cultural contexts.

The Island of Lost Girls: This novel explores the objectification of women in a futuristic setting, critiquing

marriage commercialisation. It uses Indian cultural references to ground its narrative, aligning with Asian futurism's focus on local-global intersections. Short Stories: *Gandhi-Toxin* projects Gandhian ideals into the future, imagining non-violence as a weapon, while *Sharing Air* addresses air pollution in a futuristic Delhi, both exemplifying speculative takes on contemporary issues.

Padmanabhan's *Harvest* won the Onassis Award for Theatre in 1997, marking her as a pioneer in subcontinental science fiction. Her narratives often critique global inequalities and bio-political issues, aligning with Asian futurism's focus on challenging Western narratives. Her short stories, such as *Gandhi-Toxin* and *Sharing Air* from *Kleptomania: Ten Stories* (2004), further illustrate her engagement with futuristic projections of Indian societal issues.

Samit Basu, a pioneer in Indian speculative fiction, is best known for novels like *Turbulence* (2012), *Resistance* (2013), and *The City Inside* (2020). His work exemplifies a futuristic imagination deeply embedded in Indian socio-political reality, making him a vital figure in the discourse of Asian Futurism.

In *The City Inside*, Basu presents a dystopian Delhi governed by authoritarian surveillance and media manipulation. The novel is set in a near-future India, grappling with populism, digital capitalism, and ecological collapse. Through characters like Joey and Rudra, Basu explores the fragmentation of identity in a hyper-connected yet disempowered society. The cityscape, a blend of decaying history and hi-tech control, mirrors India's current anxieties and aspirations. Basu writes, "The only thing more dangerous than ignorance was carefully curated ignorance" (*The City Inside* 84), highlighting the socio-political dangers of digital manipulation and media propaganda. The novel critiques both internal political dynamics and global techno-capitalism, situating India firmly in the global future while questioning the price of its progress. Basu's work refuses to romanticise tradition or idealise technological advancement. Instead, he interrogates both. His characters are not heroes in the traditional sense but flawed individuals navigating an ethical wasteland. This refusal to conform to Western heroic tropes is an act of resistance in itself—a hallmark of Asian Futurism. The speculative becomes a lens to examine contemporary caste politics, gender hierarchies, and communalism in India, all under the garb of a futuristic narrative.

What distinguishes Basu's work within Asian Futurism is its commitment to cultural specificity. References to Indian festivals, mythologies, and even *chai* stalls remain embedded in his dystopian futures, making

them recognisably Indian. This blending of the local and the futuristic is a decolonial act—it refuses the binary of tradition and modernity imposed by colonial frameworks. Moreover, Basu's narratives challenge the Western monopoly over the imagination of dystopia and utopia. While American futurism often projects apocalyptic collapse or interstellar colonisation, Indian futurism as envisioned by Basu is inward-looking, dealing with moral decay, ecological crises, and identity fragmentation. The emphasis is on collective survival, spiritual ambiguity, and socio-political resilience.

III. COMPARATIVE CONTEXT AND BROADER IMPLICATIONS

While Padmanabhan is a focal point, other Indian authors like Indra Das's *The Devourers*, Gautam Bhatia's *The Wall*, and Vandana Singh's *The Woman Who Thought She was a Planet and Other Stories* contribute to Asian futurism, often overlapping with South Asian futurisms like Adivasi, Dalit, and queer futurisms. These works collectively enrich the genre, offering diverse perspectives on future possibilities. The movement's growth is evidenced by events like the Jaipur Lit Fest discussions in 2022 and anthologies like *The Gollancz Book of South Asian Science Fiction*, indicating a vibrant literary scene. The significance of Asian futurism in Indian literature lies in its ability to broaden global understanding of futurism, representing diverse cultural narratives. It challenges dominant Western narratives, fostering a more inclusive discourse on future possibilities. As Indian literature continues to engage with speculative fiction, it promises further growth, potentially influencing global cultural and artistic movements.

IV. CONCLUSION

Asian futurism in Indian literature, as exemplified by Manjula Padmanabhan's works, offers a subtle exploration of future possibilities from an Asian perspective. Her dystopian narratives critique contemporary society, imagine alternative futures, and challenge dominant narratives, highlighting the importance of diverse cultural voices. This movement continues to grow, promising further contributions to global literary discourse, with Indian literature playing a pivotal role in shaping inclusive visions of the future. Alignment with Asian Futurism: Padmanabhan's works embody Asian futurism by setting narratives in futuristic India, critiquing Western influences, and addressing themes relevant to Asian societies. Her use of dystopian genres creates cautionary tales, reflecting on present-day issues through exaggerated futures, a hallmark of futurist literature. Her narratives challenge techno-Orientalist stereotypes by presenting Asian futures as

complex, culturally rich, and critically engaged. Asian Futurism is not just a genre but a movement—a critical and creative reclamation of futures by and for Asian voices. Within the Indian context, it offers a space to reflect upon and resist the historical and contemporary forces of domination, both external and internal. Samit Basu, through his speculative novels, has contributed immensely to this endeavour by imagining an India that is at once real and futuristic, broken yet resilient. As Indian writers continue to explore science fiction and speculative genres, Asian Futurism will remain a vital theoretical and artistic tool to re-envision the nation's place in global and cosmic futures. It is through such indigenous lenses that the future can be plural, inclusive, and authentically imagined.

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In Nature We Trust: Reading the Atmospheric of *Throne of Blood*

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Abstract— Akira Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood* has firmly established its place as one of the finest adaptations of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Enthralling cinema enthusiasts since its release in 1957, this cinematic adaptation has been extensively analyzed and reviewed. The paper titled "In Nature We Trust: Reading the Atmospheric of *Throne of Blood* " attempts to read the ways in which Nature warns man of unchecked and reckless ambition. Artistic originality notwithstanding, *Throne of Blood* is a testament to aesthetic cinematography. The paper traces the symbolic and stark appearances of birds, beasts and bois. Nature in *Throne of Blood* is dark, eerie and mysterious. Yet, it never fails to warn man of his flaws. The paper will attempt to read the many chances Nature offers Washizu for reflection and redemption in his all-consuming desire for power that ultimately destroys him. The paper seeks to highlight that Nature in this cinematic adaptation is not just a backdrop or a symbolic force but it tries and falls short of being the guardian spirit of man.



Keywords— Nature, Symbolism, Adaptation, Shakespeare, Kurosawa

Widely recognized as one of the most compelling adaptations of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Akira Kurosawa's cinematic tour-de-force *Throne of Blood* (1957) has been extensively analyzed and critiqued over the years. This paper attempts to read the ways in which Nature warns man of unchecked and reckless ambition. It attempts to delineate the many chances Nature offers the protagonist Washizu for reflection and redemption in his destructive desire for power. The paper argues that Nature not only functions as a backdrop or a symbolic force in the adaptation but also acts as an elemental spirit which tries, albeit in vain, to preserve humanity. Employing a theoretical framework of eco-criticism and adaptation studies, the paper tries to trace the symbolic and stark appearances of birds, beasts and bois interspersed in the narrative that warn man of his recklessness and descent towards doom.

Kurosawa does not make a straightforward adaptation of *Macbeth*, but rather relocates the story to feudal Japan, jettisoning the language and major plot points entirely. The broad strokes and themes are still there and so are many of

the major characters (Macbeth has become Washizu, Lady Macbeth has become Lady Asaji, and Banquo has become Miki, for example), but there are significant deviations from the source material outside of the linguistics or temporal changes like the presence of the chorus, replacing the three witches by a single forest spirit, the absence of MacDuff, etc. The atmospheric use of natural elements in *Throne of Blood* is a marked departure from *Macbeth*. The forest and the weather are the twin forces that put the film's themes of fate, human ambition, and the impermanence of existence into perspective. The most important natural setting in the film is the Spider's Web Forest, the site where Washizu and Miki meet the Forest Spirit. The fog and wind are a recurrent trope throughout the film underscoring existential uncertainty and raw elemental power.

The film opens with a barren landscape with dense fog covering the entire screen; a visually blinding landscape that is prophetic of the moral blindness of the characters. A ritualistic chant on the dangers of "all-consuming desire...never changing, now and until eternity" wafts

through the foggy nothingness even as a memorial column with “Here Stood Spider’s Web Castle” etched on it slowly appears *mise-en-scene*. Then, the fog momentarily lifts and Spider’s Web Castle comes in to full view. This technique of foreshadowing that the film employs is simultaneously dream-like and clinically precise. The film’s ending with exactly the same frame contributes to emphasizing the cyclical nature of Nature and unchanging cosmic order.

Washizu Taketoki and Miki Yoshiaki, the garrison commanders of the Lord of Spider’s Web Castle, have just defeated the enemy forces of the treacherous commander Fujiyaki who had joined hands with the Lord Tsuzuki’s sworn enemy Inui. With war messengers hailing Washizu’s bravery on the battlefield, the Lord and other attendants breathe a sigh of relief. The victorious commanders, however, have lost their bearings trying to navigate through the infamous Spider’s Web Forest. The forest exudes an eeriness that accentuates its labyrinthine structure. Washizu and Miki seem to be going in circles for hours together as if entangled in a web. The forest, a symbol of their entrapment, along with inclement weather creates a veil of mystery and unease around the characters. Washizu senses the presence of the witch in the forest, “There’s evil afoot”. They stumble upon a ‘hovel’ in the forest where an ancient forest spirit with a spinning wheel, talks of how men’s lives are “destined to sear its flesh in the fire of desire”. The spinning wheel is symbolic of the vicious circle of suffering and meaninglessness of life. The prophecies of the forest spirit *in lieu* of the three witches of Macbeth are also significantly altered in the adaptation. For example, the prophesy does not mention anything about “one borne of a woman”. This is necessary because there is no character that plays McDuff in the adaptation. Donald Richie writes, “[T]he idea of a trio of malevolent witches is far from the Japanese imagination. The witch, the warlock, are really priests, embodiments of a nature which is neither good nor evil. They are diviners and fortune-tellers who attempt to pierce the future but the gratuitous evil of Shakespeare’s witches is impossible” (117).

The spirit’s prophecy that Washizu, presently commander of the First Fortress, would become the Lord of the North Garrison from this day and the Sovereign of the Spider’s Web Castle soon is closely linked to her environment, suggesting that the character’s destiny is woven into the fabric of the natural world. The relentless power of evil in shaping man’s fate is revealed by the piles of human bones near the witch’s hovel. Kurosawa frames these heaps of decomposing people even after the horrified Washizu and Miki walk away, as a resonating reminder that humans are unidentifiable in death, and regardless of accomplishments

in life, they will only be able to rot away after death. The Spirit vanishing into thin air after delivering the prophecy is indicative of the illusory nature of the supernatural. Also, his/her unnerving song is a stark reminder of man’s flawed desire for power and glory. Despite leaving the forest behind, Washizu and Miki continue to be lost for hours in the barren landscape before they finally manage to reach the Castle. Their chaotic thoughts are mirrored by the harsh winds and the heavy fog that forewarn the characters of their actions. As Graham Austin in ‘Macbeth: Three Distinctive Adaptations of Shakespeare’s Scottish Play’ observes:

After Washizu and Miki encounter the forest spirit and receive their prophecies, they get lost in a thick bank of fog on their way back to the castle. The scene seems to last for an eternity, or at least well past the point in which most directors would have figured it served its purpose; there is no dialogue, and the scene is comprised purely of Washizu and Miki riding back and forth through nearly identical shots of impenetrable fog. But the maddening tedium of the sequence is key to its brilliance, in that it is a wholly visual way to depict the mental fog that Washizu and Miki are experiencing following their encounter with the spirit, and it forces the audience to spend time with the characters to wonder if they will ever be able to find their way out, both literally and figuratively.

Furthermore, as Olivia Rutigliano notes, “The padded armor worn by Washizu and Miki appears crunchy, iridescent, and darkly reminiscent of beetle skin. When men in *Throne of Blood* are riding horses—controlling another life form, let’s say—they are superior, and can be seen as men. But on the ground, awkwardly moving in their thick, shell-like armor, they are debased, and they become bugs”. The spidery appearances of soldiers, the crouching assassin begging for Washizu’s forgiveness, the androgynous forest-spirit, the ghost-like Lady Asaji all navigate the liminal spaces between nature and culture with their fluid movements.

As the scene shifts to the house of the newly appointed Lord of North Garrison, the viewers perhaps for the first time see bright sunshine and scenes of domesticity: workers in the expansive rice fields, servants bustling about the household, etc. Cut to the image of Asaji, Washizu’s wife and the viewers are back to witnessing

pure evil incarnate. After Lady Asaji has convinced Washizu of killing Lord Tsuzuki, she quietly and slowly shuffles into a pitch-black doorway before returning, facing the camera now, moments later holding a bowl of drugged sake. It is a chilling image, both because of her unnatural movements and because the doorway has been transformed into a void where she returns full with the intent to murder. This shot visually encapsulates her essence and the depths to which the narrative will go. Her ghost-like appearance, heavily influenced by the Noh masks, along with her gliding movements is maleficent at best. With her outwardly calm demeanor and steady tone of articulation, devoid of any emotion whatsoever, Asaji reasons with Washizu as to why he must pursue the Witches prophecy to its logical conclusion. They seize the opportunity to commit regicide when Lord Tsuzuki unexpectedly pays them a visit. The household also has a sealed chamber with visible bloodstains on the wall where the treacherous former Lord of North Garrison had committed suicide. The stains on the wall are a forced reminder of the destructive forces of treachery. It represents both the inevitability of Washizu's fate, and the cyclicity with which violence begets violence, or as Macbeth himself states in Act 3 Scene 4: "blood will have blood". Washizu betrays his Lord, and when he becomes Lord, he too is betrayed. This never-ending cycle of violence is furthered by another adaptive choice of Kurosawa: it is noted that Washizu's predecessor, Lord Tsuzuki, also rose to his post by slaying his former lord. However, Asaji and Washizu completely ignore the signs and carry out their discussions of murdering the Lord in the very same ill-fated chamber. Also, the day they chose to commit the regicide happens to be a new moon day. The Lord's crown carries a new moon insignia on it. They do not heed to the ominous cawing of the birds around the household. The warnings that the forces of Nature give are completely ignored by Asaji and Washizu making them culpable of the destruction that follows the regicide.

With Washizu becoming the Lord of Spider's Web castle, Miki believes that in due course his son would be declared the successor. However, Washizu had other plans and hires an assassin to murder both Miki and his son. On the day of the banquet when the assassination is to take place, Miki's loyal horse runs away from the stables. It is as if the beast has a premonition of what was in store for Miki if he decides to attend the banquet. The warnings are loud; but not loud enough before self-serving ambition.

The workers in the Spider's Web Castle talk about rats fleeing the house. They remark that rats leave a house before it burns. This is indicative of the chaos that is going to consume Washizu's household. When the enemy forces are closing in on to the Castle, flocks of birds rush wildly

into the chambers. Even when the other officials see it as a warning, Washizu interprets it as a good omen from the heavens signally his victory over the enemies. Lady Asaji, on the other hand, has become a nervous wreck obsessed with washing her supposedly bloody hands. It is highly ironic that she dies following the complications of having a still-born child.

When Washizu engages in combat with the enemy, who have hidden themselves behind twigs from Spiders Web Forest, he is fatally struck by a volley of arrows of his soldiers. In fact, he is trapped inside his own castle with his own soldiers betraying his trust. With arrows jutting out of his body, Washizu looks like a trapped spider entangled in its own web. Having Washizu's own men kill him rather than an enemy invader completes the film's circular structure.

The film ends with the barren landscape again; the loop structure reinforcing how nature reclaims the site of blood and violence. The forest avenges itself-it moves towards the castle; a testimony to Nature's role as a force of justice. The final judgement of Washizu is carried out by a natural force - an end that was his own making.

The elemental forces in *Throne of Blood* evoke unease and fatalism but they also offer scope for contemplative engagement within a larger cosmic game. Nature, the only constant in the fleeting and illusory world of impermanence, always calls. Whether man heeds or not is a matter of his free will, not necessarily his fate.

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Teachers' Perception towards Competency-Based Curriculum: A Study at the Secondary Level

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Abstract— This paper explores the very recent transition of English language teaching at secondary level in Bangladesh. Bangladesh adopted Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) to implement it from primary to higher secondary level. However, while implementing learner-centred curriculum, a mixed attitude was observed among learners, teachers, guardians, educational thinkers, and administrators. For this, the present study aims to investigate the classroom experiences of the English teachers and also to evaluate the findings objectively and recommend effective ways to develop communicative competence of the learners at the secondary level. The study employed quantitative research method and the sample was 10 English teachers. The data is analysed through Likerts' scale and the major findings show that teachers face several difficulties during the CBC implementation. They do not deny the learner-centred curriculum but they frankly expressed the limitations of resources, need for training and administrative support. The study recommends that there should be proper administrative support, regular monitoring and teachers' training in order to develop communicative competence of the learners. There should be proper utilization of digital tools in English language classroom at secondary level.



Keywords— Competency-Based Curriculum, English Language Teaching, Bangladesh, Communicative Competence, Teacher Training

I. INTRODUCTION

A relatively recent shift at primary and secondary level from the traditional content-based curriculum to a Competency Based Curriculum (CBC). (Rahman et al., 2021). This curriculum was a program to enable communicative competence, critical thinking and intercultural awareness in learners. National Curriculum Framework stated that the curriculum was less prescriptive, more learner-centered and participatory. It also adhered to a certain inclusive approach towards English language learning (NCF). Additionally, it sets out to help learners apply English for their real-life scenarios such as academic and creative purposes. It also seeks to foster democratic values in communicative practices.

That new curriculum was rescinded in mid-2024 and reverted back to the old one in 2025. While applying the Competency Based Curriculum (CBC), there was an

attitude partly positive and negative among learners, teachers, guardians as well as educational thinkers and administrators alike. Though the curriculum does not exist anymore in the context of Bangladesh, the researcher feels the necessity to evaluate that curriculum as the strengths and weaknesses of the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) will help make the present curriculum more effective.

During implementation at the grassroots level particularly in secondary schools, the pros and cons remain unexplored. At the field level, teachers' experiences, reality, and challenges are not explored. The problems like weak teacher preparation, lack of resources and inflexible assessment systems have again been highlighted by studies that still affect the proper implementation of Competency Based Curriculum in Bangladesh EFL context (Dündar et al., 2019; Brown, 1995). In addition, socio-economic

diversity and rural-urban disparities are also present in semi urban areas like Mymensingh. In circumstances like this it is essential to explore how the elicited translation of the curriculum into actual classroom practices. It is also necessary to explore how the journey of teaching and learning becomes effective from early level.

To get the answer to why this curriculum is withdrawn, the researcher felt the necessity of investigating teachers' perceptions who are important stakeholders. The success or failure of the CBC largely depends on teachers, who are the primary agents of curriculum delivery and classroom practice (Chisholm & Leyendecker, 2008).

Competency-based education was a shift from traditional lecture-based instruction to an outcome-based approach. It intended to ensure learner's English language proficiency through active demonstration of their skills, knowledge, values, and attitudes. Relevant research, newspaper reports show that teachers, students, and guardians have mixed approach towards the new curriculum. It has innovative ideas to be implemented like assignments, projects, and innovative activities. However, after 7 months of its launch, it was abandoned by the interim government. The present research will shed light on both the strengths and weaknesses of Competency-Based Curriculum objectively through teachers' perspectives. Thus, the study is directly relevant to the secondary education system of Bangladesh.

However, the research takes place in Mymensingh region only and the participants are all from urban areas. It is a major limitation of study. The sample sizes are also limited because many teachers have reservations with Competency-Based Curriculum, and they were not comfortable with this to talk to. However, the researcher focuses on the qualitative aspect of the study which focuses on the in-depth interviews with teachers.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

As the teachers' perceptions are very crucial for the implementation of CBC, the study aims:

- i. to investigate the classroom experiences of the English teachers at the secondary level during CBC
- ii. to evaluate the findings objectively and recommend effective ways to develop communicative competence of the learners

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The curriculum reform is very crucial to solve the problems of classrooms and also to ensure effective

teaching and learning. Internationally, the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) is acknowledged as a learner-centered approach that prepares learners with real-life skills along with critical thinking and independent learning (Richards, 2006). Its introduction in English education was considered to be a significant when it came into forefront enabling Engendering policy and practices that moves the country's traditional discriminatory rote-learning, grammar-translation approach towards shifts communicative competence with critical awareness of oneself, others as well their culture (NCTB, 2023).

ELT experts in Bangladesh (including Rahman & Akter, 2023; Chowdhury, 2023) claim that CBC fills some important omissions within the old curriculum. It prioritizes communication skills rather than rote memorization, in line with ELT worldwide. Second, it incorporates practical actions in daily life, democracy and self-expression through application — things that completely lacked from the former curriculum. Thirdly, it urges the of existing exam-centered pedagogy through student-center, project based and task centered approaches.

The teachers are the primary implementers and that is why understanding teachers' perceptions is essential for evaluating its effectiveness. Teachers have overall ambiguous attitude toward CBC in Bangladesh. Islam et al. (2023) found that secondary school teachers are generally positive about the potential of the curriculum in terms of student engagement, creativity and learning through practical experience. While recognizing the promise of curriculum, many teachers raised alarm bells about implementation in crowded classrooms and lack sufficient resources or institutional preparedness. The study was conducted with 32 teachers from govt. and non-govt. secondary schools. They used purposive sampling and the data were analyzed thematically. The results show that teachers expressed optimism regarding CBC and at the same time expressed substantial apprehensions regarding education system, the training system, teacher preparedness, and the assessment process.

However, according to a more recent set of studies, Bangladeshi teachers have an ambivalent view concerning the CBC. For instance, Islam et al. Findings from a study of secondary school teachers about the curriculum indicated positive attitudes toward its potential to improve student engagement, creativity and real-world skills (Education Endowment Foundation [in press], Smith et al. 2025). They liked the activity based learning and ability to link knowledge with real life situations. Yet in spite of that optimism, the majority of teachers raised issues with implementation challenges: poorly trained

educators; not enough materials or academic support for students; and lack institutional preparation.

Likewise, the research conducted by Oluoch, 2020; Shrestha, 2019) in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia revealed both positivity as well as negativity of teachers towards CBC albeit expressing their fear regarding poor training opportunities or resources during assessment. In Kenya, teachers perceived a number of gaps in professional development and administrative supports yet were somewhat positively disposed to the CBC (Waweru & Orodho, 2013).

Since the curriculum itself is ostensibly adequate, empirical studies have indicated an enduring chasm between overarching frameworks and classroom dynamics almost everywhere in rural & semi-urban areas like Mymensingh. Chowdhury (2023) reports secondary teachers of English having issues incorporating communicative tasks into large classes, limited access to authentic materials and the rigidity of examination policies emphasizing memorization over critical engagement.

Additionally, students in rural areas such as Mymensingh have been found to be demotivated because of the lack of exposure regarding English outside classroom settings and ethnic cultural (local), understanding that translates into their external interactions either at a community or home level; reading low articles about how elite people use foreign language refers. Islam 2023. The case of socio-cultural considerations further complicates the implementation of a CBC that calls for learners to be critical, creative and autonomous.

However, this contrasts with the research gap in localized studies of teacher perceptions about CBC at secondary level across various regions of Bangladesh including Mymensingh. The majority of the related literature is oriented around national-level analyses or primary education and largely misses out on key contextual challenges/needs that are present at secondary (Islam et al., 2022). In addition, limited knowledge exists on how teachers in rural and semi-urban contexts understand the relevance of CBCs as well their feasibility and effects on teaching practices or student outcomes.

The teachers' associations claimed that the CBC was foisted upon them with haste and counter-productive goals without adequate preparation, there were confusions in school levels. Examination boards might have taken a little while to align their assessment methods leading

inconsistent results between what they are teaching and how it is being examined. In the rural schools life was even more difficult due to lack of access to ICT, overcrowded classes and untrained teachers rendered CBC almost impossible. The study exposes that the CBC though theoretically strong, there are considerable challenges in those secondary schools of Mymensingh towards implementation at classroom level.

This study aims to contribute the limited empirical Evidence of Mymensingh and secondary education sector by examining teachers perceptions regarding CBC in this context. A study of the experiences, challenges and needs of secondary-level teachers in Mymensingh will give a deeper understanding to the subject matter, thereby feeding into discussions on curriculum reform for Bangladesh.

III. METHODOLOGY

Method

The study adopted quantitative research design to investigate the perceptions of the teachers at secondary level. Quantitative data are collected through FGD and research questionnaire.

Sample

The researcher followed purposive random sampling to select ten English teachers from three government schools and two non-government schools. The study conducted a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) with those ten teachers. The names of the schools are not mentioned for the ethical issues and privacy; however, the researcher will provide the necessary details on demand. The participants are selected randomly with their ethical consent to participate in this research.

Instrument

The survey questionnaire focuses on teachers understanding of CBC, classroom practices and activities, perceived strengths and limitations of the CBC and the challenges faced in resource use, assessment, and student engagement.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data is analyzed through pie and bar charts whereas, the open-ended responses are analysed through thematic discussion based on the commonness of the findings. (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Structured questionnaire is analyzed with Likert-scale items.

IV. RESULTS

4.1 Findings of the Questionnaire

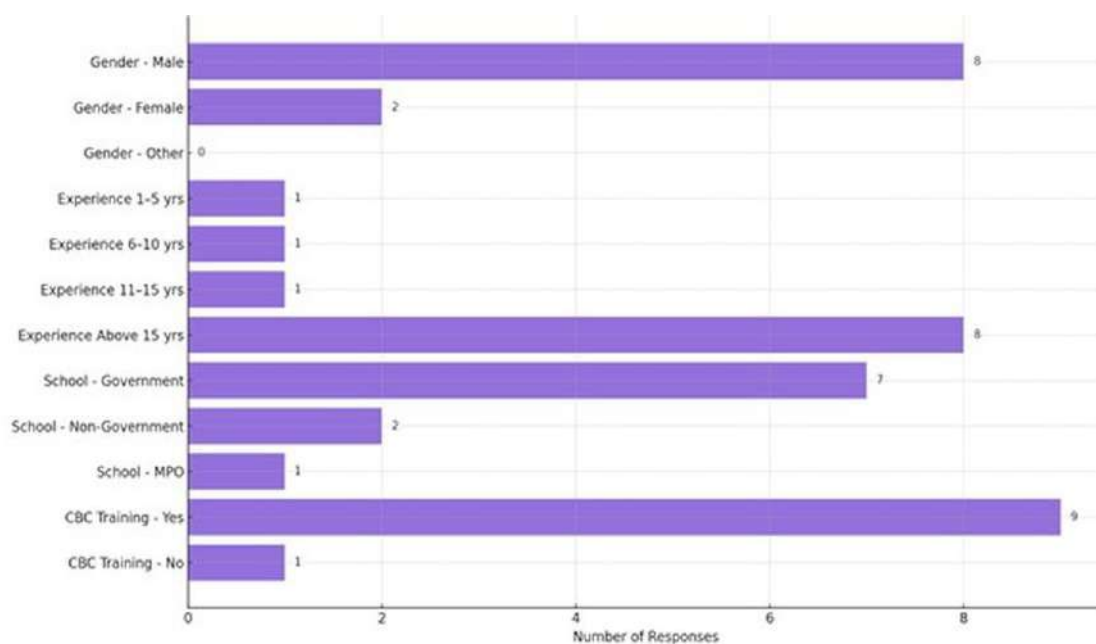


Fig.1:

Demographic information of the respondents

Male teachers (8) confine the sample of this study. This illustrates a gender imbalance in the teaching staff at this field of study. And perhaps, it follows the general case of rural or semi-urban schools around Bangladesh. Furthermore, more than 80% of the teachers had been teaching for over 15 years. This means many are seniors and subject to a plethora of curriculum changes. What they've had for a long time may simply colour their perceptions of the 'new' curricula, and have them tailor it as such. The chart further indicates that the majority of teachers are trained for work in a couple schools (government). This follows a national policy under which new curriculum and training has been provided to government schools first.

Approximately nine out of 10 (90%) report that they have been trained on CBC. This is a hopeful sign as

far as the successful rollout of them, indicating that teachers were most likely adequately equipped with foundational knowledge to deliver competency-based instruction. However, the employment of even one untrained teacher exemplifies why professional development must be universal and holistic.

Hence, the demographic profile reveals that teachers are well experienced male majority cohort, largely from government institutions and trained in CBC. This creates an opportunity for the researcher to ensure what problems have been found while implementing competency-based reforms in Mymensingh region. Notably, an additional policy focus is needed on gender balance and the inclusion of all institutional types and categories of staff in training programmes.

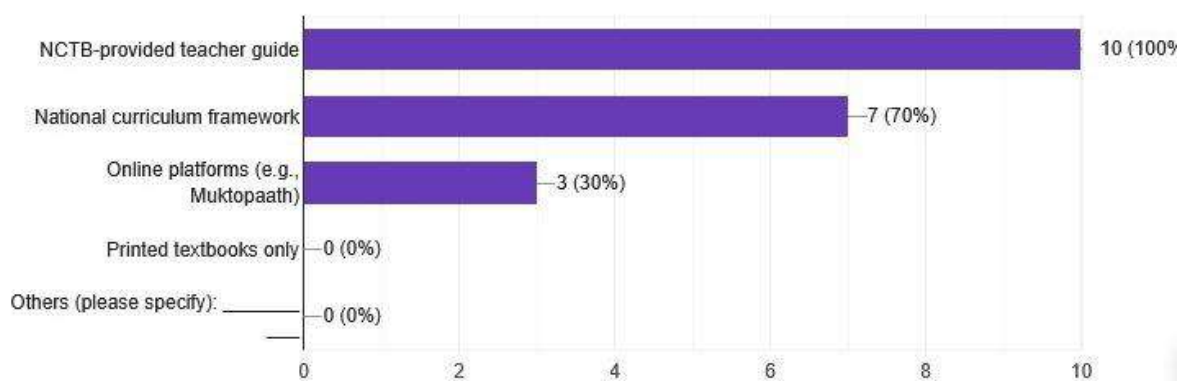


Fig.2: Which document/resource did you use most to plan CBC-based lessons? (You can select more than one)

The above figure shows the answers from teachers on which document/resource they utilise for planning CBC-based lessons (with multiple responses possible). They had the choice of using multiple category

Teachers' Guide Provided by NCTB: All the respondents (100%) said they depended on teacher guide provided by National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) while preparing their lessons of Competency-Based Curriculum CBC. Such finding indicates the central and authoritative role of NCTB guide most secondary teachers set lesson planning in time new curriculum implementation. Once again, they saw the NCTB guide to be reasonably structured, widely accessible or most in line with their ideas of what was expected from a CBC (NC) (7 responses — 70%) noted overwhelmingly as used for National Curriculum Framework. Hence, it indicates that teachers are not only working through scripted curriculum guides but also pulling from larger-scale policy and pedagogical guidelines to inform their teaching. Teachers were moderately engaged with curriculum theory and planning principles, indicating their awareness of aligning teaching objectives with national education policy.

Online Media (e.g. Muktopaath) (3 responses — 30%): Only about a third of teachers reported using any

form of digital or online platform like Muktopaath. This relatively lower percent may reflect limited digital integration, lagging professional development or gatekeeping to access technology-based resources in some schools. And then there are teachers who may be more interested in traditional print-based/official resources rather than online content.

Printed Textbooks Only (0 responses – 0%): N/A — No one chose “printed textbooks only” as resource. This finding suggests that textbooks are not seen as adequate, nor independent for lesson planning based on the CBC. And it reinforces the role of supplementary materials (guides/frameworks) in CBC implementation as well.

None of the participants selected “Others” giving us confidence that, for these respondents at least, key resources are confined to official curriculum documents and established online platforms.

Findings presented here indicate that teachers in the Mymensingh secondary education context depended on NCTB documents, especially teacher guide and national curriculum framework when implementing CBC. However, less engagement with online platforms and not solely relying on textbooks suggest the need for deeper digital inclusion in addition to broader training.

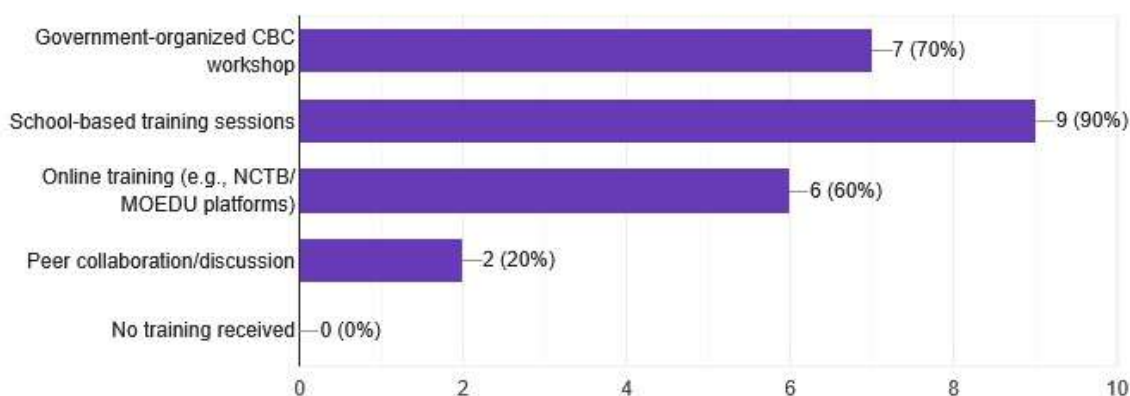


Fig.3: What type of training have you received regarding the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC)? You can select more than one)

In figure 3, the cumulative frequencies (counts N = 10) exceed total participants simply because respondents selected more than one option. 70% were reported as participants of government authority workshops (7). These workshops usually train teachers for a standardized understanding of the reforms and provide them with official guidelines and resources. The implication of their widely spread uptake is that they are quite well-disseminated at the policy level.

Nine out of ten (90%) reports this as the most prevalent training modality. Such a high percentage

indicates the importance of school-level initiatives as plays an important role in preparing teachers for CBC implementation. School-based training usually includes in-house workshops, ongoing professional development sessions and hands-on demonstrations relevant to that particular school setting.

60% of the people (6 respondents) are involved in online training. This indicates an increasing dependence on digitally supplemented National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) MHPE for other subject books from the Ministry of Education (MOEDU). For teachers who live in

an area far from their state, online training is a great option as it allows for easy accessibility. 2 (20%) identification on-the-job or informal training through interaction with fellow workers and discussions. Less common is this mode, which emphasizes the impact of collegial support networks in connecting people and sharing practices to address issues during curriculum shifting processes. Of the sample, 0 respondents (0%) reported no training suggesting that all participants had experienced exposure to at least one facet of professional development regarding CBC.

The data show that a number of teachers in the study received more than one type of training, and many had exposure to school-based sessions as well as workshops run by government agencies. Combining these online training centers and peer support is also a comprehensive measure that an individual can take for their vocational growth. The broad range of this training landscape undoubtedly plays a role in positively influencing levels of preparedness and confidence for teachers implementing the Competency-Based Curriculum in secondary schools.

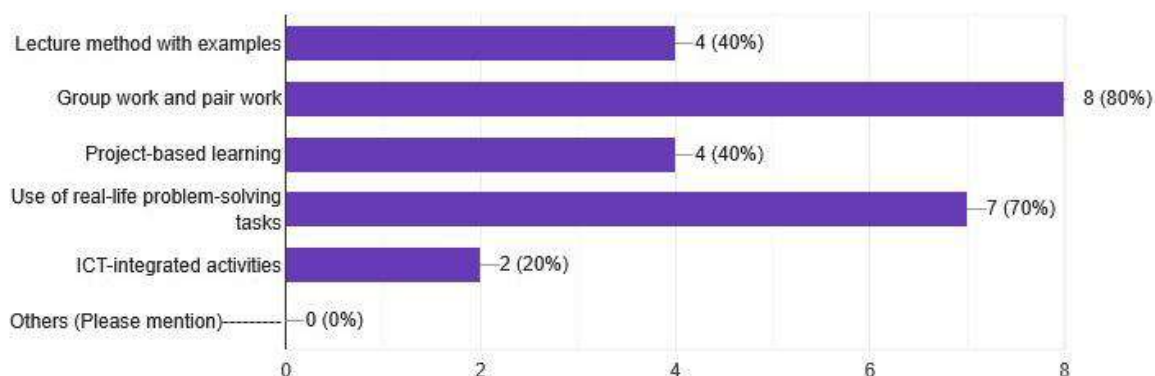


Fig.4: What teaching method did you mostly use in your CBC-based classroom? (You can select more than one)

Figure 4 shows the teaching methods used by secondary-level teachers based on ten responses under the Competency Based Curriculum (CBC). Perhaps the most common (80%) and least innovative form is group/pair work, which fits naturally to CBC's learner-centered pedagogy valuing collaboration/engagement of student. Thirdly, 70 percent of teachers were reported to give their learners tasks that involve solving real-life problems – this is important in terms of learning being contextualized and linked back to CBC which encourages application of what has been learned.

While 40% of respondents use an interactive method based on lecture with examples, the prevalence there shows that traditional practices are still in play (probably due to space limitations or simply being taught a certain practice) and not all instructors have experience

teaching differently. Similar uptake (40%) is seen for project-based learning too, which may be closely linked to time constraints or lack of assessment integration; the latter being a major argument against its use. Only 20% reported incorporating ICT-embedded activities, revealing an important gap in digital pedagogy that could stem from infrastructure and training limitations. Free-text responses under the 'Others' option were lacking, suggesting that teachers simply operate within known modes of practice (though it may also suggest a lack of experimentation or institutional encouragement around diverse strategies). Thus, promising as it is the current uptake of CBC-aligned approaches also reflects a legacy reliance on traditional methods and challenges to effective digital integration showing that further professional development resourcing continues to be necessary for successful implementation.

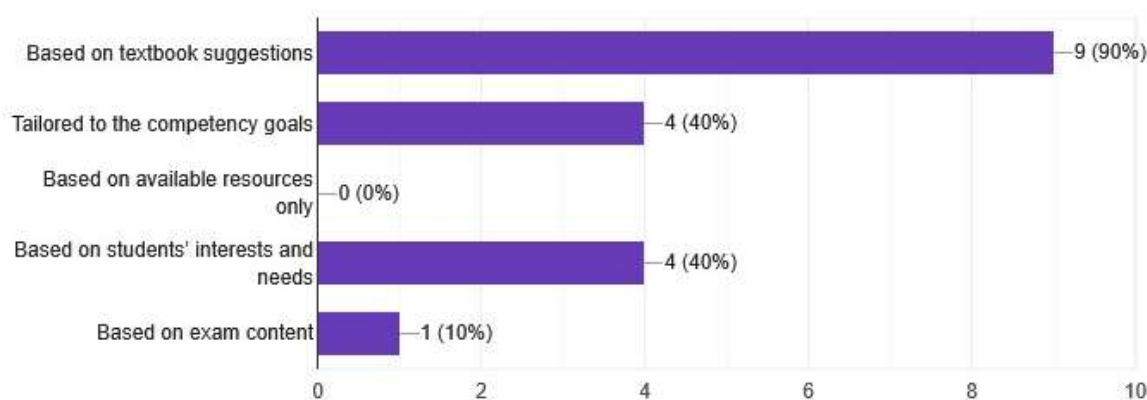


Fig.5: How did you usually select learning activities for your students under CBC? (You can select more than one)

Figure 5 shows how teachers responded to the learning activity selection criteria for students based on the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) model. A staggering majority (90%) reported reliance on textbook-led recommendations, which suggests a formulaic lesson plan preparation or possibly dependence of teachers upon textbooks. Relying on such content may promise continuity but presupposes little pedagogical flexibility or creativity in activity development.

A worrisome focus on past leading to questionable curriculum interpretation and implementation, 40% of teachers reported the following questions "To what extent have you purposefully chosen activities that align with a competency objective? Likewise, the same proportion was noted for learners' interests and unique learning needs are taken into account to suggest that attention is at least partially paid to learner

centered differentiation, which CBC fundamentally embodies. Notably, none of the respondents based their learning task selection solely on compliance with available resources; this implies that logistical constraints are perhaps not a main factor—or else materials can be assumed to be rather standardized or good enough. Further, only one (10%) of teachers engaging in activities related to the content from tests indicated that these lessons were driven by an assessment — another measure of minimal instruction based on assessments within the CBC context.

Therefore, the data imply that although CBC promotes outcome-based and learner-centred teaching, classroom practice is primarily textbook driven. It clearly points out the void from where CBC turned into a tough nut for making life miserable to teachers.

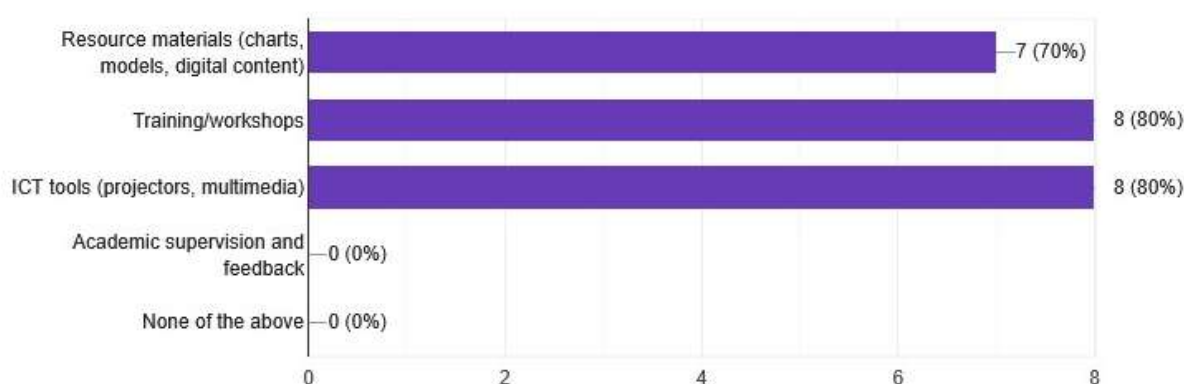


Fig.6: What kind of support did your school provide for implementing CBC? (You can select more than one)

The forms of institutional support received by teachers in implementing the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) are shown figure 6. The ten responses included one — which gave an achingly familiar sound to

so many of the professional development sessions I led as a teacher at various schools before giving teachers access to technology tools such as multimedia or projectors. This shows a good effort by schools to equip teachers with

basic competencies for effective delivery in CBC classrooms.

Of the 70% that reported access to learning aids, all were being provided instruction with something such as charts or digital content—showing investments in supplemental teaching support through materials. However, the absence of academic mentorship/formative evaluation is glaring; no participant reported having a supervisor. This gap reflects a fundamental failure of the

structure; while assistance in terms of material and training is positioned effectively, measures for pedagogical monitoring and feedback remain unmonitored.

Thus, overall the support relating to infrastructure and training seems relatively well grounded however academic scaffolding is absent which may ultimately limit long term induction or professional development in staying true to the curriculum.

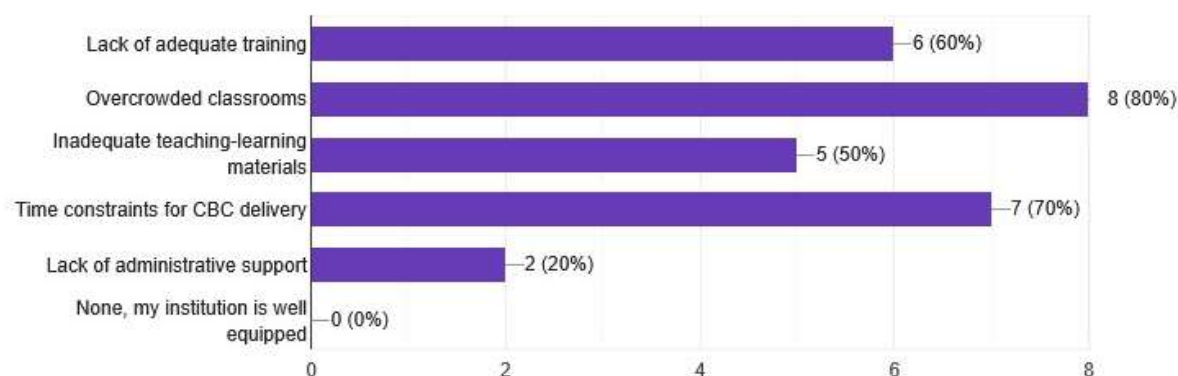


Fig.7: What was the most significant limitation in your school for CBC implementation? (You can select more than one)

It summarizes the main institutional obstacles teachers see when it comes to implementing the Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC). Eighty percent of respondents rated large class sizes as one of their top three challenges, and they say teaching in these settings makes interactive or differentiated instruction difficult. A further 70% noted, time pressure arguing components of the curriculum cannot always be delivered within scheduled timescales without compromising on quality.

Sixty percent said there was no systematic preparation, exposing gaps in continuous professional development that cannot meet the demands of CBC. Moreover, 54% of teachers pointed to a lack of

instructional materials as an obstacle meaning that they are lacking the required material resources for participatory learning. Elsewhere, just 20% cited managerial ineffectiveness when they may mean that administrative support is limited, passive (at best) in tackling implementation challenges.

More tellingly, none of the participants believed that their schools were properly prepared to implement CBC, pointing to deeper systemic inadequacies in relation to CBC readiness. In sum, these findings underscore that structural and logistical challenges—as opposed to conceptual resistance—continue to be the major impediments in applied practice.

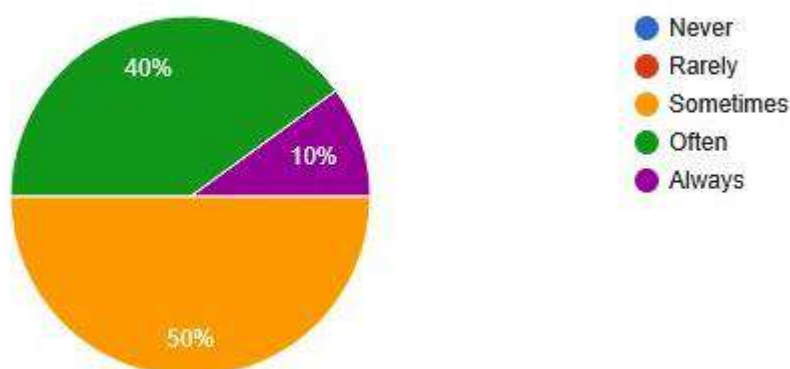


Fig.8: How often do you use communicative activities in your English class? (Rate on a scale: 1=Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Sometimes, 4=Often, 5=Always)

Based on the answer of 10 teachers pie chart eight shows how often English is used for classroom interaction in English lessons. This trend toward target language use was underscored by the dominant 70 percent who reported that they often used English. Furthermore, 20% assert they always employ English, a sign of dedication to establishing a permeable language atmosphere. And a mere 10 percent replied that they use English sometimes, while no student selected “rarely” or “never,” signaling an overall consciousness of the didactic value in furthering mastery through frequencies with which we generally deploy it.

This distributive knowing and doing suggest that the majority of teachers identify English form a principle mode for classroom communication, which is necessary communicative competence. But that only a fifth manage to use English at all times over this period may rather expose practical barriers such as learners' limited proficiency, classroom management issues or contextual restrictions in large or rural schools. Most importantly, the data suggests progress in a positive direction although certainly there is still scope for reinforcing consistency and making more of language exposure across all teaching situations.

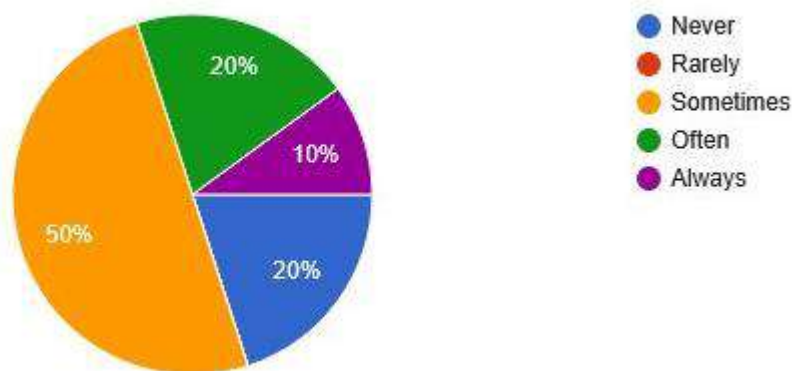


Fig.9: How often do you use Group or pair work in your English class? (Rate on a scale: 1=Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Sometimes, 4=Often, 5=Always)

The figure 9 shown the rate of English classes that reflect teachers about group or pair work. Moderate implementation levels were indicated by the fact that half of respondents (50%) reported sometimes using collaborative techniques. During that time, 20 % said they often used group or pair work and 10% claimed they always did; these are by far the minority amongst staff who regularly use learner-centered strategies.

Despite the fact that CBC emphasises interaction and communication through group activities, a significant 20% of respondents claim never to use group or pair work. There are many reasons why one may be hesitant such as

large class sizes, limited time or lack of training to implement cooperative tasks in a fruitful way.

Most importantly, despite the limited use of interactive learning formats some evidence of it can be found but more concerning is that this absence often illustrates a disconnect between what curricula communicates and actual classroom practice. Improving teacher capacity, offering classroom management support and reconfiguring class environments could facilitate more consistent use of student-centered collaborative learning methods.

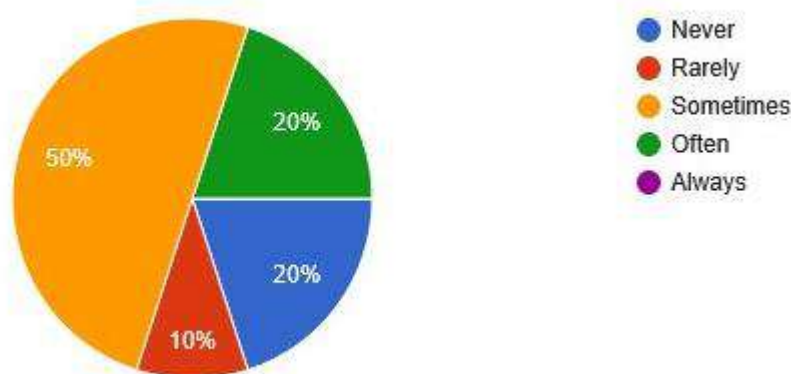


Fig.10: How often do you use formative assessment tools (Quiz, question-answer, assignments, projects) in your English class? (Rate on a scale: 1=Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Sometimes, 4=Often, 5=Always)

Based on data collected in October 2023, the figure 10 shows how often formative assessment strategies (for example, quizzes /Q&A/ assignments and project work) are used in English classroom. Half of the 10 teachers who responded use them frequently, indicating some mid-level inclusion of informal assessment strategies. 10% say this and 20 apply them often, another 20 don't use them at all.

Such utilisation display sporadic application of formative tools, despite these being pivotal to ongoing feedback and monitoring learning progress. The small percentage of regular users reflects a rift between assessment policy and instructional practice that may be

attributable to time constraints, limited training opportunities, or reliance on summative evaluation approaches.

The findings suggest supporting increased awareness and means to incorporate authentic, low-stakes forms of evaluation at all times in the classroom for reflective learning and skill building. Those whose work involved reviewing and/or writing practice tests strongly endorsed: strengthening institutional guidance and resources; offering targeted professional development as practices could be identified by area such as formative assessments, national examinations or other psychometric tools.

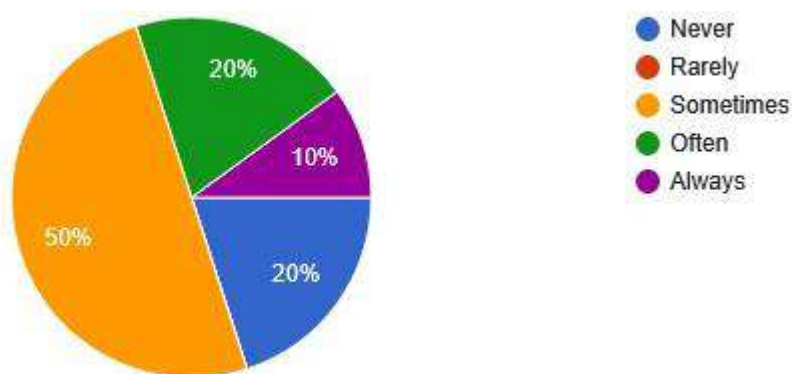


Fig.11: During class, I found the students more active than traditional classroom pattern

In figure 11, we see what respondents are observing in terms of student engagement with the current instructional model versus regular methods. Most (60%) said this meant learners were more engaged, indicating that those taking part felt the classroom atmosphere had improved. Twenty percent of respondents indicated that

they strongly believed this perspective, further solidifying theoretically the idea (Hinton, 2003) suggested by prior research that the new pedagogical structure promotes greater engagement. Another 20% said they were neutral, meaning that either the learners did not behave consistently or the respondents could be hesitant to say

anything definitively about what was observed. To my surprise, there are no negative responses which means we do share the same basic impressions of improved interactivity. These findings suggest a tentative movement towards more responsive and participatory learning environments, although the ubiquitous positivity may

indicate only subjective expectations or institutional congruence with contemporary curriculum reform. Thus, it appears the data (particularly for learner behavior) is promising but deeper analysis needs to be done into contextual adherences.

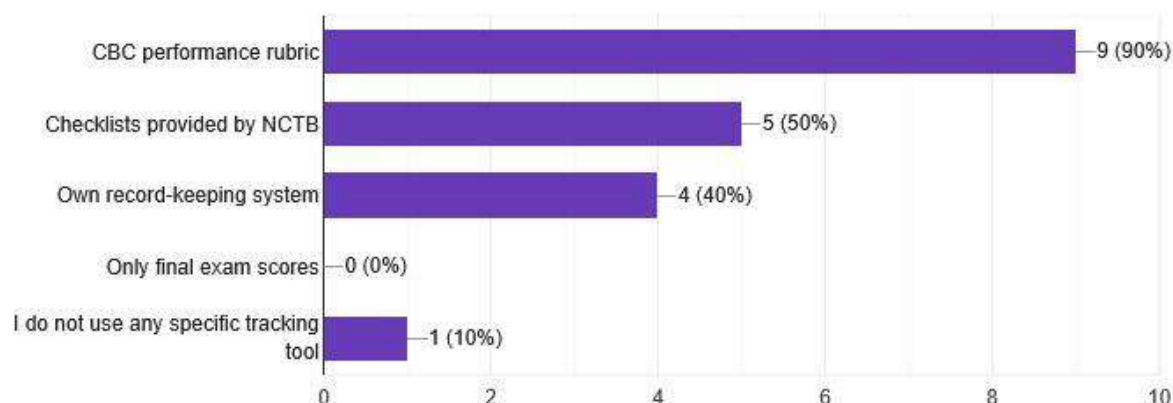


Fig.12: What tools did you use to track student progress in CBC? (Tick all that apply)

The figure shows the different tools utilized by teachers to assess students within a Competency-Based Curriculum (CBC) system. The CBC performance rubric was the most commonly used tool, with 90% of respondents reporting its use (n=10). This suggests a close fit with the formal evaluation components built into the CBC model of learning. Other respondents mentioned checklists given by the (NCTB) National Curriculum and Textbook Board facilitating formative evaluation while scoring (i.e. 50%) half of them did so respectively, indicating institutional support for their practice in this regard among those comprehensive practices); Additionally, 40% of teachers indicated using their own recordings, which implies an element of personalization or contextualization in assessment practices. None of the respondents, again using only students' final exam scores as tracking method means extreme deviation from traditional summative evaluation. The only response without any dedicated tracking tool (10%) is not surprising, especially given that a built structure of monitoring techniques in accordance with the CBC philosophy has been implemented widespread. Taken together, these results reflect a broader move to widespread regular use of formative assessment methods in secondary schools.

4.2 Discussion of the findings

A shift in subject teaching — more group and problem-solving work, consistent with the student-centred approach of the CBC. This augurs well as Vygotsky (1978) suggested social interaction plays an integral role in

learning. Yet, traditional strategies such as lectures are clearly not wholly gone— a finding typical in transitional education systems. The other big issue is teachers follow the textbook instead of ensuring that activities closely align with what students know. That show the difference between classroom learning and curriculum oriented. As described by Richards (2013), it is also hard for teachers to convert curriculum aims into actual lessons.

It seems like that institutional support is somewhat doing its job. While training and materials are available, the absence of academic oversight or mentorship is a significant barrier. Evidence suggests that ongoing support and feedback are critical for long-lasting teacher growth (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

The results also indicate that English is perhaps being used for the right reasons in classrooms, which bodes well for communicative competence. However, the mere absence of group work and formative assessment implies that CBC principles are not effectively being implemented. Formative assessment is essential for optimal student learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998), but it seldom found here.

Finally, it is promising to see more students getting involved. It suggests that CBC can potentially create more interesting classrooms (but not necessarily, depending on context and how it is taught).

V. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, a few practical steps can be suggested:

- i. Teachers are not given enough opportunities to create competency-based activities instead of just implementing guides.
- ii. Schools should not only offer workshops, but they need to put in regular mentoring and classroom observation.
- iii. And that there needs to be much more support for digital tools and platforms, particularly when it comes to rural communities.
- iv. Teachers should be discouraged from relying on textbooks, and instead place more emphasis on learning outcomes and student needs.
- v. An imbalance of formative assessment practices-A strong common thread among all the suggestions provided for critiquing summative assessments is a bias toward formative assessments—however be strong they did (read out more about this in ILR). The implications here are many but primarily revolve around simple strategies teachers can deploy on any given day.
- vi. Encouraging pair/group work is challenged by, but perhaps supported with smaller class sizes or support in larger classes.

This study investigated how teachers are implementing the Competency Based Curriculum (CBC) in secondary English classrooms. More broadly, the findings are a mixed bag. One side is things are looking positive. Most teachers are well trained and experienced but trying to follow CBC principles (teamwork, real life tasks etc., increasing the use of English in class). This is also a positive sign that the students are getting more involved, which suggests student-based learning might be making some big strides.

The study also highlights some gaps, however. That notwithstanding, teachers still follow textbook prescriptions and rely heavily on the NCTB teacher guide rather than fully understand it from a competency-based perspective. Digital tools are minimal and a lot of the classes still follow lecture techniques. Moreover, modalities such as formative assessment and ongoing group work are not practised uniformly. Also, the absence of academic mentoring and supervision adds to teachers' troubles in making a switch over.

Hence CBC implementation started off well enough, but has yet to be fully effective at the practice level. The gap between policy and the reality of a classroom still exists. Gradual support, more training on

classroom implementation strategies with teachers can eventually help them meet these needs and make CBC relevant to students.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Declarations on AI

The authors declare that generative AI and AI-assisted technologies were not used in any way to prepare or write this manuscript. However, for simple grammar checks, AI is used.

Informed Consent

Informed consent to participate in the study has been obtained from participants and respective teachers.

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Women's 'Quest of Self' leading to 'Spiritual Empowerment' in *The Escapist* of Manoj Das

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Abstract— *The Escapist* is the last English novel written by Manoj Das a bilingual writer of Odisha. The novel records the life journey of the protagonist Padmalochan Pramanik who accidentally is compelled to play as a swami. Ranjita Devi the wife of Jayant Thakore, a contractor, mistook him a swami and Padmalochan decides to play along. Living at her house he meets her daughter Sushobhana (Sushie). In the novel the character of Sushie though appears fragile but she displays a spiritual strength that mesmerises the protagonist and leads him to the path of true salvation. Thus she appears more strong character than the protagonist himself. Another strong female character of the novel is of Ranjita Devi. But contrary to Sushie's inner strength she is shown outwardly powerful. Both the female characters leave a lasting impression.



Keywords— Woman, quest, power, self, society, tradition, spirituality

I. INTRODUCTION

Individual's quest for self and desire of empowerment has been the most favoured activity of human being since ages. The power of some led to the subjugation of the weak. The struggle for controlling hold on ones' self has been one of the most recurrent desires of human beings. Yet for centuries, a large part of society has been devoid of their rights. The condition of women was much critical in this sense. They were often confined to the roles that were decided by patriarchal social and economic structures. This extensive historical marginalization of women has given rise to a global and continuous movement demanding their rights. They made the quest for their self and pursued the object of empowerment. Their quest for self is a well-grounded internal journey that leads to their conscious effort to claim personal autonomy. It also establishes their identity independent of relational roles given by patriarchal society and helps to develop self-worth.

'Quest for self' and 'empowerment' are two different terms that has been used for the study. The term 'quest for self' have different connotation according to the

situations. In religious context it is related to spirituality. In Hindu religious law text, *Manusmriti*, it was defined -

अध्यात्मरतिरासीनो निरपेक्षो निरामिषः ।

आत्मनैव सहायेन सुखार्थं विचरेदिह ॥

adhyātmaratirāsīno nirapekṣo nirāmiṣaḥ |
ātmanaiva sahāyena sukhārthī vicarediḥa ||(vesre 49)

"Taking delight in what pertains to the self, he (one) should remain seated without longing or sensual attachments. With himself (one's self) as his (one's) only companion, he(one) should walkabout here, seeking felicity." (Manu,verse 49) In Dharmashastra, the quest for self 'emphasizes the journey of understanding and discovering one's true identity and purpose, which is vital in spiritual practice. Historically in India, this quest serves as a foundational theme for personal spiritual exploration, essential for moving beyond individualism and achieving a sense of universal oneness. This pursuit highlights the importance of introspection and self-discovery in the broader context of spiritual growth.' (wisdomlib) The Quest for self in Hinduism involves a journey aimed at understanding one's true identity and purpose, highlighting the importance of self-discovery within the framework of

spiritual practices. (wisdomlib) While Paula Ripple Comin an author of religious works wrote, "inner process of searching for meaning can be the source of life's richest and most refined insights. It is the way in which hitherto hidden meaning surfaces, where sadness and turmoil give way to peace and understanding (Comin 12) In general "the quest for the self is a literary and philosophical theme that explores the individual's journey towards self-discovery, identity, and personal fulfilment." (fiveable)

The second term of study is 'empowerment'. Empowerment is also used in different contexts by different organizations. The root of the term empowerment is the idea of 'power' and power itself involves many meanings. 'Power over' deal with an either/or relationship of domination/subordination. 'Power to' relates to having decision-making authority to solve problems and creating and enabling. 'Power within' refers to self-confidence, self-awareness and assertiveness. It relates to how can individuals can recognise through analysing their experience how power operates in their lives, and gain the confidence to act to influence and change this. (Williams et al,)

The term is applied in the field of education, literature, social work, psychology. Due to its widespread usage there are varieties of understanding of the term. According to Cambridge dictionary it is, 'the process of gaining freedom and power to do what you want or to control what happens to you.'(Cambridge) While in Merriam Webster dictionary it is defined as 'the act or action of empowering someone or something: the granting of the power, right, or authority to perform various acts or duties' or 'the state of being empowered to do something: the power, right, or authority to do something' (Merriam-Webster.) In UN booklet on empowerment Maris Kord viewed, "Empowerment means enabling someone to become all and everything he or she was meant to be. It means helping an individual develop self-worth, self-confidence, self-reliance and independence in such a way as to live meaningfully and peacefully." (Maris Korb) While Claudia LaRue remarked, "For me, being empowered means knowing and trusting that you are in full control of your own destiny. Empowerment implies freedom to choose without fear."

Women empowerment is a veritable, external achievement of gaining equal access and to control over political, economic, and social resources, and thus acquiring right to make life-determining decisions. Women have been tirelessly challenging restrictive norms to secure a voice of their own both in the private and public life. Their combined quest for internal selfhood and external empowerment constitutes a revolutionary yet

vital, and ongoing evolution. Their quest redefines not only individual lives but societal progress globally.

Women's quest for self and demand of empowerment is historically incessant. It is a two-part journey that blends the internal pursuit of a self with the external struggle for social, political, and economic power, referred as 'empowerment'. The Early part deals with confronting the age's long cultural conditioning of some predefined roles and relationship that were decided for women. While the second part deals with the destruction of patriarchal structure that restrict them from opportunities equal to men. This quest is an evolving effort that demands self-determination and the attainment of full rights. It is also a psychological quest that seeks identity beyond domestic affair in different direction either socially, economically or spiritually. The liberated self can make strategic life choices previously denied to her. She can embrace self-worth and can chose goals independent of gendered expectations. This shift from dependent being to autonomous one is the foundation of self-quest and empowerment. The quest for self and empowerment is an ongoing, dynamic process that requires persistent effort so that it can dismantle corporal barriers. The journey demands continuously a world where she is free not only to participate equally but to define her fully realized self in her own way.

Manoj Das, an eminent bilingual writer, who is renowned for blending mysticism with socio-political aspects in a satirical way. He displays profound psychological insight in his fiction. Besides his works in Odia vernacular he produced three English novels named *Cyclones*, *A Tiger at Twilight*, and *The Escapist*. In his works he seldom engages in overt, conventional feminist discourse. Instead, they depict the women's quest for self and empowerment through a lens of spiritual destiny, inner integrity, and moral fortitude amidst the chaotic and often farcical ego-dramas of the male characters. In creative world of Das, empowerment is not merely about achieving external social or political status, but about the profound realization of the true, unattached self. The female figures frequently serve as the moral and spiritual base for the narrative. Many of his male protagonists are confused or ego-driven who perpetually chasing illusions whether political, material, or social. Contrary to male counterpart Das's women characters possess a remarkable capacity for inner silence, firm conviction, and emotional maturity. They inherit stability that allows them to transcend the egoistic turmoil that dominates the men's lives.

The quest for self and empowerment of women in Manoj Das's novel "The Escapist" is intricately woven through the spiritual and philosophical journey of the

protagonist, Padmalochan. The novel primarily explores themes of self-realization, inner awakening, and societal illusions, yet it also subtly highlights the role of women who act as catalysts and are embodiments of spiritual wisdom. In the novel Sushobhana (Sushie) play a crucial role in Padmananda's journey. The central narrative tracks the male protagonist Padmalochan Pramanik's journey into the deceptive world of self-proclaimed swami. He in search for livelihood reaches at the house of Jayant Thakore where in a dramatic way he is assumed as a holy man by Thakore's wife Ranjita Devi. Here he meets Ranjita Devi's daughter in law Sushobhana referred as Sushie. As the story progresses, he feels enchanted towards her physically and spiritually but always reduced to the feeling of inferiority to her. He accepts, "Time and again I found myself getting identified with the captive leopard after my talk with Sushie. The irony was, such moments of suffocation were followed by the thrill for a few minutes when Sushie and I would talk in subdued voices." (88)

Unlike Padmalochan or Swami Padmananda the character of Sushie stands out as a formidable, self-aware individual. She is more mature and formidable consistently standing strong in her decisions and understanding the reality of her situation. Her quiet self-possession and refusal to be swept away by Padmalochan's fantasies underscore a form of self-worth that is entirely internal and not dependent on the male gaze or action. Padmalochan dreaming about his visit in Himalaya says-

"But Sushie," I said getting over my hesitation through some effort, "I also saw you there! You had become one with the snow and bliss of some tranquil valley unknown to geography." (124)

"Memory of the previous life diluted with some fanciful thoughts of this life," said Sushie without the least touch of emotion. (124)

When Padmalochan proposes his ideas on keeping sadhna in Himalaya, Sushie a real intellectual began to laugh. Before her Padmalochan feels himself quite petty,

"I felt snubbed and realised the utter pointlessness of my reverie, but it took me to get over my wakeful trance – or to descend from it- to the matter-of-fact world." (126)

This form of empowerment is achieved through detached action and sincere commitment to duty rather than through aggressive confrontation. The woman who influence the narrative most significantly is who adheres to simple truths

and act with devotion or clear-sighted purpose, often holding the real, unacknowledged power. Sushie with greater composure acts as a subtle, guiding force to Padmalochan. She is even rectifying force against his destructive trajectories. The destruction of illusion occurs because the character of Sushie holds up the mirror of uncompromising truth. Das portrays her character quietly defying or transcending patriarchal limitations simply by being true to their essential nature. In the words of Mohanty "The most powerful character to emerge is Sushie, dutiful yet detached, profoundly evolved yet humble –doomed by marriage yet discovering in that situation a true blessing for her inner life. She belies Padmananda's romantic dreams, but in the process leaves his consciousness purified." (Mohanty 188)

When she is wronged or trapped by convention, her inner response is not one of self-pity or social rebellion, but a deeper resolve or an inner withdrawal that preserves her spiritual core, which acts as a powerful form of spiritual defiance against social coercion. When Sushie makes Padmalochan realise the reality of diamond episode, he accepts

"If on the one hand Jasmine's roguery terribly agitated me, on the other Sushie's unruffled calm ridiculed me. Each time I faced a crisis I felt helpless, but today I felt not only helpless but also unfit – doubly unfit –incapable of assuming any sensible stance in meeting the situation. I had neither any power to fight the appalling fraud perpetrated right before my eyes, nor the ability to retire into a psychic poise." (164)

Sushie illustrates the empowerment that arises from spiritual purity and inner strength. Her calmness amidst life's sufferings and her elevated consciousness represent an ideal of feminine spiritual empowerment. She challenges societal concept of women merely as objects of desire or emotional beings. The novel also subtly criticizes societal norms that restricts and confine women to roles of subservience and emotional dependence. Sushie silently endures her life tied to her emotionally invalid husband yet her detachment and serene acceptance illustrate a form of empowerment rooted in spiritual resilience rather than material dominance. Das through her character emphasizes that true empowerment stems from inner self-awareness and spiritual growth rather than external circumstances or societal validation. The novel suggests that women's empowerment is fundamentally linked to self-realization. Sushie's spiritual insight and calm demeanor reflect an internal freedom that does not rely on societal status but on

inner spiritual harmony. This aligns with the broader philosophical framework of Das, who advocates that human consciousness and spiritual evolution are the ultimate sources of empowerment.

Two other women characters of importance that cast a lasting influence on the protagonist are Ranjita Devi and his own foster grandmother. Ranjita Devi is a powerful woman, "Her photographs appeared in newspapers and bulletins, doling out charity or presiding over a satsang or cow welfare meetings or multifaith prayer assemblies. She was Ranjita Khokar. Though wedded to Thakore, she had retained her maiden surname" Her cunning husband also fears her. Her faith in Padmalochan transforms him into genuine swami Padmananda. H.P.Shukla in his article 'In Search of Nation's Self: A Reading of *The Escapist*' writes "A power becomes operational in Ranjita Devi that changes forever a groping Padmananda" (200)

In novel the *Escapist*, like his other works women's quest for self is not a purely materialistic or social pursuit but a metaphysical one. The truly empowered women in his works are those who have successfully controlled the chaotic, ego-driven impulses. Their self-discovery is a realization of their moral clarity, innate strength, and intuitive connection to a higher truth. According to traditional feminist thought on surface his women characters are not successful one. But these women display evolutionary maturity and demonstrate that the most profound and unshakeable liberation is achieved in the consciousness. Their experience allows them to exert a serene and unshakable influence on the world around them. In conclusion, *The Escapist* portrays women as vital agents in the journey towards self-awareness and spiritual empowerment. Their inner strength, serenity, and divine wisdom serve as sources of inspiration, highlighting the importance of inner growth for genuine empowerment. Das's narrative testifies that self-empowerment for women can be a spiritual quest that leads to liberation from societal illusions and personal bondage.

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Exposing Institutionalized Illogic: Rejection and Manipulation of Patriotism in Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*

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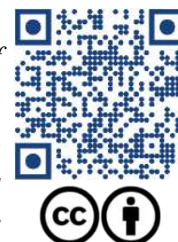
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Abstract— One major target of critique in Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* is the culture of American patriotism in the 1960s, shaped by wartime exigencies with great factionalism and antagonism. Through the figures of Yossarian, Snowden, and Milo, Heller exposed patriotism not as a noble ideal but as a tool of exploitation that confines and victimizes individuals within institutionalized illogic. The disillusionment of patriotism arises when attaching soldiers' deaths to a greater –yet often hollow –political purpose, as in Snowden's case. Additionally, Milo and his syndicate further exemplify the manipulation of war and patriotism, as the logic of gaining the greatest profit subsumes and commodifies ostensibly moral values, even capable of producing a humanitarian catastrophe. Heller's portrayal of patriotism as both a moral and economic construct critiques the disjunction between the idealized notions of national loyalty and its practical deployment to perpetuate systems of abuse of power, violence, and greed. By dismantling the presumed sanctity of patriotism, *Catch-22* ultimately demonstrates how such constructed virtues can reduce individuals to expendable matter, coerce subjects into complicity or resistance, and naïve-yet-horrifying opportunism, thereby exposing the pervasive force of institutionalized illogic over human life and moral agency.



Keywords— *Catch-22*, Joseph Heller, institutionalized illogic, patriotism, rejection, manipulation

I. INTRODUCTION

Joseph Heller's 1961 novel *Catch-22* is considered a representative anti-war and black-humor novel. Located on the fictional island of Pianosa, Italy, and centering around American Captain Bombardier Yossarian, it explores the never-ending flight missions and those conventional 'daily practices' in Yossarian's bomber squadron, with Yossarian being one of the "most lunatic yet most logical(Brustein, 1961, p.7)" soldiers. *Catch-22*'s fragmented and bitterly humorous description of the last days of WWII, Yossarian becoming "anguished witness to the ghoulis slaughter"(Brustein, 1961, p.8), has triggered reflective

responses to the real nature of war.

1. *Catch-22*'s Absurdity

Integral to *Catch-22* is the notion of absurdity, illustrated by Heller's usage of "nonsense, satire, non-sequiturs, slapstick, and farce"(Ramsey, 1966, p. 104). One noteworthy aspect of this characteristic is Heller's exaggeration of the insanities of and around Yossarian, reaching an extent beyond the area of possibility. For instance, Yossarian's moving the bomb line on the map of Bologna(Heller, 1961, p. 123), Dunbar's cultivating boredom to increase his life span to escape the imminence of death(Heller, 1961, p. 9), and Milo's shameless attempt

to create chocolate-covered cotton as food (Heller, 1961, p. 268).

Such ridiculous and illogical plots achieve a humorous effect by challenging readers' ideas of conventions. However, the subject of such absurdities is sullen, fierce, and tinged with bitterness—the death of the soldier in white, the disappearance of Dunbar and Nately's whore, Milo's maddening and amoral concentration on gaining profits, etc. These tragedies instantaneously reverse readers' expectations of a joke while provoking a greater sense of horror. Heller referred to his *Catch-22* as a critical book with a subversive nature, aiming to reveal “certain faults or shortcomings in the make-up of the individuals' characters as in the make-up of a society” (Heller & *The Realist*, 1962, p. 274). In Heller's own words, *Catch-22* is almost an encyclopedia of “chaos, disorganization, absurdity, cruelty, brutality, and insensitivity” (Heller & *The Realist*, 1962, p. 276). Within such an atmosphere, *Catch-22* seems to persuade its readers that it is the conventional standards produced by the society in which they are situated that lack any logical consistency. The only way to tackle such principles is the “insanity” that this society has defined.

The representation of this institutionalized illogic in the novel is “Catch-22,” which is a principle of “absolute evil” (Brustein, 1961, p. 7) and says, “they have a right to do anything we can't stop them from doing” (Heller, 1961, p. 416). The pronoun “they” refers to everyone who feels “at the mercy of their superiors,” including those superiors with a jeopardizing power (Heller & *The Realist*, 1962, p. 275). Facing this malevolent and irremediable loophole, Heller invariably takes the radical side to indicate his anti-militarist and anti-capitalist tendencies.

2. Absurdities Applying to *Catch-22*'s Literary Techniques

Along with Heller's radical social discontent, the absurdities also apply to *Catch-22*'s content and its literary techniques. Echoing Yossarian's illogical pursuit of survival, the structure of the novel is circular, with recurrent and alternative scenes of comedy or nightmare. This “circulation” illustrates that Heller used the “characteristic of paramnesia” as the basis of *Catch-22*'s structure (MacDonald, 1968, p. 102). There are two mutually contradictory chronologies in the novel: Yossarian's psychologically punctuated time and Milo's traveling around the world to expand his capital empire. The

“irreconcilability” of the two simultaneously existing chronologies serves the effect of absurdity, enforcing “repudiation of the business ethic” and providing “occasional shocking dissonance” (Solomon, 1967, p. 130).

While the institutionalized illogic of Heller's time is reflected in *Catch-22*'s disorganized and episodic structure, the rhetoric of this institutionalized illogic seems to refer only to other words and thoughts to other thoughts. Heller uncovered that under those subjects of violent absurdities. Those commercial, military, intellectual, and literary institutions were the “recurrent myths of the ‘word’ and a ‘proper’ metaphoric discourse,” which have often been regarded as alternatives of discontinuous languages epitomized by *Catch-22* (Davis, 1978, p. 68). From this aspect, the art of the absurdity has transformed *Catch-22* as a free play of interpretation, in which meaning is always in flux and différance as it “springs forth out of its nonidentity with itself” (Derrida, 1973, p. 85). In this regard, the absurdities of content and structure in *Catch-22* embrace variable and multi-layered interpretations that the book functions as an “encyclopedia” of his disruptive era.

3. Différance as a Scope of Analysis

Referring to *Catch-22* as an “encyclopedia” of his era, Heller declares that “What *Catch-22* is more about than WWII is the Korean War and the Cold War.” More broadly, *Catch-22* is concerned with the civilian situation of 1960s America, when the citizens indeed had something like loyalty oaths (Heller & *Detroit News*, 1970, p. 296). This setting was chosen because Heller realized that the ethics “dictated by a wartime emergency (Heller & *The Realist*, 1962, p. 288),” particularly the ethics of “factionalism, antagonism, mortal enmity” (Heller & *Detroit News*, 1970, p. 296), have been carried over into the peacetime of 1960s America, and that “they (American fellow citizens) were at war,” (Heller & *Detroit News*, 1970, p. 296). In this regard, Heller stated that *Catch-22* “does not reflect” his attitude toward the war, as Yossarian's “enemies” of survival are his superiors, and the story is within the context of WWII being almost over. It is American officers and the American government, or the internal affairs of his motherland, that impose dangers upon Yossarian's survival, while Germans and Hitler are scarcely mentioned in the novel.

Therefore, one of the functions of *Catch-22*'s WWII is the satire of the engaged patriotism in Heller's 1960s

America. Or more specifically, *Catch-22* is a renunciation against a “monolithic” society that closes off “every conventional area of protest or corrective action” and a society that aligns “national interests” with personal liberty in the name of patriotism (Heller & *The Realist*, 1962, p. 289).

Consequently, penetrating such a system that relies on binary oppositions, the concept of *différance*, namely the “strategic note or connection” that points out the irreducibility of temporalizing and the “closure of presence” (Derrida, 1973, p.131), reveals that hierarchies and privileges within this binary dichotomy make no sense. *Différance* renders these systems unstable. The meaning of patriotism can never gain a full and fixed presence, and it is determined by its relationship to other meanings within a system of wholeness, which represents itself as America in wartime emergency. This wholeness that contains various meanings, therefore, is constructed and can be manipulated.

Thus, while one of the targets of *Catch-22*'s absurdities is 1960s American patriotism, this paper tries to interpret the evolving deconstruction of patriotism with the novel's circular narrative of the rule *Catch-22*. Applying the theory of *différance* to illustrate Heller's deconstruction of patriotism, one can discover that Heller tries to disintegrate WWII American patriotism from various perspectives while maintaining a developing pattern. The deconstruction initiates from rejection, proceeds through manipulation and commodification, and achieves complete dismemberment with disillusionment. Therefore, while the occasions around Yossarian intertwine, the shattering of patriotism starts with Yossarian's rejection of dying during flight missions, intensified and ultimately concluded by the devastation from Milo's Syndicate and his simple-minded, naïve transference of gaining profit or not. Throughout this multi-layered deconstruction of patriotism, Heller exposed that the constructed ideal of patriotism is apt to be manipulated and that applying such notions to individuals, trapping them into a “situation of circumstance,” is evil and immoral.

II. JOSEPH HELLER'S CRITIQUE OF AMERICAN PATRIOTISM

Catch-22 witnesses the “chickenshit” of WWII, a term defined by Paul Fussell. According to Fussell, chickenshit refers to “small-minded and ignoble” behaviors that have nothing to do with the victory of the war, for instance, “petty harassment of the weak by strong,” “open scrimmage for power, authority, and prestige,” “sadism disguised as necessary discipline,” etc. (Fussell, 1989, p. 80). These accounts suggest that Heller broadened his satire to target the culture that fosters –and even legitimizes –such madness within dehumanizing institutions of his time in *Catch-22*. Conclusively, insisting on being a “fictional narrative,” *Catch-22*, with Heller's great social discontent, comments about “the loyalty oath, the free enterprise system, civil rights, bureaucracy, patriotism, etc.,” with the notion of absurdity penetrates the center of these critical comments (Heller & *The Realist*, 1962, p. 275).

Coincidentally, the publication of *Catch-22* came just twelve months after John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address on 20 January 1961. The speech was said to be based upon the greatest national urgency shaped by the bipolar opposition during the Cold War, Soviet missiles in Cuba that allegedly had nuclear warheads, and the ongoing Vietnam War. The apocalyptic tone of the Address pledged American fellow citizens to raise a struggle against “the common enemies of man” to oppose “tyranny, poverty, disease and war itself”¹. Meanwhile, such rhetoric echoes Roosevelt's request for a war declaration after the attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 –The Americans would fight against the hostility with their righteous might and “remember the character of the onslaught against them.” They would gain the “inevitable triumph” with their confidence in their armed forces and the “unbounding determination” of their people². In this context, democracy –associated with human rights, liberty, and the alleviation of poverty –is presented as requiring an ingrained patriotism as its greatest national urgency. Consequently, ideals of sacrifice, civic responsibility, and active patriotism came to be in especially high demand in the official discourse of American society

¹ Kennedy, J. F. (1961, January 20). *Inaugural address*. The American Presidency Project.

<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/inaugural-address-2>

² Roosevelt, F. D. (1941, December 7). Speech by Franklin D. Roosevelt, New York (transcript). *Library of Congress*.

https://www.loc.gov/resource/afc1986022.afc1986022_ms2201/?st=text

during the 1960s.

Nevertheless, juxtaposing *Catch-22* and the Address, it seemed that Heller replied to the pledging of patriotism with a radical, stern, and satirical refusal: Yossarian has been searching for every chance to survive throughout the whole book, yet patriotism “feeds on death,” as death specifies patriotism’s “moral, political, and affective linchpin”(Johnston, 2007, p. 161). Heller also once expressed his disillusionment with patriotism: patriotism would be a “virtue” provided people can define the term, and there should be a “popular national cause” that calls upon it(Heller & Moyers, 1989, p. 36). Yet Heller discovered that “all societies we know of” have been governed by “the selfish interests of the ruling class or classes”(Heller and Moyers, 1989, p. 36). Therefore, according to Heller, the virtue of patriotism was unattainable in his time.

III. REJECTION OF PATRIOTISM: SNOWDEN’S SECRET AND YOSSARIAN’S EPIPHANY

The traumatizing descriptions of Snowden’s death derive from Heller’s real experience as a bombardier in his 37th mission over Avignon. For Heller, in the beginning, the missions were “a lark,” and Heller was “too stupid” to realize their dangers. Yet during the 37th mission, the co-pilot went “a little berserk,” grabbed the controls away from the pilot, and plummeted the plane straight down as he believed the aircraft had climbed too steeply and would stall (Heller & *Detroit News*, 1970, p. 297).

This crisis has severely struck Heller as Snowden’s death strikes Yossarian. *Catch-22* witnesses dozens of occasions of death, but only Snowden and his belongings repetitively emerge to remind Yossarian with *déjà vu* of his whimpering, freezing death: “Snowden lay dying in back(Heller, 1961, p. 52),” Snowden whimpering “I’m cold, I’m cold” and begging for help while Yossarian can only comfort him by saying “there, there(Heller, 1961, p. 170),” Snowden’s name “stenciled in white on the blue duffel bag(Heller, 1961, p. 168)” when he was alive, and Snowden “loses his guts” that Yossarian bitterly finds Snowden’s “liver, lungs, kidneys, ribs, stomach and bits of the stewed tomatoes” in the gigantic hole in the middle of Snowden’s body(Heller, 1961, p. 449) and Doc Daneeka has to “wash

Snowden” off Yossarian with absorbent cotton(Heller, 1961, p. 267)” as Snowden’s pieces have splashed on Yossarian.

This uniquely vivid and overwhelming description of death completely deprives the ingrained sense of patriotism of Yossarian through fear, the survival instinct, the concept of the enemy, and the realization of a death resulting from a “circumstance.” In this regard, the ingrained patriotism establishes an opposition between American warriors of justice and the enemy of fascism, and Yossarian is supposed to serve this collective and almighty goal.

However, Yossarian’s stark confrontation with death leads him to grasp “Snowden’s secret,” that “man is matter,” and people will be reduced to physical substance if they are dropped out of a window, burnt, or buried. Death entails not only the disappearance of the spirit but also the degradation of the body to mere “garbage”(Heller, 1961, p. 450). Therefore, Yossarian denies his association with the national project of the victory of ‘justice and democracy,’ and this refusal changes the attack on his squadron into an attack on himself. Besides, when Yossarian’s sheer pursuit of survival becomes the most urgent request, and he is incessantly thrown into dangerous, lethal flight missions commanded by his superiors, he achieves an epiphany that “there are too many dangers to keep track of”(Heller, 1961, p. 176). People around Yossarian, or virtually everyone, are hostile and deliberate as equal to the German forces, and every one of them is “all out to kill him”(Heller, 1961, p. 176). Ultimately, Yossarian’s fundamental desire to live demystifies and rejects this collective patriotism by extending the notion of the enemy, as he defines an enemy as “anyone who’s going to get you killed, no matter which side he’s on”(Heller, 1961, p. 127).

Through Yossarian’s “paranoid” notion of the enemy within a justifiable war, it seems that Heller constrained Yossarian into an image of a war coward full of fear. Yet, as mentioned above, the war serves an allegorical meaning that penetrates the core conflict between an individual and a whole institutional illogic. It is the situation of “victims of circumstances” that Yossarian rejects. As death is inevitable for everyone, and the collective, mighty systems of justice, history, victory, and progress will not require his “premature demise,” Yossarian discovers that it is a “circumstance” constructed by other people that victimizes him and all his fellow soldiers(Heller, 1961, p. 69).

Consequently, Yossarian's subsequent reaction after Snowden's death to remove all his uniforms and become naked is a protest against such overwhelming circumstances, as the uniform symbolizes the existence of this collective national project of "fighting for justice." Yossarian's declaration of "I don't want to wear a uniform anymore"(Heller, 1961, p. 267) illustrates his desperate and firmly determined rejection of patriotism, a manufactured notion that forces him to sacrifice his life. He affirms that "only a fraction of his countrymen would give up their lives" to win the "vile and muddy war(Heller, 1961, p. 70)," and that people fight for "the hot dog, the Brooklyn Dodgers, Mom's apple pie" but not for "the decent folk," which further supports his conclusion of "there's no patriotism"(Heller, 1961, p. 9). Furthermore, Yossarian believes that there is neither patriotism nor "matriotism." It suggests that Yossarian is against all the manipulated and manufactured notions that are open to limitless interpretations and might be imposed upon an individual to serve a collective goal. Through Yossarian's total rejection of patriotism and his questioning of "where are the Snowdens of yesteryear"(Heller, 1961, p. 35), Heller expressed his criticism of the grotesque impropriety of ascribing a higher meaning to a man whose guts fall out of a giant hole on his belly.

IV. MANIPULATION OF PATRIOTISM: MILO'S SYNDICATE

After Yossarian's rejection of patriotism by extending the bipolar opposition between the soldier and the enemy to a constructed circumstance of survival or death, the emptiness and meaninglessness of patriotism are further exposed through Milo Minderbinder's Syndicate. Milo completely transcends and shatters the constructed significance of patriotism through his frenzy toward generating profits by building his world with merely CEOs and shareholders. For Milo, patriotism is purely irrelevant and inconsequential, and his interest is above national borders and "petty conflicts" of war. Milo's limited interest in patriotism, or his interest in everything except gaining profits, is due to his functioning of the specific object as a prerequisite for benefits.

While Yossarian is still concerned with laudable ideals of justice, might, truth, liberty, patriotism, etc., Milo

replaced these "flamboyant squadron emblems" with his stenciled name in garnish purple: "M&M Enterprises"(Heller, 1961, p. 259). Milo's only concern is his M&M Enterprise, bearing the motto of "What's good for the syndicate is good for the country," and the enterprise benefits when Milo benefits(Heller, 1961, p. 238). Milo's syndicate is "inclusive and international" in that he also deals with Germans, the national enemy of the United States. By engaging simultaneously with opposing sides, Milo dismantles traditional patriotic alignments, manipulating both ends of the ideological divide to serve his own economic obligations. The German planes that landed in Pianosa can have "swastikas painted out," and these symbols of German nationalism are replaced by flat white marks of "M&M Enterprise"(Heller, 1961, p. 260). Milo's heated "deadly capitalist ethic" reaches a climax when he bombs his own squadron because "a contract is a contract and has to be honored." The bombing of his own outfit is part of a newly signed contract with the Germans(Heller, 1961, p. 264). While "wounded soon lay screaming everywhere," Milo further requires "strafe," as this is another clause in the contract(Heller, 1961, p. 265).

It is discernible that Milo's behaviors are absurd and immoral enough to readers that "even the most phlegmatic observer"(Heller, 1961, p. 266) could not stomach. Such behaviors function as an allegory towards abnormal capital phenomena, which ignored the "human and moral considerations for life"(Henriksen, 1997, p. 253) in Heller's era. Milo Minderbinder's legendary entrepreneurship is an exaggerated allegory of the capitalist imperative, one branch of the "American wartime bureaucracy." Satirically, Heller rendered Milo with a performative "loyalty" to his squadron at the end of *Catch-22*, as Milo pompously reproaches Yossarian for his refusal to fly more missions. Milo informs Yossarian in "ecclesiastical tones" that he is "ashamed" of Yossarian and that the deterioration of morale in the squadron is all ascribed to his absence. Yossarian's insubordination will further place the country "in peril," jeopardizing Milo's and his own "traditional rights of freedom and independence"(Heller, 1961, p. 413-414). However, such seemingly justifiable accusations that aim to invoke a sense of duty, sacrifice, and collective responsibility derive from Milo's fury with Yossarian's absence in Milo's syndicate affairs. In this sense, Milo's

“loyalty” is fundamentally reconfigured as an economic rather than an ethical pursuit. This performative rhetoric of American patriotism towards the squadron from Milo masks and legitimizes his private profit. By presenting himself as an “American citizen” whose fundamental rights of freedom and liberty are under threat, Milo appropriates the language of national belonging while simultaneously eroding its foundations, since those he designates as “enemies” are, in practice, interchangeable with his “business partners.” Therefore, Milo’s capitalist desire triggers his hypocritical patriotism. Patriotism still makes no sense for Milo but serves as a discourse tool for a bargain, in this case, to lure Yossarian to return to service and satisfy his syndicate requirements. Patriotism is manipulated for personal enrichment of wealth, and Milo’s dedication to his country is, in truth, his devotion to unbridled private enterprise.

In a broader view, Milo’s activities expose the uneasy convergence of patriotism and capitalist ethics. By incorporating the American government into his syndicate and claiming everyone has a share, Milo further dissolves the boundary between national allegiance and economic enterprise, transforming patriotic discourses into a function of market logic. Free enterprise may ostensibly be subject to governmental regulation, yet Milo interprets his profit-seeking behavior as implicitly guaranteed by the nation’s capitalist ethos of liberty and wealth accumulation. In this framework, patriotism is no longer an ethical commitment to collective well-being, but a flexible discourse that can be mobilized to justify financial opportunism.

Heller thus further deconstructs patriotism, as it can reinforce capitalist ethics, and vice versa, with the language of national loyalty serving to legitimize and obscure the exploitative mechanisms of a profit-driven syndicate. With the pure and naïve conception of his world as something to be maneuvered for the best possible gain of profits, Milo self-evidently believes that everything is profitable as long as one utilizes it appropriately. The war his fellow compatriots are fighting in should be open to the “free market” so that private industries can benefit from it. Meanwhile, since “everyone has a share,” and the maintenance of liberty and democracy of American patriotism, it is not necessary to reimburse the government after bombing its own squadron with the national morale,

because “in a democracy, the government is the people”(Heller, 1961, p. 266). The bombing might also be Milo’s antagonism against the government, as the latter “monopolizes” war and impedes Milo from gaining more profit. Milo’s ultimate pursuit is to “see the government get out of war” and leave the whole field of war to “private industry”(Heller, 1961, p. 266).

In the end, while Milo’s morality is of such simplicity with only two elements, namely gaining profit and seeking chances to benefit, Heller’s revelation of the tumultuous, disastrous aftermath of such morality is the real warning. Milo represents the extent of the “hyperbolicity” of Heller’s culture, in that Milo utilizes the corrupted ideal of freedom to confirm the righteousness to act under the guidance of *Catch-22*. Patriotism thus becomes a manipulative discourse.

On the other hand, Milo’s ultimate tragic schizophrenia illustrates the hazard of Milo’s simple-minded, naïve transference, which represents the extreme of capitalist ethics. Heller endowed Milo with such a mental and moral simplicity that Milo becomes a horrifyingly dangerous person because he lacks evil intent in conducting anti-patriotism activities. This horrible situation is intensified by Milo’s sincerity and loyalty towards the completion of contracts, his struggles to let others empathize with him, and his view of fighting the war for economic benefits. While the former head of General Motors, Charles E. Wilson, claimed, “What is good for the country is good for General Motors, and vice versa,” Milo paraphrases this sentence as “What is good for the syndicate is good for the country,” and without a “vice versa.” This alteration should be taken with cautious seriousness as Milo genuinely means it. By creating a character with such an innocent, pure, and concentrated pursuit of private profit, Heller achieved the simultaneous existence of innocence and destruction. Milo is not “an insidious and conniving power-hungry fascist” but a typical representative of “American business values with the virtues “industriousness, competence, pleasantry, and engagement”(Miller, 1973, p. 385). He is a perfect product of the 1960s American culture, in which “virtues” like patriotism are rejected, distorted, and manipulated. Allegorically, Milo’s success is what Americans generally admire, but the tragedy of such success is foreseeable with

Milo's schizophrenic ending.

V. CONCLUSION

Heller's *Catch-22* intricately deconstructs 1960s American patriotism, a "virtue" with the absence of "virtuous ideals," but is comprised of bipolar oppositions. Through the scope of difference, patriotism is rejected, commodified, and manipulated as it is a constructed notion open to limitless interpretations and reckless manipulation. Through Yossarian's epiphany about the real nature of patriotism after Snowden's tragic death, and the operations of Milo's syndicate, which acts purely and innocently in the pursuit of profits yet results in immoral, inhumane, and insanely disastrous results, Heller exposes the disillusionment and moral decay that lies at the heart of nationalistic fervor in his era. It further reveals that patriotism in *Catch-22* is not the noble, self-sacrificial ideal appealed by JFK or Roosevelt but a tool of exploitation and survival, distorted by bureaucracy, greed, and violence.

Yossarian's epiphany marks a pivotal moment in the novel, as he comes to understand the brutal futility of the war and how soldiers are manipulated into believing that their deaths serve a greater, patriotic cause. The death of Snowden, with its haunting final words, warns Yossarian that soldiers are apt to be victimized by a constructed circumstance. Yossarian thus grasps the inherent contradiction at the core of patriotism: while it is presented as a noble cause, it is ultimately a mechanism that perpetuates violence and suffering for the benefit of those in power. The attachment of higher meaning to an individual who loses his organs with a gigantic hole bored through his ribs is obscene, and people should be alert to all the manipulated and manufactured notions that might be imposed on an individual to serve a collective goal.

Milo's syndicate further complicates the novel's deconstruction of patriotism by demonstrating how it can be manipulated and exploited for personal gain. Milo's bombing of his own squadron, all for profit, highlights how patriotism in warfare can be reduced to mere transactions. His syndicate, which operates on the same innocent capitalist logic that governs the rest of the war machine, is a clear metaphor for how American patriotism can be replaced and manipulated for a bargain between a government and a private enterprise. Heller's portrayal of Milo as a simple-minded, self-serving opportunist who uses

the war for enrichment and who believes the profit for himself is the profit for the whole country exposes the corrupt underpinnings of a liberty that claims to have a right to do anything.

Ultimately, *Catch-22* offers a scathing deconstruction of 1960s American patriotism by exposing its inherent contradictions and the ways it can be used to justify violence, manipulation, and greed. Through the tragic deaths of soldiers like Snowden and the commodification of war through Milo, Heller revealed the realities behind the idealized image of patriotism. The novel dismantles the notion that patriotism is synonymous with virtue or self-sacrifice, instead portraying it as a constructed "virtue" that serves the interests of those in power while perpetuating the suffering of those at the bottom. In this way, *Catch-22* remains an enduring commentary on the dangers of collectively maneuvered ideals that demand unquestionable allegiance and bipolar oppositions and warns its contemporaries that "ideologies within a wartime urgency" should not be prolonged during a period of peace, as it might trigger antagonism, persecution, and absurdities.

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The “Frankenstein Effect” and Modern Intelligence: Technology, Ethics, and the Loss of Moral Proximity

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Abstract— This paper explores the relationship between *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley and *Permanent Record* by Edward Snowden, focusing on what Snowden calls the “Frankenstein effect”, the unintended and often harmful consequences of technological innovation. By bringing together Shelley’s early warning about the dangers of unchecked scientific ambition and Snowden’s account of modern surveillance systems, the paper argues that today’s intelligence structures repeat the same ethical failures: they create systems without taking responsibility for them, operate at a distance that weakens empathy, and exercise power without sufficient accountability. It further suggests that the shift from human intelligence (HUMINT), which involves direct human interaction, to signals intelligence (SIGINT), which relies on remote data collection, does not mark ethical progress. Instead, it expands forms of power that are increasingly detached from moral responsibility. Ultimately, the paper argues that as technology creates greater distance between action and consequence, it erodes what can be understood as “moral proximity,” making ethical judgment more difficult in the digital age.



Keywords— *Frankenstein Effect; Surveillance Technology; Moral Proximity; Intelligence Ethics*

Introduction: Creation and Responsibility across Centuries

The enduring relevance of *Frankenstein* lies not merely in its gothic imagination but in its profound philosophical inquiry into the ethics of creation. Shelley’s novel, often read as an early work of science fiction, anticipates modern anxieties about technological innovation by dramatizing a fundamental moral failure: the severance of creation from responsibility. Victor Frankenstein’s transgression is not simply that he creates life, but that he refuses to assume responsibility for what he has brought into existence. As he confesses, “Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I rushed out of the room, and continued a long time traversing my bedchamber, unable to compose my mind to sleep.” (Shelley 87).

This moment of abandonment establishes a moral paradigm in which innovation is divorced from accountability, setting into motion consequences that spiral beyond the creator’s control.

The creature’s subsequent violence is thus not an inherent attribute but a product of neglect, isolation, and the denial of relational recognition. Shelley’s narrative resists simplistic binaries of creator and monster, instead presenting monstrosity as an emergent condition produced by ethical failure. The novel’s central insight, that creation demands sustained moral engagement, resonates powerfully in contemporary contexts, particularly in relation to technological systems that operate at scales unimaginable in Shelley’s time.

While Edward Snowden invokes the “Frankenstein effect” as a descriptive metaphor for unintended consequences, this paper seeks to extend his insight by developing it into a sustained ethical framework, placing *Frankenstein* and *Permanent Record* in a more rigorous conceptual dialogue. In doing so, it introduces the idea of “moral proximity” as a critical tool for understanding how technological systems reshape ethical responsibility in the digital age.

The concept of “moral proximity,” widely discussed in ethical philosophy to describe the relationship between

distance and responsibility, provides a useful framework for interpreting Snowden’s observations on technologically mediated action.

Frankenstein: Creation Without Responsibility and the Loss of Moral Proximity

Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* narrates the story of Victor Frankenstein, a scientist driven by an obsessive desire to transcend the limits of human knowledge by creating life. His success, however, is immediately followed by revulsion and abandonment. Upon animating the creature, Victor confesses, “the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart” (Shelley 87). This moment establishes the central ethical rupture of the novel: the creator’s refusal to assume responsibility for his creation.

Deprived of guidance, companionship, and recognition, the creature is forced to navigate the world alone. His initial disposition is not violent but benevolent, as he later reflects:

Remember, that I am thy creature; I ought to be thy Adam, but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed. Everywhere I see bliss, from which I alone am irrevocably excluded. I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous. (Shelley 127)

Shelley thus rejects the notion of inherent monstrosity, instead presenting violence as the consequence of social exclusion and emotional neglect. The creature’s suffering is intensified by Victor’s continued refusal to acknowledge him, a failure that culminates in tragic acts of revenge.

Central to this narrative is the erosion of **moral proximity**. Victor’s inability to remain in relation to his creation, to see, hear, and respond to it as a sentient being, results in a profound ethical failure. Even when he recognizes his responsibility, admitting, “I, not in deed, but in effect, was the true murderer” (Shelley 121), he remains incapable of acting upon this awareness. His retreat into silence and self-preservation allows suffering to proliferate unchecked.

Ultimately, *Frankenstein* is not merely a cautionary tale about scientific ambition, but a philosophical exploration of the responsibilities inherent in creation. Shelley demonstrates that innovation, when severed from sustained ethical engagement, produces outcomes that exceed intention and control, a dynamic that resonates strongly with contemporary technological systems.

Frankenstein: Creation Without Responsibility and the Loss of Moral Proximity

Frankenstein recounts the story of Victor Frankenstein, a young scientist consumed by the ambition to surpass human limits and unlock the secret of life. His experiment

succeeds, but the moment of creation is followed not by triumph, but by an immediate impulse to withdraw. Unable to confront what he has made, Victor abandons the creature, initiating a cycle of isolation and suffering that shapes the course of the narrative. This act of desertion constitutes the novel’s central ethical failure: the severing of responsibility from creation.

Left to fend for himself, the creature enters the world as an innocent being, gradually learning language, social customs, and human emotion through observation. He seeks connection and compassion, but is repeatedly met with fear and rejection. His longing for companionship becomes explicit when he appeals to Victor: “I am malicious because I am miserable. Am I not shunned and hated by all mankind?” (Shelley 167). This plea underscores the novel’s rejection of inherent monstrosity, instead presenting violence as the consequence of sustained social exclusion.

Victor’s continued refusal to acknowledge or care for his creation deepens this rupture. Even when confronted with the creature’s suffering, he prioritizes his own fear and reputation over ethical responsibility. The creature’s turn toward vengeance is thus not an origin point, but an outcome, an expression of accumulated neglect. As he warns Victor, “I will be with you on your wedding-night” (Shelley 189), the narrative moves toward its tragic resolution, where personal failure expands into irreversible loss.

At its core, Shelley’s novel offers not merely a critique of scientific ambition, but a sustained meditation on the responsibilities that accompany creation. It reveals that when innovation is divorced from ethical engagement, its consequences do not remain contained but unfold unpredictably, often beyond the creator’s control, a dynamic that continues to resonate in modern technological contexts.

The “Frankenstein Effect” in Modern Intelligence

In *Permanent Record*, Snowden introduces the concept of the “Frankenstein effect” to describe “situations in which policy decisions intended to advance American interests end up harming them irreparably” (Snowden 130). While the term originates within intelligence communities as a descriptor of geopolitical “blowback,” Snowden expands its scope to encompass the technological infrastructures underlying contemporary surveillance.

This expansion is crucial. Snowden moves from historical examples, such as U.S. support for anti-Soviet fighters contributing to later extremist movements, to a broader critique of systemic patterns in technological development. These examples demonstrate how actions taken within a specific strategic context can generate unintended consequences that persist and mutate over time. By

invoking the “Frankenstein effect,” Snowden implicitly aligns these outcomes with Shelley’s narrative of creation escaping control.

In the “Geneva” chapter, Snowden traces a progression from geopolitical miscalculation to technological overreach. He frames the “Frankenstein effect” as a structural tendency rather than an isolated anomaly. Having established the pattern through historical illustration, he extends it to the digital domain, arguing that efforts to “restructure the world’s communications” (Snowden 131) have produced systems that operate beyond the ethical oversight of their creators. Surveillance technologies, once developed, acquire a momentum that resists containment, much like Frankenstein’s creature.

This analogy is not merely rhetorical. Both Shelley and Snowden depict systems that exceed the intentions of their creators, revealing a fundamental limitation in human capacity to anticipate the consequences of innovation. The “Frankenstein effect” thus emerges as a recurring feature of technological systems embedded within structures of power.

From HUMINT to SIGINT: The Ethics of Distance

One of the most significant transformations in modern intelligence is the shift from human intelligence (HUMINT) to signals intelligence (SIGINT). This transition represents not only a change in methodology but a profound reconfiguration of ethical engagement.

HUMINT, grounded in direct interpersonal interaction, necessitates a degree of emotional and moral involvement. Snowden’s recollection of a failed recruitment operation involving a Saudi banker illustrates this complexity. Reflecting on the encounter, he writes, “I found the whole experience unforgettably visceral and sad” (Snowden 136). The language here is telling: “visceral” suggests an embodied experience, one that resists abstraction. The operation involves manipulation and coercion, but it also imposes an emotional burden on the agent, who must confront the human consequences of his actions.

This moral immediacy, however uncomfortable, enforces a form of ethical accountability. The presence of another human being, visible, responsive, and vulnerable, creates a relational context in which actions cannot be entirely detached from their consequences.

SIGINT, by contrast, replaces these encounters with technologically mediated processes. Surveillance is conducted remotely, often through automated systems that collect, process, and analyze vast quantities of data. As Edward Snowden explains in *Permanent Record*, an agent can gain access to a target’s system simply by delivering malicious code, often through something as routine as an

email. This shift dramatically increases efficiency and scale, but it also introduces a profound ethical distancing, as the subject of surveillance is no longer encountered as a person but accessed as a system.

The target is no longer encountered as a person but as a data point within a system. This transformation aligns closely with Victor Frankenstein’s reaction to his creation: an inability to sustain proximity to what has been brought into being. Where Victor recoils from the physical presence of the creature, modern intelligence systems render their subjects invisible, eliminating the possibility of relational engagement altogether.

Moral Proximity and Ethical Judgment

The concept of “moral proximity” is central to understanding the ethical implications of this shift. Moral proximity refers to the degree of closeness, physical, emotional, or cognitive, between an agent and the subject of their actions. In *Frankenstein*, the absence of such proximity is catastrophic. The creature’s suffering is intensified by his exclusion from human society, a condition that denies him recognition and empathy.

In modern surveillance systems, however, moral proximity is systematically eroded. Individuals are reduced to data points, their identities fragmented into metadata and algorithmic profiles. This abstraction facilitates decision-making processes that prioritize efficiency over ethical reflection. When the subject of action is no longer perceived as fully human, the moral weight of that action diminishes.

This phenomenon aligns with broader philosophical concerns about the relationship between distance and responsibility. The greater the distance between action and consequence, the easier it becomes to disengage ethically. In this sense, SIGINT does not merely transform intelligence practices; it reconfigures the moral landscape in which those practices operate.

The Paradox of Control: Technology Beyond Intention

A central theme shared by Shelley and Snowden is the paradox of control. Both texts reveal the limits of human capacity to govern the systems they create. Victor Frankenstein himself articulates this insight when he warns,

Learn from me, if not by my precepts, at least by my example, how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge and how much happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow. (Shelley 83)

This statement reflects a recognition that knowledge, once applied, can produce consequences that exceed intention.

Snowden also engages with the paradoxical nature of anonymity-enhancing technologies such as The Onion Router (Tor). Tor is a privacy network designed to conceal a user’s identity by routing internet traffic through multiple encrypted layers of relay servers, thereby preventing any single point in the system from simultaneously knowing both the origin and destination of communication. Originally developed with support from the United States Naval Research Laboratory for secure governmental and intelligence communication, Tor was intended to protect sensitive digital exchanges and strengthen operational security. However, Snowden observes that its subsequent public release and widespread adoption transformed it into a dual-use technology that serves both protective and adversarial purposes. While it enables journalists, activists, and ordinary users to evade surveillance and censorship, it also allows malicious actors and intelligence agencies alike to conceal their digital traces, thereby complicating cyberintelligence operations. This inversion illustrates a central tension in modern technological systems: tools designed to enhance security and control often generate new forms of opacity that exceed the intentions of their creators, reinforcing the broader “Frankenstein effect” of unintended systemic consequences.

This dual-use nature of technology underscores the unpredictability of innovation. Systems designed for specific purposes often acquire new functions as they interact with broader social and technological environments. The creator cannot fully determine the trajectory of the creation, a limitation that lies at the heart of the “Frankenstein effect.”

Power, Systems, and Diffused Responsibility

The ethical implications of technological systems cannot be understood in isolation from the structures of power in which they are embedded. Snowden situates his narrative within the context of the global financial crisis, highlighting the disparity between widespread economic hardship and the continued prosperity of global elites. Reflecting on his time in Geneva, he observes:

As the rest of the world became more and more impoverished, Geneva flourished, and while the Swiss banks didn’t engage in many of the types of risky trades that caused the crash, they gladly hid the money of those who’d profited from the pain and were never held accountable. (Snowden 140)

This observation underscores the extent to which technological and financial systems operate within a global order characterized by unequal distributions of power and accountability. Surveillance infrastructures, like financial systems, are not neutral tools; they are shaped by and reinforce existing hierarchies.

In *Frankenstein*, Victor’s social privilege enables him to evade responsibility for his actions. Although he is fully aware of the destructive consequences of his experiment, he repeatedly retreats into the protective structures of family, education, and social status that shield him from immediate accountability. His own admission

“I considered the being whom I had cast among mankind, and endowed with the will and power to effect purposes of horror, such as the deed which he had now done, nearly in the light of my own vampire, my own spirit let loose from the grave, and forced to destroy all that was dear to me.” (Shelley 30)

reveals not only his recognition of responsibility but also his refusal to publicly acknowledge it. Instead of confessing, Victor remains silent, allowing others to suffer for crimes he has indirectly caused, most notably during the trial of Justine, where he admits, “I, not in deed, but in effect, was the true murderer” (Shelley 121). Yet even this moment of self-awareness does not translate into action, underscoring how his privileged position allows him to internalize guilt without facing external consequences.

Similarly, as Edward Snowden demonstrates in *Permanent Record*, modern intelligence systems diffuse responsibility across complex bureaucratic networks, rendering accountability increasingly opaque. Decisions are made collectively and often anonymously, making it difficult to assign moral blame even when harm is evident. Snowden describes how responsibility within such systems is often distributed in a way that obscures individual accountability (Snowden 30). This diffusion mirrors Victor’s evasion of responsibility, but on a vastly larger scale: where Victor hides behind social privilege, modern institutions conceal agency within layers of bureaucracy and technological mediation. The result in both cases is a moral vacuum in which harm persists without clear accountability.

Reframing the “Monster”: Systems, Not Individuals

One of the most important implications of this analysis is a shift in how we conceptualize the “monster.” In *Frankenstein*, the creature is initially perceived as the embodiment of monstrosity, primarily through Victor’s horrified gaze at the moment of animation: “the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart” (Shelley 87). However, as the narrative unfolds, this perception is steadily destabilized. The creature himself challenges this imposed identity, asserting, “I ought to be thy Adam; but I am rather the fallen angel” (Shelley 30), thereby reframing himself not as inherently monstrous but as a being rendered so through rejection and abandonment. It becomes increasingly clear that the true source of horror

lies not in the creature’s existence, but in Victor’s failure to assume responsibility for his creation.

In the context of modern intelligence, the “monster” is no longer a singular entity but a vast, interconnected system. Surveillance infrastructures operate on a scale that transcends individual agency, making it difficult to identify a single point of origin or control. Snowden argues that contemporary surveillance systems extend beyond counterterrorism objectives and function as tools of broad intelligence gathering, including political, economic, and diplomatic analysis (Snowden 218). The “Frankenstein effect” thus invites us to reconsider the locus of ethical concern: not the individual user or operator, but the system as a whole, whose operations exceed the intentions and awareness of any single participant.

This shift has significant implications for ethical analysis. Traditional frameworks that focus on individual responsibility may be insufficient to address the complexities of technologically mediated systems. Shelley anticipates this problem through Victor’s fragmented accountability, while Snowden articulates its modern form by noting how surveillance operates through distributed mechanisms where no single person feels responsible for the totality of the system. Instead, there is a need for systemic approaches that consider how power, design, and institutional structures shape ethical outcomes, recognizing that in such environments, responsibility is not absent but diffused across networks that resist moral clarity.

CONCLUSION

The comparison between *Frankenstein* and *Permanent Record* reveals a persistent and evolving ethical dilemma: the human capacity to create systems that exceed both our control and our moral comprehension. Shelley’s novel warns against the dangers of scientific ambition untempered by ethical responsibility, while Snowden’s memoir demonstrates how these dangers have been amplified in the digital age.

The “Frankenstein effect” serves as a powerful conceptual bridge between nineteenth-century literary imagination and twenty-first-century technological reality. Both Shelley and Snowden illuminate the consequences of creation divorced from responsibility, highlighting the ways in which distance, whether physical or digital, can erode moral judgment.

In an era defined by rapid technological advancement, their insights underscore the urgent need to reintroduce ethical reflection into the processes of innovation and governance. Without such reflection, the systems we create may continue to evolve beyond our control, replicating, on a

global scale, the tragedy first imagined in Victor Frankenstein’s laboratory.

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A Study of Immigration-Related Racial Trauma and Social Divisions in the African American Free Verse

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Abstract— *With an emphasis on African American identity, themes of migration, and cultural interactions, the presented research analyzes the free verse poetry of African American Amanda Gorman in the context of 'African diaspora' concept. The selected poems also covered poets who lived outside or in their home continent, Africa. This research is significant because, instead of focusing just on marginalization and feminism, it illuminates an axis that was overlooked in discussion of Gorman's poems: the African Diaspora. The goal of the presented study is to highlight the importance and effects of moving from one environment to another, which requires patience, fortitude and patience to complete life's journey while keeping in mind the mother environment's origins. The research examines how Gorman's chosen poems engage with communal trauma, social divisions, and the lingering effects of institutional racism while promoting unity and optimism using an analytical and qualitative methodology. The new analysis indicates that Gorman is a well-liked poet of African diaspora, not merely of feminism, marginalization, and race as previously explored.*



Keywords— *African American, African diaspora, Amanda Gorman, feminism, free verse, racism, social divisions.*

I. INTRODUCTION

During President Joe Biden's inauguration, Amanda Gorman, the first young poet, stole the show by reciting her poem *The Hill We Climb* (Foussianes). As an anthem for a new country in a new political era or "challenging time," a poem is delivered by a Black African American girl as a "message of unity, hope, and healing" (Armenti). This poet's distinctive poetry makes a difference from every viewpoint. She becomes a voice for the following generation. Gorman explores "bravery to dissolve silences," "resilience," feminism, "recovery," "unity," "racism," discrimination, diversity, "liberal civility," optimism, marginalization, disparity, and other issues in her latest poems (Beeman 1100). Her poems delve further into topics that have not yet been well studied. Further research is worthwhile due to the limitations of earlier studies. As a result, it will delve deeper into a topic that is novel and undergoing more in-

depth research, such as comparing Gorman to other Black female African poets.

This study's main goal is to connect Gorman's poetry to the idea of the 'African Diaspora' and to mention African American writers who, similar to Gorman, struggle in their new nation following involuntary or voluntary emigration. In order to better live and prosper in their new home, they consequently began pushing as advocates for change. The current article starts with a deep examination of the theoretical element through giving a thorough summary of the conceptual foundation, covering all of its economic, literary, geographical, and political aspects and its historical characteristics, context, subjects, and categories. After that, a comprehensive biography of the poet laureate (Gorman) is looked at in the presented research. With regard to analysis, the last section continues to discuss several poems that were composed with societal objectives in

mind, speaking to all of the African immigrants who have endured hardships throughout the years.

II. AMANDA GORMAN'S BIOGRAPHY

Amanda Gorman was born on March 7, 1998, in Los Angeles, California. Her twin sister, whose name is Gabrielle, is with her, as is an older brother named Spencer. Despite giving birth early, Gorman was robust and in superb condition. Her mother, Joan Wicks, was an elementary school English teacher in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles and was a single mother. Gorman has humble origins. Her mother worked very hard to support the family. In spite of all the challenges they faced, the three kids had lofty objectives (Tyner 12). The little child had trouble pronouncing the letter "r" because of her auditory processing issues. According to Gorman, she seeks poetry as a cheap means of self-expression (Zelazko n.p.). The little girl attended Santa Monica's New Roads School to finish her 12th grade studies. When she was a senior, she was awarded a college scholarship. Gorman attended Harvard University to further her studies. In the year 2020, she graduated with a cum laude degree in sociology (Hansen 10,2). In the year 2014, Gorman, a 19-year-old activist, was chosen as the "first National Youth Poet Laureate" in Los Angeles.

Additionally, she founded the charity organization "One Pen, One Page" in 2016 with the intention of enabling young authors to use creative writing exercises and internet platform to impact the world ("Meet the First Youth Poet Laureate"). Speaking of her works, she wrote and released her first collection, *The One for Whom Food Is Not Enough*, in 2015. It is a collection of poems about society, hunger, and other important topics. She after that gave a reading of "In This Place: An American Lyric" within the "Library of Congress" in 2017. It talks about how each person could make a difference in their life or society (Hansen 14,6). At age of twenty-one, Gorman gained immense notoriety when she stole the show at the inauguration of President Joe Biden on January 20, 2021, by performing her poem "The Hill We Climb." However, she desired recognition for more than that particular poem. "I am more than what I did that day, but I will always be grateful for that opportunity," the young poet declares.

"I am more than my most famous moment," she continues, asserting this, "I am all the moments, the light and the dark. That seems to be quite true, and astonishingly, she has since had two books published: The graphic book *Change Sings: A Children's Anthem* has been published in September 2021, while the collection of poems *Call Us What We Carry* was published in

December of the same year. Something, someday: Her most recent collection of children's poetry was published in 2023 and is a timeless picture book for the next generation of authors. She reportedly created history by being the first poet to perform at the "Super Bowl," and she worked hard to build a reputation apart from her remarkable debut (Ukiomogbe n.p.). During August 21, 2024, Gorman delivers "a new verse" titled "This sacred scene" during the third night of the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, promising to restore "liberty" and patriotism (Bierman). Amanda Gorman's comments can encourage people of all ages (Hansen 20).

III. THE 'AFRICAN DIASPORA:' DEFINITION AND CATEGORIZATION

The Hebrew term "Galut," which comes from the verb "speiro" (to seed; to disperse) and the prefix "dia" (over), is where the Greek word "diaspora" comes from. Thus, migration and colonization are associated with the term in Ancient Greek (Berthomière and Anteby-Yemini 262). Sophocles, Thucydides, and Herodotus coined the term "diaspora" in the fifth century B.C. However, its use in Jewish tradition is more closely linked to its modern meaning (Dufoix 4, 5).

Oliver Bakewell defines "diaspora" as (a) the movement of individuals from their country of origin to several nations, either voluntarily or due to forced dispersal in search of better living conditions; (b) a strong sense of ethnic grouping consciousness that is sustained over an extended period of time based on a shared past/history, culture, and beliefs; and (c) an ongoing chain of societal relations with other group members residing in multiple nations or settlements (3). In his 1986 book *Modern Diasporas in International Politics*, Gabriel Sheffer argues that the term "diaspora" should not be restricted to the Jewish people since various other communities, such as the Phenicians, Nabatheans, and Assyrians, have long lived in exile. Furthermore, in the second half of the 1800s, a number of communities that bear numerous similarities to the Jewish diaspora appeared in Europe, including the Chinese and Greek diasporas (1–15).

According to Robin Cohen, the study of diaspora has undergone four stages: the eighties pre-classical stage, the eighties to mid-nineties stage, the mid-nineties stage, and the last stage, which is the shift to the twenty-first century and beyond (1-2). Cohen also outlines six forms of diaspora in an effort to distinguish between them. These include "labor," "victim," "trade," "imperial," "deterritorialized," and "incipient" (11, Table 1.2). Cohen's diaspora classifications show that Armenians and

Africans make up the first category, "victim," whereas "indentured Indians and the British" make up the second and third categories, "imperial" and "labor." The Lebanese and Chinese are therefore included in the fourth category, "trade." The fifth form is the forced deportation of Africans (the Black Atlantic) to change their cultural and political identities. Afghans and refugees from other countries continue to be the emphasis of the final category, "incipient" (ix–xi).

TYPOLOGIES OF DIASPORA

Another expert on this topic, Michel Bruneau, claims that the typology has to be grounded on the diasporic organization in his book *Diasporas* (1995). He distinguishes three main types of diasporas: (1) entrepreneurial diasporas (e.g., Lebanese or Chinese); (2) religious diasporas (e.g., Greeks or Jews); and (3) political diasporas (e.g., Palestinians and Tibetans) (67). The African diaspora is defined as follows by historian Joseph E. Harris:

...the African Diaspora resulted from unique historical developments, namely, the global slave trades conducted for centuries primarily by Arabs and Europeans, and the Berlin Conference of 1884-85 that partitioned Africa and set boundaries that continue to divide ethnic groups and inspire irredentism (2007 86).

Harris' identification, on the other hand, also sets the African Diaspora apart from the outcomes, occurrences, and actions of forced "transnational migrations" between other human groups. The African phenomenon is more distinct than the experiences of Chinese, Indians, Greeks, Armenians, Palestinians, and other diaspora groups, even if all of these global occurrences fit the more general conceptual definition (Dodson 50). The African diaspora is different from other diasporas mainly because of its unique history of forced displacement, which was influenced by the transatlantic slave trade; its size; and specific historical circumstances of displacement and colonialism. However, all diasporas involve the dispersal of an individual away from their homeland.

Returning to the forced relocation, this involuntary mobility, along with ongoing discrimination and marginalization, makes the African diaspora different from diasporas formed by other types of movement, such as voluntary emigration or exile (McLeod and Hine 107). Among the traits that distinguish the African diaspora are "Racialized Oppression," "Forced Displacement," "Transnational Networks," "Complex Identity Formation," and "Ongoing Challenges." However, because of the institutional oppression and forced migration, the Irish, Jewish, and Armenian diasporas have all

experienced some form of displacement, yet not to the same degree as the African diaspora. While other diasporas may face challenges such as cultural integration and political marginalization, they do not share the same historical context of slavery and racialization (Hine and McLeod, 72-80, 118).

The term "diaspora" is gaining new meaning in relation to ideas such as "transnational migration," "cultural hybridity," and global "deterritorialization" (Kokot et al. 1). Therefore, it is necessary to discover and decolonize the idea of "African identity," which is shared by everyone with African heritage. The African Diaspora is therefore defined by the evaluation of Africa as a whole as the cultural identity source and a possible place for repatriation. Many of these groups believe that dominant ideologies were developed by "Blacks for Blacks" and then appropriated and perverted by Whites for the sake of hegemony. They compare their present situation to that of the scattered tribes of Israel (Dorsch 83–5). Furthermore, individuals who participated in the African diaspora were unable to identify with specific African regions or ethnic groups, which would have enabled them to promote their own independence and religious and political beliefs (Dorsch 105).

No one has provided a more thorough, accurate, and succinct description of this idea than the "African Union." Therefore, the following definition was settled upon in 2004 during an African Union technical workshop in Trinidad:

that the definition of African Diaspora refers to the geographic dispersal of peoples whose ancestors, within historical memory, originally came from Africa, but who are currently domiciled, or claim residence or citizenship, outside the continent of Africa. This definition recognizes both dispersal and subsequent reconstitution of African Diaspora identities in new locations as equally important elements. Therefore, such peoples are committed to the advancement of continental African and Diaspora communities worldwide. (African Union 15)

In other words, everyone who has left the continent and created diasporas in the past or present is regarded as a member of the African diaspora (Zezeza 34, 5). In summary, the idea led to a large-scale forced migration of enslaved Africans from their home countries, creating the "African Diaspora," a major worldwide phenomenon that was the first of its type in nearly five centuries of human development. In other words, there is a common ancestral past and historical events and situations that took place over a significant amount of the preceding 500 years. Two essential traits that characterize its members are "geo-social displacement and migration"

(Dodson 47–54). For instance, African immigrants assimilated and created links with other minority groups, especially "native-born Black Americans" (Okpewho 19).

GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

African Americans undertook the first notable northward migration in the early 1900s. Following the abolition of slavery and the conclusion of the "American Civil War," sometimes referred to as "Reconstruction," these migrations occurred (Wilkerson, 8,9). Thus, the first diasporic wave (1916–40), which was a traditional trade diaspora, began at the beginning of the British occupation; the second, and much larger, wave came after the harsh end of British partition and control (Cohen 125). Over the course of the 20th century, around eight million African Americans moved to the South. After that, between 1940 and 1980, around five million Black people moved to the west and north. During the years of World War II and the rest of the 1940s, about 1.5 million Southerners left their homes, marking the start and conclusion of the second phase of the great migration (economic migration). On average, more than a million black Southerners left the region every ten years after the war. Between the 1980s and 1990s, such numbers drastically decreased (Gregory 21).

The "sub-Saharan Africa," "African homeland," "Old World diaspora" (1400–1600), and "Atlantic diaspora" (1492–1600) are the three main geographical locations that comprise the African diaspora (Manning 3,61). In his book *The African Diaspora: A History Through Culture*, Manning explores the various forms of the African diaspora from a historical standpoint:

More precisely, this perspective on the history of the African diaspora explores four overlapping types of connections in the history of black people: (1) interactions among black communities at home and abroad, (2) relations with hegemonic powers, (3) relations with non-African communities, and (4) the mixing of black and other communities. (4)

Throughout their history, African Americans have had to share their optimistic view for perpetual freedom (Mohammad 164).

IV. LITERARY DIMENSIONS

African American literature literally addresses "a passionate concern for race and identity, nationhood and dignity, self-integration and self-assertion, and a general quest for roots and freedom stemming from the physical and psychological dislocation which slavery had caused" (Jegade and Dasyuva, 191). These concepts are further developed by James T. Tsaaior: "race differentia and

tension, political dominance and marginalization, economic exploitation and alienation, oppression and cultural deracination, and the quest for roots, which inevitably results in an epiphanic homecoming." (1). African American literature and African American history are closely intertwined based on their respective subjects. It is easy to contend that a people's literature's themes can be comprehended by looking at their historical context (Akujobi and Okolo 28). After all of this, it is crucial to remember that one of the great things about "African American women's poetry" is that it transcends Black issues and is currently considered to be among the best in the nation (Shafiq 392).

IMPACT OF EDUCATION AND ECONOMY

In terms of the economy, the African diaspora contributes significantly, favorably, and "robustly" to the rise in real income per person in Africa. Estimates show that the impact of the Diaspora rises with emigrants' educational achievement when it is broken down by skill level. Consequently, the revenue analysis shows that the Diaspora positively affects all aspects of income. However, regardless of level of education, the African Diaspora as a whole contributes significantly to the advancement of the continent. Members of the diaspora with higher levels of education consistently have the most influence (Anyanwu and Gnimassoun 4,19). Furthermore, the African Diaspora greatly contributes to the continent's economic development, irrespective of the immigrants' educational level. For example, the "African Diaspora" in wealthy OECD countries significantly advances African democracy. The higher the diaspora's impact on democracy in relation to educational attainment, the larger the coefficients of estimation. Accordingly, the African Diaspora contributes to the improvement of living conditions in Africa (Anyanwu and Gnimassoun 19,36).

TRUE IDENTITY

Lastly, an African diaspora may include any permanent resident of the US who travels frequently to Africa, the continent of his competence (Falola, 262). To put it simply, a "truly Black identity" "group is forcefully dispersed from one center to two or more foreign regions" (Tölölyan, 12, 3). One of the most important aspects of diaspora is relationships with the motherland, which are strengthened by an ongoing interest in domestic matters. An exalted and romanticized national memory must be shared by members of the diaspora. The term "diaspora" always carries a negative connotation of trauma and suffering (Marandi and Al-Hilo 12). When the elite of the diaspora are together and in similar circumstances in other foreign nations, they begin to write original works of literature that center on their African literature, heritage, or

history in an effort to express the alienation, suffering, or dispersion they experience.

V. LITERATURE REVIEW

Emma Corbin highlights the most important topics in three of Gorman's poems in her paper "Amanda Gorman and Her Way with Poetry" (2022). The latter focuses on "social injustice," "climate change," "racial inequality," and "perseverance and togetherness" (1) Corbin goes on to describe the deeper points in Gorman's poetry, saying that she wants to convey that there has never been a satisfactory solution when it comes to rights, whether they are for black men, women, or people from other countries (3). Corbin's research highlights the coronavirus outbreak, another prominent motif that appears in Gorman's poetry. According to Gorman, despite the fact that each person was alone during this quarantine, people may come together, stand up for their convictions, and work together to improve the world (5). This essay is as up to date as Gorman's poetry at the time, when the COVID-19 pandemic—a dangerous disease with far-reaching effects that claimed many lives—was the main topic of discussion. Gorman addressed this issue in most of her poetry, and Corbin made reference to it. Additionally, without addressing the latter, this study only briefly discusses the research subject in general terms, like social and racial inequalities brought about by African diaspora.

The young poet Gorman argues in her poems about "dread," "fear," "defiance," "angst," "wrong and right," and marginalized individuals who are around us everywhere on a continuous and regular basis, according to Marc Shapiro in the foreword of his book *Word Up: The Life of Amanda Gorman* (2021) (n. p.). Shapiro's book is noteworthy since it describes Gorman's long-term suffering along the previously mentioned axes (marginalization, fright, worry, etc.) without addressing the reasons behind it. It is important to remember that this sorrow is not unique to our young poet; rather, it is united and shared with generations who came before her, were her peers, and will follow her. Her poetry is merely an effort to identify the bleeding wound and try to cleanse it in order to prevent infection.

Gorman's *Call Us What We Carry* (2021) receives an e-educator guidebook from the Disrupt Texts Team. The most important issues of this collection of poems by Gorman are discussed throughout ten pages. Themes like "loss, grief, and trauma, while also providing a powerful through line of change and hope" are listed by the teams. In addition, Gorman explores themes of "language," "history," "identity," and "erasure" in his collage work. Making use of the collective suffering caused by a global pandemic (Corona Virus 2021) (3). A few of the concerns

voiced during this health crisis are intended to be addressed in the team's guide. It also offers hope for surviving and overcoming the pandemic disaster by tenacity and change. The themes have also been presented and handled concisely because the manual was small and contained only a few brief pages. Thus, questions remain unanswered, potentially allowing readers to come up with their own explanations.

Susanne Rubenstein tells her students about laureate poet Gorman, in her book *Speak for Yourself: Writing with Voice* (2018), that "whose work confronts the social injustice our students live with every day ... On the internet, we watch her deliver commanding poetry on race, feminism, and the need for social change," and sometimes reads from her poems to them (18). In order to inspire her students to face injustice in all of its manifestations and to inculcate in them the spirit of change that penetrates many of Gorman's lines, Rubenstein invites them to consider her book, which honors the work and life of the gifted poet Gorman. Despite Rubenstein's point of view, the book is objective and neutral.

However, this research looks at Gorman's poetry from the viewpoint of the African diaspora and everything that goes along with it, such as alienation, classism, injustice, and a preference for white people over people of dark skin. The term "African diaspora" also refers to other facets of marginalized Africans and racist political supremacy, especially those who have immigrated (involuntarily or voluntarily) outside of the Black continent. All of that is based on exploitation and dependence, yet from an optimistic instead of a pessimistic viewpoint that advocates for constructive change, taking advantage of possibilities, and learning from the past in order to create a hopeful future different from what it was.

V. METHODOLOGY

By closely examining a few poems and concentrating on themes related to the 'African diaspora,' this research is qualitative and analytical. In order to demonstrate the use of the 'African diaspora' notion, it collects data about a young poet and examines her writings. The poems provide an example of how to directly change the community. This research examines a few poems written by an African American poet who, despite residing in America, draws inspiration from Africa and works to create a better future that honors the past. These poems were chosen and examined based on their diction and subject. Therefore, this research will examine three poems based on the idea of diaspora literature.

“MAKING MOUNTAINS AS WE RUN”

The poem "Making Mountains as We Run" was recited and performed during the 2018 inauguration event at the Tercentenary Theatre in honor of Laurence S. Bacow, the 29th president of Harvard University (Walsh). A group of African immigrants who came to America in quest of a better life are the subject of Gorman's long poem. The poet describes these two migrants' characteristics in detail in the third stanza. The main motivation for their expatriation is that they are fighters for survival and have a hope of a bright future and new prospects for their child. Leaving one's home country is a difficult choice with unclear consequences:

He grew up in Pontiac, Michigan.

The son of two refugees

who immigrated to America:

Two fighters who came here looking shoreward,

Two survivors dreaming higher, looking forward

At the new opportunities their son could seize. (13-18)

As mentioned, Bacow was raised in Pontiac, Michigan, as the son of Jewish immigrants who were well acquainted with the atrocities of the Holocaust. They leave Europe to emigrate. Their experience in this labor is dreadful - "witnessed oppression's worst -" given that they are the most notable example of the dispersion caused by religion. Thus, they anticipate "the American dream."

Being raised by parents who'd witnessed oppression's worst

Is what makes President Bacow so well-versed

In the American dream. It speaks to his personality,

But also, the fact that this dream is his reality. (25-8)

Every refugee hopes to be set free from the struggles they face back home. They understand that obtaining freedom is expensive and necessitates hardship and sacrifice. "Freedom" requires "daring," "diligence," and "diversity." If all of the aforementioned objectives are achieved, reform is carried out in the most exquisite way. In the stanza that follows, Gorman puts all of this into words:

Tikkun olam, to repair the world.

He knows that to repair it is to share its

Freedoms and dreams, especially at a university

Dedicated to excellence through diligence, daring and diversity. (31-4)

The most important feature of the African diaspora is its plea for solidarity. For people who were relocated to another country to survive there, they

need a bonding force. The links that diaspora people have are an important feature. Here, words like "we are all comrades" and "this extraordinary gathering" embody the poem's appeals for unity.

When he says: "Call me Larry".

He understands we are all comrades who carry

The very weight of getting to create the world here,

This extraordinary gathering of legendary luminaries and visionaries. (60-3)

They must therefore never give up and strive to live a better, more honorable life worthy of God's earthly paradise.

“ALARUM:” THE DIVISION; THE OTHER FACE OF ‘DIASPORA’

The anthology, *Call Us What We Carry* 2021, includes the poem "Alarum." The poem is written in unrhymed free verse and has eighteen lines. The archaic spelling of the word alarm is "alarum." It is possible to assume that Gorman intends to bring her readers back to the far-off past that they can no longer find. Additionally, it can be a warning - "it's a new-faced alert" - for each of us as individuals and as community members. The poem's overall tone may be derived from the poet's repressed feelings about diaspora, its negativity, agony and consequences, which she has embodied in these lines. With the line, "We were divided / from each other, person / person:/," the poet illuminates the feeling of distance, separation, and dispersion from one another.

We're writing as the daughter of a / dying world / as its new-faced alert. / In math, the slash / also called the solidus / means division, divided by. / We were divided / from each other, person / person. /. (1-4)

The poem "Alarum" uses a lot of slashes to highlight the separation of humans with the use of a lot of slashes in its structure. The poem's main theme, then, is the split in American society represented by the slashes which are not overcome. Critically, the poem's voice/alarm urges us to recognize the dangers of disengagement in order to move toward greater compassion, cohesion and "walked beside." The losses are huge, as she claims and contends, "Our loss/colossal." Someone who has left his country and people for a number of reasons, just to start his unending suffering and unfathomable tragedy in the new place, can feel all of these feelings. The idea of "diaspora" takes over the poem from start to finish by narrating a story or imparting a lesson about harmony between people across

rivers, which represent the problems or barriers that separate people:

Some
griefs, like rivers, are uncross / able. They are not to be
waded across / but walked beside. Our loss / colossal
& blossomed / is never lost on us. (4-7)

In this poem, the African American poet is successful in evoking particular feelings in the audience. For attaining mental serenity as well as social harmony, the "Alarum" urges us to avoid prejudice and hatred toward one another. Rather, it makes a case for friendly and shared coexistence. According to Gorman, it is hard to ignore the distinctions as well as variations in society, and now is the ideal time to address them.

In the poem's second half, the poet—who is currently living abroad—asks, "What are the effects of this division and dispersion felt by the indigenous population, immigrants, and refugees since the place is their place, the environment is their environment, and the homeland is their homeland?" The catastrophic results can be summed up as follows: they are continuously carried away by a river of pollution for which we pay a terrible price since they have failed to love Mother Earth and preserve a clean environment. Gorman continues enumerating the injustices in the poem's last lines in an attempt to come up with a practical solution that can rescue humanity from its current situation. She believes that Mother Earth has the power to reunite her sons of different ethnicities. As long as they cease harming her and show her love:

Love the earth / like
we've failed it. To put it plain / we have shipwrecked
the earth / soiled the soil / & run the ground aground. /
nor all the species / slashed / down / in one smogged
swoop. / Extinction is a chorus / of quiet punching /. (7-9,15-6)

The reader could wonder why this young poetess gets increasingly engaged in the subject of the consequences of divisions in the beginning of her literary career. Perhaps part of the solution lies in this research, which links the subject of the 'African diaspora' with this Black African girl who uses her poem as a lighthouse and platform to fight against the breakdown of society. We might see the other half of the answer in other research if effective and strong measures are implemented to break the habit of splits in most cultures. This research will serve as a beginning point to identify deeper answers that are

consistent with the evolution of societies. In actuality, this is merely half the truth: "to tell / only half / of the story:"

that same note. What can never be brought back / can
still be brought forth / in memory / in mouth / in mind.
To say it plain is to tell / only half / of the story. (17,9)

"THERE'S NO POWER LIKE HOME"

This poem published on December 7, 2021, in the anthology *Call Us What We Carry*, has twenty lines. It concerns the stated limitations established by COVID-19. Additionally, it eliminates the legacy of racism, which is the archenemy and terrible enemy of diaspora. The difficulties of living alone, the loss of many people's jobs, the changes in daily life, the financial hardships, and the death of loved ones are the reasons for writing this poem. These factors have all affected many people's mental health as well as well-being during the psychological and epidemiological crisis brought on by the corona pandemic (Alomosh and Alameri, 291).

The title's usage of the word "Home" effectively highlights the existence of the homeland and the significance of the home as a concept. In order to strengthen the meaning and make it more significant, the title takes the form of a negative. Because of all the symptoms that could result from missing homelands that are fundamentally exposed to racial issues, which have occurred and continue to occur in the American society in which the poet lives, this poem conveys deep melancholy and a depressed and sick feeling: "We were sick of home/Home sick" (1, 2). However, as we've already covered, the poem's title captures the strength that homelands give their citizens—power that no other force can match.

The poet discusses the idea of the mask in the verses that follow. When we enter the home, we immediately take off the "mask" that we wore on our faces throughout the Corona days. The mask could be a metaphor for all the masks we wear when we go outside. We all put on one or more masks to hide our true selves from the outside world for a variety of reasons, including fear and shyness. We decide not to show others our true selves or our inner selves for a variety of reasons. We appear to be deliberately keeping ourselves apart from other people. This disguise keeps us from being honest with each other, which is detrimental to our future and society. The issue facing the diaspora is that we are not genuinely accepting of others and do not welcome those who are banished from their country when they travel to other nations. We never would have thought that we would eventually be compelled to live abroad and bear the burden of dispersion:

That mask around our ear
 Hung itself into the year.
 Once we stepped into our home,
 We found ourselves gasping, tear-
 ing it off like a bandage,
 Like something that gauzed
 The great gape of our mouth. (3-9)

The entire poem is about a ghostly hometown with melancholic eyes, a place of abode with faded features or almost no features at all. Every diaspora on the earth faces this dilemma in their native countries. However, a smile on their faces conveys hope:

Even faceless, a smile can still
 Scale up our cheeks,
 Bone by bone,
 Our eyes crinkling. (10-3)

The poet's intelligence is evident in the poem's vivid images, which are dotted with the greatest beauty and magnificence. The howl of a sad dog, the adventure of a squirrel, and the delicate beauty (which conceals the eyes in the faces) with the thinness of the paper wrapped over the rice ears all convey images of grief. There are many reasons to feel miserable in this waste land, where everything exhibits its melancholy in a different way:

Delicately as rice paper
 At some equally fragile beauty-
 The warbling blues of a dog,
 A squirrel venturing close,
 The lilt of a beloved's joke. (14-8)

In actuality, the mask completely hides our features until we are unable to see the faces of others. When we put on masks that don't look like us, this is exactly what happens. We become oblivious to the characters' inner personalities and lose sight of our own identities. Everything about ourselves is reflected in what we see in other people. Consequently, this poem conveys a wonderful message through the symbolism of Corona mask: /Our mask is no veil, yet a view. If not what we perceive in another, what are we? (19–20). In this poem, the mask serves as a deft and powerful metaphor. Individuals have both invisible and visible public faces that they are unable to identify. Every country has its own language, history, religion, and culture.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study attempts to explore the moral and sensuous dimensions of the diasporic trend that Gorman imagines in her poems. The young poetess is unable to resist this propensity, which is almost evident in most of the poems, because of the circumstances she has faced. This research concludes that individuals who are dispersed throughout the world are governed by their pasts prior to their present. They are the offspring of their new communities and the core of their mother societies. This research could be the foundation for a more thorough investigation in the future into how the poetry of such dispersed poets impacted their peers in the countries they visited or resided in, instead of just the countries they left, whether under duress or voluntarily.

The poems included in the presented study show how the content of free poetry in the millennia of the new century has been impacted by migration as well as the replacement of one's home nation. The reader is aware that beginning a new life abroad is challenging and requires tenacity, fortitude, confidence, and patience in one's own abilities. Gorman accomplishes this, and the study proceeds with it all the way through. This study offers a distinctive analytical viewpoint on Gorman's poetry, which has previously only been discussed in terms of freedom, feminism, marginalization, and racism. Yet, Gorman believes that no study has made the initiative to discuss the African diaspora, from which she got the majority of her verses, and offers concepts that can undermine the diaspora as a whole.

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Witnessing with Courage: Radical Hope in Etty Hillesum's Diaries

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Abstract— This paper examines the notions of moral fortitude and transformative hope in the diaries and letters of Etty Hillesum, a young Jewish writer who lived through the Holocaust. Drawing on Jonathan Lear's concept of "radical hope," understood as a commitment to goodness beyond present comprehension, the study situates Hillesum's writings within an ethical framework shaped by crisis and cultural devastation. Rather than interpreting her optimism as naïve or escapist, the paper argues that Hillesum's response to suffering embodies a conscious, ethically grounded resilience that aligns with an expanded Aristotelian understanding of courage. By distinguishing between mere optimism and ethically rooted hope, the study shows that Hillesum's outlook exemplifies what Lear terms "radical hope", a forward-looking openness to meaning when conventional frameworks collapse. The paper positions Hillesum as a moral witness whose writings offer profound insights into human dignity, ethical responsibility, and the possibility of sustaining meaning under extreme conditions. Her diaries emerge not only as historical testimony but also as philosophical texts that redefine courage and hope in the context of modern catastrophe.



Keywords— Etty Hillesum, Moral Courage, Radical Hope, Jonathan Lear

*To meet death filled with hope--- Henry Real Bird,
Custerology*

"I had visions then of ruined cities. I saw old cities vanish and new cities arise, and I thought to myself, even if the whole of this world is bombed to bits, we shall build a new world, and that one too will pass, and still life will be beautiful, always beautiful. – Etty Hillesum (96)

Dictionary defines hope as "a feeling of expectation or grounds for believing that something good may happen" but hope stops being a feeling and becomes a conscious and difficult decision synonymous with courage and resistance when sported and displayed during the darkest of times. Emily Dickinson calls hope, "a thing with feathers" and rightly so. On the face of devastation of culture and civilisation and as Hannah Arendt calls it, a shaking of "the pillars of the best-known truths", the most natural response would be terror and holding on to a feathered and flitting hope becomes the biggest challenge. American professor and author, Jonathan Lear in his

seminal book, *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Devastation* argues that tragic cultural destruction calls for "radical hope" that can only be accessed through Aristotelian courage and being open to forces that work beyond human rationality. This paper looks into the remarkable courage and radical hope of young Holocaust victim, Etty Hillesum as expressed through her diaries and letters. She lived in one of the bleakest times of history and her determination to stay altruistic in the face of cultural and personal devastation has been a surprising element for her readers and researchers alike, making them wonder if the positive approach was a manifestation of her inherent optimistic nature or a conscious decision or a well-maintained façade she tried to bravely keep up or a beautiful combination of all these, which Lear calls radical hope.

Jonathan Lear in his *Radical Hope: Ethics in the Face of Cultural Devastation* discusses the role of courage, values and ethics in a society and in individuals while faced with utter destruction of a culture and way of life. Lear bases this thesis on the life and experiences of Plenty

Coups, the last great chief of the Indian tribe the Crow Nation. Before his death, talking to a white interviewer, Coups said, "When the buffalo went away the hearts of my people fell to the ground, and they could not lift them up again. After this nothing happened." (2) and this sums up the end of Crow culture and their way of living. Even when faced with the real possibility of being completely stripped of all that they believed in and being completely wiped out, Plenty Coups lead his people with courage and continued to hope against hope that something good would emerge. Lear calls this Radical Hope- "a daunting form of commitment to a goodness in the world that transcends one's current ability to grasp what it is" (100). He calls hope a remarkable human achievement that helps in avoiding despair. For Lear, the issue of hope becomes crucial for an ethical inquiry into life at the horizons of one's understanding and this is the kind of radical hope against hope one finds in the writings of Etty Hillesum.

The entries from the diaries of the Holocaust victim, Etty Hillesum offer us an enlightening glimpse into her beautiful and light-filled mind. Etty Hillesum was a Jewish woman who created through her diaries and personal letters one of the most remarkable texts of our time- a testimony of faith and love written in the darkest hours of modern History. Etty Hillesum was an emancipated, educated and urbane young woman who was an avid reader and aspiring writer, too. She took her degree in law at the University of Amsterdam and later enrolled to learn Slavic languages, philosophy and psychology but her plans were disrupted as World War II had broken out by then. Just before the war she became the assistant of Julius Spier, a famous Jungian Psychoanalyst with whom she developed an intimate relationship. She also worked as a Russian teacher.

Etty Hillesum lived in Amsterdam, Holland and her country had been occupied by Hitler's Nazi forces since May 1940. It was a wrong time and place for a Jew to live and in April 1942, the Nazis launched their first major round up of the Jews with the ultimate aim of genocide and ethnic cleansing. Etty lost her job as a teacher but through the influence of friends got a job as a typist in the Jewish Council. In July, 1942 the Nazis wanted to concentrate all the Jews in Westerbork, a transit camp, which would be the last stop before Auschwitz Death Camp for more than 1, 000,000 Dutch Jews. Etty volunteered to accompany the Jews to Westerbork where she worked in the camp hospital. She resisted the efforts by friends to help her escape and on 7 September 1943 was deported to Auschwitz with her family. As her friend, Jopie Vleerschhouwer would describe later, "she left for the death camp full of life and characteristic sparkling humour, waving a cheerful bye"(xxii). They reached Auschwitz on

10, September 1943 and on the same day her parents were gassed. The Red Cross reported the death of Etty on 30 November 1943. One of her brothers was killed in the camp too, another survived only to die on the way back to Holland.

Etty Hillesum was 27 years old when she started writing her diaries. Written in Eight exercise books, these diary entries unravel the story of the personal growth of a young woman who chose to find life beautiful and meaningful even in the most chaotic of times. Her many letters addressed to friends and family, though describes the horrors of concentration camps, do not fail to reveal as Eva Hoffman puts it: her "light-filled mind and the astonishing internal journey it charts".

Jonathan Lear bases his theory of radical hope on Aristotle's conception of courage but also explores courage as extending beyond the virtue that Aristotle explicitly considered. He defines a courageous person by the framework of five Aristotelian criteria and applies these characteristics to the Crow tribe and their leader Plenty Coups. Lear propounds that even in such extreme circumstances certain forms of human excellence are still possible and rather than arguing for radical hope in isolation, he argues that such hope may play a crucial role in a courageous life.

This paper shall look into the writings of Etty Hillesum to say that she was a courageous person filled with courage and radical hope. The five characteristics of a courageous person as stated by Aristotle and used by Lear in his book are:

1. A courageous person has a proper orientation toward what is shameful and what is fearful.

That is, he grasps what would be truly shameful and he is thereby motivated to avoid it. He also understands what is genuinely fearful "No one is better at understanding what is frightening"— and yet he is nevertheless motivated to act courageously in the face of it. (Radical Hope 109)

Etty Hillesum is a strongly passionate person. She writes in a diary entry, "Cold-blooded, icy objectivity is something my nature prevents me from attaining. I am too full of emotion for that" (40) Though highly intelligent and educated, she sees the world through her emotions and her understanding of her experiences. Thus, both the "shameful" and the "fearful" start for Hillesum from her own life and mind. The very first diary entry talks of shame. She says, "The thoughts in my head are sometimes so clear and so sharp and my feelings so deep, but writing about them comes hard. The main difficulty, I think, is a sense of shame" (3). Her dysfunctional family background, hereditary psychological problems, low self-esteem, inner conflict and overthinking often led her to a state of self-

loathing and shame. Drastic political changes, knowledge of the inevitable destruction of her people, devastation of the culture she grew up in, curbing of rights, shattering of dreams, the impending doom, fear of her own hedonistic streak and fluid sexuality proved fearful for her but the courageous person she was, she nevertheless was motivated to be cheerful and brave in the face of it all.

Etty Hillesum reminds herself that "objectivity is better than swooning in great emotions" (10) and she dreams even in the darkest times to "finish up as an adult, capable of helping other souls who are in trouble, and of creating some sort of clarity through my work for others, for that's what it's really all about" (11). These brave words don't just stop with self-motivation but urged her on to volunteer to Westerbork transit camp, decide against selfish escape and till the end to be the "thinking heart of the barracks" when others were too traumatised and incapable of thinking; someone who cheered others up at the expense of her own health, comfort and life. She knew both the shameful and the fearful with all its intensity but chose to rise above the circumstances.

2. The next criterion to radical hope would be "the courage that aims toward what is fine" (not just guts but aims for fineness) Lear further explains that a cornered animal may fight boldly for survival—but it is acting from instinct. "Human beings too, then, are distressed when angry and take pleasure in retaliating; but people who fight from these motives are effective in fighting, not courageous, since they do not fight because of what is fine or noble, or as correct prescription directs, but from emotion" (110).

In Etty Hillesum, one finds a truly fine and nobly altruistic soul. Finesse is evident in her writing, her way of living and her way of fighting. Even when Jews were getting slaughtered and she was sure of her own destruction, she dares to write, "Indiscriminate hatred is the worst thing there is. It is the sickness of the soul. Hatred does not lie in my nature" (11). She diagnoses the problem of her age: hatred of Germans poisoning everyone's mind. On March 15, 1941, she writes down what she calls a liberating thought that surfaced like a hesitant, tender young blade of grass thrusting through a wilderness of weeds, "if there were only one decent German, then he should be cherished despite that whole barbaric gang and because of that one decent German it is wrong to pour hatred over an entire people" (11).

She fails to find even that one decent soldier and one day when a young Gestapo officer peevishly shouts at her, she writes in her diary that night: "a disgruntled young Gestapo officer yelled at me, but that I felt no indignation, rather a real compassion, and would have liked to ask, "Did you have a very unhappy childhood, has your girlfriend let

you down?" (86) She felt that he looked harassed, driven, sullen and weak and needed help. Etty's courage was something that truly aimed towards fine and sublime.

3. The third Aristotelian criterion for courage is that a courageous person must grasp the situation he or she is in and, through experience, exercise good judgment. (111)

Etty Hillesum was a brilliant and erudite person who liked to start the day on an empty stomach with Hegel and Dostoevsky. Etty Hillesum was not a simpleton or a naïve child who was oblivious of the fascist vortex that was sucking the Dutch Jews into an unprecedented genocide. It was very evident to her that the noose was tightening for the Jews with the occupation of the Nazis. She was very well able to discern the condition of the Jews and she was not in denial. Writing about the predicament of the Jews she writes, "'No Admittance to Jews'. More and more of these boards are appearing all over the place." And in her characteristic tone laced with courage and positivity she continues, "Nevertheless there is still enough room for one to move and live and be happy and play music and love each other" (90).

Sometimes one would suspect that a person's hopefulness is a strategy for averting her gaze and escaping reality. Etty knew what was in store and she writes that she has come to terms with her reality and made her decisions based on fine judgement and longed to be the chronicler of the times too. On July 3, 1942 she writes, "What is at stake is our impending destruction and annihilation, we can have no more illusions about that. They are out to destroy us completely" (153). Still her determination to stay positive doesn't diminish. With clear judgement of the situation, she chooses writing as resistance and her way of fighting back. She writes:

I shall wield this slender fountain pen as if it were a hammer, and my words will have to be so many hammer strokes with which to beat out the story of our fate and of a piece of history as it is and never was before. Not in this totalitarian, massively organized form, spanning the whole of Europe. Still, a few people must survive if only to be chroniclers of this age. I would very much like to become one of their number. (173)

4. The fourth parameter of courage offered by Lear would be that it paradigmatically involves the risk of serious loss and of enduring certain pains.

Etty Hillesum loses everything as the World War II rages on and her world turns upside down. Everything gets taken away from her: her regular and happy life at Amsterdam, her favourite work desk decked with books, flowers and pinecones, her friends, her beloved Spiers, her parents, her health and finally her life but she endured

everything cheerfully and had the courage to continue saying that life is beautiful and meaningful. She says, "In a labour camp I should die within three days. I should lie down and die and still not find life unfair. (160)" Access to her favourite picnic spots and park benches were forbidden, travel by trams were barred, her cycle confiscated, rations became scarce, queues became longer and life more miserable but she writes, "I sometimes bow my head under the great burden that weighs down on me... I grow stronger on the bearing of it, and at the same time feel sure that life is beautiful and worth living and meaningful. Despite everything" (153). Aristotle says that the courageous person is generally thought to be a person who is fearless about a fine death. In Etty Hillesum, the reader finds a truly courageous soul who finds life beautiful and meaningful even in the face of not-so-fine death. The day the "badge of Shame", the Yellow Star was issued she writes, "Never give up, never escape, take everything in, and perhaps suffer, that's not too awful either, but never, never give up" (128) and this courage we find displayed even in her very last postcard thrown out of the cattle-car that proclaimed, "We left the camp singing" (introduction).

5. Bold acts that derive merely from optimism are not themselves courageous is the fifth idea Lear presents as he differentiates between optimism and radical hope (112).

At the time of cultural devastation, the reality a courageous person has to face up takes new and radical dimensions. Plato defined humans as finite erotic beings, who find transcendence through religion and God. Under the influence of Julius Spiers, Etty becomes more spiritually matured and comes to peace with herself. It was through his guidance she started writing a diary to chart her thought process from day to day. As she writes down her life and gains understanding of herself as a finite erotic being, Etty Hillesum's attitude becomes more of radical hope with her determination to stay happy and helpful to others in spite of every pain and loss. As she records the day to day affairs, one finds her getting evolved into an emotionally mature person who moves from Eros to Agape love towards the whole mankind.

When a friend bitterly ponders what is it in human beings that makes them want to destroy others, she argues by saying, "the rottenness in others is in us, too... I see no other solution, I really see no other solution than to turn inward and to root out all the rottenness there. I no longer believe that we can change anything in the world until we have first changed ourselves. And that seems to me the only lesson to be learned from this war". (84) With a saint-like attitude, even in an enemy she could see the man beyond the evil. She says, "what needs eradication is the evil in man, not man himself". Thus, she becomes a

fountainhead of radical altruism, in touch with reality, with herself, and her God. She proudly says, "I find life beautiful and I feel free... I believe in God and I believe in man, and I say so without embarrassment" (145)

For Lear, to be human is necessarily to be a vulnerable risk-taker; to be a courageous human is to be good at it. That is, a courageous person has the psychological resources to face the risks with dignity and to make good judgments in the light of them (123).

The Holocaust, the unprecedented ethnic cleansing and attempt in the annihilation of Jewish people, their culture and memory was the bleakest event of the history of mankind. Etty Hillesum lived through the most turbulent times of genocide, cultural devastation, malnutrition, starvation, disease, confinement and loss of concept. Yet that couldn't corrupt the beautiful and sublime soul and spirit of Etty Hillesum. In her last diary entry, she records, "We should be willing to act as a balm for all wounds" (231) Etty's fidelity to hope fits all of Aristotle's hallmarks of courage and she emerges as a beacon of courage and radical hope, who becomes a chronicler and witness of times, something she always wanted to be.

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Commodified Motherhood and the Politics of the Female Body: A Revisionist Reading of Mahasweta Devi's *Breast-Giver*

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Abstract— Motherhood has continually been contextualized in the cultural discourse as the place of purity, sacrifice and emotional abundance. These idealizations, nevertheless, tend to mask material and ideological ways in which the maternal identities are manufactured, disciplined and consumed. This article presents a revisionist feminist interpretation of the story of *Breast-Giver* by Mahasweta Devi that the text challenges the sacrificialized notion of motherhood by revealing its intimate alignment with labor, stratification of classes, as well as paternalism. Although the previous academic research on the story has been productive in terms of discussing not only subalternity but also female misery and the exploitative nature of the body, it has failed to consider enough the aspects of lactation as an extractive labor or motherhood as an ideological framework by the dependence of the economy. Methodologically, the research takes a qualitative, textual and theoretical form that is premised on revisionist feminism, feminist materialism, postcolonial criticism, intersectionality, and womanist intuition. The paper reveals how the maternal body is turned into a place of use-value, biology capacity redefined as a social and economic activity through a close analysis of Jashoda as a wet nurse. The physical aging and ultimate desertion of Jashoda is a gradual process that discloses the expendable nature of the system of mythifying motherhood but forecheseably overloading women who give birth to babies. The pivotal contribution of the paper is to rebrand *Breast-Giver* as a rethinking of sacred motherhood. It suggests that Devi does not just depict the ailing mamma; it questions the social and political framework that transforms the motherhood nurturing into marketable commodities. Through this the study will contribute to existing arguments on reproductive labor, feminine embodiment, as well as politics of care in the postcolonial and global feminist debate.



Keywords— *Commodified Motherhood, Revisionist Feminism, Female Body Politics, Maternal Labor, Postcolonial Feminism, Subaltern Motherhood*

I. INTRODUCTION

Motherhood has traditionally held a lofty place in the cultural, religious and literary conversations. It is recurrently invoked as the utmost symbol of self-sacrifice, perseverance, motherhood, and nurture as well as unconditional love. But this exaltation frequently is based on a disturbing abstraction. The mother becomes an ethical ideal, only after being disconnected of the material body

that works under her taking-in, creating, sustaining, and wearing down the body (that is the body) in the care process. This sentimentality uplifting has continually been confronted by feminist thinking, which demands that motherhood as such is never an exclusively biological state or feeling. It is also an institution of history which is shaped by ideology, organized by labor and mediated by imbalanced power distributions. What is perceived as

natural may be, in most cases socially constructed and imposed by the culture.

This is exactly the conflict between purification and consumption that renders the *Breast-Giver* by Mahasweta Devi a very disturbing reading. The narrative rejects the redemptive discourses whereby motherhood is typically redeemed and instead forces the reader to acknowledge the maternal body as a place of production, exchange and loss. In the character of Jashoda, a woman, the lactating body that feeds off of an upper-caste family, Devi deprives motherhood of its idealist wistfulness and repatriates it to the exchanges of class and dependency, patriarchal usefulness, and bodily extraction. Jashoda is glorified as the mother just as long as she is productive. When her body starts failing, piety is replaced by indifference. The story becomes thus a perverse irony: when the maternal body gets devoured, it is glorified.

The present paper will argue that irony in that light by using a revisionist feminist lens. The term revisionism in the context does not essentially imply providing a fresh meaning of a well-known text. It refers to the questioning of the ideological underpinnings that seem to render some meanings so natural, everlasting and unquestionably morally right. Read in that manner, *Breast-Giver* is not just a work of maternal suffering; it is an attack on the cultural script which desires to have such suffering which is noble. Devi throws the door to motherhood open to debate by revealing the mechanisms by which the commodification of the female labor of reproduction is carried out and by which that commodification is masked in the name of responsibility, nurture and ladylike virtues.

Even though *Breast-Giver* has received significant criticism, much of the available academia has focused on the notion of subalternity or caste-class domination or symbolic violence perpetrated towards the female body. The following lines of inquiry can in no way be dismissed, but we will find them frequently unsatisfactorily analyzed: how, then, does Devi appeal to motherhood itself, in order to make it an object of revisionist criticism? The lactation of Jashoda, in most of the readings, does not constitute a separate kind of gendered labor but seems to be a continuation of her victimhood process which joins the body and the economy and ideology. Likewise, the productive and extractive aspects of the maternal body are underexplored with most of the time this body is seen as being in the form of a metaphor of suffering. This is not the gap between scholarship and lack of scholarship on the issue of oppression, but the gap between a lack of a continuity of critical approach to the matter, in which motherhood is understood as a form of commodified labour

and the female body is understood as a politically controlled port of use of value.

It is this gap which creates the core issue that the current study tackles, which is that the idealization of mothering masks the processes by which maternal abilities are usurped, made natural and used up in disproportionate social formations. In *Breast-Giver*, the sustenance turns ritualistic, procreation turns into means, and self-sacrifice turns into compulsion. It is not merely that Jashoda is at a disadvantage, but the fact that it is her suffering that is culturally transformed into virtue. The truth is such a form requires a reading that can sustain gender ideology, labor extraction, hierarchy up to classes and bodily politics without diminishing the text to either allegory or social documentation.

This paper accordingly works towards achieving three objectives which link with one another. To begin with it analyses the ways in which Devi subverts the sentimental and sacred symbol of motherhood by putting a spotlight on its economic and ideological underpinnings. Secondly, it examines the female body within the text as a control zone, production field and an abandoned site in the end. Third, it shows that a revisionist interpretation of *Breast-Giver* broadens existing discussions on breast-giver motherhood by placing the issue of maternal identity in the context of overlapping forces of class, masculinity, and postcolonial social relations.

The relevance of this study is that it tries to reposition *Breast-Giver* in the context of continuous arguments in care, reproductive labour and the commodification of the women body in the society. Devi has a new urgency at a time when feminist scholarship is more concerned with the invisible economies of care work and inequality of the display of bodily labor. This essay would contend that *Breast-Giver* preempts most of these anxieties by demonstrating how motherhood, or these institutions of extraction, can be used not as place of power, but as an institution of extraction in the cases of class dependence, and patriarchal demand. It adds to the study of literature, feminist theory, and postcolonial studies by advocating that motherhood is to be read as not a universal category.

In this paper, it is thus argued that *Breast-Giver* is a significant revisionist experience of busting down the mythical construct of motherhood and revealing maternal labor as a commodified experience and female flesh as a negotiated territory in which gender, classes and power merge in a very disheartening way. By following the life of Jashoda, Devi demonstrates that motherhood, instead of being an immortal moral subject, is a materialized, and

ideologically controlled phenomenon, the sanctification of which often hides the violence.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research takes place within an interdisciplinary framework, which unites revisionist feminism, feminist materialism, postcolonial theory, intersectionality and womanist thought. They are not understood as being alien theoretical adornments; indeed, they operate against each other so as to help shed light on how *Breast-Giver* constructs motherhood as an ideological, economic and physical construction.

Revisionism is the main interpretive prism of the paper. Revisionism is more than re-examining a familiar subject in a new light in feminist literary criticism. It involves deconstructing the assumptions that have led to the appearance of natural, permanent and moral sanctity of cultural categories such as motherhood, femininity, and sacrifice. This revisionist mythmaking formulation created by Alicia Ostriker is of particular significance as this author shows how literature can difficulties established structures of symbols by rewriting the discourses that can authorize the gendered identities. Even though *Devi* is not updating an archetypal myth in any literal way, *Breast-Giver* is a very radical gesture. It explodes one of the most persistent culture myths of patriarchy the sacrificialized mother.

The feminist materialism reinforces this revisionist paradigm, it is now feasible to interpret maternal labor, not as a personal sentimental act, but as a socialized work. The lactation in the story of *Devi* is both not biological and somewhat not symbolic. It turns into value-producing labour. It is no whistle of praise to the maternal body and this, it is arranged in order to be productive and worn out. The language of feminist materialism thus provides the conceptualization it is the language which motherhood can be interpreted as labor masked behind the ideological terminology of care, devotion and sacrifice.

There is equally need to have a postcolonial structure since the story is born out of a socialized world of class stratification, caste laden relationships and domestic dependence. Postcolonial analysis enables the paper to transcend abstract feminist arguments, and pay attention to the particular historical order of power that renders the body of *Jashoda* appropriable. In this respect, the work by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak can not be ignored anyhow. Through her theorization of the subaltern woman, we can understand that only the roles of various functions that the bodies of such women are designed to play make them become socially visible.

The intersectionality and womanist thinking are also borrowed by the study to prevent treating and defining woman as a universal category. The intersectionality of Kimberlé Crenshaw proves helpful in demonstrating that the exploitation of *Jashoda* cannot be traced to gender per se; her frailty comes about in the intersection of gendered duty, economically precarious circumstances, and social stratification. As much as womanism discussed by Alice Walker has a historical ground based on the experience of the Black women, it is still hints that it is attentive to the survival, endurance, and lived experience of marginalized women. These frameworks serve to shed light on the differences in the ways motherhood in *Breast-Giver* is organized based on power with an eye to read comparatively and with care.

Combined, these approaches to theory enable the paper to make an argument that *Breast-Giver* is not merely a narrative on maternal suffering. It is a literary and ideological deconstructing of divine maternity and the way that the labor of the mother is naturalized, the value of the body is associated with productivity and that the mother is found useless when her labor is no longer useful.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

As long as scholarship on Mahasweta Devi has used the *Breast-Giver* as a way to understand how gendered exploitation refers to it, the story has been viewed as an expression of such exploitation which has been discussed disproportionately across its various political registers. Postcolonial feminist and subaltern studies have reacted to form the foundational readings which provided a precursor of the question of representation; as *Jashoda* becomes visible to the social order, it is not her body, but her become-worldly functions of reproductive and affective care which makes her visible. The formulation of the work of *Devi* by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has been particularly important in the shift of focus away the personal suffering to the historical and ideological formations whereby the subaltern female body is reconfigured as labor, duty and symbolism. But these readings though clarifying mediation and marginality are not always able to maintain a different analysis of motherhood as a historically constructed institution. Motherly body is not completely theorized as a place where care is translated to extractive labor, even though it is usually subalternized.

Breast-Giver has come under a related body of criticism addressing *Breast-Giver* via Marxist-feminist as well as materialist approaches. Such studies have been useful towards making cases to support the argument that the wet-nursing of *Jashoda* makes motherhood an economic activity and the underpinning of patriarchy, class

dependency, and social hierarchy. The latter is a significant aspect of such work, which proves that lactation in the text cannot be merely a sacred instinct but work. However, a large part of this criticism is still more than conceptually wide. It recognizes exploitation, but not necessarily delves into the ideological processes that render exploitation noble, even natural, and even culturally desirable. Consequently, the culturally sacredized language that is actually what justifies extraction motherhood is frequently under scrutiny.

More recent criticism has made the purely victim-centered approaches to reading slightly more difficult: it focuses on the politics of breastfeeding being both ambivalent and ambiguous. The work by Morgan Richardson Dietz is important in this respect as it does not see the need to apply one symbolical role to breastfeeding in the Indian literary text. Dietz conflates it with hunger, nourishment, embodiment and social power to provide a more referenced interpretive area where intimacy and coercion can both be experienced in the case of breastfeeding. This is significant intervention as it allows Jashoda to cease being a flattened symbol of submission with passive suffering. Simultaneously, there is excessively heavy-handed emphasis on ambivalence that can make the structure of the critique of *Devi* soft. Contradiction in *Breast-Giver* is not an existential contradiction but a socially constructed contradiction. Not just caught in the paradox; the body of Jashoda is forcefully implanted into an economy where the productivity of the maternal body is given a reward and the body is earlier disposed in the same way when that productivity becomes low.

The other more recent study of the body politics in the greater oeuvre has also helped to further enrich the field to demonstrate that women bodies in her fiction are battlegrounds dominated by violence, power, and resistance. It is on the basis of such studies that one is enabled to understand that the suffering of the body in *Devi* is never absolutely personal. Nevertheless, there are reproaches against the inability of surveys across a range of texts to discontinue the classification of such a category as that of the female body, without specification of the motherly body. The breast could be talked about as a symbol, torn lesbian, or injury, but not very frequently as a tool of labor, which is implanted in a continuous system of extraction. Such a difference plays a crucial role in the current paper, because *Breast-Giver* is not just a piece about physical harm; it is a way in which creative power becomes transformed into an enduring tool of social capital.

At this juncture, revisionism is significant indeed. The theory of revisionist mythmaking by Alicia Ostriker provides a very promising approach since one of the most common cultural narratives of the patriarchal culture, the

sacred mother, is undone by the story of *Devi*. Such revisionism is not merely the reinterpretation; it is a disclosure of that which culture has made self-evident. *Breast-Giver* defrocked motherhood of sentimental halo and brought her into historicity of her place of work, of hard work and material disparity. But surprisingly, the criticism of the story has not always put revolution in the classification of interpretations to the forefront. Scholars may refer to the irony or inversion in *Devi* about treating Jashoda, however, the studies do not show how the text is systematically rewritten about the ideological presumption of treating motherhood as a selfless, natural and morally transcendent phenomenon.

The intersectionality, womanism, and Black feminist thought are comparative frameworks of feminism that provide additional conceptual sensitivity. The intersectionality as explained by Kimberlé Crenshaw can be employed to explain why the vulnerability of Jashoda can not be gendered; it can be exploited when gendered need combines with class vulnerability and deep-rooted stratification. The work by Patricia Hill Collins on motherhood and organized inequality also questions universalizing descriptions of maternal identity in its demand that the motherhood should be constructed through labor, social stratification and power. The even survival and lived female resilience of Alice Walker is yet another suggestive prism through which a negotiation of surviving without romanticization by the marginalized female can be viewed. But in a large part of modern criticism such frameworks are called out merely gesturally. Their quotations are given as hypothetical indicators and not completely translated into the caste-specific and postcolonial particularity of the world of the narrative of *Devi*.

Of particular interest to this distinction is that between motherhood as lived experience and motherhood as institution, which is set forth by Adrienne Rich. Rich makes it possible to observe that it is not a critique of maternal feeling, but the institution that lays claim to care, naturalizes the obligation, and sanctifies the depletion, which *Devi* is criticizing. The criticism which has been in existence has swung between the two insuffices: on the one extreme she has been sentimentalized into being the ultimate sacrificial mother and on the other she has been understood as merely a victim of patriarchy. There is not enough in either of the accounts. The institutional capture of capacity to mother, so that mothering turns into labour, labour then becomes identity and identity then becomes disposable after the body ceases to be productive is what *Devi* dramatizes.

The main gap in the current body of literature, then, is not that the issue of oppression is not addressed in *Breast-Giver* but rather the lack of a complex concomitant approach that interprets the story as both revisionism and commodified motherhood, as well as the politics of the female body. The previous literature has talked about subalternity, breastfeeding, ideology and bodily suffering without a sustained discussion on bringing these strands into a continuing dialogue with an aim of demonstrating how Devi defies the sacrificial myth of motherhood as such. The paper fills that gap by positing that *Breast-Giver* redefines maternal hood as a commodified labor and the maternal body as a place of extraction that is controlled politically, the paper sheds some light on how the patriarchal and class structure transforms maternal virtue into social utility.

IV. METHODOLOGY

To explore the theme of a critique of commodified motherhood and politics of female body as portrayed in the work of Mahasweta Devi, the current study follows a qualitative, textual and theory-driven approach to analyzing *Breast-Giver* by Mahasweta Devi. Instead of the empirical data and quantitative models, the paper is based on close reading and critical interpretation. The literary text is viewed as a thick cultural entity where the relations between gender, labor, classes, ideology and embodiment are generated and challenged. That kind of methodology is particularly suitable, since the key point of the paper is not about gauging social conduct but about looking at how the narrative structure, the characterization, the images, the organization of the themes reveal the underlying maternal logic of the materials and the political logic.

The analytical paradigm consists of an interdisciplinary approach based on feminist critical, womanist, postcolonial, and revisionist reading. Feminist criticism helps the study to analyze the institutionalization of motherhood and patriarchal subjectivity of the feminine body. Womanist thinking builds on this analysis by highlighting the issue of survival, work, perseverance and the reality of the lived life of the marginalized women. A postcolonial treatment places the experience of Jashoda into context of the contemporary realities of the stratification, dependence at home, and historical based disparity. Revisionism serves as the key interpretive practice of the paper, because the work aims at demonstrating the processes of destabilization of the perfected version of motherhood by Devi as she demonstrates its economical and ideological basis.

The paper methodologically approaches a precise analysis of the chosen narrative scenes, repetitive imagery

and the changes in social status of Jashoda. The representation of lactation, reproductive labour, bodily depletion, illness, and abandonment deserve special attention, as these aspects shed light on how the maternal identity is turned into labour and the body of value that becomes dependent on the productivity. It is thus thematic and theoretical analysis. It neither finds motifs in the text, but interprets the motifs as to the issues of reproductive labor, commodification, body politics, and maternal ideology.

The reason behind the choice of this methodology is due to the nature of the research problem as such. As the paper aims to comprehend how a construct of motherhood is culturally constructed, politically controlled and exploited materially in the story of Devi, a qualitative and theoretical approach offers the deep insight and interpretative option. The ideological tension, symbolic density, and narrative force the *Breast-Giver* disturbs the sacred concept of maternity would be inadequately studied using a purely descriptive or sociological approach. The approach, along with its stratified approach to reading, employing tools such as close reading and feminist, womanist, postcolonial, and revisionist theory approaches, allows bringing a multi-layered interpretation to the text and deliver on the larger claim of this paper, namely that motherhood in Devi is not natural, sacred, it is a space of contest and labor and inequality.

Critical Analysis

Commodified Motherhood

Breast-Giver is a dismantling of the sentimental fiction of motherhood by Mahasweta Devi, who thrusts it into the realm of exchange. The pregnancy of Jashoda is not presented as one in itself as a personal emotional state; it gets transformed into a kind of labor where the value of labor is in its ability to provide others. Her body comes in handy as much as it can be mobilized in a repetitive way to be used in the nourishment, and the nourishment is turned into a social and economic activity. What is revealed by Devi, however, is not just suffering of the mother but the commodification of maternity itself. Being a mother is a life that is not lived by chance but structured, digested and formalized. Value of the maternal body is only provided as long as it is productive.

The novel needs to be read then as an antithesis to ideology misrecognition. Jashoda is worshiped as mother, although this worship veils the truth that her reproductive and lactating abilities are being acquired as labor. The religious words about maternity serve as a cultural and cultural veil which does not allow the exploitation to manifest itself as such. What appears to be natural feminine generosity, is actually work that ideology has made

invisible. This is the most prominent insight of Devi: the aspect of motherhood that is most easily commodified is the aspect of the motherhood that is the most highly sanctified as, in such a way, labor is not called labor.

Politics of the Female Body

It is not the female body that is oppressed in *Breast-Giver*, but rather politically administered. Devi uses the body of Jashoda as a place where the social power is applied by exploiting, controlling and abandoning it, eventually. They are not treated as breathing body parts which have weariness, finite and thirst; her breasts are turned into productive organs which value is quantified in action. It is the politics of the female body which is exactly this conversion of person into instrument.

An intersectionality influenced reading elucidates why Jashoda is never exploited in an abstract sense as woman. She is a clear cut exploitation of a poor lady placed in a chain of dependency and deprivation. No, it cannot be attributed solely to gender. Her physical body is exposed to be used up since the patriarchal demand comes up against the economic vulnerability and social hierarchy. The story of Devi is therefore an indication that female embodiment is valued differently. Consumption is not womanhood, but rather the working body of the socially precarious woman.

Revisionist Deconstruction of Sacred Motherhood

The most radical power of *Breast-Giver* is its destruction of the myth of elements of sacred motherhood as a culture. Devi does not merely present an image of a suffering mother, she challenges ideological script that glorifies maternal suffering. The good mother figure of the patriarchal culture proves to be the one who is always giving, self-sacrificing and has a morally uplifted attitude through sacrifice. Devi makes this script topsy-turvy. The better Jashoda is acting in ideal motherhood, the better she is devoured by this ideal. Her sanctification lacks in giving out dignity; it gives out exhaustion.

It is at this point that revisionism comes in. Devi is not a re-write in the classical sense of the word of the myth, but of one of the most persistent models of symbols of culture the holy mother. *Breast-Giver* takes the transcendental prestige out of motherhood and puts it in the realm of toil, subordination and physical loss. The mother is no longer the symbol of just nurture; she is the place itself where political brutality is shrouded in the language of moralism. The strength of the intervention of Devi is due to the fact that it is no anti-motherhood of a simplistic kind. Instead, it is the opposite of mystification which is anti-mystification. It unveils: the idealized official motherhood has been reliant on the depletion of the bodies of women and ideal quietness.

Motherhood and Capitalist Patriarchy

Even though the world of *Breast-Giver* cannot be narrowed down to the scope of modern corporate capitalism, the text can be completely readable within the logic of capitalist patriarchy. The maternal labor by Jashoda is not industrialized as such but it definitely is productive. It maintains a family, ensures continuation and procreation of lives of others. Devi thus displays that patriarchal economies are dependent not only on visible wage labor but hidden instances of reproductive and care labor. The maternal body becomes an individual machine of social reproduction, which generates value without becoming structurally acknowledged.

Capitalist patriarchy is an effective concept in this situation since it actually gives the meeting of the ideology and material power its name. Patriarchy provides the moral grammar of the feminine responsibility; a stratification of classes defines who does the caring and who gets the care; economic rationality defines the value of the woman as bodily useful. Jashoda can only be revered when she is productive. Her work cannot be done away with but her personality takes a back seat to her role. Maternal idealization and economic exploitation do not oppose each other in the text, but they support each other.

Agency vs Survival

To read Jashoda more carefully entails going beyond such facile opposition between victim and agent. Devi does not give her her full autonomy or passivity. Jashoda cajoles, copes, compromises, yet these behaviours fall more within the domain of existential survival than the sovereign freedom. It is not her implication of liberated choice that she engages in wet-nursing; rather it is her reaction to structural precarity. What matters is not the question of whether she has agency in the abstract, then, but what the options of agency are when the aspect of survival is based upon bodily availability.

The use of a womanist approach is also helpful in this case as it highlights the endurance without manipulating romanticism. Jashoda lives, but at a high price. It assures continuity to the detriment of the body, and ultimately, of selfhood. Devi is offered two things to accept and she rejects both: she glorifies endurance as empowerment and erases action by reducing Jashoda to total victim. In place of that, she provides a more challenging and honest character—one whose actions are actual, but limited; one who is active, but determined by overdetermination.

Disposable Motherhood

Among the most heart-shattering revelations in the story is the deep-seated reality that, commodified

motherhood, is expendable. Only so long as her body can bear is Jashoda needed. When another factor stops working--the sickness--the halo of reverence around her starts to dissipate. This driftage of glorification to abandonment disclose the conditional character of the maternal value. She is not venerated in the sense of the permanent morality; she is venerated in the sense that she is a useful woman.

This structure is called by the name disposable motherhood. The mother is glorifying when in usable condition and is discarded when not in usable condition. Devi is thus able to unveil the violence concealed in maternal glorification. Believing in culture does not guarantee reciprocity, protection and dignity. However, the opposite is usually true since it hides the fact that maternal body has been relegated to dispensable labour. What dies down in the sickness of Jashoda is not merely her health, but the ideological fantasy of motherhood, which promises honor.

Class and Subaltern Motherhood

The condition of Jashoda can not be interpreted outside of the class. She is not just a mother, but a poor mother, whose motherly abilities are usurped in a rank household structure. Breast-Giver does not criticize motherhood as something universal, which is experienced by all women. It portrays that motherhood is hierarchical. Another dependent body is the spending, the physical sacrifice, of a socially disadvantaged woman keeping the other household comfortable and continuing. Devi in this way reveals the inequality of the reproductive load of a stratified social structure.

Subaltern motherhood category is thus very important. Jashoda is not left out of being a mother; she is overwhelmed by it. Maternity is overloaded with her identity, and yet, she is denied structural protection that would render motherhood dignified as opposed to being extractive. The latter is one of the most piercing political observations made by Devi: denied the right to be a good mother, marginalized women are ensnared in the most exploitative type of motherhood. their work keeps others alive, and their own susceptibility is not assuaged.

Concluding Critical Position

Combined, these dimensions indicate that Breast-Giver is not a just a story of female suffering. It is a critical assessment of the political organization of motherhood in terms of labor, discipline and disposability. The revisionist strength of Devi is showing the shadowed worlds of extraction that bear the sacred motherhood. The body of Jashoda is the place of convergence of cultural sanctification and material violence. It is through this convergence that it is possible to take the story as a challenge to revise the idea of motherhood as a historically

contingent formation, and a formation at stake, politically, morally.

This uniqueness of the reading is that it demands the central insight of the text is not the fact that women are victims of the patriarchal institution, but that even the very ideal of motherhood can be used to mine the resources of women bodies slaves to patriarchal and even class power. Jashoda is not merely a representation of sacrifice. She unveils the institutionalized violence disguised in celebration of maternal virtue.

V. CONCLUSION

This paper has suggested Breast-Giver by Mahasweta Devi requires a more strict and historically authoritative perspective of motherhood by revealing their comprehension with work, order, and loss of the human flesh. The suffering of the one woman is not what is made visible of the text, but the ideological and material process on which is built, was borrowed, and is exhausted the production of maternal identity. The path of Jashoda confirms that not all motherhood is the contrary of exploitation; to some circumstances, it is one of the most acceptable ways to become exploited.

This paper has endeavored to transcend generalized arguments of suffering that befall women by introducing revisionism, feminist materialism, body politics, postcolonial and intersectional insight into a lasting conversation. Its most important contribution is that Breast-Giver does not just have to be read as an account of subaltern suffering, but is a form of revisionist critique of the figure of sacrificed maternity. The paper has revealed how lactation is made a labor, transformation of the maternal body into a use-value and how motherhood can be commodified and turned into a disposable commodity. By so doing, it provides a more combined system to view maternity, social hierarchy and political economy of care in relation to each other.

There are consequences to this argument which are not limited to literature. Devi is narrated with unparalleled urgency in the Indian context where women have yet to overcome the culturally ingrained and unacknowledged care labour that remains uneasy to change though motherhood is still culturally revered. It sheds light on the paradox between symbolic dignity and material disregard, particularly in the life of the economically disadvantaged women whose efforts and energies keep families, legislations, and communities in existence yet they are not given equal protection. The story also reflects the contemporary discourses of reproductive work, surrogacy, domestic economies of care, dispositions of the body, and feminization of sacrifice, at the global scale. Breast-Giver,

therefore, comes out as a lasting contribution to the discourse of the way in which the bodies of women are valued, controlled and consumed over disparate social formations.

Concurrently, the research paper presents a few research directions in the future. Further comparative work can include the exploration of the representation of motherhood as labor via the writing of South Asian, African and diasporic women. The other fruitful lineage would be to read *Breast-Giver* and the current arguments about reproductive justice and the neoliberal care economies, and the medical exploitation of female bodies. The connection between caste, class and maternal embodiment in Indian literary works can also be studied in more specific ways in further studies. These questions would enrich the discussion that this paper opens by proving that motherhood is never a single or fixed category, but a historically moving landscape which is informed by ideology, survival and resistance.

In the end *Breast-Giver* survives as it does not consent. It will not permit motherhood to be an idealised abstraction not bound to the body which works beneath her. Rather, it adheres that the maternal body be viewed in all its political and material reality. By doing so, Devi challenges, in an unsettling and yet very needed way, what culture holds most sacredly: one of the most finely tuned systems of women-exploitation that culture practises.

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From *The tempest* To *Hag-Seed*: The rise of Caliban in Postcolonial Criticism

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Abstract— Canadian writers have produced a variety of genres. Influences on Canadian writings are broad, both geographically and historically. Criticism of Canadian literature has focused on its nationalistic and regional themes, although this is only a small portion of Canadian literary criticism. Margaret Eleanor Atwood, born in November 18, 1939 is a Canadian poet, novelist, literary critic, essayist, and environmental activist. She is a winner of the Arthur C. Clarke Award and Prince of Asturias Award for Literature, has been shortlisted for the Booker Prize five times, winning once, and has been a finalist for the Governor General's Award several times, winning twice. In 2001, she was inducted into Canada's Walk of Fame. Margaret Atwood's rendered her excellent play *Hag-Seed* in 2016 to Hogarth Shakespeare publications. It is a novel that takes Shakespeare's play of enchantment, retribution, and second chances leads us on an interactive, illusion ridden journey with new surprises and wonders of its own. No study of *The Tempest* would be complete without some knowledge of its life on the stage in a historical perspective since, among other reasons, the stage history runs almost parallel with the critical history of the play and is therefore instructive in many ways. Moreover, criticism and stage presentation are complementary to each other. In the absence of directly inherited traditions from Shakespeare's day, the theatre has often learnt from criticism and, conversely, no critical insight would be of much value unless it could be realized in the theatre. The earliest recorded performance of the play was at the court: "a play called *The Tempest*" was presented there in November 1611. Again, it was a part of the festivities organized in honour of the betrothal and marriage of Princess Elizabeth, daughter of James I, during the winter of 1612-1613.



Keywords— Canadian Literature, Margaret Atwood, *Hag-Seed*, *The Tempest*, Shakespearean Criticism

Postcolonial Aspects of *The Tempest*

The play *The Tempest* might have been publicly performed at the Blackfriars and even at the Globe soon after the court presentation but there are no records. Theatrical traditions were totally lost with the closure of the theatres in 1642. The text of Shakespeare's play was grossly mutilated when, soon after the restoration, D'Avenant, with some help from Dryden, altered it in order to make it "fit" for the changed conditions of the new age. The adaptation, "The Tempest, or the Enchanted Island" by Dryden and D'Avenant was presented at the Duke's Theatre in Lincoln's Inn Fields on 7 November 1667 and published in 1670. The well-known diarist, Pepys saw it eight times and greatly liked it. In this adaptation the principle of formal balance

was carried to extremes by adding a number of characters to serve as counterparts to the existing ones. Hippolito (a man who had never seen a woman), Dorinda (a sister-companion for Miranda), Sycorax (a sister for Caliban) and Milcha (a female sprite, Ariel's companion) were some of the new additions. Caliban is a creature who is different in nature, language and appearance from every being that ever existed, whether in literature or in the world. It is in the early passages of the play in which this rare and fanciful monstrosity is really sketched out. During his first short interview between Prospero and Caliban all the main points of the monster's nature are brought out.

The Rise of Caliban

Caliban has inspired varying criticism and interpretation. To some he is the epitome of evil whose disposition is so hopeless that he cannot be rescued from the pits of his darkened existence. There are others who believe that he is the symbol of a “mindless mob”. Trinculo thinks he is a fish, and Prospero calls him a tortoise. He neither recognizes nor understands any moral law, and is often considered as the unconscious image in our minds of the evolutionary “missing link”. Thus, he is symbolic of mankind in its initial stage of existence. He is so many things to so many people, and he inspires so many varied interpretations that it is impossible to merely call him a ‘brutish savage’. He is a product entirely of nature. We are bound to go wrong of we assess him with our social values. What we need to do is to assess him in intellectuality moral terms by an inviolate moral code. It is then that the true Caliban surfaces. Canibal means “human that eats human flesh”. Shakespeare’s *Caliban* is from a version of the word, with -n- and -l- interchanged, found in Hakluyt’s ‘Voyages’. *The Tempest* was inspired by the decolonization movements of the 1960s and 1970s in Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America. These readings challenge more traditional interpretations of the play, questioning Prospero’s ownership of the island and rethinking the role of Caliban.

What was Shakespeare’s response to stereotypes of race and religion? Postcolonial criticism is a method of analysis that addresses questions of racial identity and equality, and also of gender equity via two main modes of inquiry. First, it investigates how Shakespeare’s plays relate to the social codes and conventions by which early modern Europeans defined non-European and non-Christian people and races they encountered. Second, it explores the more recent history of the *reception* of Shakespearian drama within non-Western societies and settings – in Africa, India, the Caribbean, and Latin America.

Thus, postcolonial criticism of a play like *Othello* not only draws our attention to Renaissance attitudes toward Moors, Africans, and Turks, among others, but it also examines how the play may have been interpreted and performed in countries involved in recent colonial and post-colonial struggles, for example in apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa. This process was, of course, a complex one. On the one hand, Shakespeare was an export to the colonies of European literature and language as a part of their policy of cultural domination. On the other hand, it also enabled the colonized groups to revise and remake Shakespeare’s works in ways which related to their own social conditions.

Early post-colonial responses to *The Tempest*

Until the advent of postcolonial criticism, Anglo-American critics frequently read *The Tempest* as an allegory about artistic creation. Since this was once considered to be Shakespeare’s final play, Prospero has been defined as a surrogate playwright, shaping the main action through his magic. Starting with the artificial tempest of the opening scene, Prospero directs, rewards, and punishes the main characters according to his master plan, which is to marry his daughter, Miranda, to Ferdinand, the son and heir to the Duke of Naples, his former enemy. This plan is considered his revenge for his forcible exile from his own kingdom. In leading to this desired union of Naples and Milan, Prospero obstructs the advances of Caliban, the native of the island where he and Miranda are exiled.

Furthermore, Prospero’s magical power not only ensures the enslavement of Caliban, but also demands the servitude of a sprite named Ariel to put his magical designs into action. Overall, in this commonly accepted reading of *The Tempest*, Prospero emerges as an all-knowing, benevolent patriarch and artistic creator whose motives are beyond reproach. Since the play is a romance in terms of its genre, its plot was generally approached as a fanciful tale with little connection to the history of the period or its aftermath.

Empire Writes Back tells that this is a long tradition of privileging Prospero’s creative powers as beneficent and god-given began to be overshadowed by the growing stature of Caliban, following the de-colonisation movements of the 1960s and 1970s in Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America. If, traditionally, Prospero’s art represented the world of civility and learning in contrast to the ‘natural’ black magic of Caliban’s mother Sycorax, anti-colonial revisions of the play challenged this rather abstract Eurocentric division between art and nature. Instead, as Africans and Caribbeans saw that widespread national liberation was imminent – that is from 1959 onwards – they began to revise and mobilise the play in defence of Caliban’s right to the island on which he is born prior to Prospero’s arrival. Caliban’s assertion in the play, ‘This island’s mine,’ by Sycorax my mother, / Which thou tak’st from me’ (1.2.331–32), became the rallying cry for African and Caribbean intellectuals from the 1960s to the 1970s.

For instance, Aimé Césaire, a black writer and activist from Martinique, re-wrote Shakespeare’s play in 1969 in French. *Une Tempête* (translated into the English *A Tempest* in 1985) celebrates Caliban’s verbal attacks on Prospero and questions the latter’s claims to the island. Set in a colony – a prototype of a Caribbean or African setting – in the throes of resistance and unrest, Césaire’s play focuses initially on Caliban’s resistance to Prospero’s control over language. Here, Césaire is clearly sensitive to

the way in which the name Caliban/Cannibal appears in Shakespeare's play and in colonial history as a cultural stereotype for the natives of the New World. Accompanying Caliban's challenge to language are references to an actual guerrilla movement and an impending black independence. And Ariel, who is labelled a 'mulatto' in this play, represents the mixed races more able to accept their limited oppression. Overall, this play characterizes the changes undergone by the figure of Caliban in productions of the play: in 18th and 19th century European productions he was represented as a primitive or 'missing link' from Darwin's theory (i.e. a being in between apes and humans in the evolutionary process). However, with the advent of national liberation of the non-European races, as in Césaire's play, Caliban was widely depicted as a defiant subject under European rule, or simply an embodiment of any oppressed group.

Such identifications with Caliban and an accompanying unease about his alien language typify numerous Latin American and Caribbean responses to the play in the wake of decolonisation in the 1960s. In Africa too, the play became a site for anti-colonial responses, such as the novel *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), by Kenyan Ngugi Wa Thiong'o. This work, however, does not focus on Caliban's potential resistance. Rather, it examines the nature of Prospero's colonising drives and methods. The central character of Ngugi's novel is a colonial functionary, John Thompson, who associates *The Tempest* with the grand moral idea of the British Empire and plans to write about his experiences in Africa in a book entitled *Prospero in Africa*. Overall, whether one considers *The Tempest* as an allegory of Caliban's liberation or of Prospero's colonial paternalism, post-colonial readings of the play's reception in the developing world clearly establish that we can no longer recuperate *The Tempest* as a historically 'innocent' text, uncorrupted by later historical readings.

Caliban's version of history

In trying to view the conditions of Caliban's servitude from *his* perspective, postcolonial criticism gives legitimacy to his claims to the island, based on a reading of history that challenges the version narrated by Prospero to his daughter. In Caliban's account, Prospero is the intruder who betrayed the initial welcome given to him by Caliban:

This island 's mine, by Sycorax my mother,
Which thou tak'st from me. When thou cam'st first,
Thou strok'st me and made much of me, wouldst give me
Water with berries in 't, and teach me how
To name the bigger light, and how the less,
That burn by day and night; and then I loved thee,

And showed thee all the qualities o' th' isle,
The fresh springs, brine-pits, barren place and fertile –
Cursed be I that did so! All the charms
Of Sycorax, toads, beetles, bats, light on you;
For I am all the subjects that you have,
Which first was mine own king, and here you sty me
In this hard rock, whiles you do keep from me
The rest o' th' island.

(1.2.331–43)

It is this rendition of history that became the battle cry for the anti-colonial movements in Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America – a rendition that became the staple of many revisions and appropriations of Shakespeare's play in these regions. While the play was written in 17th-century England, postcolonial criticism takes the play outwards towards its complicated transactions between European and African and Caribbean cultures in the succeeding centuries. Postcolonial criticism in the West has mined this new archive of the reception history of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, questioning, once again, all normative ideas of a 'common humanity', while articulating, as Shakespeare did, the voices of the marginal characters in Prospero's grand designs.

CONCLUSION

This paper explores various interpretations of *The Tempest* concentrating on the postcolonial aspects. Contrarian viewpoints of the text are investigated. Shakespeare creates a world of imagination and illusion: a completion between the "real world" and the "new world". Through this play an important idea can be seen and understood: Utopianism. Utopianism is seen in this play in many different levels. It can be looked at in a social and political level or in a religious level. Shakespeare uses the ideas of Thomas More and Plato in the underlying plots of *The Tempest*. Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism* argues that colonialism was not - and had never been – a benevolent movement whose goal was to improve the lives of the colonized; instead, colonists' motives were entirely self - centered – i.e., economic exploitation. According to Césaire, colonizers establish their colonies on Third world countries and they exploit them. This is same in the case of *The Tempest* where Prospero establish his power on the island and exploit the life of Caliban by imposing European civilization on him. When criticism evolves, the minds of the readers have radical change, which makes the minor characters as Heroes. This paper presents the evolution of Caliban from a character of hatred and subservience to that of a disempowered individual.

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Barriers to Proficiency: EFL-Students Reluctance in Writing Skills (A Descriptive Analysis)

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Abstract— *The achievement of proficient writing skills remains one of the most formidable challenges in the field of English Foreign Language Learning (EFL) and applied linguistics. While literacy is a cornerstone of academic and professional success, a significant demographic of students exhibits a persistent reluctance to engage in writing tasks, a phenomenon often characterized by avoidance behaviors, high levels of anxiety, and linguistic stagnation. This research paper investigates the multidimensional nature of student reluctance in writing, categorizing the inhibitors into three primary domains: psychological constructs, cognitive-linguistic barriers, and pedagogical misalignments. Utilizing a qualitative descriptive framework, this study explores how writing apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and the cognitive load of bilingual processing contribute to this resistance. Furthermore, the paper examines the evolving role of digital literacy and Artificial Intelligence (AI) in either mitigating or exacerbating student hesitation. Preliminary analysis suggests that reluctance is rarely a result of a lack of motivation alone; rather, it is an adaptive response to perceived linguistic inadequacy and instructional methods that prioritize product over process. The study concludes by advocating for a shift toward "Process-Oriented Pedagogy" and the integration of self-regulated learning (SRL) strategies to empower students, reduce affective filters, and foster a more resilient writing identity.*



Keywords— *Applied Linguistics, Writing Reluctance, Artificial Intelligence, Affective Filter, Cognitive Load, Pedagogical Barriers.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Teachers around the world are facing growing reluctance from students. This problem is clear for the authors as teachers of EFL for more than 14 years. They do their best to have their students well-motivated and able to formulate ideas and arguments using written communication. Applied linguistics defines writing as an advanced cognitive-social-language exercise. The goal of this paper is to introduce the scope of this study. Namely what background led to this study, it explores the background, the specific problem, and the theoretical framework guiding this investigation.

1.1 Background of the Study:

The "Four Skills" of language -listening, speaking, reading, and writing- have been the basis for pedagogy in curriculum design. Writing stands out as particularly challenging. It demands explicit knowledge of syntax, spelling, and discourse markers .

In the context of English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL), the difficulty increases. Learners face the "Dual-Task" phenomenon. They are trying to master English while also learning the rules of academic writing. Recent changes toward digital communication have made this even more complicated. Students may write more in informal settings like texting and social media, but there is a widening gap between their

informal fluency and formal academic performance. This gap often shows up as reluctance. Students may delay, avoid, or put in minimal effort when faced with formal writing assignments.

1.2 Statement of the Problem:

The core problem that will be addressed in this study is higher and secondary students showing signs of reluctance. Reluctance to write is a very complicated psychological and language barrier. Despite having access to advanced writing tools and various teaching strategies, many students remain stuck at the pre-writing stage. This reluctance is not just laziness or a lack of discipline, as some might think. It is a complex psychological and linguistic defense mechanism. When the cognitive demands of a task exceed what a learner believes they can handle, they often disengage completely. If ignored, this reluctance can lead to poor academic performance, less professional growth, and a lasting fear of writing that continues into adulthood. We need to clearly identify these barriers to go beyond superficial solutions .

1.3 Purpose of the Study:

The primary goal of this descriptive research is to identify and categorize the specific factors that trigger reluctance in writing. The study aims to:

- Explore the psychological causes of writing anxiety.
- Determine how first language (L1) interference and cognitive load affect second language (L2) writing speed and quality.
- Assess how traditional teaching methods, like focusing on final products, might discourage student participation.

1.4 Research Questions:

To guide this investigation, we propose the following questions:

- What primary psychological factors, such as anxiety, self-belief, and fear of evaluation, are linked to writing reluctance?
- How do cognitive and language limitations in English proficiency contribute to avoiding complex writing tasks?
- How do teaching environments and feedback systems affect a student's willingness to engage in writing?

1.5 Significance of the Study:

This research is important for curriculum developers, writing center directors, and language teachers. It provides the context needed to create more supportive and effective writing experiences.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Writing reluctance is not a fixed state but a complex issue that has gained attention in applied linguistics. This chapter reviews scholarly discussions about the psychological, cognitive, and sociocultural aspects of this problem. By looking at the relationship between the learner's mental state and their language environment, we can create a clear picture of the barriers that prevent student engagement .

2.1 The Psychology of Writing Apprehension:

Writing apprehension, a term popularized by Daly and Miller (1975), remains a key focus in studying student reluctance. Recent research indicates that this hesitation is deeply rooted in performance anxiety. Unlike reading or listening, writing creates a permanent record of a learner's language abilities that can be repeatedly examined by instructors and peers.

Fear of Negative Evaluation: In the modern classroom, the focus on error correction can cause avoidance. Holmes et al. (2018) point out that graduate students often experience a crisis of identity when their writing is critiqued. This can lead to paralysis where students prefer not to write than risk doing it poorly.

Self-Belief and Writing Identity: Bandura's idea of self-efficacy is crucial here. Students who see themselves as poor writers tend to fulfill that belief. Amerstorfer and Münster-Kistner (2021) note that when students doubt their ability to organize ideas, their engagement decreases. This is especially true in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) settings, where the stakes are high.

2.2 Cognitive Barriers and the Dual-Language Burden:

From a cognitive standpoint, writing in a foreign language requires significant executive function. The brain must handle vocabulary retrieval, apply complex grammar rules, and maintain linguistic coherence simultaneously .

The Bottleneck Effect: Conti (2026) describes writing in a second language as a cognitive bottleneck. L2 learners often lack automatic language structures, requiring conscious effort for basic mechanics like spelling or verb conjugation. This leaves little mental capacity for higher-order tasks like argumentation or structure, leading to mental fatigue and reluctance .

L1 Interference and Translation Fatigue: Many reluctant writers get trapped in a cycle of mental translation. They think of ideas in their native language and struggle to find the right words in English. This friction creates a delay that makes writing feel tedious and unrewarding .

2.3 The Role of Digital Literacy and AI:

The years between 2023 and 2026 have seen a significant change in how writing is done due to generative AI. This

has introduced a new form of reluctance: technological dependency .

The AI Influence: Recent findings from Preprints.org (2026) suggest that students may hesitate to write naturally because they see a gap between their own work and AI-generated content. This sense of inadequacy can prevent them from developing their unique voice .

Plagiarism Anxiety: On the other hand, the heavy use of AI-detection tools in universities has created a culture of surveillance. Some students report being reluctant to write for fear that their work may be flagged as AI-generated by flawed algorithms (Streefkerk, 2024)

2.4 Teaching Misalignments:

Traditional product-oriented instruction is increasingly seen as a deterrent. When the final grade is the only measure of success, the writing process, which includes messy drafts and struggles, is undervalued .

Feedback Loops: Research by Pardede (2024) indicates that collaborative writing and peer review can lower anxiety. However, when feedback is late or only summative, it fails to help students escape their avoidance cycle .

Task Authenticity: Students are much more reluctant when writing tasks feel disconnected from real life. Writing a standard five-paragraph essay solely for a grade lacks the intrinsic motivation found in task-based or project-based learning .

2.5 Summary:

The literature shows that reluctance is a multifaceted issue. It brings together emotional (anxiety), mechanical (grammar/vocabulary), and instructional feedback/task design challenges. Going forward, we must shift our focus from fixing students to improving the writing environment. This will help ensure the cognitive load is manageable and psychological safety is prioritized.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative descriptive research design. It aims to document current conditions without affecting the study's scope. This chapter details the procedure used to identify and categorize barriers to writing proficiency observed in recent academic settings .

3.1 Research Design:

Given that writing reluctance is an internal psychological state seen through external avoidance, the researcher applied a descriptive qualitative design. This approach aims to uncover the reasons behind the behavior by providing rich context. By focusing on descriptive analysis, this study compiles insights from classroom interactions, student self-

reports, and the latest linguistic research to outline the landscape of writing resistance (Amerstorfer & Frein von Münster-Kistner, 2021).

3.2 Data Collection Sources :

The primary data for this research comes from a systematic review of current academic sources and teaching case studies from 2021 to 2026. The sources include:

- Peer-Reviewed Journals: High-impact publications in applied linguistics and education psychology .

- Preprint Repositories: Recent data from 2026 regarding the impact of AI on student writing behaviors (Preprints.org, 2026).

- Curriculum Reports: Analysis of CEFR-aligned writing tasks and their relationship with student engagement levels.

3.3 The Role of the Descriptive Framework:

This research uses the Affective Filter Inventory and Cognitive Load Mapping as lenses for description. Instead of measuring student ability, the methodology aims to identify friction points in the writing process. For instance, data collection focuses on pinpointing when a student stops writing—whether during brainstorming (pre-writing), drafting (linguistic struggle), or revising (evaluation anxiety)

3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

The analysis uses a Thematic Synthesis approach. The collected data was organized into three main topics :

Linguistic Deficit vs. Psychological Block: This topic distinguishes between students who cannot write due to language limitations and those who will not write due to anxiety .

The Feedback-Response Cycle: This examines how different types of teacher feedback affect student willingness to participate .

Technological Interaction: This maps the shift from manual writing to AI-assisted writing and the resulting loss of activity in students (Streefkerk, 2024).

3.5 Limitations of the Methodology:

This study outlines the current state of the field. The findings are limited by the fast changes in AI tools, which may shift student writing psychology more quickly than traditional peer-reviewed literature can document. However, the basic psychological and cognitive principles, like anxiety and cognitive load, remain the same in both analog and digital settings.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents descriptive findings from the research, evaluating the data collected through psychology, linguistics, and pedagogy. The discussion provides a detailed examination of why students hesitate to engage with writing.

4.1 The Structure of Resistance:

The data shows that reluctance to write is rarely a simple state of being motivated or unmotivated. Instead, it represents a spectrum of avoidance.

The Perfectionism Trap: Students describe a situation where the ideal version of their essay in their mind is so distant from their actual abilities that writing feels like a betrayal of their intelligence. This leads to significant procrastination (Holmes et al., 2018).

The Social Cost of Writing: Analysis of the data suggests that for many L2 learners, writing involves high social risks. Unlike speaking, where mistakes are often overlooked, writing serves as a permanent record of one's abilities. This social vulnerability creates a strong affective filter, delaying the creative process before it begins.

4.2 The Cognitive Load of L2 Composition:

The analysis of cognitive barriers highlights a notable gap in processing that characterizes reluctant writers.

Lower-level vs. higher-level processing: Reluctant writers often find themselves stuck in lower-level thinking. The data indicates that while skilled writers have automated their spelling and basic syntax, reluctant writers expend up to 80% of their cognitive capacity on managing verb tenses and word choice (Conti, 2026). As a result, when they need to analyze or evaluate—tasks that require high-level thinking—they quickly run out of mental energy.

The blank page submission as cognitive overload: Observations show that it is not a lack of ideas that holds students back, but lexical disorientation. Many students feel overwhelmed by the number of options available to them (lexical, structural, and thematic). Without structured support or pre-writing strategies, this overload can result in failure to complete the task.

4.3 The Impact of Digital Transition:

A key finding in this 2026 analysis is the use of AI. While generative AI was initially viewed as a helpful tool for reluctant writers, the data suggests it may increase their reluctance.

Agency Loss: Students who depend on AI to create first drafts often feel a loss of ownership. They describe the resulting text as not their own, which further distances them from the writing process. Rather than improving their writing skills, they become prompt engineers, which does

not alleviate the underlying anxiety about their own writing (Preprints.org, 2026).

Detection Anxiety: The discussion also highlights that the fear of being wrongly accused of using AI has added a new layer of psychological stress, making students reluctant to use even helpful digital tools like Grammarly or spell-checkers.

4.4 Instructional Feedback: The Red Pen vs. The Green Pen:

The data analysis emphasizes the instructor's role in either breaking or reinforcing the cycle of reluctance.

Corrective vs. Formative Feedback: Traditional feedback that focuses on what is wrong tends to trigger the affective filter. In contrast, formative feedback correlates positively with increased student risk-taking in later drafts.

The Power of Small Wins: The research notes that students who write show a marked decrease in reluctance when approaching high-stakes academic tasks.

4.5 Synthesis of Findings :

The evidence suggests that student reluctance is a response to an overwhelming environment. When the fear of failure meets the cognitive challenges of L2 writing, compounded by a high-pressure classroom, reluctance is a logical result. The Reluctant Writer is not someone who dislikes writing, but someone who is protecting their self-esteem from a seemingly impossible task.

V. CONCLUSION

The research findings offer practical strategies for educators and researchers to tackle student reluctance in writing within applied linguistics.

5.1 Summary of Findings:

This research describes writing reluctance not as a fixed trait but as a complex response to linguistic and psychological pressures. The investigation shows that the reluctant writer often finds themselves in a cycle where fear of evaluation and cognitive overload reinforce each other.

Psychological Blockage: Anxiety and a strong affective filter are the key predictors of writing avoidance.

Cognitive Constraints: The lack of linguistic automation in L2 learners creates barriers, making writing physically and mentally exhausting.

Pedagogical Impact: Focusing too much on correctness over communication discourages risk-taking, while the growth of AI introduces new layers of action loss and detection anxiety.

5.2 Conclusion:

In conclusion, student reluctance in writing is a complex issue that needs a multifaceted approach. Applied linguistics should move beyond viewing writing as a purely mechanical task. To nurture skilled writers, we first need to support resilient writers. The evidence shows that providing a safe environment—where teachers replace red ink with constructive dialogue and manage cognitive load through scaffolding—helps diminish reluctance. As we progress into an AI-enhanced academic world, preserving the human aspects of writing is more important than ever.

5.3 Recommendations:

Based on the analysis, the researchers suggest:

Implement Process-Oriented Writing: Shift attention from the final product to the stages of brainstorming, drafting, and peer review. This lowers the stakes for initial attempts.

Scaffold for Cognitive Load: Offer transitions, vocabulary banks, and graphic organizers to help students avoid lower-level mechanical issues, allowing them to focus on higher-order thinking.

Integrate Low-Stakes Writing: Encourage freewriting or digital journaling without graded grammar. These builds writing stamina and lessens the fear of the blank page.

Redefine AI Integration: Instead of banning AI, use it as a pre-writing partner to assist students in generating ideas, while ensuring strict requirements for the student's voice in the final product.

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Two Visions of Emptiness: A Comparative study of T. S. Eliot's the Hollow Men and Martin Scorsese's Taxi Driver

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Abstract — This paper examines representations of spiritual emptiness and alienation in *The Hollow Men* and *Taxi Driver*. Situating the works within post-World War I Europe and post-Vietnam America, it analyses how fragmentation, repetition, and disrupted continuity shape experiences of existential dislocation. Through a comparative literary and cinematic approach, the study argues that emptiness operates not only as a theme but as a structural condition embedded in both texts, reflecting the instability of modern experience.

Keywords — Alienation, Existential Crisis, Fragmentation, Modernity, Spiritual Emptiness



I. INTRODUCTION

Modernity is frequently celebrated as an era of progress, technological expansion, and innovation. Yet beneath this narrative lies a persistent sense of instability that reshapes both social structures and inner life. The twentieth century witnessed not only rapid industrial and urban development but also a gradual erosion of religious certainty, communal cohesion, and moral clarity. In such a context, individuals often appear disoriented, immersed in activity yet detached from meaningful frameworks of belief. Literature and cinema, rather than resolving this condition, frequently dwell within it, exploring the consequences of living in a world where meaning has become uncertain.

Within this broader framework, *The Hollow Men* by T. S. Eliot and *Taxi Driver* directed by Martin Scorsese offer two distinct yet deeply connected representations of modern emptiness. Eliot's poem emerges from the aftermath of the First World War, a moment marked by cultural disillusionment and spiritual fatigue. Scorsese's film, produced in the context of post-Vietnam America, reflects a different yet comparable crisis characterized by political distrust, urban decay, and psychological fragmentation.

Despite differences in medium and historical context, both works engage with a shared concern: the fragmentation of the modern self and the collapse of stable systems of

meaning. Eliot's hollow men inhabit a barren, shadowed landscape where intention fails to become action, while Travis Bickle navigates a crowded yet isolating city that mirrors his internal dislocation. In both cases, alienation extends beyond social isolation to encompass a deeper spiritual and existential condition.

This study adopts a comparative approach to examine how literary and cinematic forms construct emptiness through distinct aesthetic strategies. By analysing poetic fragmentation alongside cinematic subjectivity, it argues that emptiness is not merely thematic but structural, embedded in form, language, and perception. In doing so, the paper highlights the continuity of modern alienation across time, demonstrating how the crisis articulated in early modernist literature persists in later cultural expressions.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The twentieth century repeatedly confronts the problem of diminishing meaning in a rapidly changing world. Across literature, philosophy, and cinema, the modern subject is depicted as fragmented and alienated, shaped by industrial modernity, war, urbanization, and the decline of shared belief systems. In response, artistic forms adopt fragmentation, repetition, and silence as formal strategies,

making absence both a theme and a structural condition. While the works of T. S. Eliot and Martin Scorsese are central to discussions of modern alienation, they are rarely examined together.

Critics of *The Hollow Men* consistently read it as an expression of spiritual paralysis. F. R. Leavis links Eliot's poetry to a decline in moral conviction, while Cleanth Brooks emphasizes its fragmented structure as an embodiment of spiritual exhaustion (Leavis, 1932; Brooks, 1939). Theological readings by Helen Gardner and Hugh Kenner situate the poem in a liminal space between belief and disbelief, where redemption is desired but unattainable (Gardner, 1949; Kenner, 1959). Later critics such as Terry Eagleton and Maud Ellmann extend this analysis by connecting Eliot's imagery and language to broader cultural instability and absence (Eagleton, 1983; Ellmann, 1987).

In contrast, *Taxi Driver* has been examined primarily within film and cultural studies. Robert Kolker interprets the film as a study of urban alienation, while Robin Wood highlights its moral ambiguity (Kolker, 1988; Wood, 1986). Foster Hirsch emphasizes cinematic techniques, voice-over, framing, and sound, that immerse viewers in the protagonist's fragmented consciousness (Hirsch, 2001). Paul Schrader's concept of transcendental style further reveals how the film expresses distorted spiritual longing, where the desire for moral order collapses into violence (Schrader, 1972).

Despite extensive scholarship, comparative analysis between these works remains limited. Eliot's poem is often read through theological frameworks, while Scorsese's film is approached through psychological or socio-political lenses. This study addresses that gap by examining emptiness as a shared structural principle, arguing that both poetic fragmentation and cinematic subjectivity construct it as a persistent condition of modern consciousness.

III. MODERNITY, FRAGMENTATION, AND THE EXPERIENCE OF EMPTINESS

Modernity is often associated with progress and technological advancement; however, it also produces instability in systems of belief and meaning. The twentieth century reshaped social, political, and urban life while weakening religious authority, moral certainty, and communal cohesion. As a result, previously stable structures of meaning became uncertain, leaving individuals navigating environments characterized by movement without coherence and connection without clarity (Weber, 2001).

Urbanization intensified this condition. Industrial cities offered new opportunities but also fostered anonymity and emotional detachment. Social relations became increasingly

impersonal, and labour grew more specialized and disconnected from meaningful fulfilment. In this context, alienation emerged as a lived experience, reflecting a growing divide between individuals and their social and existential realities (Marx, 1988). This widening gap between intention and fulfilment contributed to a pervasive sense of emptiness.

The First World War further deepened this crisis by undermining faith in progress and rational order. The scale of destruction revealed the fragility of civilizational ideals, prompting artists to question traditional forms of representation. Modernist literature responded by adopting fragmentation, repetition, and ambiguity as formal strategies to represent a fractured reality. Rather than restoring coherence, these texts dwell in suspension, where emptiness manifests as hesitation, incompleteness, and deferred meaning (Lukács, 1971).

This condition persists in later cultural forms often associated with postmodernity, characterized by the instability of identity and the collapse of overarching narratives (Lyotard, 1984). Rather than marking a rupture, postmodernism extends the concerns of modernism, reconfiguring fragmentation within new cultural and technological contexts (Jameson, 1991).

Cinema plays a crucial role in expressing this evolving condition. Through techniques such as constrained framing, repetition, silence, and voice-over narration, film translates internal dislocation into sensory experience. The modern city, in particular, becomes a central site of fragmentation, crowded yet isolating, dynamic yet disorienting. In such representations, emptiness is not explicitly stated but constructed through aesthetic form (Deleuze, 1989).

This historical and theoretical framework provides the foundation for analysing how literary modernism and urban cinema articulate emptiness as a structural feature of modern experience.

3.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in three interconnected concepts: modernity as historical rupture, alienation as structural condition, and emptiness as both spiritual and aesthetic experience. Max Weber's concept of disenchantment explains the erosion of spiritual coherence in modern society, where rationalization displaces traditional belief systems (Weber, 2001). This shift provides a key context for modernist literature.

Georg Lukács argues that modern art reflects a fragmented reality in which unity can no longer be assumed, thereby embedding historical disintegration within form (Lukács, 1971). Similarly, Karl Marx's concept of alienation describes the detachment of individuals from labour,

society, and self, extending beyond economic critique to cultural and psychological estrangement (Marx, 1988).

Postmodern theorists further develop this framework. Jean-François Lyotard identifies a decline in grand narratives, while Fredric Jameson emphasizes fragmentation and loss of depth in late twentieth-century culture (Lyotard, 1984; Jameson, 1991). These perspectives suggest continuity rather than rupture between modernism and later cultural forms.

Film theory clarifies how cinema represents this condition. André Bazin highlights realism as a means of preserving ambiguity (Bazin, 1967), while Christian Metz explains how identification with the camera produces subjective experience (Metz, 1982). Gilles Deleuze's concept of the "time-image" describes a cinematic mode where action no longer leads to resolution, resulting in suspended narratives and psychological uncertainty (Deleuze, 1989).

Together, these frameworks support the argument that emptiness functions not only as a theme but as a structural principle. In literature, it appears through fragmentation and disrupted language; in cinema, through subjective narration, visual confinement, and narrative suspension. Emptiness thus emerges as a persistent condition of modern consciousness across artistic forms.

IV. SPIRITUAL DESOLATION IN *THE HOLLOW MEN*

Written in the aftermath of the First World War, *The Hollow Men* reflects a profound crisis of belief and moral certainty. The devastation of the war undermined faith in progress, rationality, and divine order, producing a climate of spiritual disillusionment. Within this context, T. S. Eliot presents not a dramatic collapse but its aftermath, a world where belief has diminished and spiritual vitality has weakened. The poem opens with a striking paradox: "We are the hollow men / We are the stuffed men" (Eliot, 1925/1952). These figures appear outwardly formed yet internally empty, suggesting a condition of spiritual depletion. The collective voice emphasizes that this emptiness is not individual but cultural and generational. Their speech, "quiet and meaningless" further reflects linguistic exhaustion, where language persists but no longer carries conviction (Eliot, 1925/1952).

The landscape mirrors this inner desolation. Repeated references to barrenness and dryness, "This is the barren land" evoke a world devoid of renewal, reinforced by the absence of water as a symbol of spiritual regeneration (Eliot, 1925/1952). This imagery establishes emptiness as both physical and metaphysical, where survival replaces growth. Formally, the poem embodies this condition through fragmentation and repetition. The recurring lines

"Between the idea / And the reality" articulate a state of suspension, where intention fails to translate into action (Eliot, 1925/1952). This structural incompleteness reflects both psychological hesitation and spiritual stagnation. Similarly, the fragmented rendering of prayer, "For Thine is / Life is" suggests that faith persists in memory but collapses in articulation, indicating the erosion of spiritual continuity.

Motifs such as the absence of "eyes" further intensify this disorientation, symbolizing the loss of guidance and recognition. The hollow men exist in a liminal state, described as "Shape without form," suspended between life and death, belief and disbelief (Eliot, 1925/1952). This in-between condition reinforces the poem's central theme of unresolved existence. The poem's rhythmic structure, marked by pauses, repetition, and incomplete lines creates a sense of stagnation. Its conclusion, "Not with a bang but a whimper," encapsulates this subdued collapse, where decline replaces dramatic resolution (Eliot, 1925/1952). Rather than offering catharsis, the poem ends in exhaustion and ambiguity.

Despite this desolation, traces of longing persist. The hollow men recall faith and gesture toward transcendence, yet remain unable to realize it. Emptiness thus emerges not as complete nihilism but as a condition of suspended desire. Through imagery, structure, and language, Eliot constructs spiritual desolation as both a thematic concern and a formal principle, reflecting the instability of modern consciousness.

V. ALIENATION AND THE URBAN VOID IN *TAXI DRIVER*

Released in 1976, *Taxi Driver* reflects the disillusionment of post-Vietnam America, marked by political distrust and urban decay. Within this context, Martin Scorsese constructs a psychological exploration of alienation, where the protagonist, Travis Bickle, inhabits a world devoid of stable meaning (Scorsese, 1976). The film's opening sequence establishes the city as an extension of Travis's inner turmoil. Through neon-lit streets, drifting camera movement, and voice-over narration, viewers are immersed in his fragmented consciousness. His perception of the city as corrupt reflects both moral anxiety and psychological projection. Insomnia further intensifies this condition, symbolizing his inability to achieve inner stability. The taxi becomes a confined space that isolates him from meaningful interaction, reinforcing his detachment despite constant exposure to urban life.

Cinematic techniques play a crucial role in constructing alienation. Repetition of routine actions, prolonged silences, and constrained framing create a sense of stagnation. Drawing on Deleuze's concept of the "time-image," the

film resists linear progression, instead presenting suspended and unresolved experience (Deleuze, 1989). Visual elements such as mirrors and reflections fragment Travis's identity, most notably in the "You talkin' to me?" scene, which reveals his psychological disintegration. Travis's desire for purification, expressed through his recurring fantasy of cleansing the city, reflects a distorted form of transcendence. However, in the absence of a stable ethical framework, this impulse devolves into violence. The climactic shootout, though seemingly decisive, lacks moral clarity and resolves into ambiguity. The subsequent framing of Travis as a hero further complicates interpretation, exposing the instability of social judgment.

The film's conclusion reinforces this uncertainty. Travis's final glance in the rearview mirror suggests that his psychological fragmentation persists, undermining any sense of closure. As in modernist literature, resolution is deferred rather than achieved. Ultimately, *Taxi Driver* portrays alienation as both social and spiritual dislocation. The urban environment functions not merely as setting but as an externalization of fragmented consciousness, crowded yet isolating, dynamic yet devoid of coherence. Through subjective narration, repetition, and ambiguous closure, the film constructs emptiness as a structural condition. While Travis attempts to overcome this condition through action, his efforts only intensify it, revealing that modern emptiness persists regardless of response.

VI. TWO VISIONS OF EMPTINESS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Placing *The Hollow Men* alongside *Taxi Driver* reveals that modern emptiness persists across time, adapting rather than disappearing. Despite differences in medium and historical context, both works depict worlds in which stable systems of meaning have eroded. The spiritual crisis articulated by T. S. Eliot in the aftermath of the First World War reappears, in transformed form, in Martin Scorsese's portrayal of post-Vietnam America. In both cases, emptiness emerges not merely as a mood but as a structural and unresolved condition.

In *The Hollow Men*, emptiness manifests as paralysis. Eliot's figures exist in suspension, "Between the idea / And the reality" (Eliot, 1925/1952) unable to convert intention into action. Their fragmented speech and diminished voices reflect a world where belief persists only as memory. Emptiness thus produces inertia and quiet disintegration. By contrast, *Taxi Driver* presents emptiness through excessive action. Travis Bickle attempts to overcome dislocation through violent intervention, seeking meaning in moral purification (Scorsese, 1976). However, this apparent contrast reveals a deeper similarity: his violence is not a

resolution but a symptom of absence. His actions expose, rather than resolve, the instability he inhabits.

This tension is most evident in the film's climax. While the violent outburst appears to contradict Eliot's "whimper," it ultimately dissolves into ambiguity. The aftermath lacks moral clarity, and Travis's subsequent recognition as a hero feels hollow. His final glance in the mirror reintroduces instability, suggesting that no fundamental transformation has occurred. In this sense, the apparent "bang" recedes into a quieter, unresolved continuation (Eliot, 1925/1952; Scorsese, 1976).

The environments of both works reinforce this parallel. Eliot's barren landscape reflects absence and spiritual depletion, while Scorsese's urban setting, though visually saturated, similarly withholds meaning. In both cases, external space mirrors internal fragmentation. Form further unites these texts. Eliot's fragmented syntax, repetition, and disrupted prayer enact emptiness at the level of language. Similarly, *Taxi Driver* employs voice-over narration, visual confinement, and repetition to construct subjective disorientation. Across different artistic forms, emptiness becomes structural rather than merely thematic.

Both works also engage with distorted forms of transcendence. In Eliot's poem, prayer remains incomplete, signalling a desire for belief that cannot be fulfilled (Eliot, 1925/1952). In Scorsese's film, transcendence appears as moral absolutism, yet collapses into violence due to its lack of grounding (Scorsese, 1976). In each case, the longing for meaning persists but fails to stabilize experience.

Ultimately, the comparison demonstrates that modern emptiness is not singular in expression. It may appear as paralysis or aggression, withdrawal or excess, yet its underlying condition remains consistent. The continuity between these works highlights how modernist fragmentation evolves into cinematic subjectivity while retaining its core instability. Both texts resist resolution. Eliot's poem concludes in quiet diminishment, while Scorsese's film ends in unease. Neither restores coherence; instead, both sustain ambiguity. Through this shared refusal of closure, *The Hollow Men* and *Taxi Driver* reveal emptiness as a persistent and defining condition of modern consciousness.

VII. CONCLUSION

This study has examined representations of spiritual emptiness, alienation, and existential instability in *The Hollow Men* and *Taxi Driver*. Despite differences in medium and historical context, both works articulate a shared modern condition: the erosion of stable meaning in twentieth-century life. T. S. Eliot's *The Hollow Men* reflects the disillusionment of post-World War I Europe, portraying

figures suspended "between the idea / And the reality" (Eliot, 1925/1952). Their condition is defined by paralysis, where belief persists as memory but cannot be realized in action. Emptiness appears as quiet, unresolved stagnation.

In contrast, Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* presents a more active yet equally unstable response. Travis Bickle attempts to impose meaning through violent action, but his efforts expose rather than resolve his alienation (Scorsese, 1976). The apparent intensity of his actions ultimately dissolves into ambiguity, echoing Eliot's notion of a "whimper" rather than a definitive resolution. The comparison demonstrates that emptiness is not confined to a particular form or period. Instead, it emerges as a structural condition shaped by modern processes such as secularization, urbanization, and historical trauma. In both works, fragmentation operates not only as a theme but as a formal principle, manifested through disrupted language in poetry and subjective narration and visual disorientation in cinema.

At the same time, the differences between the texts remain significant. Eliot's vision is marked by restraint and quiet dissolution, while Scorsese's is characterized by intensity and eruption. Yet both responses ultimately return to the same condition of instability, where attempts at meaning fail to achieve coherence. Neither work offers resolution or moral certainty. Instead, both sustain ambiguity, emphasizing the persistence of uncertainty in modern experience. By placing these texts in dialogue, this study demonstrates that modern emptiness endures across artistic forms, evolving while retaining its core features of fragmentation, suspension, and unresolved longing.

Ultimately, *The Hollow Men* and *Taxi Driver* suggest that the modern subject remains caught between desire and doubt. The search for meaning continues, but without guarantees of fulfilment. In this ongoing tension lies the enduring relevance of both works, as they reveal emptiness not as absence alone, but as a defining condition of contemporary consciousness.

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Navigating Patriarchal Constraints: A Feminist Reading of Monika Bhatti's *Lives Not Lived*

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Abstract— This paper offers a feminist analysis of Monika Bhatti's *Lives Not Lived*, focusing on the character of Naina to examine how patriarchal structures restrict female autonomy in contemporary Indian society. Situating the study within the broader trajectory of feminist thought, the paper draws upon theoretical frameworks proposed by Kate Millett, Sylvia Walby, Kamla Bhasin, and Nivedita Menon. It explores how patriarchy operates through ideological conditioning, social norms, and coercive practices that limit women's agency. The analysis highlights three major dimensions of control in Naina's life: the absence of autonomy in education and personal decisions, experiences of sexual and emotional exploitation, and the burden of gendered societal expectations. Through close textual reading, the study demonstrates how these mechanisms function collectively to discipline, regulate, and subjugate women. The paper further examines the psychological consequences of such systemic oppression, including trauma, alienation, and internalized self-blame. By foregrounding Naina's experiences, this study contributes to the limited scholarship on Bhatti's work and underscores the persistence of patriarchal power structures despite advances in feminist discourse.



Keywords—*Lives Not Lived*, autonomy, sexual politics, feminist theory, patriarchy.

I. INTRODUCTION

Society has witnessed four waves of feminism, each shaped by evolving priorities and ideologies. The first wave, emerging in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, focused on women's suffrage. The second wave, gaining momentum in the mid-20th century, addressed reproductive rights, bodily autonomy, workplace representation, and equal pay. The third wave, arising in the late 20th century, emphasized inclusivity and intersectionality, highlighting how gender intersects with race, class, and other identities. The ongoing fourth wave, beginning around 2007–2012, is defined by digital activism and movements like #MeToo, which combat systemic gender-based violence and inequality (Sternadori, 2019). These shifts have also influenced global and regional literary traditions, particularly feminist literature in the Indian subcontinent.

Indian feminist literature has long provided a compelling platform for the articulation of women's

voices, especially those negotiating the tensions between traditional expectations and modern aspirations. Writers such as Shashi Deshpande have explored themes of gender discrimination, patriarchy, identity, and psychological conflict through the lives of middle-class, educated Indian women. Her novels—*The Dark Holds No Terrors*, *Roots and Shadows*, and *That Long Silence*—examine the inner and outer lives of women seeking autonomy amidst restrictive societal norms (Behtash & Sajjadi, 2012). Alongside Deshpande, authors like Anita Desai, Kamala Das, Arundhati Roy, and Mahasweta Devi have also expanded the feminist discourse in India. While Desai explores emotional repression and domestic solitude, Das challenges taboos around female desire and identity (Behtash & Sajjadi, 2012). Roy critiques caste and gender oppression through a political lens, while Devi portrays the systemic exploitation of tribal and marginalized women with gritty realism. Together, these writers have cultivated a literary tradition that confronts patriarchy and redefines female subjectivity.

Despite these feminist strides, gender-based violence and systemic oppression persist. Monika Bhatti's debut novel *Lives Not Lived* captures this enduring reality through the stories of Haree and Naina—women from two different generations shaped by patriarchal ideologies. Although set in contemporary times, Naina's life experiences reveal how women remain entrapped in deeply rooted structures of inequality. Bhatti's work sheds light on institutionalized gender-based violence, exposing how it undermines women's agency and perpetuates subjugation.

While Bhatti's novel resonates with themes explored by earlier feminist writers, it has received limited scholarly attention. This paper aims to contribute to the emerging discourse surrounding *Lives Not Lived* by offering a focused feminist analysis of Naina, its central female protagonist. Specifically, it investigates why Naina is unable to transcend the patriarchal constraints imposed upon her. To explore this, the study draws upon Kate Millett's (2016) foundational concept of patriarchy. Further, drawing on Sylvia Walby's (1990) theory of patriarchy, this paper analyses the mechanisms of control in Naina's life. In order to contextualize the analysis within the Indian socio-cultural context, the paper also engages with the works of Kamla Bhasin (2003) and Nivedita Menon (2004, 2012). By examining the ideological, psychological, and sexual forces of control that shape Naina's life—particularly through instances of coerced education, forced marriage, and sexual exploitation—this study seeks to illuminate the mechanisms through which patriarchy systematically limits female autonomy and resistance.

II. ANALYSIS

1. Absence of Agency and Autonomy

Monika Bhatti's *Lives not Lived* chronicles the lack of agency, autonomy, and freedom in Naina's life, illustrating how patriarchal structures dictate her existence and suppress her individuality. The novel underscores the deeply ingrained societal norms that deprive Naina of self-determination. As Millett (2016) explains, "Sexual politics obtains consent through the socialization of both sexes to basic patriarchal politics with regard to temperament, role and status" (p. 26). This disparity eventually leads to a prejudice of deeming men as superior and women inferior. Patriarchy, in this context, functions to reinforce male dominance by shaping women's roles according to societal expectations. Women are systematically denied the privileges afforded to men, including access to essential resources such as quality education, services, and opportunities (Bhasin, 2003, p. 28). Similarly, Naina is

placed in a position of disadvantage, wherein her freedom to make independent decisions are severely restricted.

One of the pivotal moments in the novel that illustrates the restrictions imposed on Naina's autonomy begins with the restriction of her educational choices. Rather than being allowed to pursue a field that aligns with her passions and aspirations, the male figures in her family collectively impose an undergraduate degree upon her, disregarding her personal interests. "They decided what her career should be and all her forms for college were filled out by her brother" (Bhatti, 2023, p. 28). This decision exemplifies the systemic control exerted over women's lives, where their ambitions are subordinated to the expectations and dictates of male authority figures. When Naina expresses her desire to pursue a degree in business administration, her uncle dismisses her aspirations with mockery, deeming her intellectually unfit for a career in business because she is a woman. This response reflects a broader ideological framework described by Kate Millett (2016), where she critiques the notion of a "temperamental imbalance of personality traits between the sexes" (p. 42). She argues that such gendered assumptions lead to a rigid division between 'masculine' and 'feminine' domains of knowledge, with women often relegated to the humanities or social sciences, while men are privileged in fields such as science, technology, and business.

Naina's lack of agency is not limited to her educational pursuits but extends into her personal relationships as well. After being seen with a male classmate, she is subjected to both physical punishment and verbal shaming. A family member remarks, "See, that's what happens when you let them go. They go and sleep around with boys" (Bhatti, 2023, p. 253). As a consequence, her remaining freedom is further curtailed—she is prohibited from attending college, and her family begins arranging her marriage into a wealthy household despite her vehement refusal. This reaction reflects a social system that polices female behaviour with strict moral codes, where any form of interaction with the opposite sex is perceived as a threat to the family's honour. Kate Millett (2016) critiques this dynamic, noting that "the large quantity of guilt attached to sexuality in patriarchy is overwhelmingly placed upon the female, who is, culturally speaking, held to be the more culpable party in nearly any sexual liaison" (p. 54). This notion is clearly echoed in the narrative when Naina's uncle states, "That's why people don't want daughters. They bring shame if you allow them to study. If you free them" (Bhatti, 2023, p. 264). This statement reflects how patriarchal structures prioritize social conformity and honour over a woman's aspirations

or well-being, reinforcing gender bias and expectations through control.

Moreover, Naina's existence is characterized by relentless surveillance, reinforcing the pervasive patriarchal control imposed upon her. She is consistently denied the freedom to move independently, requiring a male chaperone for even the most basic interactions. As the narrator states, "She had never been allowed to deal with outsiders...Naina was used to moving through the burrow of life, holding the hands of males" (Bhatti, 2023, p. 28). This practice reflects a deep-rooted mistrust of women's autonomy, grounded in the patriarchal belief that female behaviour must be closely monitored to prevent any perceived deviation from social norms. Bhasin (2003) in her analysis of patriarchal structures, addresses this dynamic directly, asserting that one of the primary areas over which men exert control is women's mobility (p. 9). By restricting their movement through surveillance or social constraints, patriarchy effectively maintains control over women's sexuality and independence (Bhasin, 2003, p. 9). In Naina's case, such limitations severely restrict her ability to engage with the world on her own terms, reducing her to a passive subject within a rigid system of gendered power. These mechanisms of surveillance not only curb her physical mobility but also instil a lasting sense of powerlessness, as her capacity to make decisions without male oversight is denied.

Through Naina's experiences, the novel lays bare the multifaceted ways in which patriarchy disciplines women—limiting their access to education, suppressing their sexuality, and reducing their existence to compliance and subservience. Such impositions not only stifle intellectual growth but also reinforce the notion that a woman's role is to conform rather than to carve out her own path. Moreover, the act of forced marriage not only erases Naina's right to choose her life partner but also exemplifies how women's lives are often dictated by concerns of reputation and societal approval rather than their own desires. *Lives not Lived* emphasizes how patriarchy operates through both ideological conditioning and direct coercion to preserve male dominance. Therefore, Naina's life becomes a powerful site for examining the gendered dynamics of power, where her choices are overridden, her movements monitored, and her individuality stifled.

2. Exploitation and its Consequences

In *Lives Not Lived*, the exploitation that Naina endures serves as a powerful representation of patriarchal control, where systemic oppression manifests through sexual violence, coercion, and deep psychological trauma. Her experiences, when situated within the broader

discourse on patriarchy, reveal that her victimization is not an isolated event but a symptomatic outcome of deeply entrenched structures of gendered domination. Millett (2016) asserts that "patriarchal force relies on a form of violence particularly sexual in character and realized most completely in the act of rape" (p. 44). This articulation underscores how sexual violence becomes a tool through which male authority asserts control over female autonomy. Naina's assault and subsequent suffering exemplify this dynamic, as her autonomy is violently subjugated through acts intended to silence and dominate her. Similarly, Susan Brownmiller (1975) contends that rape functions as "a man's basic weapon of force against woman, the principal agent of his will and her fear" (p. 14). This assertion finds resonance in *Lives Not Lived*, where Naina is subjected to sexual violence precisely as a means of control, leaving her to grapple with its enduring psychological consequences. The novel, thus, not only depicts the brutality of individual acts but also exposes the systemic nature of such violence within patriarchal frameworks.

A pivotal moment in *Lives Not Lived* is the childhood sexual assault that Naina endures at the hands of Ashok, a middle-aged man who manipulates his position of authority and maturity under the pretence of affection. This traumatic event reveals the deeply rooted sexual perversion, commodification of women's bodies, and the pervasive culture of victim shaming. Ashok exploits Naina's innocence, offering her toffees in exchange for sexual gratification, thereby highlighting the predatory behaviour cloaked in seemingly benign gestures. Reflecting on the incident, Naina recalls that she "had entered into a world...where every girl is treated like a piece of meat, a world where she was being preyed upon" (Bhatti, 2023, p. 282). This notion of commodification aligns with the critique in *Seeing Like a Feminist*, where she argues that women's bodies are persistently sexualised and objectified to serve male desire (Menon, 2012, p. 199). Subsequently, the perpetrator, Ashok, attempts to deflect responsibility for his actions by shifting the blame onto Naina, asking, "Tell me, why did you show me your breasts when you did not want this?" (Bhatti, 2023, p. 290). This instance exemplifies the culture of victim-blaming, wherein the burden of the assault is unjustly placed on the victim rather than the perpetrator. Brownmiller (1975) critiques this tendency, asserting that "the popularity of the belief that a woman 'cock-teases' a man into rape, or precipitates a rape by incautious behaviour, is part of the smoke screen that men throw up to obscure their actions" (p. 312). Ashok's response reflects this very rhetoric, as he manipulates patriarchal narratives to justify his abuse and maintain control over

Naina, a child rendered powerless by both her age and authority.

Beyond the physical violation she experiences, Naina is also subjected to psychological and sexual manipulation by her boyfriend, Veer, who coerces her into believing that sexual compliance is a necessary condition for love and emotional commitment within a relationship. For Naina, sex becomes an “obvious process that passionate lovers go through”, despite her own lack of desire or readiness (Bhatti, 2023, p. 216). The narrator reveals her internal conflict: “She didn’t know why she let that happen, why she couldn’t say ‘No’ to him” (Bhatti, 2023, p. 222). Veer manipulates Naina, using emotional coercion to guilt her into sexual acts, asserting, “No, you don’t love me! Otherwise, you wouldn’t have stopped me. You don’t trust me” (Bhatti, 2023, p. 221). This form of emotional blackmail illustrates how patriarchal norms dictate women’s sexual availability as a measure of their love and loyalty. Bhasin (2003), in *What is Patriarchy?*, asserts that patriarchy seeks to regulate women’s sexuality, rendering them subordinate and “obliged to provide sexual pleasures to men according to their needs and desires” (p. 8). Veer’s treatment of Naina aligns with Sylvia Walby’s (1990) observation that men in heterosexual relationships frequently “sexually objectify women, reducing them to mere sexual objects” (p. 118). While Naina does not explicitly label her experience with Veer as rape, the absence of clear, enthusiastic consent positions the encounter within the realm of what appears to be dubious one. Menon (2004) notes that, “if consent is established, the act is considered legitimate”, yet the coercive circumstances surrounding Naina’s decision problematize any assumption of genuine consent (p. 126). Her consent is not freely given, but rather extracted through manipulation—revealing how emotional coercion operates as a subtle yet insidious form of patriarchal control. This dynamic underscores the gendered power imbalance that enables men to assert dominance in intimate relationships by framing women’s sexual submission as a requisite for love and loyalty.

The long-term consequences of Naina’s exploitation manifest primarily in the form of deep psychological trauma, marked by self-loathing, anxiety, and physical manifestations of distress. In the aftermath of her assault, Naina engages in compulsive acts—brushing her tongue and scrubbing her skin until it is sore—suggesting an attempt to cleanse herself of the violation. Her unresolved trauma is further evident in her responses to intimacy, as the narrator observes: “whenever Veer tried to come close to her, her body unconsciously repelled his touch. The panic would start to rush in her body whenever he came close” (Bhatti, 2023, p. 172). Naina’s experiences

culminate in nervous breakdowns, panic attacks, and recurring nightmares, highlighting the enduring psychological toll of sexual violence. Brownmiller (1975) asserts that sexual assault leaves “lasting psychological effects on all women” who have been subjected to such violence (p. 377). Menon (2012) elaborates on the socio-cultural explanation of this trauma, explaining why rape is often perceived as “a fate worse than death” (p. 159). According to Menon (2012), the pain and shame experienced by survivors are exacerbated by societal attitudes that stigmatise victims rather than perpetrators (p. 160). She further argues that ‘sex,’ ‘sexual violence,’ and ‘sexuality’ occupy some of the most intimate and private spaces of an individual’s identity (p. 161). Thus, when sexual violence occurs, it unsettles not only the body but also the self, resulting in a profound disintegration of one’s sense of identity.

This disintegration is intensified by the patriarchal framework within which rape is situated—a framework that not only legitimises male dominance but also conditions women to internalise blame for their victimisation. Naina’s self-loathing can be understood within this context: she is not merely coping with the violation itself, but also with the emotional burden imposed by a society that expects women to carry the weight of their own subjugation. The psychological aftermath of sexual violence, therefore, is not solely a private struggle, but a reflection of deeply entrenched patriarchal ideologies that perpetuate cycles of trauma and silence.

Naina’s experiences illustrate the pervasive nature of patriarchal control, wherein male sexual entitlement is normalised and women’s bodies are positioned as objects of desire and domination. The asymmetry in age, experience, and power renders Naina particularly vulnerable, emphasizing how patriarchal structures exploit such imbalances to reinforce gendered subjugation. Her coercion by a manipulative partner exposes how patriarchy extends into the most intimate relationships, often disguising exploitation as affection. As Naina internalises the belief that love necessitates submission, her sexual autonomy is systematically undermined. The resulting alienation, anxiety, and psychological trauma results as an aftermath of the assault affirm patriarchy’s insidious ways of governing the ways women view their own worth. Naina’s story thus underscores the multifaceted impact of systemic gendered violence.

3. Burden of Gendered Societal Expectations

In the novel, Naina’s life is shaped by rigid societal expectations that enforce traditional gender roles, effectively restricting her autonomy. Bhasin (2003), in

Understanding Gender, iterates how gender roles are socially constructed and systematically assigned based on prevailing societal norms and expectations rather than biological determinants (p. 32). Consequently, women are often relegated domestic responsibilities such as caregiving and household management, while men are encouraged to pursue education, professional advancement, and public engagement. These socially and culturally imposed roles result in a gendered distribution of power and privilege, wherein women typically enjoy fewer rights and resources than men (Bhasin, 2003, p. 5). This imbalance is clearly reflected in the treatment Naina receives from her family. In her case, patriarchy functions as a force of oppression, limiting her opportunities in both public and private spheres.

Naina's experiences exemplify this systemic oppression, as she is burdened with household responsibilities that impede her academic and social pursuits. This restriction is indicative of how domestic labour is often disproportionately assigned to women, reinforcing their subordination and preventing them from engaging in activities that could foster personal growth. Naina expresses resentment over being compelled to undertake domestic chores while her male friends engaged in leisure activities. From an early age, she was conditioned to believe that "tasks of every married women and unmarried girls in the family were predicated..." (Bhatti, 2023, p. 52). This observation aligns with Menon's (2012) assertion that "women are responsible for housework... The labour that goes into making people capable of working day after day (food, clean clothes, rest) is provided by women" (p. 11). These gendered expectations also hinder Naina's participation in extracurricular activities during her college years, as the demands of domestic labour consume much of her time and energy. She frequently feels alienated among her peers, noting that while they discussed their hobbies and weekend courses. This sense of exclusion highlights the ways in which patriarchal constraints obstruct women's pursuit of individual aspirations, entrapping them in a vicious cycle of domesticity and subordination.

One of the primary ways in which Naina is constrained is through the imposition of household chores, which leaves her little time to engage in extracurricular activities at her college. Kate Millett (2016) discusses how patriarchal systems create and sustain power imbalances by relegating women to domestic roles. Naina's forced prioritization of household duties over her education is a manifestation of this dynamic, wherein domestic labour is considered an intrinsic aspect of female identity. This expectation inhibits her ability to cultivate skills and networks that could contribute to her personal and

professional development. Furthermore, this aligns with Nivedita Menon's (2012) argument in *Seeing Like a Feminist*, where she critiques how the societal division of labour naturalizes the idea that women must shoulder unpaid domestic work while men are encouraged to pursue external achievements. Naina's lack of agency in choosing how she spends her time underscores the structural constraints that limit women's participation in broader spheres of life.

In addition to being restricted by household responsibilities, Naina faces the moral obligation to uphold her family's reputation—a burden disproportionately placed on women within patriarchal societies. This gendered responsibility is made explicit when her father admonishes her: "Always remember that a girl carries the weight of name and reputation of her family on her shoulders. I am trusting you with it. Keep it safe" (Bhatti, 2023, p. 93). Menon (2012) also asserts how this gender-appropriate behaviour is inevitably placed on women, where their morality and virtue are policed to ensure the reputation of the family (p. 4). She claims, "The institution that manages this policing is the patriarchal heterosexual family. The family as it exists is the core that sustains the social order" (p. 4). This policing and moral surveillance permeates all aspects of Naina's life, manifesting in restrictions on her social interactions, prohibition against attending parties, and limiting even the necessary communication with male peers. The psychological toll of such restrictions becomes evident when Naina reflects, "All her excitement had evaporated. Suddenly, college felt like a battlefield, where she will have to fight hard to save her family's honour" (Bhatti, 2023, p. 93). This encapsulates the control exerted in patriarchal society, wherein, unlike their male counterparts, women aren't allowed the freedom to navigate their life on their own terms without the constant imposition of familial expectations.

Moreover, Naina is subjected to societal pressure to dress modestly and adopt the comportment traditionally associated with being a 'good girl'. This control over female bodies and appearance is a fundamental aspect of patriarchal regulation. Millett (2016) identifies traits such as "passivity, ignorance, docility, virtue and ineffectuality" as those historically idealised in women (p. 26). Bhasin (2003) situates this within the Indian context, noting that women are subjected to prescriptive expectations regarding both behaviour and appearance: "The mode of dress can and does influence...the dignity of people" (p. 6). Women are also expected to be kind, gentle, nurturing, and obedient—qualities Naina's family demands of her. Her father instructs, "Girls should be silent like an ant, which works hard the whole day without disturbing

anybody” (Bhatti, 2023, p. 92). As a result, Naina is expected to dress conservatively, wrap a *dupatta* across her chest, lower her gaze while speaking to men, and even refrain from wearing kohl under her eyes. These behavioural codes are not merely familial expectations but broader societal impositions on women's autonomy. The narrator notes that Naina's boyfriend, Veer, is drawn to her because she is soft-spoken and dresses traditionally, reinforcing the notion that female desirability depends on submission. However, Naina questions these norms: “Naina never understood these reasons... How can wearing jeans and having a phone decide the character of the girl” (Bhatti, 2023, p. 149). Although she does not openly resist, the narrative highlights how such expectations suppress individuality and agency. Patriarchal systems thrive on the internalisation of these codes, which facilitate the continued subjugation of women under the guise of virtue and propriety.

Therefore, Naina's obligation to conform to an ideal of righteousness is emblematic of the ways in which women's behaviours are closely scrutinised and regulated under patriarchal norms. In Naina's case, this ideal manifests through expectations that she must embody virtue, dress modestly, behave with restraint, and dutifully perform household responsibilities. These demands are not presented as personal choices but as moral obligations tied to her family's honour, which the male members of her family remain exempt from. Through these instances, the novel highlights how Naina's agency is curtailed by patriarchal norms that impose rigid gender roles. Such scrutiny reflects the broader structures that police women's conduct and restrict their freedom.

III. CONCLUSION

Bhatti's *Lives Not Lived* offers a compelling critique of patriarchal oppression, illustrating how systemic control governs women's autonomy and agency. Through Naina's experiences—ranging from coerced education and forced marriage to sexual exploitation and domestic subjugation—the novel exposes the pervasiveness of gendered constraints. Bhatti highlights how patriarchy functions through both overt acts of violence and insidious mechanisms of control that shape women's identities and limit their freedoms. However, while the paper analyses the impacts of such oppression, its scope remains primarily focused on the experiences of just one female character in the novel. Broader intersections of caste or class as depicted through Haree's character remain largely unexplored. Nonetheless, *Lives Not Lived* powerfully represents Naina's lack of agency not as an isolated instance but as emblematic of a deeply entrenched system that polices behaviour, restricts

mobility, and conditions women to internalize their subjugation.

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Teaching Academic Writing Skills to the E.S.L. Students: A Pedagogical Framework

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Abstract— *Academic writing has emerged as a cornerstone of higher education, yet it remains one of the most challenging skills for English as a Second Language (ESL) learners to acquire. Undergraduate students, particularly those in non-English-dominant contexts, often struggle with accuracy, organization, and the formal register expected in academic discourse. This study investigates pedagogical approaches to teaching academic writing to undergraduate ESL learners, focusing on the integration of product, process, genre, and process-genre within an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) framework. Drawing on classroom-based interventions at Aligarh Muslim University, the present study examines how structured tasks—ranging from paraphrasing and summarizing to cohesion-building and hedging—enhance learners' ability to produce coherent and accurate academic texts. Findings indicate that scaffolding writing through recursive processes and genre awareness improves both linguistic accuracy and rhetorical effectiveness. The study concludes by highlighting pedagogical implications for ESL writing instruction, stressing the need for integrative approaches that address linguistic, cognitive, and sociocultural dimensions of writing.*



Keywords— *academic writing, ESL learners, undergraduate education, English for Academic Purposes, genre pedagogy, process approach*

I. INTRODUCTION

Academic writing has long been recognized as one of the most complex and cognitively demanding aspects of language use, requiring students not only to command advanced grammatical and lexical resources but also to engage in higher-order thinking processes such as synthesis, evaluation, and argumentation. Unlike conversational English, which allows for flexibility and informality, academic writing demands precision, formality, organization, and objectivity. It is a gatekeeping skill in higher education, as success in coursework, examinations, research projects, and dissertations is largely determined by one's ability to communicate effectively in written academic discourse (Hyland, 2016; Swales & Feak, 2012).

For ESL learners at the undergraduate level, the challenges of academic writing are magnified. Many enter university with limited exposure to extended written discourse in English, often relying heavily on memorized structures or

translation from their first language. Consequently, they struggle with organization, accuracy, appropriate academic register, and the ability to integrate sources. These difficulties have practical consequences: poor writing performance frequently hinders overall academic achievement, limits participation in scholarly conversations, and impedes future professional mobility in a globalized economy where academic literacy is increasingly tied to employability (Lekki, 1991; Hamp-Lyons & Kroll, 1997).

The Indian higher education context exemplifies these challenges. Institutions such as Aligarh Muslim University attract a large population of ESL students who are academically capable but underprepared in English writing skills. Despite strong disciplinary knowledge, their inability to meet the demands of academic writing compromises their academic success. Addressing this gap requires systematic pedagogical intervention, guided by theories of second

language acquisition (SLA), writing pedagogy, and English for Academic Purposes (EAP).

The teaching of academic writing in ESL contexts often oscillates between two extremes: traditional grammar-focused instruction and unstructured exposure to extended writing tasks. While the former emphasizes correctness at the expense of expression, the latter risks overwhelming students without providing the scaffolding necessary for success. Neither approach adequately addresses the cognitive and rhetorical demands of academic writing.

The central problem, therefore, is how to design pedagogical interventions that enable undergraduate ESL students to acquire academic writing skills systematically and effectively. This involves striking a balance between linguistic accuracy, rhetorical organization, and critical engagement, all while motivating students to view writing as a recursive and meaningful process rather than a burdensome requirement.

Research Objectives

This study seeks to develop a pedagogical framework for teaching academic writing that integrates product, process, and genre-based approaches, investigates the effectiveness of structured tasks (e.g., paraphrasing, summarizing, cohesion-building, hedging) in enhancing ESL learners' academic writing competence, provide insights into how English for Academic Purposes (EAP) can support undergraduate learners in mastering academic writing. Also, identify challenges and propose strategies for making academic writing less intimidating and more engaging for ESL learners.

Research Questions

Given below are some of the research questions which guide this study:

What is the significance of academic writing skills in undergraduate ESL education?

How can academic writing be taught systematically and practically to ESL learners?

What tasks and approaches most effectively improve ESL students' academic writing skills?

How can EAP frameworks be employed to scaffold the teaching of academic writing?

How can academic writing be made engaging and less burdensome for ESL learners?

Rationale of the Study

The rationale for this research lies in the recognition that academic writing is not a peripheral skill but a central determinant of academic success. ESL students often possess strong oral communication abilities but falter when

confronted with the demands of written academic discourse. This disconnect calls for pedagogical approaches that move beyond rote grammar instruction and isolated writing assignments.

By embedding writing instruction within the EAP tradition, this study emphasizes language as both a cognitive and social practice. The proposed framework integrates accuracy-focused drills, process-oriented activities, and genre-based awareness, thereby offering a holistic model that addresses linguistic, rhetorical, and pragmatic dimensions of writing. The dissertation-turned-study also underscores the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy, acknowledging the influence of learners' first language and sociocultural background on their writing practices (Kaplan, 1996; Connor, 1996).

Organization of the paper

The paper traces the historical evolution of writing pedagogy, from product-oriented to process and genre-based approaches, highlighting their applicability to ESL contexts. The Research Methodology outlines the classroom-based tasks and pedagogical framework employed to teach academic writing at the undergraduate level. The Research finding presents evidence of how specific interventions impacted learners' writing performance. Finally, this paper interprets these findings in relation to SLA theory, EAP, and existing scholarship while synthesizing the study's contributions, limitations, and pedagogical implications.

Through this structure, the study aims not only to document the challenges of academic writing instruction in ESL contexts but also to propose actionable solutions that can be adapted across diverse higher education setting Language Strategies, Genre Awareness & Learner Perceptions

A recent study in Indonesia ("An investigation of English academic writing strategies employed by Indonesian graduate students in an English-medium instruction context", 2025) examined pre-writing, drafting, and post-writing strategies. Findings suggest that students rely heavily on drafting and revising, but struggle more with pre-writing (planning) especially when they do not have strong models of genre or disciplinary expectations. The study argues for scaffolding at all stages, especially genre modeling and peer discussion.

Complementing strategy studies, research on learner perceptions reveals attitudinal and affective challenges. For example, "ESL Academic Writing: Perceptions of Post-Graduate Learners of Arunachal Pradesh" (2023) indicates that postgraduate ESL students value academic writing skills but feel anxiety over evaluation, lack sufficient feedback, and believe that more exposure to academic reading would help their writing.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS AND KEY CONSTRUCTS

Genre theory (especially SFL) provides a strong theoretical basis in recent studies. It involves recognition of schematic structures (e.g., introduction, literature review, methods), move structure, discourse features (cohesion, modality, voice). Genre pedagogy helps demystify these for students. The combination of genre with process (process-genre) has been especially promising, because while genre gives form/function/context, process gives procedure and practice.

EAP (English for Academic Purposes) also features prominently in the literature. It is often the umbrella under which academic writing instruction is conducted, especially in non-native contexts. Recent studies emphasize not only linguistic competence but also rhetorical competence, disciplinary literacy, and academic socialization. For instance, integrating tasks that require students to engage with actual academic texts, peer review, and discipline-specific genres are shown to improve transfer of skills to domain courses. The Indonesian EMI study (2025) shows that strategy use increases when students are engaging in academic work in their subject disciplines. Even with these recent advancements there remain gaps. Undergraduate focus in non-elite / less-resourced institutions: Much of the research is at graduate level or in well-resourced universities. Less data exists for larger undergraduate ESL populations in regional universities (e.g., many in India) where class sizes are large, resources limited, and exposure to academic reading/writing is minimal prior to under graduation. Another gap exists in understanding. Students might understand genre features reasonably well in analysis tasks, but actual writing performance still shows deficits in coherence, academic register, citation, hedging, etc. Some studies conducted intensive interventions (e.g. small class, lots of feedback, technology tools) that may not be sustainable in regular university coursework. It is also the technology's double-edged nature which raises concerns around originality, dependence and whether students learn to self-monitor although tools like AI or writing software often promise immediate feedback. There also arises hindrance due to various Affective/ Motivational factors. For example, anxiety about writing, lack of confidence, fear of negative feedback, perceptions that academic writing is foreign. Some recent works explore perceptions, but fewer integrate effect with performance over time. There also exists a gap in terms of wide opportunities given to the students to perform academic tasks in the EAP courses as compared to other disciplines (e.g., science, engineering, humanities), where genre and discourse demands may differ significantly. Lastly Longitudinal studies are rare: We need more long-term tracking of how students improve with

genre/process interventions over multiple semesters or years, to understand retention, transfer, and whether improvements persist under real assessment conditions.

Indian higher education shares many of these challenges: large classes, limited exposure to academic writing in school, mixed proficiency levels, resource constraints. Recent Indian studies (e.g., ChatGPT intervention, research scholars' writing needs) reflect these same tensions: students often know what is expected (or believe they do), but struggle with how to deliver consistent academic writing in terms of coherence, register, citation, integration of sources, and revision practice.

Given that English is often taught as a subject rather than used as a medium in many disciplines, the disconnect between what is taught in general English/EAP vs. what is required in subject courses is sharp. Also, teacher training, assessment practices, and institutional support vary widely

Drawing all this together there is strong support in recent literature for integrated pedagogies combining product, process, genre, EAP methods, in multiple feedback cycles. Innovative tools (AI, writing software) are being explored but with caution due to issues of dependence and assessment integrity. Learner perceptions, strategies, and affect have been included in several studies, but few have fully woven them into interventions and outcome assessments. Thus, the gap this study aims to fill is to empirically test a robust pedagogical framework (process-genre + EAP + feedback cycles) in an Indian undergraduate ESL context (with perhaps large classes, mixed proficiency), focusing not only on writing performance (coherence, register, correctness) but also on strategies, perceptions, and sustainability. Also to Incorporate technology or supportive tools if possible and perhaps design tasks that align with students' disciplinary expectations. The study also aims to monitor outcomes over multiple drafts and tasks, to see whether improvements are stable and transferable.

III. RESEARCH DESIGN

This study adopted a classroom-based intervention design situated within the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) tradition. The design was exploratory and pedagogically oriented, aiming to examine how a set of structured tasks could improve ESL undergraduates' academic writing skills. As writing development is a complex process that unfolds through recursive drafting, revision, and reflection, the intervention integrated process, genre, and accuracy-focused instruction into a unified framework. This design was appropriate because it allowed close observation of learners' progress within a naturalistic classroom

environment while maintaining systematic data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2018).

Context and Participants

The study was conducted in the Department of English at Aligarh Muslim University (India), a large public institution that attracts students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. English functions as the medium of instruction in many courses; however, most students come from schools where English exposure was limited or where grammar-translation methods predominated.

Participants were 60 undergraduate ESL students (32 female, 28 male), aged between 18 and 21. Their English proficiency ranged from lower-intermediate to upper-intermediate, as measured by a departmental placement test administered at the start of the semester. The group was selected because they were enrolled in a compulsory “Academic Writing” module designed to introduce them to essay writing, summarizing, paraphrasing, and source integration.

Participation in the research component of the course was voluntary. Students were informed that their work would be anonymized and used for research purposes only, and that opting out would not affect their grades. Forty-eight students (80%) consented to have their data included in the analysis.

Instructional Framework

The intervention was guided by an integrated process–genre approach. This approach sought to combine the recursive, student-centered activities of the process model with explicit instruction in the features of academic genres (Badger & White, 2000; Hyland, 2007). The framework emphasized three interrelated dimensions: Accuracy and Language Control, Genre Awareness, process-oriented practice. To ensure accuracy and language control, students should engage in focused tasks targeting grammar, syntax, vocabulary, cohesion, and hedging strategies. This should be supported by building genre awareness through the analysis of model texts and guided practice in writing specific genres, such as summaries, argumentative essays, and short reports. Furthermore, a process-oriented approach provides recursive cycles of planning, drafting, receiving feedback, revising and editing to refine the final output.

Each weekly session followed a structured sequence that began with the presentation of model texts to highlight key features such as organization, transitions, citation and register. This was followed by guided practice involving collaborative activities, such as identifying topic sentences, cohesion markers, or hedging devices. Students then transitioned to task performance through individual or small group writing assignments, concluding with feedback and

revision cycles that incorporated peer review, teacher feedback and self-reflection.

Data Collection and Interpretation

Multiple data sources were collected to allow triangulation, including writing samples where students completed three major task during the semester: a baseline argumentative essay on a familiar topic to establish initial proficiency, a paraphrasing and summarizing exercise focused on integrating source material, and a final academic report requiring organization, use of evidence and accurate academic style. Additionally drafts and revisions were collected for each major task, with students producing at least two versions to track changes in organization, cohesion and accuracy. Peer and teacher feedback records were also archived, consisting of written feedback from both parties and oral feedback summarized in teacher logs. Finally, students completed reflective questionnaire at the end of the course to share their challenges and perceptions of the intervention.

To evaluate the data, both quantitative and qualitative methods were integrated through a rigorous process of triangulation to ensure the findings remain reliable and valid. Rubric- based scoring served as the primary quantitative measure, where writing samples were assessed across five dimensions- accuracy, cohesion, organization, academic style, and critical engagement- based on a rubric adapted from Hamp- Lyons and Kroll (1997) to track improvement between baseline and final tasks. This measurable evidence was complemented by a granular error analysis, which involved coding frequent grammatical and lexical mistakes to pinpoint persistent linguistic challenges. Furthermore, the qualitative depth of the study was captured through the thematic coding of student reflections, revealing learner perceptions of the intervention, alongside process tracking of drafts and revisions to document exactly how feedback and recursive drafting facilitated progress. By synthesizing these diverse sources, the analysis of effectively based objective performance trends with subjective learner experiences and the procedural evolution of the writing process.

IV. LIMITATIONS OF THE DESIGN

While the intervention provided rich insights, several limitations should be acknowledged to contextualize the findings. The study’s duration was limited to a single fourteen-week semester, which inherently restricted the ability to assess long- term retention of the skills acquired. Furthermore, as a single- site study, the findings may not generalize to all Indian or International ESL context where institutional resources and learner backgrounds vary significantly. Methodologically, although rubric-based

scoring provided a systematic framework, it may not have fully captured more nuanced improvements in rhetorical awareness or creativity. Additionally, because the researcher also served as the instructor, a potential risk of researcher bias existed, though this was carefully mitigated through data triangulation and the anonymization of student work. Despite these constraints, the research design remained highly suitable for capturing the developmental trajectories of ESL learners' academic writing within a real classroom environment, as the synthesis of quantitative rubric scores and qualitative reflections offered a comprehensive understanding of both learner progress and ongoing challenges.

V. FINDINGS

Analysis of rubric scores revealed a significant improvement in students' academic writing competence from the baseline essay to the final report. On a five-point scale, average scores for accuracy rose from 2.3 to 3.7, cohesion from 2.5 to 3.9, organization from 2.6 to 4.0, academic style from 2.4 to 3.8, and critical engagement from 2.1 to 3.5. These gains indicate that learners not only reduced grammatical and lexical errors but also developed stronger control over coherence, academic register, and the integration of sources. The greatest progress was observed in organization and cohesion, which were areas explicitly targeted through process genre tasks such as mind mapping, the use of transition markers, and peer review.

Regarding accuracy and error reduction, baseline essays displayed a high frequency of grammatical errors, especially in article usage, subject-verb-agreement, and tense consistency. For instance, an initial sentence such as, "Students face many problems in academic writing because the instructor could not give clear instructions," Lexical choice also improved, shifting from colloquial terms like "kids" and "stuff" to a more formal register including "children" and "materials", suggesting that explicit instruction in academic vocabulary and hedging devices had a measurable impact.

Students initially struggled to connect ideas logically across sentences and paragraphs, with many baseline essays resembling lists of points without transitions. However, with transition markers and peer feedback, final drafts displayed a smoother progression of ideas. Cohesion tasks, such as ordering jumbled sentences and practicing lexical chains, appeared to foster the ability to signal relationships like cause-effect and contrast. Similarly, the intervention's emphasis on genre modelling helped students move away from essays lacking clear structure towards reports with conventional thesis statements and topic sentences. One striking example involved a student who transitioned from

writing a single, unbroken paragraph to submitting a four-section report, illustrating how genre awareness can reshape a learner's conception of academic writing.

Another area of progress was the adoption of an appropriate academic style and the use of hedging. Initial drafts often contained a personal pronouns and categorical statements, such as "Writing is always difficult". After instruction, students began using cautious language, framing claims more tentatively by stating that writing "appears to be particularly challenging," which demonstrates a greater awareness of academic discourse conventions. While critical engagement with sources was more challenging, improvements were still evident. Students moved from verbatim copying without attribution to paraphrasing and citing appropriately, such as referencing Swales (1990). However, critical synthesis remained less developed than other skills, echoing literature that suggests source use is often the last skill to mature in L2 writing.

Students' perceptions, gathered through questionnaires and reflections, highlighted several key themes. Participants reported increased confidence, noting that breaking the writing process into manageable steps made the task feel less intimidating tool. However, students did face challenges with time management, as those accustomed to "one-shot" exam essays initially resisted the intensive drafting and revising process.

Despite these overall improvements, certain persistent challenges remained. Errors in articles and prepositions decreased but did not entirely disappear, and true synthesis of multiple sources remained a rare achievement among the cohort. Furthermore issues of cultural transfer occasionally reappeared, with some rhetorical patterns from the students' first languages- such as circular introduction or indirect thesis statements- suggesting deeper rhetorical habits that require more than a single semester to fully address.

VI. CONCLUSION

The results indicate that a process-genre intervention within an EAP framework can substantially improve undergraduate ESL learners' writing competence across dimensions of accuracy, cohesion, organization, and academic style. Gains were particularly strong in areas where tasks were explicit (e.g., transition markers, paraphrasing, hedging). However, more complex skills such as critical engagement with sources and sustained accuracy in articles/prepositions require longer-term scaffolding. Student reflections confirm that the intervention not only enhanced skills but also reduced writing anxiety, fostering greater confidence and autonomy.

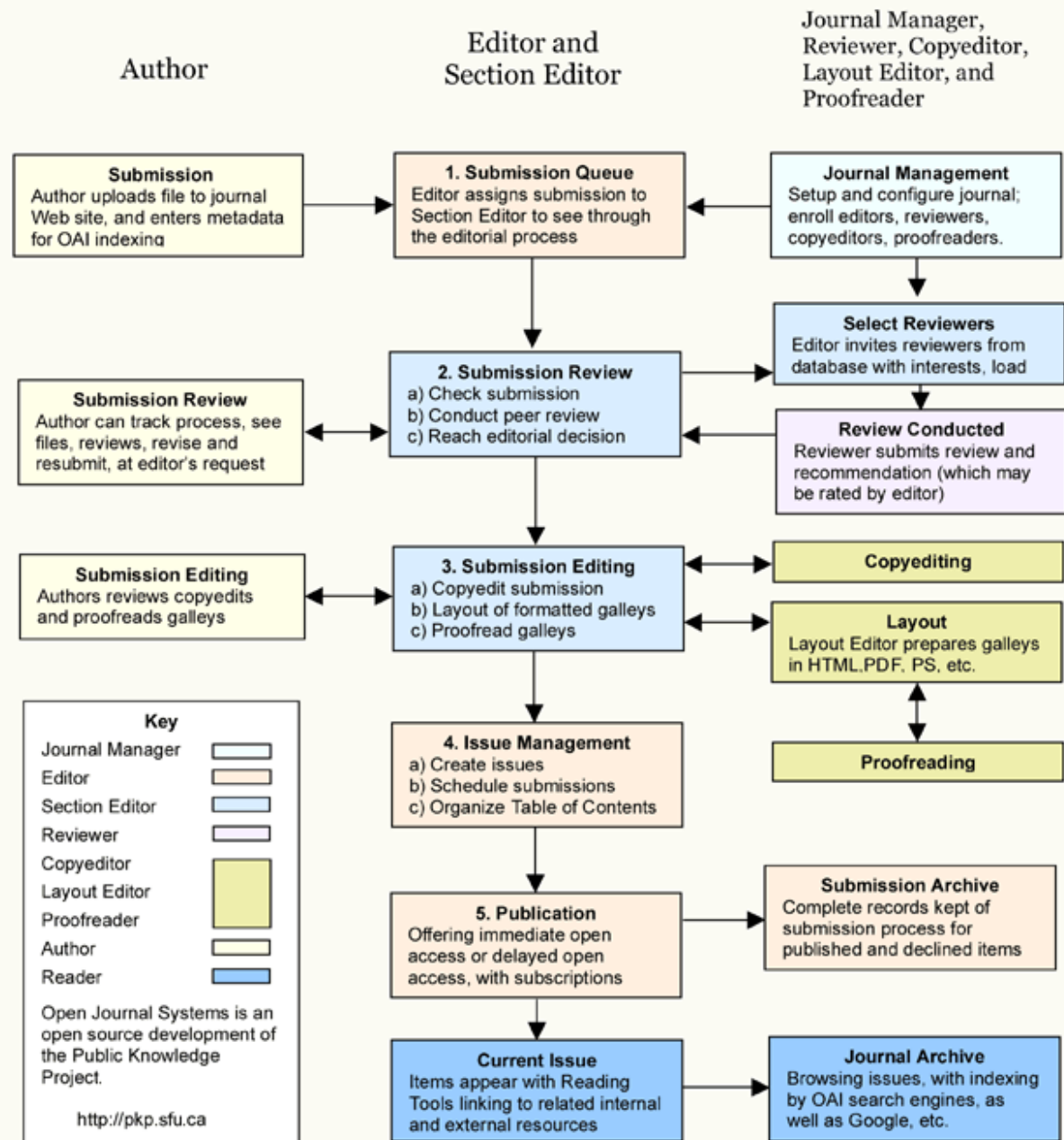
The results of this classroom-based intervention provide compelling evidence that integrated process–genre pedagogy within an EAP framework can significantly enhance ESL undergraduates’ academic writing performance. Improvements in accuracy, cohesion, organization, and academic style align with previous studies that emphasize the value of combining recursive drafting with explicit genre awareness (Hyland, 2007; Badger & White, 2000). The findings also affirm that writing is not simply a linguistic activity but a socially situated practice that requires awareness of audience, purpose, and discourse conventions (Lillis & Curry, 2010).

A key outcome of this study was the marked growth in organization and cohesion, the two dimensions that showed the highest gains. This suggests that when students are guided through genre models, brainstorming, and the use of transition markers, they can begin to produce writing that approximates academic conventions more closely. The shift from list-like baseline essays to structured reports with clear introductions, body sections, and conclusions echoes findings from Xu and Li (2018), who demonstrated that explicit genre instruction helps Chinese EAP students adopt disciplinary conventions.

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