ISSN-L 0537-1988

61

2025

THE INDIAN JOURNAL OF ENGLISH STUDIES

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Gurukul Kangri Vishwavidyalaya, Haridwar

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ASSOCIATION FOR ENGLISH STUDIES OF INDIA

THE INDIAN JOURNAL OF ENGLISH STUDIES VOL LXI 2025

ISSN-L 0537-1988 61

THE INDIAN JOURNAL OF ENGLISH STUDIES

VOL LXI 2025

SIXTY-ONE YEAR OF PUBLICATION



ASSOCIATION FOR ENGLISH STUDIES OF INDIA

ISSN-L 0537-1988
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THE INDIAN JOURNAL OF ENGLISH STUDIES

An Annual Peer-reviewed Journal

Vol. LXI **2025**

Cosmos Impact Factor 5.210

Editor-in-Chief

Dr. Mukesh Ranjan Verma
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Gurukul Kangri Vishwavidyalaya, Haridwar

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THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF ASSOCIATION FOR ENGLISH STUDIES OF INDIA

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Price: **₹ 500 (for individuals)**
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ISSN L-0537-1988

The journal has done blind peer reviewed and the journal got Impact factor for the year of 2016 is 5.210*

01.06.2017
Mr.Sunanda Das
Director
South-East Asia Division
Cosmos Impact factor

www.cosmosimpactfactor.com

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Editorial

In my 'Call for Papers" for IJES this year, I had to put a clause that the authors will have to furnish a certificate to the effect that their papers have not been prepared with the help of AI. Such is the inroad that Artificial Intelligence has made into our academic life. We not only seek information of different kinds, including information about an author or a literary work or a critical theory from ChatGPT or Grok or other generative AI tools, but also ask them to prepare notes, summaries, answers to university or competitive examination questions, and, what is disturbing, even research papers. I was really surprised when I saw an advertisement in a leading English newspaper with the headline 'Crack UPSC with ChatGPT'. The advertisement claimed to provide ChatGPT generated "crystal clear, structured notes for all syllabus-linked and hidden themes". Seeking facts and even interpretations from different sources is not bad, but to reproduce them without imbibing them and enhancing our critical understanding of the subject is definitely so. Writing a research paper without acknowledging the source from which we have gathered our ideas or without adding our own interpretation or critical analysis to the topic is not only intellectual dishonesty but also damaging to the corpus of knowledge on a particular subject. Pope Leo XIV made a profound observation about AI recently. When asked what he thought about it, he said that AI can give knowledge about a subject, but it cannot give wisdom. Nor can it distinguish between good and evil. Good literature, which deals with life in totality, has been a rich source of both. And good criticism not only discusses the literary merits or defects of a work but also makes an observation, may be not explicitly, about the felt experience of life in it, about life as it is or was or should be. If this journal has

succeeded in producing at least some papers which serve this purpose, even to some extent, it has justified its existence.

The journal, true to its tradition, contains research papers from all over India. It also covers nearly all the genres of literature—fiction, poetry, drama, autobiography, and many current literary theories. There are some papers dealing with the issues of multilingualism in school education in India and the New Education policy which seeks to align contemporary India with its rich centuries-old traditions. Voices from the marginalized sections of Indian society asserting their identity have also found place in the journal. As in the past, the present volume of IJES contains some beautiful poems and perceptive book reviews.

M.R. Verma
Editor-in-Chief

IJES, Volume LXI, 2025

The Novel and Society in *A Suitable Boy :* A Critique

***Rajnath**

Abstract

The journey for the search of a suitable boy for Lata Mehra which begins with the opening sentence uttered by her mother, Rupa Mehra and ends with Lata's marriage with Haresh Khanna has been examined by the author with great dexterity. The social matrix of the novel and the step by step movement of Lata Mehra are subjected to close scrutiny. Cultural and religious values are foregrounded throughout the study and Lata Mehra is viewed as the nearly most cultured woman protagonist in contemporary Indian English fiction.

Keywords: spurious reputation, cultural formation, public image, metaphor, metonym.

Narasimhaiah's immense contribution to Indian Writing in English cannot be denied but he has done less than justice to Vikram Seth and his novel, *A Suitable Boy* which, in my considered opinion, is one of the finest products of contemporary Indian English Fiction.

Narasimhaiah clubs together three novelists, who are very different from each other, under the caption, "Spurious Reputations: Vikram Seth, Salman Rushdie, and Shashi Tharoor." Among the

***Rajnath,** retired Professor and Head, Dept. of English, University of Allahabad, is a well-known scholar and critic. He was among the early Indian scholars to discuss Derrida in India.

novels which he has taken up for a detailed discussion are Vikram Seth's *A Suitable Boy,* Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, and Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel.* In the present essay I take up for a detailed exegesis Seth's *A Suitable Boy* which Narasimhaiah has dismissed as a product of spurious reputation levelling a number of charges against the author and his novel. But, in my opinion, *A Suitable Boy* is an extraordinary achievement not only by my standards, but by Narasimhaiah's own standards The creation of the near perfect woman protagonist, Lata Mehra, has no parallel in contemporary Indian English fiction.

There is no doubt, as Narasimhaiah argues, the immense volume of the novel running into 1349 pages is a big stumbling block for the reader who finds it difficult to build a clear perspective on the text for understanding and evaluation. There is a great deal of superfluous, extraneous, and irrelevant material for which there is no justification but in this mountain of information one finds a gem in the form of Lata Mehra, the woman protagonist of the novel, who is the very embodiment of culture, so complete as a person and so well portrayed by the novelist that one has nothing but admiration for her and her creator. And next to her is her mother, Mrs. Rupa Mehra, the widow of Raghubir Mehra, a Senior bureaucrat in the Railways, who died of cardiac arrest just before he was due to be promoted as a member or Chairman of the Railway Board. Her sense of duty towards her children despite financial hardships deserves kudos. If Lata Mehra is the most cultured, Mrs. Rupa Mehra is the most religious character in Indian English Fiction.

Narasimhaiah sets great store by Indian religion and culture in his discussion and evaluation of Indian English literature for which he has been criticized by Salman Rushdie in his Introduction to *The Vintage Book of Indian Writing* where he writes that

> it is surely excessive to use it [religious faith] as does one leading academic, the redoubtable Professor C.D. Narasimhaiah as a touchstone so that Mulk Raj Anand is praised for his "daring" merely because, as a left writer, he

> allows a character to be moved by deep religious faith, while Arun Kolatkar's poetry is deeply denigrated… because in *Jejuri*, a cycle of poems about a visit to a temple town, he skeptically likens the stone gods in the temple to the stones on the hillsides nearby ("and every other stone is a god or his cousin".) (xv)

I am in conformity with Narasimhaiah and differ with Rushdie. But having accepted religious faith as a criterion, he should have singled out Mrs. Rupa Mehra for special praise, as she is, in my opinion, nearly the most religious character I have come across in Indian fiction in English. But in the list of characters that Narasimhaiah offers to his reader Mrs. Rupa Mehra is not even mentioned. So deep is her religious faith that she carries with her a copy of the *Bhagvadgita* wherever she goes and reads its two chapters before she starts the routine of the day. Moreover, she does prayer at night before she sleeps. She also wants a reading of *Ramcharit Manas,* an epic-cum-scripture by Tulsidas and if that is too long, at least the section called *Sunderkand* which focuses on the god Hanuman and his confrontation with the villain, Ravan. Mrs. Rupa Mehra is a woman of the elite class with English education, and yet she is so religious.[1]

Characters play an important role in fiction as in drama and Narasimhaiah lists the characters which he reckons important in *A suitable Boy:*

> Arun and Varun. Pran and Feroz, Imtiaz, precocious Aparna and Maan, "a bit of a bounder", Pran's brother, "that ogling fellow," "Super sophisticated Meenakshi," "who had fallen in horrid raptures, and elegant love," "eating enormous and tasteful pallav," "brothers with their endless "unchokable wit" and improvised rhyming couplets. Anything to commend them. (122)

It is interesting to note that Narasimhaiah forgets to tell us whose wedding is the occasion for the characters to meet nor does he mention the mother of the bride, the sophisticated and the highly religious, Mrs. Ripa Mehra or the younger sister of the bride, Lata Mehra, the protagonist of the novel.

There are three main families in the novel, the Mehras, the Chatterjis and the Kapoors. To place the characters listed by Narasimhaiah in the right order, Arun and Varun are the two sons of Mrs. Rupa Mehra; Pran and his brother Maan are the two sons of Mr. Mahesh Kapoor, the Revenue Minister in the State cabinet of Purva Pradesh, Feroz, and Imtiaz Ali are the two sons and Zainab, the only daughter of the rich and powerful Zamidar of Baitar and a close friend of Mr. Mahesh Kapoor, "precocious" Aparna is the daughter of the supersophisticated Meenakshi Chatterji married to the equally sophisticated Arun Mehra, her brothers, three in number are very different from each other, Amit Chatterji, a poet and novelist is enjoying good reputation as a creative writer, though he has a degree in Law from Oxford University but does not practice, Dipankar, a banker with a degree in Economics is a highly philosophical and religious person who comes to Pul Mela (read Khumba Mela), held once in six years, spends time in the mela along with his brother-in-law, Pran listening to religious discourse and visiting sadhus who can perform miracles, the third brother Tapan is still studying.

Narasimhaiah comments on this own reading experience of the novel.

> I can't say that I have read the novel from cover to cover. Who has? Who can? unless it is an upper class unmarried Victorian girl who, not knowing how to kill the time, came to the novel with a gush that it could keep her occupied for the next few weeks. I confess my first arbitrary reading starting where I liked and closing when I could not drive myself any further, hoping to return to it at the next sitting amounted to 150-200 pages in all. (122)

I do not fall into any of the categories of readers that Narasimhaiah mentions but I have read the novel from cover to cover twice and in the third reading I have read the first nearly two hundred pages and also the closing two hundred pages between the lines. Have I wasted my time? No, because I was so interested in the development of the protagonist, Lata Mehra that I wanted

to watch her conduct and language in different situations throughout the novel. I only cursorily glanced through the portions where Lata did not figure like the ones dealing with the politics and election in the early 1950's, the long chunks describing the three generations of the courtesans and the detailed account of the shoe manufacturing from the hide to the leather and then to the shoes. But the nearly perfect and fully cultured Lata Mehra was the centre of my attention.

I have said that Lata Mehra is the very embodiment of culture? What are the parametres for identifying culture, or in other words, how to recognise a cultured person when you see one. A cultured person must have the control of language, what the *Bhagavadgita* calls *Vechiktap*, and the control of conduct and the suitable attire. ("appareil tells the man" says Shakespeare in *Hamlet*). There are some external factors like the social hierarchy to which a person belongs which is primarily a matter of wealth. Convent education is somewhere linked with prosperity and therefore not an important factor in cultural formation. Meenakshi Chatterji, a convent educated woman from a rich family married to Arun Mehra has no trace of culture. She has no control on language, on conduct and no qualms about having extramarital affairs with her husband's close friend, Bill Irani and she does not even know whether the child she is expecting is her husband's or his friend's. Mrs. Mahesh Kapoor without convent education has religious and moral concerns while her husband with English education does not have religious faith and lacks personal morality though his public image is unimpeachable.

Lata Mehra has studied in the famous St. Sophia convent in Mussoorie and has now come to Brahmpur to live with her mother who is sometimes living with her son, Arun in Calcutta and sometimes with her daughter, Savita, recently married to Pran, an English Lecturer at Brahmpur University. She has no house of her own. Lata's schooling is over and she is now studying English at Brahmpur University. There is little doubt that the capital city of Purva Pradesh, Brahmpur is modelled on Allahabad which was the first

modern city in the North, and the capital of the United Provinces. English education through convents began in Allahabad in the 19th Century well before Allahabad University was established in 1987. The period covered by Vikram Seth in *A Suitable Boy* is the early 1950's when Allahabad University with its formidable reputation was known as the Oxford of the East. There is a reference in the novel to two eminent teachers of the English Department, S.C. Deb and P.E. Dustoor (mentioned only by their surname), whose reputation travelled beyond the English Department. I have seen a student like Lata Mehra in my own class in the English Department where once Deb and Dustoor taught. There is also a reference to Muir Central College which is still in existence. Dhobighat, which is often mentioned in the novel, is still a landmark in Allahabad. The banyan tree on the root of which Lata and Kabir meet on the Ghat is inside the Fort which was built by Emperor Akbar and the boat in which the two lovers go out at dawn can be seen on the river taking people from near the Fort to the Sangam, the confluence of the Ganga and Jamuna.

On the campus, Lata meets a Muslim boy, Kabir, son of a Mathematics Professor doing history. He goes fast in making friends with Lata who goes slow as she is aware of the constraints thrust on her by her mother. Step by step they move from talking to holding lands and then to kissing. Mrs. Rupa Mehra, always concerned about Lata's future, finds out everything about Lata and Kabir, confronts her with a straight question, "Do you want to marry him." Lata musters courage to give a categorical reply, "Yes". Finding the situation out of control Mrs. Rupa Mehra resolves to take her to Calcutta and place the problem before her son, Arun Mehra. By now Lata is so passionately in love with Kabir that she resolves to meet him one last time to suggest that they elope and go where there is no third person. But Kabir does not agree to which Lata remarks:

> "You are, you are disillusioning me. How long will we have to wait?"
>
> "Two years. First I have to finish my degree, I think.

> After that I'm going to apply to get into Cambridge—or may take the exam for the Indian Foreign Service—."
>
> "Ah—" It was a low cry of almost physical pain.
>
> He stopped, realizing how selfish he must have sounded.
>
> "I'll be married off in two years, said Lata covering her face in her hands. You are not a girl. You do'nt understand. My mothere might not even let me come back to Brahmpur." (186)

Kabir tried to talk but Lata did not respond. She realized that she had reached the dead end and must leave his company for ever. She returned to her sister's place and in the evening left for Calcutta with her mother.

Lata never loses control of her language. When her mother learns about her movements with Kabir, especially when she learns that the boy is a Muslim, she twists her ears and gives her two hard slaps more than once but Lata does not use any harsh language. She knowns that her mother has made tremendous sacrifice for the family and therefore her feelings must not be hurt. She suffers but she cannot inflict sufferings on others.

Lata turned her back to Kabir but she could not drive him out of her mind. Knowing that Kabir is no longer an option for her marriage, she co-operates with her mother in arranging her marriage but she cannot give up her individutity and blindly accept a boy selected by her mother or brother, as Savita did. That she is quite aware of the difference between her and Savita is evident from the following conversation between them:

> "Do you like being pregnant?."
>
> "Yes," said Savita with a smile.
>
> "Do you like being married."
>
> "Yes," said Savita, her smile widening.
>
> "To a man who was chosen for you—whom you didn't really know before your marriage."
>
> "Do not talk like that about Pran, it's as if you were talking

> about a stranger," said Savita, taken aback. "You are funny sometimes, Lata. Don't you love him, too?"
>
> "Yes, said Lata, frowning at her non sequitur," but I don't have to be close to him in the same way. What I can't understand is how—well, it was other people who decided that he was suitable for you—— but if you did not find him attractive—, She was thinking that Pran was not good-looking and she did not believe that his goodness was a substitute for—what? a spark. (174).

The dialogue between the two sisters speaks volumes of the difference between them and their respective values. Who is right and who is wrong.? Savita is prettier than Lata but her husband is not as handsome as Kabir. As we learn from the later development, Kabir is no longer an option for Lata and she has to think of an alternative. For Rupa Mehra, Savita is the ideal daughter who quietly acquiesced in her mother's decision on the man she had to marry, though the choice of Rupa Mehra was arrived at after sufficient cogitation. Pran was a bright Lecturer in English at the prestigious Brahmpur University and the son of the Revenue Minister in the state Cabinet. But Lata is different. She cannot sacrifice her individuality for the wish of her mother or brother or anyone else in or outside the family. She rejected two proposals which were brought to her notice by her brother Arun Mehra in Calcutta, Vishwanath Bhaduri who was selected for Lata with the tango dance in mind but she did not participate in the dance and her brief conversation with him put her off and Amit Chatterji, the poet who lived more in imagination than in reality.

Kabir has become an obsession with her and Keeps appearing in her imagination and dream. It is a different thing that Kabir did not countenance her proposal to elope, but just in case he had agreed, she would have certainly got her much desired emotional and sexual satisfaction but life's happiness depends on other things, too. He rejects her proposal because, unlike Lata's, his emotion, just as deep and powerful as Lata's, is not devoid of reason.

Even though carried away by her emotion and disturbed by Kabir's rejection of her proposal, she does not lose control of her language and conduct. Let us revert to the scene created by Mrs. Rupa Mehra when she gets to know that Lata had been gallivanting with Kabir.

"A Muslim," said Mrs. Rupa Mehra to herself rather than to anyone else. Mrs. Rupa Mehra tends to blame herself for any untoward happenings in the family. But this time her stubbornness is answered by Lata's.

> She stood up again. "Never, never, never, never - -" she said. By now Lata, having conjured up the image of Kabir in her mind had gained a little strength. She opened her eyes. He tears had stopped and there was a defiance set to her mouth.
>
> "Never, never, absolutely not—dirty violent, cruel lecherous-
>
> "Do you want to marry him?" cried Mrs. Rupa Mehra in a fury.
>
> "Yes!" said Lata, carried away and angrier by the second.
>
> "Yes, he'll marry you—and the next year he'll say, 'Talak, Talak, Talak,' and you'll be out on the strects. You obstinate, stupid, girl! you should drown yourself in a handful of water for sheer shame."
>
> "I *will* marry him," said Lata unilaterally. (182)

If we are familiar with the entire context, we shall pity Rupa Mehra and sympathise with Lata. Mrs. Mehra, widowed when she was still in her forties, had as many as four children to look after. In her situation the main succor should come from her parents. He mother in already dead and the father, Dr. Kishen Chand Seth, a retired Civil Surgeon re-marries when in his 70's a crass woman Savitri younger than his own daughter. Mrs. Mehra, living a flawless life, is blamed by his own father for casting an evil eye on the visitors to his house. He goes to his son in Calcutta where her difficult daughter-in-law, Meenakshi, the daughter of a High Court judge, tortures her.

We sympathise with Lata because when she met Kabir, she did not know that he was a Muslim and by the time she got this information, she was already deeply and passionately in love with him. Mrs. Mehra's doubts about the instability of marriage with a Muslim is not baseless, as the marriage can be annulled on the utterance of "talak" thrice. Where will Lata go after the divorce? She will be back to squire one with a problem staring in her face and none to help her.

Once Lata comes to realize that the marriage with Kabir is not going to work either because Kabir wants her to wait for two years, or if it does materialize, her family will not let it work, she forces herself into accepting an arranged marriage. As Mrs. Rupa Mehra could not live with Savita in Brahmpur because of the Kabir factor, she decided to leave for Calcutta alongwith Lata and take Arun's help in solving the problem of a suitable boy for Lata. While Mrs. Rupa Mehra and Lata were waiting at the Brahmpur Junction Station with Pran to see them oft, Haresh Khanna, whom Lata finally marries, was on the platform to catch his train to Kanpur. He recoginised Pran with Lata whose attractiveness impressed him and left as his train had arrived. This was Hares's first glimpse of Lata.

Lata's control of language and conduct despite provocations is admirable. She had as her close friend Malati Trivedi, convent educated like Lata but having affairs without any qualms and tells Lata that she will have at least one more affair before she settles down with marriage. Like Mr. Rupa Mehra, Malati's mother is a widow but she has told her daughters that she will give them the best education, but they'll have to find their husbands on their own. Lata and Malati are in a diametrically opposite situations and their conducts are also very different. With Malati as a friend and Meenakshi as a sister-in-law with no sexual morality Lata remains uninfluenced by them and retained her exemplary conduct.

Lata cannot hurt a fly, as the saying goes. After making a mild adverse comment on Pran to Savita, she feels sad and thinks that

she should have phrased her opinion more carefully. After divulging her well-quarded relationship with Kabir, Lata says to Savita;

> Should I tell Ma? said Lata.
>
> "No" said Savita. No, No, don't tell Ma, whatever you do. She could imagine her mother's shock and pain.
>
> "Please don't tell anyone either, Didi. Anyone, said Lata.
>
> "I can't keep any sceret from Pran," said Savita.
>
> "Please keep this one," said Lata.
>
> "You are my sister. You've known this man for less than a year. As *soon as the words were out of her mouth Lata felt bad about the way she had referred to Pran, whom she now adored. She should have phrased it better.*
>
> Savita nodded a little unhappily (174, my Italics)

Both Lata and Savita, unlike their elder brother, Arun are sensitive and they are aware of the sacrifice that their mother has made for her children and the amount of hardships and humiliation that she has suffered for bringing them up after their father's death. Rupa Mehra, Savita Mehra (now Kapoor) and Lata Mehra can be arranged in an hierarchy with Lata as the most sensitive.

Being the woman protagonist, Lata Mehra is at the centre of the novel and plays the pivotal role. She supplies the parametres to assess the other characters and their activities. Of the two women, both the daughters of Mrs. Rupa Mehra, Lata is more sensitive as well as innocent than Savita. She does not know that girls start menstruating at puberty and that during the pregnancy periods stop. When Lata asks Savita why she did not tell her about these changes in the female body she tells her that she presumed that her sister knew all this as she knew at her age. Not knowing the extent of her innocence Mrs. Rupa Mehra buys for Lata just before her marriage with Haresh Khanna a copy of *Ideal Marriage* by Van de Velde, which tells all about the man's body and the role that husband and wife together play after their marriage. Lest Lata should feel embarrassed after going through the contents of the book, Mrs. Mehra tells her that even Sita and Savitri had to have these experiences.

After discarding Kabir, though she cannot driving him out of her memory, Lata goes to Calcutta alongwith her mother and help her find a suitable boy for her. Amit, the poet and novelist, is already interested in her. She first met him when he came to her Department at Brahmpur University for poetry recitation. That he is a poet and a novelist he can be taken as standing for Vikram Seth himself.

Once in Calcutta events take place in quick succession. Arun Mehra invites to his residence his employer, Basil Cox and his wife. Then came a letter from Kabir which Lata read surreptiously, although her brother Varun got wind of it and threatened to kill him to which Lata replied, "there is nothing to kill", which means that he is no longer a presence in her life. In the party organised by Justice Chatterji Lata learns that the Chatterjis were not happy with Meenakshi's marriage with Arun Mehra because of their superior social and financial status. Lata was surprised that this information maligning her brother was conveyed to her in the presence of others while her mother had thought that this marriage was nothing short of a disaster. She finds Meenakshi's family "amusing and confusing." Being a sensitive person Lata does not like others using language and indulging is manners without any regard for the others' feelings. When Amit's sisters, Meenakshi and Kakoli write couplets to make fun of him, Lata says:

> "Why do you let them get away with this?"
>
> "You mean with that doggerel?" said Amit.
>
> "I mean with teasing you," said Lata.
>
> "Oh, I don't. It runs off my back like duck's water," said Amit. (385)

Lata looks surprised, but Kakoli says:

> "He is doing a Biswas on You."
>
> "A Biswas?"
>
> "Biswas babu, my father's old clerk. He still comes around a couple of times a week to help with this and that and give us advice on life. He advised Meenakshi against marrying your brother," said Kakoli. (385).

The brief dialogue speaks volume of the cultural difference between the Mehras and the Chatterjis. Lata is so sensitive that she does not tike Amit's sisters making fun of him, but Kakoli has no qualms about hurting Lata's feeling by telling her Biswas Babu's negative opinion about her brother, Arun. Even then Lata does not make a summary dismissal of the Chatterjis when she says that they are "amusing and confusing."

Lata's sense of hunmour, though always within control, brings out the lighter traits of her personality. Not finding a suitable boy for Lata who had rejected both Amit Chatterji and Bishwanath Bhaduri, Mrs. Rupa Mehra resolved to leave for Delhi and take the help of Kalpana Gour to search out a suitable boy. Kalpana Gour, about the same age as Lata, was the daughter of Mrs. Mehra's husband's best friend. Lata refuses too go with her, as she was comfortable in Calcutta with the three Chatterji brothers treating her as their third sister but her mother does not like her proximity to Amit, as she does not want to sacrifice another of her children to the Chatterji clan.

Mrs. Rupa Mehra suffers on every front but her interest in the family never flags. She has no roof over her read and so shifts from place to place and also battles her major health problem of diabetes, but she is determined to find a suitable match for her younger daughter, Lata Mehra. She also keeps protecting her from undesirable young men like Kabir in Brahmpur and Amit in Calcutta.

Mrs. Rupa Mehra arrives in Delhi and goes straight to the residence of Kalpana Gaur, who was like her own daughter and, as a child, played with Lata and Savita. After her daily routine and the recitation of the two chapters of *Bhagavadgita* she broached the topic to Kalpana who immediately became active to track down Khatri boys in Delhi. Through her contacts and connections she ferreted out at short notice as many as seven Khatri boys. But they were all rejected by Mrs. Rupa Mehra for one reason or another. She gave up her hope and thought of visiting cities like Banaras, Allahabad and Lucknow where her husband had contacts.

At this very juncture appeared one Haresh Khanna who was Kalpana's classmate at St. Stephen's Delhi. He was a handsome young man of Khatri Community going by his surname. It was after he had left that Mrs. Mehra asked Kalpana the details of this young man and the possibility of his marriage with Lata. His family that lived in Delhi, told her that he had left Delhi for Kanpur where he worked with Cawnpore Leather and Shoe Factory. One learns that Kalpana herself had a mild crush on him, when they were studying together, but he himself was deeply in love with one Simran, a Sikh girl whose parents were determined to marry her only within the Sikh community. With no possibility of marrying Simran, he was now inclined to see and, if possible, marry another girl. Not being in a position to return to Delhi he could see the girl only in Kanpur.

A telegram was sent to Lata asking her to come to Kanpur in two days without giving the reason for the urgency. As desired, Arun dropped Lata at Howrah station early in the morning on a day train. During the journey Lata's mind began to wonder:

> Lata thought of Kabir and she felt both miserable and—in a curious way that she could not understand—happy. She loved him still— it was pointless to pretend otherwise. Has Calcutta had any effect at all in diminishing what she felt for him? Certainly, his letter had not given her any great hope of the strength of his feeling for her. Was there anything at all to be said for loving and not being loved equally in return? She did not think so.
>
> As the train was pulling out of Brahmpur Junction Lata got a glimpse of the university and wished she could have a glimpse of Kabir in the casual clothes he had worn, when he had been with her on the boat smiling with his old friendliness arguing with a porter about the rate he was charging— supposing he had been going to Kanpur—or at least as far as Banaras or Allahabad— Lata felt that her heart would have leapt with happiness at the sound of his voice, or the sight of his face—and any misunderstanding between them would have vanishad in a single puff of steam, single turn of the wheels (559).

So deeply ingrained is Kabir in her mind that he can surface in her memory without any external stimuli as he does just before her train has to enter Kanpur station. She hoped her mother was well. She yawned. She put *Emma* aside. She thought once again of Kabir.

As Lata learns the reason for calling her to Kanpur, she is dumbfounded and refuses to see Haresh Khanna. She was speechless for a moment. Then in a tone of disbelief she said, "You treat me as a child." One can see a clash here between Lata's love for Kabir and her love for her mother. Suspecting her mother's illness she rushed to Kanpur remembering and fantasizing on Kabir and once there Kabir is replaced by the unknown Haresh Khanna. This was the reason for her shock and surprise. Realizing that Kabir can exist only in memory, not in reality she agrees to meet Haresh. And Haresh, who is in love with a Sikh girl, Simran as deeply as Lata in love with Kabir, also realises that he must come to terms with reality, see another girl and, if possible, marry her.

The meeting of Lata and Haresh will be the meeting of the two rejected lovers. Lata is thinking of Kabir and Haresh of Simran when they meet in Kanpur. Both have no option but to turn their back on the past and turn over a new leaf. But there is a difference between Lata and Haresh. Being a more sensitive person Lata never mentions Kabir in the presence of Haresh but Haresh, on the contrary, has a framed photograph of Simran on his writing table which Lata and her mother can see. As Lata says to herself, he should have at least removed Simran's photograph, when he knew that Lata and her mother would be coming to his place. Lata makes sure that she does not hurt anybody's feelings with her words or deeds. This is not true of Haresh, or for that mater, any other character in the novel.

Lata has had physical contacts with Kabir to the extent of holding hands and kissing but between Simran and Haresh there was only distant relationship. Having uttered harsh words to her mother, Lata felt that she had gone too far and to comfort her said.

"All right Ma, I'll see him." (563) Lata is fully aware of the contribution that her mother has made in shaping her and the others in the family.

Lata in quite confident about her English, her dress sense and her manners and judges others by her own standards without hurting their feelings and making concession where necessary. The first meeting between her and Haresh speaks volumes of the difference between them. The first thing Haresh said to her was, "we have met before Miss. Mehra, haven't we?"

Lata frowned. Her first impression of Haresh was that he was shorter than she had expected. The next—when he opened his month to speak—that he had been chewing paan, which was far from appealing. Perhaps, if he had been wearing Kurta-pyjamas, a red stained month would have been appropriate—if not acceptable. Paan did not go at all with fawn gabardine and a silk shirt. In fact, paan did not go at all with her idea of a husband. Her whole mode of dressing struck her as being flashy. And the flashiest of all were co-respondent shoes. Who was he trying to impress? wondered Lata.

"I do'nt believe we have Mr. Khanna," Replied Lata politely. "But I'm glad we've got the chance to meet." Lata and Haresh formed very different opinions of each other. Lata's impression was rather poor but Haresh's impression was altogether positive. Unlike Haresh and her own mother, Lata did not like bragging about her or her family's achievements. Lata was feeling highly disgusted when her mother started praising Arun and her own husband. Throughout their journey to Lucknow Lata presented herself as a more sensitive, cultured and sophisticated person than Haresh. Lata's control of language as well as conduct is far superior. He keeps finding an excuse to refer to Simran but Lata never mentions Kabir in his presence. All said and done Lata concludes that, "the thought of their getting married was ridiculous." (575)

The legendry linguist and literary critic, Roman Jakobson has distinguish between the similarity-based metaphor and the continuity-

based metonym saying that poetry is primarily metaphorical and fiction primarily metonymic.[3] Vikram Seth is quite efficient in metonymic description. When Lata and Haresh are sitting in the restaurant at Kanpur Railway Station, Seth exploits to the full the metonymic device to describe them:

> Lata was dressed in a pale green Chanderi Sari with little white flowers and a white border. She wore the same pearl ear tops as before; they were virtually her only item of jewellery and she had not known she was going to be on display, she had not bothered to borrow anything from Meenakshi. Mr. Kakkar had taken a champa out of a vase and put it in her hair. It was a warm night and she looked lively and fresh in green and white.
>
> Haresh was wearing an off-white Irish linen suit and a cream tie with brown polka-dots. Lata disliked these expensive, over smart clothes and wondered what Arun would have thought of them.... As for a silk shirt, sure enough, it was there too. Haresh even brought his shirts into the conversation. They were made of the finest silk, the only silk he deigned to have made into shirts, not the rich poplin that was popular these days but the kind that had the brand mark of two horses—the base of the bale. All this meant no more to Lata than did wet-blue, samming and splitting. Luckily Haresh's co-respondent shoes were hidden beneath the table. (578)

Such metonymic description in prose fiction is its chief distinguishing feature but much of it is not needed when the novel is transferred to the film version where everything is visible.

Language is important in cultural formation but Arun Mehra's excessive stress on accent and idiom is out of place. Haresh's diction and accent puts Lata off. She recalled that, by way of overcompensation he had pronounced "daal" as "doll" at lunch and he pronounces Kanpur as "Cawnpore". When she compares his company with that of the polished and convented Bishwanath Bhaduri that evening at Firpos not long ago he finds the present company much better, which clearly implies that she is much more

balanced in her thinking that her elder brother. After all, culture is a question of values, and language does play a role in cultural formation not in terms of accent but in terms of the choice of words, which Lata knows but Arun does not.

The stream of thoughts that passes through the minds of Lata and Haresh, with which the reader is familiar but the characters are not has been very well highlighted by Seth.

> Over ice-cream, Lata decided she liked his eyes. They were lovely she thought, and surprisingly so. They were small and lively, did not spoil his good looks....
>
> Haresh's thoughts were not complicated. He said to himself: This girl is intelligent without arrogance and attractive without vanity. (579)

For a few minutes Haresh forgot Simran and Lata forgot Kabir which implies that neither of them can completely forget their old love.

Lata is more confident about herself than Haresh, and she keeps correcting him wherever she deems fit, but she does it humorously, not seriously so that his feelings are not hurt. At Kanpur station when Lata and her mother had boarded the train to Lucknow and Haresh was about to leave he said goodbye to Lata:

> "An revoir then," he said smiling. He had taken a few French lessons in England.
>
> "An revoir," replied Lata with a laugh.
>
> "Why are you laughing," asked Haresh.
>
> "Were you laughing at me?"
>
> "Yes," said Lata, honestly.
>
> "I was. Thank you."
>
> "For what?" asked Haresh.
>
> "For a very enjoyable day." She glanced once more at his co-respondent shoes." I won't forget it?
>
> "Neither will I," said Haresh

"You must learn to say shorter goodbyes."

"Do you have any other advice for me?" asked Haresh.

Yes, thought Lata; at least seven pieces, aloud she said.

"Yes, do keep to the left."

"Grateful for the affectionate banality,"

Haresh nodded. (582)

This dialogue brings out the difference between Lata and Haresh, but it is clear that they are getting close to liking each other, though the final decision on marriage is still a possibility, not certainty.

Lata's marriage with Haresh raises several questions. Is he a suitable boy? Is this going to be a happy marriage? Of the three other men who wanted to tie the nuptial knot with Lata, Amit is good for poetry but no for marriage. She cannot imagine making love to him. This explains why she did not like being kissed by him though she only gently resisted but did not openly protest. Arun's friend Bishwanath Bhaduri was not taken seriously by Lata who simply made fun of him. The Mulsim boy, Kabir, who was the first to come in Lata's life and impressed her so much that she wanted to elope with him against the wishes of the family, especially her mother, Mrs. Rupa Mehra. She dreams of him, fantasizes on him, imagines having physical relationship with him but she is not sure that her marriage with him would be allowed to work, as not only Mrs. Rupa Mehra but also brothers, Arun and Varun are against it. And in case Kabir had agreed to elope with her, after the expected joy of a married life she would have landed in trouble. As her mother says, with "triple talak" in Islam, she could have been back to square one with no one to support her or in case the marriage had worked, she would have been deserted by her own family which would have made her feel miserable.

Just before her marriage Lata received from Amit "a brief note of congratulations" but nothing from Kabir. And Lata ruminates:

Whose life am I living? Lata wondered. Was my acceptance but a reaction? Despite Haresh's encouraging letters and her

> own cheerful replies, Lata began to feel both uncertain and very lonely. Sometimes she sat on the bunyan tree and looked over the Ganga recollecting what it was pointless to recollect. Would she have been happy with him or he with me?" (1332)

Her mind goes into the future as well as the past.

> Two weeks more, she thought and I'll be the bride of Goodyear Welted.
>
> Oh, Kabir, Kabir— she wept.
>
> I should run away, she sought.
>
> I should run away, she thought, far from Haresh, far from Kabir, for from Arun and Varun, and Ma, and the whole Chatterji clan, far from Pran and Mann and Hindus and Muslims and passionate love and passionate hatred and all loud noises—just me and Malati and Savita and the baby.
>
> We'll sit on the sand on the other side of the Ganga and go to sleep for a year or two. (1333)

This wishful thinking in her reverie shows how intensely Lata loves Kabir. And a year or two of her sleep refers to Kabir's desire expressed to her that he wished to spend a year or two to build up his career before he settled down with a marriage, presumably with Lata.

On the eve of Lata's marriage, others are expressing conflicting opinions about Lata's decision to marry Haresh. Meenakshi thinks that Lata made a mistake by turning down the offer of marriage from her brother, Amit and Malati opines that Lata has married the wrong man.

Every marriage, whether arranged decided by the parents or decided by the couple themselves has an element of uncertainty. Meenakshi and Malati express serious doubts about the joy and happiness that will come to Lata from this marriage or whether Haresh will prove to be an ideal husband. Both Lata and Haresh have in the background love for another person. They have to forget it if they want their marriage to succeed. If they could forget

it on the first night, the night of the honey moon, only they know but their response after the night is a little unusual:

> The morning after the wedding Haresh suddenly decided over breakfast since he happened to be in Brahmpur, he should look in on the local Prabha factory. "But you can't leave me like this," said Lata putting down the tea cup in astonishment. They were sitting at a small table in the bridal bedroom in her grandfather's house.
>
> "No," said Haresh "I can't. Why don't you come too? You might enjoy it."
>
> "I think I'll go over to Savita's," said Lata and picked up the cup again.
>
> . . . .
>
> Lata walked over to the window after a while and looked out at bougainvillea, a little puzzled. This was a strange way to begin her married life. (1348).

This does indicate that Lata is not fully content with her experience of married life so for. The future of Lata as well Haresh depends on their being able to control or forget their previous love, Lata for Kabir and Haresh for Simran respectively. Going by their response on the day after the first night together, Lata seems to be doing better than Haresh. Lata's emotional involvement with Kabir was deeper but she also has better control on her emotion. This is evident from the fact that she has never mentioned Kabir in the presence of Haresh.

What will happen in future is difficult to predict, but as things stand now Lata seems in a better position to control the memory of her previous love than Haresh. Both lovers will reap the consequence of what they do. We know that they are good human beings and so we wish them well.

NOTES

1. Moving from the novel to the novelist, Vikram Seth himself displays deep religious faith in that the has rendered verse translation of *The Hanuman Chalisa* by Tulsidas recited by

most Hindus every morning after taking bath and before taking breakfast, see *The Hanuman Chalisa*, tr. Vikram Seth (New Delhi: Speaking Tiger Books, 2024).

2. Even Lata was not spared. When she was a school girl in St. Shophia Convent and decided to become a nun, Arun was called to dissuade her and "Arun exasperated with the lack of success of his budgeoning attempts at dissuasion, had said: "All right, go ahead, become a nun, ruin your life, no one would have married you, you book just like the Bible—flat in front and flat at the back." (25)
3. Of the prose fiction, Jakobson writes: "Following the path of contiguous relationships, the realist writer, metonymically digresses from the plot to the atmosphere and from the characters to the setting in space and time. In the scene of Anna Karanina's suicide Tolstoy's artistic imagination is focused on the heroine's handbag." "The Metaphoric and Metonymic Poles," *Modern Criticism and Theory*, ed David Lodge (Delhi: Pearson Education, 2024, p. 57.

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IJES, Volume LXI, 2025

Scaling the Racial Mountain with Wings of Words: Role of Self-Education in the Making of Frederick Douglass and Malcolm X

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Abstract

The present essay focuses attention on two African American icons – Frederick Douglass and Malcolm X– who remain in the forefront of any discourse related to the issues of the racial dilemma of America in coming to terms with the ideals of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness enshrined in *The Declaration of Independence.* Through the close examination of *Narrative of the Life of Frederic Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself* and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X,* an attempt has been made to show how the two personalities, each in his own way, discovered the importance of self-education in transforming their own lives and that of the communities they hailed from. Douglass, a former slave had affirmed, "Once you learn to read, you will be forever free." Similarly, Malcolm X, a human rights activist and electrifying orator, championed the cause of Black empowerment and equality in the United States and beyond with what he called his "home education."

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Keywords: Racism, Slavery, Frederick Douglas, Malcolm X, Home-Education

We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves.

—Langston Hughes (57)

On July 5, 1852, at Corinthian Hall in Rochester, New York, Frederick Douglass, a former slave, rocked the American nation with his fiery speech entitled "What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July?" We are all aware of the significance of the said date in American history. 4th of July 1776 was the date on which the *Declaration of Independence* was adopted by the Continental Congress setting free the thirteen American Colonies of all allegiance to the British rule under King George III. Enshrined in the famous *Declaration of Independence* were the ideals set forth by the founding fathers: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." (*Declaration of Independence* 35) Douglass began his speech by showing his respect for the creators of the *Declaration of Independence* but soon turned his focus to a scathing indictment of the institution of slavery that was a gross violation of the principles contained in the *Declaration*. He stated with a blend of courage and commitment:

> The sunlight that brought light and healing to you, has brought stripes and death to me. This Fourth July is yours, not mine. You may rejoice, I must mourn… What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer: a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciations of tyrants, brass fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade,

> and solemnity, are, to him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy—a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. (Douglass, "What to the Slave…")

The above passage, from what is considered the most significant of the hundreds of speeches that Douglass gave after he gained his freedom, amply illustrates his ability to earmark the aspects that separated American ideals of democracy from the gross reality of the slavery to which the blacks were subjected. Like Douglass, Malcolm X, though born a little over a century later, became an undisputed spokesman of racial discrimination and Black Power Movement in America. My purpose in the present essay is to examine and highlight how these two African American revolutionaries scaled the racial mountain through self-education and passionate activism.

Frederick Douglass (1818-1895)

Way back in September 2003, when I picked up the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself* at the University Book Store in Seattle, USA, I was instantly drawn to the appendage "Written by Himself" in the title itself. As I had not till then come across any title of a book where an author felt the compulsion to authenticate his authorship, I couldn't help feeling a little surprised. Then it dawned on me that, since it was an autobiography of a slave, Douglass must have been concerned by the prejudice that questioned the ability of someone 'less than human' to read and write. It is quite possible that Douglass may have been aware then about the trials, tribulations and the humiliation that Phillis Wheatley – a black slave girl – had to undergo way back in October, 1772 to prove to the gathering of eighteen heightened white statesmen and politicians from Massachusetts Colony that she was the rightful author of her collection of twenty poems. "The panel," writes Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "had been assembled to verify the authorship of her poems and to answer a much larger question: was a Negro capable of producing literature?" (Gates, Jr. 5)

Perhaps, in order to emphasize that a slave actually has written the book, Douglass thought it prudent to include the fact in the title as a kind of a declaration. The book was published in 1845. In a letter dated April 22, 1845, Wendell Phillips, abolitionist and president of the American Anti Slavery Society, wrote to Frederick Douglass to convey his deep appreciation of the latter's brilliant *Narrative*:

> I was glad to learn, in your story, how early the most neglected of God's children waken to a sense of their rights, and of the injustice done them. Experience is a keen teacher; and long before you had mastered your A B C, ... you began, I see, to gauge the wretchedness of the slave, not by his hunger and want, not by his lashes and toil, but by the cruel and blighting death which gathers over his soul. (Phillips in *Narrative* 44)

What is significant in the *Narrative* is how an extremely sensitive soul grapples with the dehumanizing first-hand experience of slavery in all its wretchedness and how, refusing to accept his fate as a bondsman, he feels the ceaseless stirrings of freedom from slavery. This desperate urge for freedom is kept alive by his instinctual need for learning to read and write to attain his goal.

At the very beginning of the *Narrative*, Douglass writes about his parentage. His mother was Harriet Bailey, daughter of Isaac and Betsy Bailey, both colored. His father, he presumes, was a white man. He had no means of verifying the whispers that told that his master was his father. Douglass succinctly points out that it was a common custom to separate children from their mothers at a very early age. He says, "For what this separation is done, I do not know, unless it be to hinder the development of the child's affection towards his mother, and to blunt and destroy the natural affection of the mother for the child." (*Narrative* 48) Douglass describes his master as "a cruel man, hardened by a long life of slaveholding." (*Narrative* 51) Nothing seems to have given his master greater pleasure than the opportunity to whip a slave.

Douglass recounts how, even as a seven-year-old, he would be deeply affected by the songs sung by the slaves in chorus that

described their miserable existence fraught with ceaseless oppression. Though the songs displayed scant regard for melody or rhythm, they told "a tale of woe … (and) breathed the prayer and complaint of souls boiling over with the bitterest anguish. Every tone was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains." (*Narrative* 57-58) According to Douglass, the songs convey the misery and pain of the debasing nature of human bondage far more effectively than 'volumes of philosophy'. He lyrically describes the lasting imprints the slave songs had on his impressionable mind and heart and in spurring his creativity.

Chapter X of the *Narrative* dwells at length with the craving for freedom from bondage that Douglass experienced even at the tender age of seven/eight. Fired by the zeal to escape the predicament of remaining permanently enmeshed in chains of bondage, he often vacillated between bitter despair and endless glimmer of hope. He confesses how, like Prince Hamlet in Shakespeare's play, he too seems to be caught in the dilemma of 'To be or not to be'. Echoing Shakespeare's lines, Douglass writes: "I say, this picture some-times appalled us, and made us 'rather bear those ills we had,/ Than fly to others, that we knew not of.'" (*Narrative* 124) Caught between the reality of his existence and the prospect of gaining freedom, he became restless.

Even a cursory reading of the *Narrative* is bound to convince anyone of the author's extraordinary power to use words with ease and felicity. But, at the same time, one may wonder how a slave boy, especially in the pre-civil war era, could acquire such learning and flair for writing to become a legend among the abolitionists. This should be a matter of paramount concern for those who believe in the transformative potential of words. It is true that with desire, determination, commitment and steadfastness one can aspire for any goal in life.

Yet, it appears almost incredible that a slave-boy, without access to any formal education of any kind, could write in the manner that Douglass does in the *Narrative* or deliver speeches indicative of the highest quality of intellectual oratory. His deep conviction that

slavery would not always be able to hold him "within its foul embrace" would not have turned to fruition but for what providence had in store for him.

At the age of seven Douglass was sold to a couple named Hugh and Sophia Auld to take care of their little son Thomas. When he reaches the Auld household he is pleasantly surprised to find them affectionately disposed towards him. With utmost sincerity Douglass acknowledges the human kindness he receives from the Aulds as an act of divine dispensation: "From my earliest recollection, … and in the darkest hours of my career in slavery, this living word of faith and spirit of hope departed not from me, but remained like ministering angels to cheer me through the gloom. This good spirit was from God, and to him I offer thanksgiving and praise." (*Narrative* 75)

Sophia Auld takes a lot of interest in little Douglass and teaches him the alphabets. Gradually, she tells him how he can combine a few letters and create three or four-letter words. His heart is full of praise and gratitude for Sophia Auld whom he refers to as "a woman of the kindest heart and finest feelings … Her face was made of heavenly smiles, and her voice of tranquil music." (*Narrative* 77)

However, fatesoon intervenes to give his ecstasy a jolt. One day while Sophia is in the process of teaching him to read, she encounters her husband. Her husband gives her a scolding and forbids her from teaching him to read and write saying that such acts were unlawful and unsafe. He instructs her: "A nigger should know nothing but to obey his master—to do as he is told to do. Learning would *spoil* the best nigger in the world … if you teach that nigger (speaking of myself) how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave." (*Narrative* 78)

Douglass is quick to comprehend from the content of Hugh Auld's admonishment of his wife that education can create "the pathway from slavery to freedom." What needs to be specifically pointed out from this episode is that any society that wants to keep

the oppressed in their place, its first attempt is to stop them from getting access to anything related to reading, writing, knowledge, culture etc. because the moment they are able to rationalize, they are sure to question the status quo. The kind of determination this boy at the age of seven has is evident from his statement: "What he most dreaded, that I most desired. What he most loved, that I most hated. That which to him was a great evil, to be carefully shunned, was to me a great good, to be diligently sought." (*Narrative* 79)

Hugh Auld's views on the hazards of teaching a "nigger" to read and write comes as an awakening for Douglass. On the contrary, it is interesting to see the effect it has on Sophia. With a tinge of humor, Douglass recalls:

> Slavery soon proved its ability to divest her of these heavenly qualities. Under its influence, the tender heart became stone, and the lamblike disposition gave way to one of tiger-like fierceness. The first step in her downward course was in her ceasing to instruct me. She now commenced to practise her husband's precepts. …She was not satisfied with simply doing as well as he had commanded; she seemed anxious to do better. (*Narrative* 82)

Subsequently, if Sophia Auld saw Douglass even with a newspaper she would rush at him and snatch it away from his hands. Douglass ruminates: "She was an apt woman; and a little experience soon demonstrated, to her satisfaction, that education and slavery were incompatible with each other." (*Narrative* 82)

Though Douglass is deeply interested in reading, writing and expressing himself, he realizes how difficult it is to learn anything without a teacher. Yet, he is not the one to give up his determination to use education as the "pathway to freedom." He soon explores other avenues for acquiring learning. The Aulds had plenty to eat and Douglass would take loaves of white bread in his pocket and go to the streets to meet white little boys who were poorer than him where eating and other things were concerned. He thought of a plan wherein he could exchange the bread and make them his teachers to augment his learning:

> As many of these as I could, I converted into teachers. With their kindly aid, obtained at different times and in different places, I finally succeeded in learning to read. This bread I used to bestow upon the hungry little urchins, who, in return, would give me that more valuable bread of knowledge. (*Narrative* 83)

With the anxiety of "being a slave for life" weighing heavily upon him as he grew older, Douglass became all the more eager to immerse himself in reading books that could take him forward on his mission to freedom. Around the age of twelve, he heard about a book entitled *The Columbian Orator* that the white kids often mentioned in their conversations. Collecting 50 cents by shining shoes for a month, Douglass bought the book. What immediately attracted his attention, among the many speeches and texts from celebrated writers, intellectuals and statesmen from diverse ages, nations and cultures that the book contained, was a conversation between a slave owner and a slave. The slave runs away thrice and is caught thrice and brought back. In the said conversation, whatever can be said in support of slavery is narrated by the slave owner and whatever can be said against slavery is spoken by the slave. In the story, the slave owner is so convinced with the arguments that he finally frees the slave. Douglass accepts that the moral he gained from the dialogue "was the power of truth over the conscience of even a slaveholder." (*Narrative* 84)

The various other speeches that he found in *The Colombian Orator* had a magical effect on his mind and soul:

> These were choice documents to me. I read them over and over again with unabated interest. They gave tongue to interesting thoughts of my own soul, which had frequently flashed through my mind, and died away for want of utterance … The more I read, the more I was led to abhor and detest my enslavers. (*Narrative* 84)

The Colombian Orator made Douglass not only aware of man's inhumanity to man in terms of race and color but also stirred within him the passion to denounce slavery and other agencies of

oppression and exploitation. The book became Douglass's most prized possession and he would carry that book with him all the time. Because he was not supposed to write or read at the Auld home, he would go into the streets with a piece of chalk and practice his writing on the pavements, walls, and trees to acquire the skills he so desperately needed. Interestingly, one common word which would always perplex him was "abolitionist":

> I was eager to hear any one speak of slavery. I was a ready listener. Every little while, I could hear something about the abolitionists. It was some time before I found what the word meant. It was always used in such connections as to make it an interesting word to me. If a slave ran away and succeeded in getting clear, or if a slave killed his master, set fire to a barn, or did any thing very wrong in the mind of a slaveholder, it was spoken of as the fruit of abolition. (*Narrative* 86)

It is pertinent to mention here that, while embarked on his mission, Douglass was never tempted by thoughts of material gains for himself. His avowed goal was not restricted to ways and means to attain his individual liberty. He generously shared the fruits of his knowledge and wisdom with fellow-slaves to awaken their urge to freedom.

Douglass's passionate dream of attaining freedom ultimately succeeds when, on the third day of September 1838, he leaves his chains forever and arrives in New York. From that moment started the remarkable journey unparalleled in human history. Freed from the chains of slavery, he wrote his iconic *Narrative* and engaged himself, heart and soul, in addressing huge gatherings on the denunciation of slavery and advocacy of equal rights for the slaves as human beings. His intuitive ability to be inspired by the power of words that began with *The Columbian Orator* did not become dormant after he procured his freedom. Towards the end of the *Narrative* he mentions how *Liberator,* the weekly abolitionist newspaper published from Boston, "became my meat and my drink. My soul was set all on fire. Its sympathy for my brethren in bonds—its scathing denunciations of slaveholders—its faithful exposures

of slavery—and its powerful attacks upon the upholders of the institution—sent a thrill of joy through my soul, such as I had never felt before!" (*Narrative* 151) It is, perhaps, significant that David Blight's recent Pulitzer Prize winning biography of Douglass is titled *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom*.

Malcolm X (1925-1965)

Malcolm X was born Malcolm Little on May 19, 1925 in Omaha, Nebraska. His mother, Louise Little, was the National recording secretary for the Marcus Garvey Movement which commanded millions of followers in the 1920s and 30s. His father, Earl Little, was a Baptist minister. Earl Little's Civil Rights activism prompted death threats from the white supremacist organization Black Legion, forcing the family to relocate twice before Malcolm's fourth birthday. In 1929 their Lansing, Michigan home was burned to the ground. Two years later, Earl's body was found lying across the town's trolley tracks. Malcolm's mother was diagnosed as mentally ill and sent to the Kalamazoo State Mental Hospital, where she stayed for 26 years. Placed in foster homes. Malcolm had a disturbed childhood. In 1939 Malcolm was sent to a juvenile home in the nearly all-white community of Mason, Michigan. Bright and intelligent, he did well at school and figured among the toppers in his class. English and History were the subjects he liked most. In his VIII grade he was quite impressed by his English teacher, Mr. Ostrowski, who was "always giving advice about how to become something in life." (*Autobiog.* 29) One day he asked Malcolm what he wanted to be in life? Malcolm answered, "I've been thinking I'd like to be a lawyer." Surprised by Malcolm's aspiration, Ostrowski responded by saying:

> Malcolm, one of life's first needs is for us to be realistic. Don't misunderstand me, now. We all here like you, you know that. But you've got to be realistic about being a nigger. A lawyer—that's no realistic goal for a nigger. You need to think about something you *can* be. You're good with your hands—making things. Everybody admires your carpentry shop work. Why don't you plan on carpentry? People like

> you as a person— you'd get all kinds of work. (*Autobiog.* 36)

Shocked by the attitude of his teacher he had hitherto adored, Malcolm lost interest in his studies and left for Boston to be with Ella Collins, his half-sister. He wistfully notes in his *Autobiography*:

> Whatever I have done since then, I have driven myself to become a success at it. I've often thought that if Mr. Ostrowski had encouraged me to become a lawyer, I would today probably be among some city's professional black bourgeoisie, sipping cocktails and palming myself off as a community spokesman for and leader of the suffering black masses, while my primary concern would be to grab a few more crumbs from the groaning board of the two-faced whites with whom they're begging to "integrate." (38)

Boston wrought the astonishing transformation of the studious Malcolm into one engaged in doing odd jobs on railroads, in restaurants and bars, at shoeshine stands, and in a jewelry store. Malcolm learns to dress like a hipster, dyes his hair, and starts hustling in Boston, New York and Detroit where hegoes around by the nickname "Detroit Red." He returns to Boston where he engages himself in hustling, stealing, dope peddling, pimping, wielding firearms and other such nefarious activities. These activities ultimately lead to his arrest and conviction with an eight-to-10-year imprisonment sentence. He is sent to jail in Charlestown, Massachusetts followed by Concord Reformatory and finally to Norfolk Prison Colony in Massachusetts.

It is at Norfolk Prison Colony that his life undergoes a change for ever from the criminal Malcolm X to the militant spokesman for the Blacks in America. In an interview with Re-Markings, Lama Rangdrol lucidly captures the transformation of Malcolm X when he says: "One might recall "Detroit Red," an ordinary incarcerated Black man. While "doing his time" he studied world culture and African history in the prison library. The fact that street thug Detroit Red emerged as Malcolm X is the kind of miraculous turn of events Buddhists believe in. Malcolm was not Buddhist. Nonetheless his metamorphosis was miraculous and inspiring. (Rangdrol 18)

Chapter XI of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* offers a graphic account of what turned a mind from that of a criminal to one whose passion for reading and writing helped him create and expand his intellectual horizon to address issues of oppression of the Blacks in the world's most powerful democracy. Though he had been studious at school, the criminal phase of life that he underwent after quitting school changed him into someone who would grope for words to convey even his basic feelings on paper. Malcolm observed in desperation: "I became increasingly frustrated at not being able to express what I wanted to convey in letters that I wrote… In the street, I had been the most articulate hustler out there—I had commanded attention when I said something. But now, trying to write simple English, I not only wasn't articulate, I wasn't even functional." (*Autobiog.* 171)

Malcolm's despair led him to think of using a dictionary to learn new words with all seriousness. At the same time he felt the acute need to improve his writing skill and penmanship. He requested the prison authorities to provide him with a dictionary along with tablets and pencils. Once he lay hold of the dictionary, he says, "I'd never realized so many words existed! I didn't know which words I needed to learn. Finally, just to start some kind of action, I began copying. In my slow, painstaking, ragged handwriting, I copied into my tablet everything printed on that first page, down to the punctuation marks. I believe it took me a day." (*Autobiog.* 172) Going a step further, he began reading aloud the words he had copied. The sound of the words resonated in his mind and with every succeeding page, he says, "I was so fascinated that I went on—I copied the dictionary's next page. And the same experience came when I studied that. With every succeeding page, I also learned of people and places and events from history. Actually the dictionary is like a miniature encyclopedia." (*Autobiog.* 172)

Stating that he had read over a million words, he recounts that with the broadening of his word-base, he began to pick up books to read and understand the contents. He became an avid reader and

until he left the prison every free moment he had he spent in reading in the library or in the isolation of his cell. Enjoying reading in the "total isolation" of his cell, he would read till 10 P.M. every night and when the lights were switched off he would remain awake and read by the glow of the corridor light till early morning. For the first time Malcolm felt he had never been so "truly free" in his life. He acknowledges that attending lectures in the classes given by instructors who came from Harvard and Boston universities enhanced the area of his reading and opened, in the process, a completely new world for him.

The first set of books that impressed him comprised *Wonders of the World,* Will Durant's *Story of Civilization,* H.G. Wells' *Outline of History, Souls of Black Folk* by W. E. B. Du Bois, Carter G. Woodson's *Negro History,* J.A. Rogers' three volumes of *Sex and Race,* Aesop's *Fables, Genetics* by Gregor Mendel and books by Frederick Olmstead among others. As a voracious reader he devoured books that reminded him of the message he had once received from Elijah Mohammad, the leader of the Nation of Islam Movement: "black prisoner symbolized white society's crime of keeping black men oppressed and deprived and ignorant, and unable to get decent jobs, turning them into criminals." (*Autobiog.* 169) The bound pamphlets related to the Abolitionist Anti-Slavery Society of New England that he found among the Parkhurst's collection in the prison library made him aware of "atrocities, ... illustrations of black slave women tied up and flogged with whips; of black mothers watching their babies being dragged off, never to be seen by their mothers again; of dogs after slaves, and of the fugitive slave catchers, evil white men with whips and clubs and chains and guns." (*Autobiog.* 176)

The only novel, he recalls to have read was *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* Reality appeared more important than fiction. He reminisces with anger and sadness how in his school at Mason "the history of the Negro had been covered in one paragraph." (*Autobiog.* 29) Such factors motivated him to remain immersed in books that brought to

light the "glorious history of the black man" in all its manifestations. Reading the histories of various nations, he tells, opened his eyes to "how the whole world's white men had indeed acted like devils, pillaging and raping and bleeding and draining the whole world's non-white people." (*Autobiog.* 176)

His reading arena didn't close with Black history. He read Philosophy too at length beginning with Herodotus and Socrates, and moved on to "touch all the landmarks of philosophical development." (*Autobiog.* 179) His reading included both Occidental and Oriental philosophers like Schopenhauer, Kant, Nietzsche, Spinoza and many others. He also read Shakespeare, Bacon and Milton. He succinctly pointed out that "the collective white man had been actually nothing but a piratical opportunist who used Faustian machinations to make his own Christianity his initial wedge in criminal conquests." (*Autobiog.* 177) He emphasises that his "homemade education" gave him with every book he read "a little bit more sensitivity to the deafness, dumbness, and blindness that was afflicting the black race in America." (*Autobiog.* 177) He mentions how, later, when asked by an English writer on phone from London, "What's your alma mater?" he responded by saying that his alma mater was "books, a good library" and added, "If I weren't out here every day battling the white man, I could spend the rest of my life reading, just satisfying my curiosity—because you can hardly mention anything I'm not curious about. I don't think anybody ever got more out of going to prison than I did." (*Autobiog.* 179-80) Intensive reading for a considerable time every night in the faint lights-out glow of the prison led to astigmatismand to his first pair of eyeglasses.

In his *Autobiography* Malcolm humbly mentions how extensive passionate and committed reading had changed his life forever: "Many who today hear me somewhere in person, or on television, or those who read something I've said, will think I went to school far beyond the eighth grade. This impression is due entirely to my prison studies." (*Autobiog.* 171)

It is relevant to indicate here that if extensive reading helped him acquire intellectual awakening of the highest kind, he had realised in his prison tenure itself that he needed to develop his skill at oratory through which he could address the masses of Black people and show them the way to their true independence. Consequently, he enrolled himself in all the debating contests and activity that came his way in the prison. He writes, "in the prison, debating, speaking to a crowd, was as exhilarating to me as the discovery of knowledge through reading had been." (*Autobiog.* 184) Looking back at the situation as a prison inmate Malcolm accepts that his transformation through reading books was nothing short of a miracle: "I'd never have dreamed anything so wild as that one day I would speak in coliseums and arenas, at the greatest American universities, and on radio and television programs, not to mention speaking all over Egypt and Africa and in England." (*Autobiog.* 184)

It is amazing that his concern while in prison was not circumscribed to the racial situation in America but it extended to various parts of the globe inclusive of Africa, China as well as India. He notes about Africa that "115 million African blacks—close to the 1930's population of the United States—were murdered or enslaved during the slave trade." (*Autobiog.* 177) He talks about the way China was duped by the white men and controlled by the Opium War. He also refers to India where, according to him, "half a billion deeply religious brown people" were subjugated by the "British white man, by 1759, through promises, trickery and manipulations, controlled much of India through Great Britain's East India Company." (*Autobiog.* 177) As an inspired leader, Malcolm X felt that his concern was not limited to the indictment of the Whites but it was equally necessary to awaken the element of human dignity in the heart and soul of his Black brothers who had been brainwashed into accepting the 'White is Right' dictum. In one of his famous speeches, "The Ballot or the Bullet," delivered in Cleaveland on April 3, 1963, Malcolm appeals to the Black masses:

> Whenever you're going after something that belongs to you, anyone who's depriving you of the right to have it is a

> criminal. Understand that. Whenever you are going after something that is yours, you are within your legal rights to lay claim to it. And anyone who puts forth any effort to deprive you of that which is yours, is breaking the law, is a criminal. (*Malcolm X Speaks* 33)

In speech after speech Malcolm exhorted his Black brothers and sisters to come out of their shell of helplessness and despair and claim their human rights before talking about Civil Rights. He was extremely critical of even Black professors and intellectuals who had been brainwashed by the evident "whitening" of history by the White man so much so that professors and Ph.D.'s knew "little more than the most ignorant black man about the talents and rich civilizations and cultures of the black man of millenniums ago." (*Autobiog.* 181)

Following his release on parole on August 7, 1952, Malcolm joined the Nation of Islam under Elijah Mohammad. Rejecting his surname "Little" as a slave name given to his family by white oppressors, he came to be known as "Malcolm X." With his charismatic personality and eloquent oratory he quickly created a special place for himself in the leadership of the organization. However, in 1963 differences with Elijah Mohammad began to surface that worsened with time till Malcolm parted ways with the leader he had once so deeply revered. In the summer of 1964 Malcolm formed the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU) and continued his mission of bringing together his Black brethren not only in the U.S. but also in other nations like Egypt, Lebanon, Liberia, Senegal, Nigeria, Ghana, and Saudi Arabia.

On February 21, 1965, Malcolm X was assassinated while speaking at an OAAU rally in Harlem. Malcolm X passed away at the age of 39 but his legacy of awakening the racially oppressed masses continues to inspire people throughout the world through his bestselling *Autobiography* and through his electrifying revolutionary speeches that had taken roots during his prison days. Cornel West in *Race Matters* hails Malcolm X as "the first real

black spokesperson who looked ferocious white racism in the eye, didn't blink, and lived long enough to tell America the truth about this glaring hypocrisy in a bold and defiant manner." (West 151) How Malcolm X continues to cast a long shadow on issue of race relations in America can be gauged from the way he dominates the discourse of the Black Lives Matter movement. Ta-Nehisi Coates, the winner of the US National Book Award, 2015 for *Between the World and Me* reaffirms with enormous respect in the said book: "If I could have chosen a flag back then, it would have been embroidered with a portrait of Malcolm X, dressed in a business suit, his tie dangling, one hand parting a window shade, the other holding a rifle." (Coates 35)

Taken together, the narratives of Frederic Douglass and Malcolm X exemplify how the zeal for self-education can help individuals use the power of words to become torchbearers for humanity's relentless struggle against slavery of any kind, be it in the domain of religion, class, caste, creed, colour, ethnicity, or race. In conclusion, I deem it appropriate to exhort young teacher members of the Association for English Studies in India to draw inspiration from the above narrative to illumine their own lives and that of others rather than limit themselves to view education as a mere source of livelihood.

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IJES, Volume LXI, 2025

Post-truth Media, Literature and the Indian Viewpoint

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Abstract

The notion of a post-truth world has caught the fancy of literary intellectuals even though it has become a powerful tool for the politicians whose focus is to appeal to the emotions of the electorate without referring to facts or if used, not bothering to ascertain their veracity. It gives utter freedom to the advocates of this concept to make use of lies and falsehoods. Present day media and literature, high on the postmodern ethos, is shedding its commitment to truth and noble objectives. Use of the post-truth approach in literature upends the age-old philosophies of literature, particularly the ones upheld in India. My paper takes up the play of post-truth in some varieties of Indian English Fiction, as for example in history and "myth"- based fiction. Besides, it examines the postulates upon which the edifice of post-truth rests and compares the situation before and after the emergence of post-truth scenario, and outlines the dangers in blindly following the ever-changing western ideologies.

Introduction

The term post-truth is now common currency even if its incorporation in the Oxford Dictionary is a few years old. The first

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use of this term is reported to have been in 1992, when the Serbian American playwright Steve Tesich in his article titled "A Government of Lies," criticized the American public for submissively accepting the lies of the George Bush (Sr.) administration and of consciously deciding to live in a post-truth world. The term resurfaced in 2004, in the title of a book by the American author Ralph Keyes, "The Post-Truth Era" (Brahms). So, the 'post-truth' world meant to political pundits, a world in which truth is not important.

This resonates with George Orwell's book *1984* wherein he says that the politicians of all shapes and sizes utter lies but make their lies sound truthful. Come Adolf Hitler during the Second World War, and we learnt from his minister Joseph Goebbels that a lie told a hundred times becomes truth. Recently in 2014, when a philosopher named Joseph Heath used the term during the 2014 American elections, it caught the fancy of other politicians also. Donald Trump used it to his advantage during his 2016 election which he won. One is also reminded of the present-day philosopher Yuval Harari who opines that "Humans are post-truth species"! (Harari).

We know politics has never been based on truth, which shows that the term 'post-truth' is descriptive, but the problem is that the votaries of poststructuralism in arts and literature seem to have taken it as prescriptive! The Oxford Dictionary has tried to straitjacket this 'Word of the Year 2016' – 'post-truth' and defined it as "a term relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief." The problem with this definition is that it seeks to conjure up a different picture of truth itself: a truth that is akin to facts only; is devoid of emotions; is not visualized subjectively, and so on. It begs the following questions:

1. Why is truth equated with facts?
2. Should emotions be outside the purview of truth?
3. Why is subjective truth of less value than the so-called impersonal truth?
4. Is truth the same for everyone?
5. Does post-truth exclude values or ethics—fully/ partially?

To contextualize these questions, we need to have a brief review of the theory of poststructuralism and its Derridean offshoot of deconstruction. Derrida attacked Western epistemology as metaphysical (logocentric) because he was against all that we consider as a fixed logos. So, for him, no absolute truth could is possible. Everything here is dependent on everything else; nothing is purely self-present. So, why hanker after truth at all? Has mankind thrown up hands in the face of the corporates sponsoring fake news? History, for example, is now confronted with too many versions, so let's call it the end of history! Does not this approach show a certain disinterest or fatigue in going after truth? For that matter, every problem in science demands strenuous pursuit which can cause fatigue.

Philosophy, in order to legitimize its existence, has to aid existence of mankind because man cannot survive in an utterly uncertain world where falsehood becomes the norm of all worldly actions. If we apply the reflexive logic to the notion of post-truth and believe in it unquestioningly, then post-truth itself becomes truth. In other words, post-truth, seen as a construct, becomes logos!

It is said that post-truth values emotions over facts because political audiences get easily swayed by what was valued even in Socratic times as rhetoric, but let us not forget that rhetoric comprised of ethos, pathos and logos. This is not to devalue emotions, but to assert that both logic and sentiments are equally important for human beings.

Post-truth Media

Let us examine what this notion of post-truth has meant to social media. Generally, when people talk about media, they tend to include media of all type: mass media (also called mainstream media), and the social media. Social media operating electronically has spawned many platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Whatsapp, Instagram, etc. which, propelled by artificial intelligence, now seek to mould human mind and perception. Its power has grown manifold

so that like Frankenstein's monster depicted in Mary Shelley's eponymous novel, it is now seeking to control human lives.

The notion of post-truth absolves the media of any commitment to truth. The question one asks here is: Do all these media forms act similarly? One can argue that the traditional print media, at least the leading newspapers and journals, has more credibility than the digital media. But we see that the electronic media like TV channels, even though sponsored by the traditional newspapers and journals has joined to a great degree the social media in some respects. Both have beaten print media in terms of sweep and speed, and therefore, are more powerful in moulding public opinion.

Anyone can operate it privately. Thus, it is viewed as a democratic domain with unlimited space. The king and the commoner jostle without any reservation or restraint in this greatest of carnivals which Mikhail Bakhtin once noticed in fiction. Also it has immense scope to host content which leads to information overload – something that the viewer cannot cope with. While Marx talked about religion holding sway over masses and Foucault talked about the discourse created by the state that controls our thinking, media is now the enviable controller which is getting more and more powerful with the ever-increasing aid from artificial intelligence. (Malik & Batra 47-61).

The interface of the post-truth philosophy and the social media has had a two-dimensional impact. One, the post-truth media can be taken as a vetter of lies; two, post-truth philosophy can mean caution to the consumer of social media in accepting a piece of information. We celebrate the fact that any one can post his or her views addressed to the President of a country or to people at large as easily as to his/her friend. But the veracity of the person initiating the communication is not satisfactorily established as it would when the two were physically present. Thus, the credentials of a Facebook user are no guarantee of their authenticity. Too often, we have seen that the morphed image or the deepfake video or the clever play upon words has destroyed the image of a noble person or assassinated the character of a budding actress or scholar.

Indeed, social media can help in spreading news about an emergency like an earthquake or flood, but if it is fake news sent out for some ulterior purpose, then it means a lot of trouble for so many. The speed of digital social media harms the social set-up when rumours are taken as facts. Many an instance can be quoted where riots spread in a city simply because of rumour-mongering. The problem is that with the kind of information load that is out there and the speed with which it keeps on piling up, even the authorities in charge of media feel hamstrung in discerning chaff from grain. But should instances like these underline the difficulty of arriving at truth or degrading the value of truth itself?

In the post-truth times, addiction to the social media has become all the more intense through cultivation of the psychological condition of narcissism. The Gen-Z is deep into instant like, instant share, instant subscribe regimen. This current craze for social media status and the role of the influencers who jack up viewership and count of 'likes' and the price that it has to pay is described beautifully in a story "Follow me on Instagram" by a contemporary writer Richa Dhawan. In this touching story, the protagonist Maya is seen fed up with life because of her fleshy physique and wishes to end it but a friend comes to her rescue and shows her the way to make her picture attractive with the help of filters. He also motivates her to post these on Instagram and enjoy the appreciation of others. This falsity is accepted as a means to boost the morale of this diffident character. The trick works and she becomes the darling of media-crazy youth.

> "Now Maya had a well-planned social media rigmarole which she had inculcated in her life. Her strategies to fake her life were thoroughly organized and aptly executed. She would wake up early in the morning and go to the terrace and get clicked with a yoga pose or with dumbbells, and water droplets on her face pretending it as sweat. She would post this with captions about working out. And after this, she would go back to bed." (Dhawan 32).

She would even advise others about staying fit! But this fakery comes at the cost of losing touch with the real world and she becomes delusional believing herself to be a real celebrity. She values the 'love' of her followers more than the love of her mother, who meets with an accident and dies. It is later found that the driver who hit the car was busy sending message to Maya about her looks when his car hit Maya's mother! So, the same addiction to social media by one of her followers had become the cause of her mother's death! The story gives a vivid account of the hazards of falsity dished out liberally on the social media.

Post-truth Literature

Coming to the role of post-truth in literature, let us first be clear about the relationship between fact and fiction. When the novel as a genre emerged in England in the first half of the 18th century, the narrative was supposed to be nearer to real life than the bygone romances. Fielding's novel was titled *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* to give the impression that it was real description of a foundling, and this title did have its impact. Down the line, this insistence to claim fiction to be 100% true to the person depicted could have meant a biography. So, as Forster opined in his classic critical work: *Aspects of the Novel*, a novel would depict what could happen in the real world. In these our times, however, we have seen the introduction of magic in novel touted as magical realism – a queer nomenclature by any yardstick – it seeks to take away from the fictional world what should ideally be analogous to the real world.

We find under the banner of magic realism, all sorts of violations of natural order, taking the reader back to romances wherein one read of fairies and demons, magic and witchcraft. The terms like magic or aliens or half-humans per se would not find mention here because the descriptions are done in a matter-of-fact manner. Take, for instance, Salman Rushdie's novel *Quichotte* in which the protagonist Quichotte is travelling the Americas along with his son Sanchez, who, it turns out later, is a figment of imagination just as

we are told that a certain innkeeper in the Fourth Valley checks their ears, nose, etc. for signs of transformation into "mastodons" (pre-historic elephant type animal), since many humans from locality have reportedly changed partially or fully into Mastodons. Both also see a war between humans and Mastodons! After all, in this post-truth fictional world, "It was the Age of Anything-Can-Happen, he reminded himself. He had heard many people say that on TV and on the outré video clips floating in cyberspace, which added a further, new-technology depth to his addiction. There were no rules any more. And in the Age of Anything-Can-Happen, well, anything could happen" (Rushdie 7).

Apart from magical realism in fiction, two other important categories have also been impacted by the post-truth ideology. These are: history-based fiction and myth-based fiction, in which correspondence to established texts in terms of facts and values respectively are at stake. The writers of these sub-genres have taken the philosophy of post-truth as a signal to do what they like with the established historical or revered mythical narratives. Fiction based on history has a lot of amplitude in that it fills the blank images with colour. Characterization or atmospherics get enriched whereas historians simply refer to the name of the historical personage and any outstanding feature besides, of course, focussing on his or her political role at a time, but the problem arises where pseudo-history, without any basis, is presented as history through fiction.

There are, for sure, welcome situations where imagination is applied to find alternative history to counter the mainstream narrative circulated through court historians. Taking examples from recent history, one comes across Rohinton Mistry's *Such a Long Journey* which portrays Major Billimoria as the fictional representation of the real-life Nagarwala who was presented as a criminal during Indira Gandhi's time. Mistry's account presents the fellow as a victim of power politics and it found acceptance among a large readership. At times, history is effaced and the novelist steps in as in the case of the 1990s exodus of Kashmiri Pandits which forms

the outline of Rajat Mitra's novel *The Infidel Next Door*. Apart from graphically narrating the sequence of events orchestrated by the terrorists with the government turning a blind eye to them, Mitra also tells of a terrible genocide of Hindus that happened during the Pathan rule (1752-1819). But if something is presented as historical fiction without any basis whatsoever, will it still be called historical fiction – that is the question.

On the other hand, post-truth has thrown up surprises like Ashwin Sanghi's *Keepers of the Kalachakra* where history is mixed with pseudo-science, concocted myths, invented politics, fake archaeology, etc. As if this were not enough, the novelist addsumpteen references, with the hope that the readers will use "the list of sources for further reading and discovery" even if he himself avers, his take could be contradictory to what there is in the books (402-06)! Then what does it intend to prove? Such attempts present a misleading version of things, and even though fiction is fiction, it sits oddly with the things in the present world of which one may not be in a position to check every detail.

Myth-based fiction is a category in which stories of Indian epics and Puranas are being taken up by authors and re-told in their own way. Now, we know that the stories in Puranas and Itihasa texts are full of diverse characters including supernatural entities like deities and demons. In a way, these would conform to the magic realist style of writing. But then there is a vital difference in that whereas most magic realist fiction is devoid of deeper value, in the case of epical tales, the characters and events impart spiritual or moral message. That is why these are revered as scriptural texts and the use of the word 'myth' by the western scholars, as explained in the next section, is not justified. We treat these as itihasa or Indian historiography, which has its own style and does not conform to the western concept of history. (Batra 360-361)

The retellings in contemporary times, which are faithful to the mainstream narratives, fall in two categories: renditions in brief, reader-friendly format; and the POV-specific recensions where

the story is given from the point of view of a character. But, if in the name of creativity, someone like Amish Tripathi shows Lord Shiva in his *The Immortals of Meluha* as a tribal chieftain and a totally ignorant Ganja addict, who has to be enlightened by Nandi (not the bull, but a captain of an army unit) about the meaning of the holy word OM, then it tends to topsy-turvey the status of the deity who is one of the three chief gods of the Hindu pantheon. He is also shown to be very untidy and dirty who has to be made presentable for his marriage and so, has to be given a makeover as they do in present times: "His fair face had been scrubbed clean with special Ayurvedic herbs to remove years of dead skin and decay" (30).

Same is the case with Ashok Banker who presents a perverted picture of holy figures in his *Siege of Mithila*, a retelling of Ramayana, as in other books. Sita is a "sharp-tongued roving sword-for-hire Janaki Kumar" (341), meaning a mercenary soldier! Prior to the Swayamvar, when they meet in the jungle, Lakshman tells Sita: "I hear Mithila virgins have fine figures too! You really know how to provoke a man's imagination'… 'I'll be dreaming all night of naked virgins prancing down the raj-marg!' (274). This is writer's perversion only considering that Lakshman respects Sita as his mother, according to the mainstream narrative, i.e., the original Valmiki Ramayan that is the mainstay of Hindu faith.

There are many others like Anand Neelakantan, Kavita Kane, et al, who give skewed versions of the epical tales divesting these deities of their divine aura and the deep spiritual message and values that the epics contain. As intellectuals, one can well understand the impact that such distorted versions of revered cultural icons and their actions would have on our young generation but it seems the authors of our times are more concerned about the money that comes from the sale of these exotic retellings. Post-truth scenario emboldens them but at what cost?

Summing up this section, it would be right to say that literature has suffered a dent due to the post-truth ideology because its notions

like indeterminacy of truth, reality and self have taken the wind out of all characterization and description of society, nature, etc. According to a critic, the post-Marxian scenario has "changed the study of literature from an interest in social and moral virtue (despite an often moralistic and over-rigid kind of conceptualisation) to a preoccupation with real-politic and epistemology" (Shapiro 16). This probably explains the easy intrusion of the post-truth ideology from politics into literature.

Indian Viewpoint

The modernist philosophy showed dissatisfaction with the Enlightenment ideals of reason, truth and progress, on account of the two World Wars. World politics meanwhile saw the experiment with Marxism which also impacted literary studies. However, our concern is the visualization of truth for which literature turned from the external world to the inner and tried to appropriate it through the narratological techniques of Stream of Consciousness and Interior Monologue. Neither Marxism nor Freudism provided the stability to modern man so that Lyotard, the high priest of postmodernism, laid down that the meta narratives were hollow and it was time for the celebration of inability to reach truth. This, as already submitted, is not just ignoring truth but also indicating a certain fatigue and a consequent disinterest in the search for truth.

Indian thought encompasses limitless time and expanse of universe. It does not look at the limited life span of an individual. To the Indian mind, truth is the most important goal of life, and even several lives could be spent in its pursuit (re-birth being a cardinal principle of Hinduism). *Satyamev jayatenanratam* (Truth, and not falsehood, always wins in spiritual as also in worldly matters) (Mundak 3.1.6). is the watchword of Indian civilization. Western scholars want it quick which is indicative of lack of commitment to reach truth, particularly where the truth lies in a region that is discarded as mystic, not amenable to logic as understood by the western world. Not for nothing did the ancient Indian seers slog for hundreds of years to get a glimpse of the ultimate truth.

However, one must be clear about the shades of truth. According to Hindu philosophy, the ultimate truth or reality is God, however, we can make distinction between that truth as the everlasting or *sashwat* and the temporal or the *saamyik* truth which is based on time, place and actor involved. In literature, the absolute truth is not delineated, only hinted at since it is indescribable; it being a matter of experience that transcends feeling and thought, but the momentary or *Saamyik* truth is surely representable. It should be done sincerely, based on facts as comprehended by the author who is himself an elevated soul; his inner self is the guide to the appropriation of truth. That is why author, in the Indian poetics, is no ordinary person; he is an epitome of intellect, experience and practice.

Compared to the western theorists, the Derridean philosophy treats logos as functional and not absolute, which serves as the reference point for all assertions taken to be true. The Indian viewpoint is more refined and it takes in the absolute as also the relative realities. Take the oft-quoted Indian view that the whole world is unreal or *mithya*. Indologist Rajiv Malhotra corrects the perception by pointing out that the traditional scriptures depict the world as *mithya*, which actually means comparatively less real. "When we say that universe is *mithya*, we mean it is unreal when seen as an independent reality. [It can't exist on its own]; however, it is surely real when seen as caused by Brahman and dependent upon Brahman," (Malhotra 186). The ultimate truth is One though the scholars approach it and even describe it differently: *Ekam sat viprahbahudhavadanti* (Truth is one but is described differently by different scholars) Therefore, and in this the Nyaya philosophy rightly lays down: "There are only subjective truths and relative realities" (Paul).

Literature and arts are expected to conform to the triad represented by *Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram* which means any creation must be beautiful, conform to truth and lead to wellbeing of all around us including not only human beings, but also flora and fauna and the universe on the whole. In day-to-day life, the dictum

mahajano yen gatahsapanthah works which means one must follow the path of the great persons. This means placing faith in what the great artist or philosopher says, thus assigning value to the author, which is contrary to the western theories which find author either a product of socio-economic and politico-cultural environment, or simply said, discourse; or 'dead' being subservient to language (Roland Barthes' dictum). Purity of self is indeed the quality of the author who must create in a state of *samadhi*– concentration transcending the subjective self (Kapoor 103-107).

Indian thinkers relate the element of delight that one gets from literature to, not only the use of prosody, metaphors, etc. on which a large corpus is still extant, but also to its meaning and objectives. Various terms like *riti, dhwani, alamkaar*, etc. refer to style whereas rasa, *auchitya*, *guna-dosha*, etc. judge the content of art and literature. At the same time, the tradition that flows from the reflections of literary thinkers from Bharatmuni to Vaamana to Visvanatha lays stress on a holistic view of the objectives of life. The Sanskrit term for 'literature' – *Sahitya* – literally means taking into account the interest of all. Indologist Kapil Kapoor rightly comments, "In the Indian context, all worldly and spiritual pursuits are measured by their role/contribution in the attainment of *purusartha* the four ends of life – Dharma (righteousness), *artha* (worldly prosperity), *kaama* (satisfaction of desires) and *moksha* (liberation from sorrows)" (Kapoor 59). The term 'moksha' has, however, been defined in most philosophical works as liberation from the cycle of birth and death – from the dualistic world, transcending life that swings between worldly pleasure and pain, and enjoying a blissful state of *ananda*.

With the overarching demand on literature to be useful for the total well-being of all in the world and cosmos, values denoted by Dharma are necessarily followed. Now, while the western scholars have viewed literature in terms of language and style, and on the basis of the contemporary politically tinged theories, the Indian viewpoint has an idealistic approach and there is a search for an ideal human being, an ideal hero, and ideal society.

Conclusion

The present confusion about post-truth could have been avoided to a great extent, if it had been simply stated as "It's post-truth politics" rather than saying that "these are post-truth times", which has created a skewed understanding of the whole thing. Who doesn't know that politics is bereft of truth? In the absence of this important caveat (post-truth is for politics only), or maybe due to the fascination that the easy path to falsity provides, in contrast to the tedious one to truth, post-truth has been taken as prescriptive — as a philosophy for our times and lapped up as such in media and literature, giving them a totally different direction.

As a result, social media has particularly felt free from any value-based constraint. Literature too feigns ignorance of truth in the postmodern fashion which makes historical fiction as a historical and mythical fiction titillating and exotic. While the concept of post-truth indicates lack of will or means to reach truth – terming it relative, contextual, local created by political, historical and cultural discourses – in Indian philosophy, realization of truth is the highest goal of human life and art and literature are seen as instruments to achieve that goal while retaining the distinctive pleasure-giving features. Indian thought stipulates that truth is one of the three cardinal attributes of literature– whether the litterateur or the critic wishes to explore the individual or the social, the inner desires of an individual or the collective problems of the world, like terror, environmental degradation, etc. It, therefore, does not approve of any fakery or deception in social media or literature in the name of 'post-truth' scenario.

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IJES, Volume LXI, 2025

Voicing the Silenced: Dalit Feminist Assertion in P. Sivakami's *The Grip of Change*

***Suresh Kurapati**

Abstract

This paper critically examines *The Grip of Change* by P. Sivakami through the lens of Dalit feminist discourse, foregrounding the intersectionality of caste, gender, and power. As one of the earliest novels written by a Dalit woman in Tamil in 1989 and later translated into English in 2006 by the author herself, the text offers an insider's perspective on the lived realities of Dalit women who were for a long period of time i.e. for centuries excluded from both mainstream literary representations and feminist theorising. The narrative explores how Dalit women are doubly marginalised, first by the oppressive structures of caste and then by patriarchal norms within their own communities. This paper argues that *The Grip of Change* is a powerful act of narrative resistance, wherein the silenced voices of Dalit women find articulation through complex characters like Thangam and the assertive presence of Kathamuthu. While the novel critiques the male-dominated political structures masquerading as social reform, it also exposes the internal contradictions of Dalit patriarchy. Through a close textual analysis, the paper investigates how Sivakami dismantles both Savarna feminism and Dalit male hegemony to carve a distinct space for Dalit feminist assertion.

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Ultimately, the paper positions *The Grip of Change* as a seminal work in Dalit literature that not only challenges dominant literary canons but also reclaims narrative agency for the most silenced subjects in Indian society.

Keywords: Dalit feminism, caste and gender, intersectionality, narrative resistance, subaltern voices, feminist literary criticism

Introduction

Since 1970s Dalit literature has emerged as a powerful literary and political movement that contests the caste hierarchies entrenched in Indian society. Rooted in the lived experiences of the most oppressed castes, Dalit writing serves not merely as a mode of expression but as a form of resistance and a tool of social transformation. It challenges the Savarna dominance of Indian literature, which historically excluded the narratives of the marginalized. As Satyanarayana and Tharu (2011) assert, Dalit literature is "a site of political assertion and aesthetic innovation," offering a counter-narrative to the homogenized cultural history constructed by upper-caste intellectuals. Central to this literary and ideological movement is the emergence of Dalit feminism, a critical paradigm that foregrounds the intersectionality of caste, gender, and class. Unlike mainstream (Savarna) feminism, which often abstracts gender from caste realities, Dalit feminism insists that the two are inseparable (Rege, 1998; Paik, 2014). As Sharmila Rege (2006) famously argued, Dalit women are not just subjects of caste violence but also agents of knowledge production. Their experiences lie at the confluence of multiple axes of oppression i.e. patriarchy, caste, and economic deprivation and therefore demand an analytical framework that recognizes this complexity. Dalit women's narratives, however, have often been rendered invisible in both male-authored Dalit literature and uppercaste feminist discourses (Guru, 1995; Sunder Rajan, 2011). As Gopal Guru (1995) notes, Dalit women have to "speak differently" because their realities do not align with either group. Their literature resists being co-opted into dominant narratives, instead articulating a "double critique" (Rege, 1998) that questions both caste-based and patriarchal oppression.

One of the most significant contributions to Dalit feminist literature comes from P. Sivakami, whose novel *The Grip of Change* (*Pazhaiyana Kazhidalum*, 1989; trans. 2006) occupies a seminal place in Indian literary history. As the first Tamil novel by a Dalit woman to be translated into English, the work is groundbreaking in both content and form. Sivakami, a bureaucrat-turned-writer, uses fiction to expose the contradictions within Dalit political movements and the patriarchal structures that govern them (Kumar, 2016). Her portrayal of characters like Thangam, a widowed Dalit woman subjected to brutal caste and sexual violence, and Kathamuthu, a complex figure who oscillates between protector and patriarch, reflects the nuanced dynamics of power and resistance within Dalit communities. Contemporary scholars have increasingly acknowledged the novel's continuing relevance, especially in light of resurgent caste-based violence and the rise of intersectional activism in India (Anandhi, 2020; Teltumbde, 2018). The text compels readers to examine how structures of power operate within marginalized groups and how gendered caste violence is often rationalized under the guise of social reform (Aloysius, 1998; Limbale, 2004). Therefore, this paper explores how *The Grip of Change* gives voice to the silenced experiences of Dalit women and articulates a distinctly Dalit feminist assertion. The narrative does not merely represent victimhood but foregrounds agency, resistance, and ethical ambiguity. Through a close reading of the text, this paper investigates how the novel critiques the performative nature of male-led Dalit activism while simultaneously dismantling the caste-blindness of Savarna feminism. In doing so, it redefines what counts as literary resistance in contemporary India. The key research questions focused in this study are:

1. How does *The Grip of Change* represent the voices and agency of Dalit women?
2. In what ways does the novel critique both caste-based oppression and patriarchal control within the Dalit community?

Ultimately, this study positions Sivakami's novel as not only a pivotal text in Dalit literature but also a prescient commentary on the continuing struggles of Dalit women. It challenges dominant literary and feminist canons while offering a radical reimagining of justice, community, and resistance from the margins.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws upon three interrelated theoretical frameworks to analyse P. Sivakami's *Grip of Change: intersectionality, subaltern studies, and Dalit feminist criticism*. Each offers a critical lens to unpack the multiple and overlapping layers of marginalisation experienced by Dalit women, while also foregrounding the strategies of resistance and self-assertion embedded in the narrative. The concept of intersectionality, coined by Kimberle Crenshaw (1989), provides the foundational premise for this analysis. Crenshaw argues that traditional modes of feminist and anti-racist discourse fail to address the specific experiences of Black women in the United States because they treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories. In the Indian context, intersectionality is crucial for understanding how caste, gender, and class simultaneously shape the lived realities of Dalit women. *The Grip of Change* illustrates this dynamic vividly through the character of Thangam, who is not only subjected to caste-based violence but also denied support and autonomy within her community. The protagonist's social positioning cannot be understood through a singular lens of gender or caste; instead, it is the intersection of these identities that constitutes her oppression. This framework enables a nuanced reading of how multiple axes of identity intersect to produce unique forms of marginalisation and resistance. Complementing is the theoretical orientation offered by Subaltern Studies, particularly Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988). Spivak critiques the tendency of elite intellectuals to speak for the marginalised without enabling them to speak for themselves. Her analysis reveals how subaltern voices are often co-opted or erased within dominant discourses. In

this context, *The Grip of Change* can be read as a literary act that *reclaims the voice of the Dalit woman*, not through external representation but through an insider's articulation. Sivakami, herself a Dalit woman, navigates the complexities of narrative voice and authorship to foreground subaltern agency. The act of self-translation from Tamil to English is not merely linguistic but epistemological, allowing the subaltern voice to enter transregional and academic discourses on terms.

The third and most central framework for this study is Dalit feminist criticism. As advanced by scholars like Sharmila Rege (1998) and Gopal Guru (1995), Dalit feminism interrogates both Savarna feminism's caste blindness and Dalit male discourse's gender insensitivity. Dalit feminist criticism focusses on the lived experiences of Dalit women, emphasising autonomy, dignity, and political subjectivity. Sivakami's novel disrupts the narrative control of male reformers like Kathamuthu by illustrating how even well-meaning patriarchs reproduce domination. Through characters like Thangam and the unnamed narrator (often read as Sivakami's alter ego), the novel offers a critical reflection on intra-community gender politics and the often-paternalistic tone of Dalit male leadership. Together, these theoretical lenses allow for a comprehensive analysis of *The Grip of Change* as a text that narrates the marginalisation of Dalit women and constructs a literary space for their voice, agency, and resistance. The intersection of caste, gender, and power will thus serve as the analytical anchor for interpreting the narrative, characters, and thematic concerns of the novel.

Textual Analysis and Discussion

The novel powerfully articulates the silenced voices of Dalit women and critiques both caste oppression and internal patriarchy. The following sections examine key themes in the novel through close textual analysis, supported by critical theory and scholarship.

i) Caste and Gender Oppression: The novel opens with the character of Thangam, a Dalit widow who is brutally beaten and thrown out of her house by her upper-caste landlord, highlighting

the harsh realities of caste and gender-based violence. Thangam represents the intersectional victim a Dalit, a woman, and a widow positioned at the bottom of the sociocultural hierarchy. Her vulnerability is compounded by her economic dependence and lack of familial protection, making her susceptible to both physical violence and social stigma. Sivakami does not portray Thangam merely as a passive victim; instead, her suffering becomes the catalyst for the narrative's central conflict. The villagers' initial indifference and the reluctant intervention of Dalit leaders emphasise how caste solidarity often overlooks gender injustice. As Sharmila Rege (1998) argues, Dalit women face a "triple burden" of caste, class, and gender, and is starkly visible in Thangam's circumstances. Her marginalisation is not just a result of casteist oppression by the upper castes but also due to the internal patriarchy of her own community.

ii) Assertion and Agency: The character of Kathamuthu, a local Dalit leader, embodies a complex form of male dominance masquerading as progressive activism. While he champions Thangam's cause by confronting her oppressors and facilitating a legal settlement, his actions are marked by patronising attitudes. He uses Thangam's suffering for his own political growth. His decisions are unilateral, made without consulting Thangam, thus reproducing the same structures of control that he ostensibly opposes. The unnamed narrator often interpreted as Sivakami's alter ego presents a counterpoint to Kathamuthu. She is educated, assertive, and conscious of the gendered power dynamics within the community. While Kathamuthu exercises control through public activism, the narrator asserts agency through introspection and critique. She questions the authenticity of male-dominated reformist politics and highlights the silencing of Dalit women in both public and private spaces. This theme aligns with Gopal Guru's (1995) critique of Dalit male intellectual discourse, which marginalises women's voices under the guise of community representation. The narrator's reflections offer an alternative model of leadership rooted in empathy and inclusivity, rather than dominance and performance.

iii) Narrative Technique and Voice: Sivakami employs a layered narrative structure that gives space to multiple voices, challenging the monologic tendencies of both mainstream and Dalit male narratives. The use of a first-person narrator allows for an engagement with the inner world of the Dalit woman, making visible the psychological dimensions of oppression. The act of self-translation from Tamil to English is particularly significant. Unlike most translated texts, *The Grip of Change* is rendered into English by the author herself. Through this translation nuances of the Tamil Dalit experience are not lost in translation. As Mini Krishnan (2006) observes, self-translation here is an act of reclaiming narrative agency in a multilingual literary culture often dominated by Savarna voices. Through her narrative voice, Sivakami reclaims the right to represent Dalit women's experiences on terms, resisting both literary or linguistic and cultural erasure. The first-person perspective, interspersed with dialogues and community interactions, creates a dialogic space where silenced voices can speak and contest dominant narratives.

iv) Critique of Upper-Caste and Dalit Patriarchy: One of the most powerful aspects of *The Grip of Change* is its double critique of both upper-caste and Dalit patriarchy. The novel refuses to romanticise caste solidarity by exposing gendered power relations within the Dalit community. Kathamuthu's interactions with women, especially Thangam and the narrator, reveal how patriarchal control is justified as protection or guidance. The novel also critiques upper-caste complicity in systemic violence. Thangam's humiliation and the community's apathy highlight how caste privilege operates with impunity. However, Sivakami goes further by illustrating how Dalit leaders mimic these hierarchical structures in communities. is evident in Kathamuthu's desire for control, his dismissiveness of women's opinions, and his insistence on political image over genuine empowerment. Sharmila Rege's (2000) call for a Dalit feminist standpoint is embodied in Sivakami's narrative strategy. By refusing to separate caste from gender, the novel articulates a politics that is both intersectional and transformative. It critiques the dominant

political rhetoric that uses Dalit women's suffering as a symbol without addressing their real concerns and voices.

Ultimately, *The Grip of Change* emerges as a pioneering text that challenges both the mainstream literary canon and internal patriarchal discourses. It foregrounds the agency of Dalit women not through heroic posturing but through everyday acts of resistance, introspection, and the assertion of voice. Sivakami's narrative insists that true change lies in not reproducing power under new names but in dismantling the structures that silence, marginalise, and control. By illuminating the lived experiences of Dalit women, the text calls for a radical rethinking of societal norms and values. It champions the importance of listening to these voices and recognises their struggles as integral to the broader fight for justice and equality.

Conclusion

P. Sivakami's *The Grip of Change* emerges as a landmark in Dalit feminist literature, offering a compelling portrayal of the intersectional oppression faced by Dalit women and their quest for dignity, identity, and agency. This paper has shown how the novel powerfully challenges both the external structures of caste-based discrimination and the internal patriarchy within Dalit communities. Through complex characters such as Thangam, who embodies the brutal consequences of marginalisation, and Kathamuthu, who represents the contradictions of patriarchal leadership, Sivakami critiques not only Savarna hegemony but also the gendered hierarchies within Dalit political and social life. The narrator's reflective and assertive voice provides an alternative feminist lens that emerges from lived experience and resists being coopted by dominant discourses. The novel's act of self-translation by the author further reinforces this resistance, preserving cultural authenticity while asserting control over how Dalit stories are told and received. In voicing the silenced, Sivakami not only disrupts canonical literary spaces but also redefines the parameters of feminist literary criticism in India. *The Grip of Change* thus becomes more than a narrative of individual or communal suffering; it is a political text that reclaims

authorship, asserts Dalit womanhood, and calls for a more inclusive and intersectional approach to literary analysis. The study reaffirms the importance of engaging with Dalit feminist narratives that challenge both caste-based and gender-based hierarchies, paving the way for a more just and representative literary tradition.

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IJES, Volume LXI, 2025

Re-writing the Time Line: *The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World*

***Jai Shankar Jha**

Abstract

This paper examines Suzan-Lori Parks' *The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World* as a critical intervention in the politics of history, memory, and representation. Parks destabilizes linear historiography by deploying repetition and revision as dramaturgical strategies that expose the gaps and fissures within dominant narratives. Her dramatization of allegorical figures, stereotypes, and folkloric imagery functions as a counter-discourse to historical erasure, foregrounding the silenced experiences of African Americans. Food metaphors and ritual structures further operate as symbolic tools of cultural reclamation, situating the play within a continuum of survival and resistance. The recurrent motif of "death" in the play, rather than signaling extinction, becomes emblematic of continuity, resilience, and rebirth. Through the fusion of historical, mythical, and performative registers, Parks reconfigures theatre as a site of historiographic revision, producing a complex interplay of absence and presence, loss and renewal.

Keywords: African-American theatre, historiography, memory, cultural representation

Suzan-Lori Parks, the first African-American woman to receive the Pulitzer Prize for Drama was listed by *Time Magazine* in 1923

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among the hundred most influential people in the world. She is highly innovative and experimental in her theatrical venture. In her take on history, Parks destabilizes any linear sense of memory and time. She deliberately problematizes the view of history, relationships and the past by way of providing a counter-discourse to the dominant historical record, which has served to deny or displace the centrality of the African presence in the Western imagination. Parks rather searches for the missing links wherein the gaps and fissures that rupture the dominant record are parodied and laid bare. Both the dark and the blank pages of history are more alluring to her.

The erasure or omission of the African-American experience from the historical whole is problematized by her through her plays. Parks states categorically- "The mission of many plays is to tell a known history. But there are a lot of things that black people have done that haven't been written down – haven't been chronicled, are not remembered. There is a lot of history that has fallen through the gaps, the cracks; we read these events as having never happened. Those unchronicled events are what I'm interested in writing about. ('The Aesthetic' in the Introduction to *The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World*, 244) In "Possession", Parks writes: "Since history is a recorded or remembered event, theatre for me, is the perfect place to "make" history—that is, because so much of African American history has been unrecorded, dismembered, washed out." (Introduction to *The America Plays and Other Works*, 1)

Dismantling the pejorative myths about the African-Americans, resurrecting the soul anew with all its lost respect and glory is what Parks' theatre strives to achieve. She digs deep into the great historical hole for the stories forgotten and unregistered. In her article entitled "What is a Black Play?", Parks writes about the potential theatre holds. She says,"… expressive art has the capacity to enable self-determination, to record and preserve historical experiences, and to fashion community by providing audiences with opportunities to see themselves and their stories enacted on stage." (qtd. Shannon 08) History and identity are constantly intertwined in

her plays. Taking cue from the jazz aesthetics where a musical composition is revised in scales and notes to make it sound variously in every repetition practised, Parks takes recourse to 'rep and rev technique' to repeat and revise the events and stories, rendering the tale distinctly and emphatically.

The professed aim of "... rewriting the Time Line - creating history where it is and always was but has not yet been devined" ("Possession", 2) finds its creative outlet in *The Death of the Last Black Man in the Whole Entire World* (1990). She states: "One day I was taking a nap. I woke up and stared at the wall: still sort of dreaming. Written up there between the window and the wall were the words, "This is the death of the last negro man in the whole entire world". Written up there in blackvapor. I said to myself, "you should write that down"...Those words and my reaction to them became a play. ("Possession", 3)

"There is a fascination in much of the twentieth-century historical drama of the USA with repetition in history", writes Heidi J. Holder, "certain kinds of actions— rebellion, oppression, fight, execution, miracles- are shown to be part of an endlessly recurring pattern that may or may not be broken or changed in the present or future". (18) Parks' play foregrounds an assemblage of biblical and historical personages along with demeaning satirical stereotypes of African-Americans.

The play's protagonist "Black Man With Watermelon" (like his significant 'other' Black Woman With Fried Drumstick), is caught between the margin and the centre. He is at once written out of History, yet placed at the centre of his own narrative. Black Man With Watermelon is able to voice his (true) self through the personal pronoun I, yet he is forever trapped within the metaphoric stock of stereotypes that transcend (linear) Time as History:

> (I bein in uh Now:uh Now bein inuh Then: I bein, in Now in Then, in I will be. I was be too but thats uh Then thats past. That me that was be is uh me-has-been. Thuh Then that was be is uh has-been-Then too. Thuh me-has-been sits in thuh be-me:we sit on this porch. Same porch.Same me... (274).

The spatial shuttling of subjectivity matches with its temporal counterpart in the recounting of the black woman: "Yesterday today next summer tomorrow just uh moment uhgoh in 1317 dieded thuh last black man in thuh whole entire world. (277)

Flouting the settled notions of Time- Space continuum, Parks freely juxtaposes the seemingly distant, discordant components of black subjectivity to rewrite a history that is unheard of so far. Being wrenched from his homeland; falling off a slaveship/twenty-three floors; bursting into flames, being lynched, chased by dogs, and electrocuted the generic black man has been on the receiving end for ages. Though the setting or "time" of the play is located in the "Present", it is the fusion of eternal and temporal, now and then. Parks' figures are allegorical rather than sociological beings. They represent the fluidity of Time and Space, the modalities of an interwoven and overlapping past, present and future. The opening section of the play is entitled" Overture". Though the figures are ostensibly limited by the retrograde connotation of stereotype, Parks' freeing of the voice essentially deconstructs and thus subverts the cultural, historical weight of racist imagery. Figures such as Lots Of Grease And Lots Of Pork and Yes And Greens Black-Eyed Peas Cornbread riff on the culturally-specific folkloric resonances of Southern soul food, while myth and counter-history are voiced through the "ghosts" of Ham and Before Columbus, respectively. Similarly, And Bigger And Bigger And Bigger and Prunes And Prisms (a phrase taken from Joyce's *Ulysses*) reflect the intertextual, Signifyin(g) possibilities of African-American culture productions.

Yvette Louis remarks that "Parks uses food as a powerful metaphoric tool for restoring what has been ruptured on the physical, social, cultural and linguistic levels. She maximizes food ... as a vigorous element in re-membering the black body". (160) Parks deliberately problematizes the practice of consumption by naming her characters with food names, such as Black Man With Watermelon, Black Woman With Fried Drumstick, Lots Of Grease And Lots Of Pork, Yes And Greens Black-Eyed Peas Cornbread

and Ham. Taking recourse to the food-items, she attempts to reconstruct the culture of which they are the integral components. The "Histree" of Ham or that of Queen-Then-Pharaoh-Hatshe put has been dropped in the gap between image and reality. The images of Queen and Columbus are representative of the juxtaposition that the two versions of history project. Before Columbus as the name suggests echoes the glorious past of the Africans who ruled their land and lived with peace and prosperity. The figures taken together evoke the life that once was. The dis-membered memories and prejudiced representations in the wake of racist historical distortions find their optimum, holistic-creative outlet in the hands of Parks.

The musical frame and the opening refrain of Black Man With Watermelon- "The black man moves his hands" (249) and, later "The black man moves his hands.— He moves his hands round. Back. Back. Back tuh that… When thuh worl usta be roun. Thuh worl usta be *roun*". (250) operate as the leitmotif guiding the play's progression and suggest the fluidity and circular movement of the figures who otherwise stand fixed and fetishized at the margins of discourse. As Parks suggests: "In the theatre, someone can simply turn their palm up and that is an event." (qtd. in Soloman, 79) All the big moments and movements of history have small, modest beginnings. The big gestures happened to be the later manifestation of countless gestures that have appeared earlier.

Structurally, the play is divided into seven sections (including the Overture) which represent aseries of "Panels", including the First, Second, and Final choruses. "Thuh Holy Ghost", "Thuh Lonesome 3 Some", and "In Thuh Garden of HoodooIt". The play is conceptualized in terms of ritual with the choruses filling the gaps and at the same time propelling the action of the play forward. The chorus as the organizing principle of the drama stands for the collective force, the community and the ancestors who are taking active interest in safeguarding their own community.

In *Black Skin White Masks*, Fanon reiterates, "I am not a prisoner of history. I should not seek there for the meaning of my

destiny… In the world through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself. I am a part of Being to the degree that I go beyond it". (179) Through the act of artistic innovation, Parks recalibrates time, pushes the subject/object (black/white) binary to the background and projects the painful living continuum of the black life. Although the last man of the title dies many deaths over the course of the play, his 'death' does not represent the end of life as such but painful continuity and survival. Moreover, this death is only a prelude to the life falling after.

From the ashes I spring phoenix-like

To ignite the trajectory of life.

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IJES, Volume LXI, 2025

Beyond Peripheral Consciousness: Pilgrim's Progress of An Artist

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Abstract

From Plato to Pound, from Dante to Dattani, from Aristotle to Adiga, the voyage of literature has been from 'Peripheral Consciousness' to 'Super Consciousness'. Consciousness is the tip of the iceberg for literature. Man does not live by bread alone. By this Jesus means that man cannot live by body alone. By the same scale of interpretation, the principle of great literature was formulated, which states that literature does not live just as consciousness alone. Creative imaginative literature awakens what J. Krishnamurti calls 'inner revolution'; Outer revolution is static. It is cause-based, time-based. It outlives its significance with the passage of time. The internal revolution is dynamic and lasting. Peripheral Consciousness is the outer revolution. It gives a push from where an individual has to dive deep. Literature lasts only when the 'contemporary' is converted into 'continuity'. Literature not only solves, but it also resolves. It is a resolution—resolution for an individual. Solution is timeliness; Resolution is timelessness. It is beyond. It is 'whole'. It is super-consciousness. Literature stands the test of time not because of its iceberg appearance, but because of its 'hidden appearance', the camouflaged one. Outer

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revolutions fail. They have a very short-lived victory, celebration, and ecstasy. Great writers bring inner revolutions by igniting a wildfire in the hearts of humanity through their power of words. They just do not write for the peripheral consciousness. For them, the contemporary consciousness is just raw material; they write in the moment what James Joyce terms 'epiphany'— an 'awakened state', an 'experienced condition' born out of 'sadhana'. The 'body-based' literature makes us worldly conscious; the 'soulful' literature makes us 'sadhak'. It is here, beyond peripheral consciousness, works what Irving Babbitt calls the arrival of 'supersensuous truth'. Internal revolutions never fail. The flames burn till the final enlightenment. It is for this that Dante is 'read' and 're-read', Virgil is 'searched' re-searched', for the timeless dimensions of the present. Peripheral Consciousness abounds in the world of time and mind, its ambitions and competitiveness. 'Beyond Peripheral Consciousness' is a 'competition-free' state; it is the ecstasy of consciousness. The aim of this paper is to dive deep into the making of great literature which in itself is a classic case of superconsciousness.

Keywords: Consciousness, inner/Outer revolution, Sadhana, Sadhak, Superconscious truth.

Great creative imaginative writing is not only an intellectual participation but it is an experiential participation in truth. A writer is not simply a reader of a situation but beyond this he is the person who not only gains a mental grasp of situation but experientially participates in mixing words, connotative nuances and rhythm. He develops himself as a writer who is not merely a scholarly 'expert' on art but brings the ideas into being in the physical substance. This is the actual progress of a writer. He has actual sensations, subjective feelings inside himself as to how to do something called creative writing. He acts on his knowledge and produces an independent manifestation of his understanding. If he is satisfied with intellectual participation in higher consciousness alone, and does not go ahead to develop organs that allow him to participate

experientially, he can succeed in achieving 'being contemporary' but never 'continuity'.

This is the reason that a writer with experiential participation in truth is fit to address generation after generation. It is because of this that the entire gamut of creative literature is classified into what W.H. Hudson calls "literature of felt experience and literature of borrowed experience" (Hudson 16). Writers with only intellectual participation in truth can claim to have great appeal to the generation but in reality, they fade away with passage of time. The celestial progress in a writer is well evident when we find multiple, multi-layered and endless dimensions in a piece of literature.

Creative literature is meditation. Meditation, particularly in Buddhist practice, is a disciplined method of mental cultivation. In Theravâda Buddhist texts, particularly the "Visuddhimagga" (Path of Purification), the stages of jhana or deep meditative absorption are achieved through the cultivation of five specific mental factors: *vitakka* (applied thought), *vicâra (sustained* thought), *pîti* (rapture), *sukha* (happiness), and *ekaggatâ* (one-pointedness of mind).

In the literary context, these factors can be metaphorically applied to the stages of a writer's engagement with their craft. The writer is a pilgrim who, like Bunyan's Christian in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, sheds worldly distractions to achieve clarity and purpose. As the meditation deepens, so does the quality of art produced.

Applied Thought (*Vitakka*): The Initiation of Creative Engagement

Applied thought refers to the initial act of directing the mind towards the object of meditation. In writing, this correlates with the stage where the writer begins the process of ideation—choosing themes, conceptualizing narrative structures, and visualizing characters or imagery. It is a purposeful initiation of focus, a gathering of mental energies to begin the creative journey. Theoretical support for this can be found in Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's concept of "flow", where the individual engages in a task with full involvement and energized focus. Just as the meditator fixates

attention on the breath or mantra, the writer locks onto the germ of the narrative

Sustained Thought (*Vicâra*): The Continuity of Focus

This factor involves keeping the mind on the object without drifting. For a writer, this means returning to the manuscript, refining, and expanding ideas over time. It is the labour of persistence, often requiring multiple drafts and enduring engagement. In cognitive psychology, sustained attention is linked to executive function and is critical for tasks requiring deep work. Cal Newport's advocacy of "deep work" (Newport) aligns with this principle, emphasizing the importance of uninterrupted concentration in producing meaningful intellectual output.

Rapture (*Pîti*): Creative Ecstasy and Union

Rapture is the joyful thrill that accompanies deepening concentration. In writing, this stage is marked by an intense absorption in the narrative, where the boundaries between the writer and the work dissolve. There is an exhilaration—a moment where the story writes itself. Neurological studies in creativity (Limb and Braun, 2008,) have shown that during creative improvisation, activity in the prefrontal cortex (associated with self-monitoring) diminishes, suggesting a transcendence of ego typical of rapture in meditation.

Happiness (*Sukha*): Contentment and Inner Fulfillment

Happiness in meditation is not pleasure, but a serene contentment. For writers, this corresponds to the satisfaction that arises from meaningful engagement with their work. It is not necessarily the joy of publication or recognition, but the deep, private fulfillment that comes from knowing the work has integrity. This aligns with Aristotle's concept of *eudaimonia* (Aristotle, *Ethics*), the flourishing that comes from living in accordance with one's true purpose. The writer, in this moment, is living authentically.

One-Pointedness of Mind (*Ekaggatâ*): The Culmination of Focus

The final factor, one-pointedness, is the full immersion of the mind in a single object without distraction. In literary creation, it is

the stage where the writer becomes fully unified with the work. Time and space dissolve. Distractions fall away. The act of creation becomes a meditative state. This has been widely described by authors and artists. Virginia Woolf's stream-of-consciousness technique (Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*) is an example of such immersion, where thought and form merge.

By mapping the Buddhist meditative journey onto the creative process, we gain a deeper understanding of literature not just as communication, but as contemplation. The writer, in shedding the ego and surrendering to the flow of thought, becomes a pilgrim, much as envisioned by John Bunyan (Bunyan 8). The creative act, when viewed through this lens, is a disciplined practice of inner transformation—a meditation on existence itself.

Literary Pilgrimage

Factors	Function	Formation
Applied Thought	Examination, Visualization, Thinking	Raw materials at physical truth
Sustained Thought	Returns to the object. Not drifting from it	Process of concentration begins
Rapture	Oneness with the object. Ecstasy. Absorption with the object	Process of achieving competition free state
Happiness	Contentment through completion of Art	Inner satisfaction of an Artist of achieving the objective
One-pointedness of mind	Focus on a single thing without distraction	Revelation of Truth

Literature with peripheral consciousness is like a specific mathematics problems: (2+3=5), but great imaginative literature is like that of an algebra formula: (a+b=c). The capability to draw the law of probability, to imagine what "might happen", (Aristotle, *Poetics*)"to behold the future in the present" (Shelly), "to stand with his feet firmly planted on the ground but beneath the soles of

his feet a mighty current gather and is intensified" (Aleindre) are some of the symptoms that attest the visionary odyssey of an artist.

Human consciousness can be divided into three broad levels—Physical, Vital, Mental. An artist is not just a material being. He is also a vital being. An artist moves from the physical centre to the vital centre and from the vital centre to the mental centre which is far more conscious than the physical and vital consciousness. It is here an artist seeks knowledge, accepts ideals and strives for perfection. The process of imagination and creation begins at this stage. Above this lies the higher mental consciousness where the artist's ideals are perfected and he achieves "humanized intensity—intensity on a background of calm" (Babbit) "gains consciousness, pure of ego" (Sri Aurobindo) in the smithy of meditation.

A literary artist is a literary pilgrim who transforms the enlightened experiences of search into rich creative works of art. The pilgrim devotes himself to the quest for the ultimate knowledge that lies hidden beneath the veil of appearance. A pilgrim's path is, however, fought with exceptional difficulties as it implies a ceaseless devotion to higher mental consciousness. The pilgrim then attains a degree of enlightenment as he becomes of seeing and feeling the high mental consciousness. He now feels his progress towards the divine force. He realizes the state of super bliss which is not possible unless he sheds of his outer being. This is the state which Wassily Kandinsky calls "the possession of an awakening prophetic power" (Kandinsky 26). In his aesthetic manifesto, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art,* Wassily Kandinsky looks for the rejection of materialism and realism as the dominant cause for the rise of art:

> When outer supports threaten to fall, man withdraws his gaze from externals and turns it inwards. Literature, music and art are the most sensitive spheres in which this spiritual revolution makes itself felt. They reflect the dark picture of the present time and show the importance of what was at first only a little point noticed by the few. (Kandinsky 26)

This state is achieved by an artist's life-long, ceaseless devotion and meditation. This higher journey transforms the entire being of

the artist and takes him to the state that is Transcendental and Real. Once the state of omniscience is achieved either by meditation, self sacrifice or grace which constitute different forms of meditation, the need for communicating the charismatic experience of the ineffable vision arises. And thus is the creative writing born.

A searching artist becomes a seer. The great western literature of Dante, Virgil, Milton, Shakespeare is a philosophical exploration of reality and truth rather than a strolling on the sunmica surface of appearance. It is a revelation of truth. Even in the Indian tradition the writer and sage are not different. Indian sages like Valmiki and Vyasa by their incessant meditation and *tapasya* became capable of seeing the finest specimen of archetypes of human agony and the super human power of endurance in their epics the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Even in Sri Aurobindo inspiration alone accounts for the dynamic of poetic creation. Creative Writings of an artist of higher consciousness are thus born out of archetypal myths and have become essential parts of the collective unconsciousness. Filled with universal content, they reflect the ethos and psyche of the people. Thereby they are the sources of inspiration to many practicerners of creative literature. This is the reason that the ancient Indian epics are as literary as they are metaphysical. They inaugurate the Indian art of creative writing, which is not merely a poetic interpretation of the social enigma of the Indian people, but includes traditional lore, myths and legends. It is deeply immersed in the spiritual quest tradition of ancient India and acts as the illuminating agent even for a modern writer.

Higher consciousness and literary art get intermingled, one with the other, as the artist turns from the scrutiny of existence to contemplation of essence. The literary art is, in this way, transformed into a transcendental entity, not a historically generate mode, but a way of responding to the eternal and the Absolute by encompassing the whole metaphysical status of man. Literature in the hands of a conscious practicener of art arises out of some spatial arrangement of experience that is at once personal and universal,

contemporaneous and timeless. The artist as devotee, like a self-conscious pilgrim, invites the reader to share with him a composite experience of human life that includes both the beautiful and the vulgar. Creative literature with a*sadhak* (devotee) thus becomes what Raja Rao calls 'ritual' through '*sadhana*'. It is to this writer turned *Sadhak* who will have the experience, what James Joyce calls, 'epiphany'. The conception of literature as an epiphany is a sudden spiritual manifestation that enables the artist to have a deep insight into lives of others, and by capturing some of the most delicate and evanescent of moments. The artist command does find a clue to the meaning of human life as a whole.

The creative and philosophical writings of Rabindranath Tagore often emphasize the *interweaving of higher consciousness with artistic expression*, mirroring the idea that literature is a medium through which the eternal, the Absolute, and the universal essence of human life are contemplated and expressed.

Tagore viewed art not as a mere representation of the external world, but as a manifestation of the quest for truth of the inner Self. He believed that the artist turns away from the mechanical and empirical to access the universal and eternal through intuitive insight. Tagore says, "Art belongs to the realm of the spirit. Its truth is not the truth of facts but of feeling; not of the external but of the essential" (Tagore, *The Religion*). In this view, Tagore aligns closely with the idea that literary art becomes a transcendental entity—not a historically bound phenomenon, but a metaphysical response to the Absolute.

Tagore often likened the artist to a *bhakta* (devotee), and artistic creation to an act of *sadhana* (spiritual practice). This idea strongly reflects the assertion that creative literature becomes ritualistic, blending Raja Rao's "sadhana" and Joyce's "epiphany." Tagore in his famous treatise *Sadhana* says, "The highest purpose of art is to reveal through the object something of the divine and permanent which lies in the soul of things" (Tagore, *Sadhana*). In *Sadhana*, he repeatedly affirms that creative expression is not merely

aesthetic—it is a sacred engagement with truth and beauty that transcends the temporal.

It is always felt that literature in the hands of a conscious practitioner becomes both personal and universal, timeless and immediate. Tagore expresses this same sentiment: "That which is eternal in the human being is revealed not through abstraction, but through the concrete forms of art" (Tagore, *Creative Unity*). He argues that the particular (the artist's individual experience) serves as a gateway to the universal. Thus, literature as art speaks to the metaphysical essence of humanity while remaining rooted in lived experience.

While Tagore does not use the term "epiphany" as Joyce does, his conception of "*ananda*" (divine joy) and "*bhava*" (mood or inner realization) reflects similar moments of sudden spiritual insight: "In the infinite, the finite is revealed; in the temporal, the eternal" (Tagore, *Gitanjali*). His poetic moments often capture fleeting yet profound revelations of the eternal in the mundane—a hallmark of literary epiphany.

Tagore believed that art was not simply about representation but about *illumination*—giving meaning to human existence by connecting it to the divine rhythm of the universe. "The meaning of our self is not to be found in its separateness from God and others, but in the ceaseless realization of union" (Tagore, *The Religion*). This resonates with the idea that the artist ultimately finds a clue to the meaning of human life through these sudden, transcendent moments in literature. Tagore's philosophy of art looks at art as spiritual sadhana, and at artist as a seeker, and at literature as the manifestation of higher consciousness. He believed that the essence of art lies not in its material or historical form but in its *transcendence*—its ability to open the reader (and the writer) to the divine, the eternal, and the universal human condition.

Born with such manifestation a literary artist, a conscious pilgrim, is not simply content with telling the tale of human joys and travails

or providing with some solutions to human problems but prepares ground for an individual to have resolution and conviction in life through a medium of moral questioning and through a vehicle of a spiritual quest for the ultimate answer to the mysteries of life, by "allowing the reader to participate in an act of emotional activity" (Kandinsky 33). It is here an artist deals with timelessness which is not possible without exploration to the realism of higher consciousness, which is 'beyond', which is 'whole', which is 'super', which is 'ecstasy'. In the beginning an artist cannot ignore the issues of peripheral consciousness, but gradually his wider, deeper spiritual outlook embraces them all and transcends them too. Through an intense spiritual exercise, the artist ultimately succeeds in achieving the final vision of the beatitude. The fictional craft and theme then become both creative and redemptive.

Creative art in the hand of such an awakened master ceases to be a mere criticism of life but it becomes a contribution to a new awareness of a greater life. No passage of the finest poetry is created by labour and study. An artist has a vision and he participates in this version which is eternal, infinite and one. Great art is hardly created mere by intellect. Intellect is a phase of a literary pilgrim. Sri Aurobindo says, "it is the pseudo-classical or lower kind of classical art and literature which depends upon the faculty of intellect for achieving perfection, for real classical art, works by a large vision and inspiration not by the process of intellect" (Sri Aurobindo 172)

The poetic process is beyond any rational explanation because art is not creation but a revelation of the supreme realization. Art is not mere recording to images, vision and dreams but it is the poetic inspired consciousness that records them with right use of words. Words in that sense become '*mantric*' and '*literary*'. In between '*mantric*' and '*literary*' comes the 'scholarly'. In the Platonic connotation '*mantric*' will correspond to 'Good' and '*literary'* will correspond to 'Beautiful' and in between these two will come 'True'. In the yogic path '*mantric*' will correspond to '*Bhakti'* (devotion)

and '*literary*' will correspond to *'Karma'* (action) and in between the two will come '*Jnana'* (knowledge).

Literature and Its Corresponding Connotations

Language →	Mantric	Scholarly	Literary
Platonic Ideas →	Good	True	Beautiful
Characteristics of Reality →	*Sat* (Being)	*Chit* (Awareness)	*Anand* (Joy)
Paths of yoga →	*Bhakti* (Devotion)	*Jnana* (Knowledge)	*Karma* (Action)

There are three characteristics of reality: *sat*, *chit* and *anand*. *Sat* or pure being, the One Self before which all illusory separate selves evaporate, is approached by the path of devotion because it is the primal Goodness. *Chit* or objectless awareness in which the ever-changing objects of the mind disappear along with the separate subject, is approached by the path of knowledge, because it is the primal Truth, and *anand,* the primal Beauty which dwells in the heart of things, is approached by the path of action. A literary art has to correspond to all the three characteristics of reality. The '*mantric'* corresponds to sat because the mantric effect of literature is approached only through *'devotion'* to art, the *'literary'* is approached through *'action'* and *'scholarly'* is accomplished through knowledge. A literary pilgrimage is said to be complete only when the three are fused together and addressed properly to produce a work of art.

In the Old English the word for 'poet' was *scop,* which is related to our modern word shape and means 'he who shapes, creates or makes something'. In the days of Shakespeare, the word *'maker' was* frequently used to refer to *'poet'*. The association of the writing of literature with 'making' or 'creating' is an important one. The writer of literature creates a world, and in doing so he mimics the action of the Logos which is the divine Word. Much like the Logos, the divine Word, a writer is also the creator of 'human word'. For creating the human word a writer follows the path of action to express the Beautiful and thus he serves the ends of joy.

The creative impulse that brings forth a Cosmos and the creative impulse that brings forth a work of literature both respond to the same motive and serve the same end—the joyous creation of beauty. Such words are no ordinary words but words captured at the moment of fleeting experiences, at the time of tremendous transformation in the individual consciousness.

The language of literature has always been wisdom. The subject-matter becomes intrinsically and internally resonant, polyphonic, multilayered, symmetrical, ultimately simple and unified.

In his Nobel Lecture in 1977, Vicentre Aleixandre, the Nobel Prize Winner in Literature said:

> The poet, the truly determinative poet, is always a revealer; he is, essentially, a seer, a prophet. But his "prophecy" is of course not a prophecy about the future; for it may have to do with the past: it is a prophecy without time. Illuminator, aimer of light, chastiser of mankind, the poet is the possessor of a Sesame which in a mysterious way is, so to speak, the word of his destiny. To sum up, then, the poet is a man who was able to be more than a man: for he is in addition a poet. The poet is full of "wisdom"; but this he cannot pride himself on, for perhaps it is not his own. A power which cannot be explained, a spirit, speaks through his mouth: the spirit of his race, of his peculiar tradition. He stands with his feet firmly planted on the ground, but beneath the soles of his feet a mighty current gather and is intensified, flowing through his body and finding its way out through his tongue. Then it is the earth itself, the deep earth that flames from his glowing body. But at other times the poet has grown, and now towards the heights, and with his brow reaching into the heavens, he speaks with a starry voice, with cosmic resonance, while he feels the very wind from the stars fanning his breast. All is then brotherhood and communion. The tiny ant, the soft blade of grass against which his cheek sometimes rests; these are not distinct from himself. And he can understand them and spy out their secret sound, whose delicate note can be heard amidst the rolling of the thunder. (Aleindre 3)

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IJES, Volume LXI, 2025

Multilingualism in School Education: A Pedagogical Perspective

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Abstract

The National Education Policy 2020 emphasises teaching of Indian languages and teaching through Indian languages in school education. It also focuses on mother tongue based multilingual education at the foundational and preparatory stages for smooth transition from home language to school language. Therefore, sufficient work is required in research, development, training, and extension to realise the recommendations of NEP 2020. This article presents some important considerations in this direction for effective implementation of language policy in light of NEP 2020, NCFFS 2022, and NCFSE 2023. In this article, efforts have been made to disambiguate multilingualism and mother tongue based multilingual education with a special reference to the current school education policy.

Keywords: Multilingualism, Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education, NEP 2020, Language Policy, Language Education

Introduction

In light of the growing importance of multilingualism and the challenges it presents, there is a pressing need to identify challenges

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and opportunities in implementing multilingualism in school education, and to disambiguate the associated key concepts. The present article presents an interpretation of the language education policy in light of NEP 2020, NCFFS 2022, and NCFSE 2023 with a view to explaining the key concepts along with practical executional aspects for the benefit of teachers, teacher educators, material developers, and other stakeholders of school education. Successful implementation of the language policy and smooth shift in educational approach require concentrated and coordinated efforts in research, training, development, and extension. Therefore, this article focuses on the operational considerations of multilingual education with a special reference to the foundational and preparatory stages of school education to achieve the following objectives:

- To identify the major challenges and key considerations related to multilingualism in school education
- To create a roadmap to address the challenges in mother tongue based multilingual education

Multilingualism Education and its Context

Many scholars find multilingual education the need of the hour in the Indian contexts considering the multilingual scenario of the county. Languages in India enrich one another as they share linguistic and cultural attributes due to their co-existence. Agnihotri (2014) sees language as a fluid system which cannot be strictly compartmentalised within purist perspective of language. He sees the use of multilingualism in education as means of social justice and harmony as it will give the marginalised children voice, which otherwise could stifle. Mohanty (2019; 2023) highlights the cognitive advantage of multilingual education as multilingual education requires more efforts leading to better cognitive development. He also stresses that multiple languages should be treated as resources and not burdens as multilingualism makes children more intelligent and creative with better control in cognitive activities. Mishra (2022) highlights the importance of mother tongue based multilingual education that combines community knowledge and pedagogy. He

finds multilingual approach especially effective with the tribal communities as observed in the project on Saora schools in Odisha. Incurricula and textbooks, Saora oral tales and myths were adopted, taught by teachers from the Saora community, which aimed to overcome the gap between family and school language and provide a meaningful dialogue with children. The approach was found effective in achieving the curricular goals.

Languages play a vital role in shaping societal values, cultural traditions, knowledge systems, and worldviews. Language is the basic resource through which the teacher and the taught work together in school to interpret different affairs of the world (Yadav, 2022, p. 30). India is a multilingual country with 22 schedule languages, 99 major non-scheduled languages, and numerous minor languages and dialects. They are the primary means through which communities express their identity, preserve their heritage, and connect with the world. In India, where cultural and linguistic diversity is vast, preserving and promoting local languages is crucial for strengthening national pride and identity. The NEP 2020 underlines the fact that young children learn and grasp concepts more quickly in their home language/mother tongue. With this view, the NEP2020 advocates for the mother tongue to be themedium of instruction in early years of education.

> "Wherever possible, the medium of instruction until at least Grade 5, and preferably till Grade 8 and beyond, will be the home language/mother tongue/ local language/ regional language. Thereafter, the home /local language shall continue to be taught as a language wherever possible." (NEP2020, 4.11).

The NEP 2020 supports the continued implementation of the three-language formula, allowing flexibility in language choices, but ensuring that at least two of the three languages are native to India. The formula has been designed to encourage learning multiple languages, with a focus on Indian languages. Furthermore, NEP 2020 suggests the consideration of "the constitutional provisions,

aspirations of people, and the Union and the need to promote multilingualism as well as promote national unity" in the implementation of three language formula (NEP2020, 4.13). The constitutional provisions in the context of languages include 8th schedule languages, The Official Languages Act 1963, and other Acts (Article 347: Article 350A and Article 350 B). According to Article 343(1) of the Constitution of India, Hindi in Devnagari script is the official language of the Union and according to Article 343(2), English will continue to be used as associate official language. According to Article 350 (A&B), the States will make all efforts to provide adequate facilities for instruction in the mother tongue at the primary stage of school education, and safeguard the linguistic and cultural identity of linguistic minorities.

Multilingual Scenario in India

India is a multilingual country with various patterns of diglossia and multi-glossia. Diglossia is a sociolinguistic situation in which two languages simultaneously exist in a society with each having its specific role and prestige associated with it (Ferguson, 1959; Fishman, 1972). In Indian multiglossic situation, three or more languages generally exist simultaneously with each having its specific role. In most cases, the local vernacular exists with the standard state language and English with varied degrees of power and prestige. While vernacular is used mostly for informal communication in family and other intimate domains, the state language, which is Hindi or any schedule language, is used for formal education, media and entertainment, and English is generally used for academic and intercultural discourses.

Indian society does not have homogenous pattern in its multilingualism as its multilingual situations vary from region to region. Three broad divisions of Indian multilingualism seem to capture the most representative patterns.

The multilingual situation in India cannot be seen as a monolithic sociolinguistic phenomenon as it has three clear divisions – multilingualism in tribal areas, multilingualism with a scheduled

language as mother tongue, and multilingualism in urban areas. Sociolinguistic situations and challenges in tribal regions are entirely different from those in urban settings or regions with major 8th schedule languages. Therefore, each of the three types of multilingualism is required to be described separately to locate strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges. In case of minor tribal languages, students' mother tongue will serve a transitional purpose, whereas the languages of the 8th schedule will be additive in nature.

(i) Multilingualism in Tribal Areas: The sociolinguistic setting in tribal areas is different from that in other places in India. Generally, each tribal community has its own tribal language which is spoken by a small population in a specific region. Such a tribal language sometimes coexists with other tribal languages. Furthermore, the major state language functions as a lingua franca for all serious purposes such as administration and education. Tribal communities are generally socio-economically disadvantaged groups (SEDG) with significantly low literacy rate. Mother tongue based multilingual education (MTBME) in these regions presents a different set of challenges as indicated below:

- Minor tribal languages are spoken in smaller regions; therefore, language-specific material development and resource building are difficult.
- In tribal schools, multiple tribal languages may be present together in the classroom, making classroom diversity even more complex.
- The teacher may or may not have an understanding of students' first language.

Keeping in mind the challenges listed above, the school education at the foundational and preparatory stages needs to undertake a few special initiatives. Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education (MTBME) should be used for smooth transition from minor tribal language (home Language) to the state language. In the initial years of the foundational and preparatory

stages, home language shall be used along with the state language to build students' confidence and capability in educational transaction. Minor languages without script will be used mostly for oral communication. However, such languages will be written in the script of the major state languages wherever necessary. The school language/state language and other Indian languages will be taught with their standard script, glossary, and grammar for formal purposes. Tribe specific materials in terms of trilingual glossary and textbooks, folktales, and other cultural materials from the local and contexts will be used. A concentrated effort should be made to ensure the availability of the teachers who have an understanding of the local languages and culture. A special care should be taken to integrate the socio-cultural assets of these communities into the educational processes.

(ii) Multilingualism with a Scheduled Language as Mother Tongue: The socio-linguistic scenario of the communities having the scheduled languages as their mother tongues is different from that of the tribal communities. The scheduled languages are generally standardised with well- codified dictionaries, grammars, and a body of published literature. These languages also have wide reach in media, academia, and socio-political discourses. Therefore, sufficiently high power, prestige, and popularity are attached to these languages, making them socially desirable and sustainable. Most of these languages are being used as a medium of instruction and in formal education at least at the school level. Therefore, practising mother tongue based multilingual education in these linguistic communities is relatively less challenging.

In the scheduled language communities, multilingualism can be practised in terms of three language formula. At least two languages native to India including the mother tongue are to be taught at the foundational and preparatory stages. The third language could be an Indian language or English. The purpose of the three-language formula is national and cultural integration; hence, any major scheduled languages can be taught in addition to the mother

tongue. In MTBME, bi-lingual/trilingual textbooks, teaching materials, glossaries, cultural discourses should be used wherever required. The teacher is supposed to have a good understanding of the local language as well as the additional languages to the extent possible. Research and training in material development, resource building, and pedagogical practices are to be planned accordingly.

(iii) Multilingualism in Urban Areas: Urban societies in India are multilingual in different degrees due to migration and intermixing of population. This type of multilingualism is also accompanied with some type of polyglossia. Polyglossia is a socio-linguistic situation in which multiple languages exist side by side in a linguistic community, each having its defined role and varying degree of relative prestige attached to it. Various socio-economic concerns such as prestige, employability, and educational opportunities affect people's linguistic preferences in education. In a metropolitan city, like Delhi, children with several mother tongues can be found in one and the same classroom. Such a situation raises following considerations:

1. What should be the criteria to determine a practical approach to multilingualism in school education?
2. What considerations are to be kept in mind in deciding material, approach, and teacher's eligibility for such situations?

The NEP 2020 and NCFSE 2023 emphasise mother tongue based multilingual education (MTBME) at the foundational and preparatory levels, aiming at smooth transition from the home language to the school language. The best practical approach in urban settings is to consider the major state language (common lingua franca of the state) as the school language and Hindi or any other Indian language and English as additional languages at the preparatory stage. Further, students' home language should be accepted particularly at the foundational stage as much as possible. Textbooks, primers and additional educational materials should be used following the three-language formula.

Multilingualism in NEP 2020

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 explicitly guides language development in schools to focus on teaching many languages and developing multilingual capacities. It says, "As ... multilingualism has great cognitive benefits to young students, children will be exposed to different languages early on (but with a particular emphasis on the mother tongue), starting from the Foundational Stage onwards..." [NEP 2020, 4.12].

The National Education Policy 2020 considers Indian multilingual scenario and the significance of multilingual education in schools. A child learns non-trivial concepts better in mother tongue. Insistence on teaching through a language that is not one's mother tongue creates unnecessary burden and it adversely affects learning. The challenges become more pronounce in the case of SEDGs and other under-privileged sections. It has also been established through researches that learning multiple languages helps in children's cognitive development and refines their interpersonal skills. Therefore, the NEP2020 suggests mother tongue based multilingual education at least at the foundational and preparatory stages. The mother tongue based multilingual education is required not only for smooth transition from home language to school language but also it helps in bridging the social divide in favour of the under-privileged linguistic communities. It is understandable that the students from under-privileged communities reach school with their mother tongues, which in many cases is not a scheduled language. If their home language is allowed, adopted, and appreciated, the children feel confident and motivated to participate in classroom activities. The NEP 2020 recommends the continuation of the three-language formula according to which every student will study minimum three languages of which two languages are native to India. This will prepare students according to the national and global aspirations. Multilingualism will help in promoting national integration, social harmony, and understanding among students. Learning Indian languages and learning through Indian languages makes the core of multilingual education envisioned in the NEP2020.

Major Considerations of MTBME

Though the policy of multilingual education is well-founded and thoughtfully conceptualised, it has some significant considerations in implementation for achieving the desired outcomes. Some of the considerations have been listed below:

1. All mother tongues are not at par in terms of number of speakers, availability of resources, and overall impact and prestige. For instance, scheduled languages like Hindi, Bengali, and Marathi have wider reach and stronger impact in comparison to other languages like Bodo, Maithili, and Meitei. Concentrated efforts will be required to prepare resources, train teachers, and gain social support for multilingual education.
2. People's attitude towards all the Indian languages is not the same. Some languages are considered lacking in expression, refinement, and employment opportunities. Mohan (2022) in his survey of 1200 stakeholders found that people's attitude towards language and preference for medium of education is not determined by emotional attachment only but employment opportunities and social prestige attached with the language also play a significant role. More than half of the total participants in this survey also believed that the language of their preferred medium of education is associated with better cognitive development (Mohan, 2022, p. 84). Due to this reason guardians may hesitate in sending their wards to schools where medium of education are these vernacular languages. Efforts are required to be invested not only in developing consensus among people but also resolving the material reasons of concern as mentioned above.
3. Languages are rooted in their culture and social environment and their ability for expression is limited by their traditional usage. Therefore, such minor languages will be required to be enriched by adding vocabulary and standardisation of

spellings and grammars. The national Bodies like CIIL Bhartiya Bhasha Samiti (BBS), and Council for Scientific and Technical Terminology along with the state Bodies of such languages are required to undertake projects for the purpose.

4. Mother tongue based multilingual education also requires availability of learning-teaching materials, literature in translation, and multilingual teachers with proper training. NCERT, SCERTs, and other bodies have been working on these activities and some success has already been achieved. However, more concentrated and sustained efforts are required in this direction.
5. It is also required to be considered how students from mother tongue medium schools will have smooth transition to the secondary and tertiary education. A viable transition scheme and extensive multi-stage educational planning will be required. Students are also required to build advance proficiency in a major Indian language and English along with their mother tongue.

MTBME as a Pedagogical Practice

MTBME is heading towards becoming a foundational pedagogical practice in school education in India. Therefore, its teaching techniques, materials, and processes are required to be pondered upon carefully. The purpose, considerations, and opportunities of MTBME should always be kept in mind while developing a comprehensive plan of its pedagogical practices. An outline of the initial plan has been presented here.

1. Respect for Students' Mother Tongue: Children reach school with prior knowledge of their mother tongue. Therefore, mother tongue is the anchor through which children can be connected to school and their conceptual understanding can be cultivated in the initial years of their education. Even if children's mother tongue is minor language or dialect, its use should be allowed, promoted and respected in classroom interactions. If students'

mother tongue is different from the school language, bilingual communication should be adopted to facilitate smooth transition from the home language to the school language. At the foundational stage, children should be encouraged to participate in classroom interactions to refine their oracy and build their conceptual clarity. Students' mother tongue should never be considered a hurdle but utilised as a resource in learning-teaching process.

2. Learning New Language by Using Home Language: Students' home language/mother tongue can be used as a resource and scaffold for learning a new language. The meaning and concept of the target language can be explained by using the home language/ mother tongue (L1). L1 can also be used to explain grammar rules, vocabulary, and comprehension. Jhingran (2022) is of the opinion that the use of the mixed language is a powerful strategy in the process of learning new languages (Jhingran, 2022, p. 20-21). A multilingual approach helps to bring children's culture and experiences to the classroom and connects them to education in a better way.

3. Focus on Oracy along with Literacy: Due to the over emphasison reading and writing, many times much required development of oracy and interpersonal skills are ignored. Mother tongue based multilingual education emphasises preparing a conducive educational environment where all students are encouraged to participate in oral activities such as language games, problem solving, group activities, story narration, etc. This will build their confidence and enhance their interpersonal skills. Further, this will cultivate their inquisitiveness, psychomotor skills, language, and vocabulary along with socio-emotional skills. Reading and writing should be duly accommodated with these activities. This will require the teachers to be not just resourceful and creative but also friendly, approachable, and appreciative.

4. Interactive and Experiential Learning Using Bilingual/Trilingual Resources: The basic principle of education is to move from the known to the unknown. Therefore, multilingual

approach of education uses bilingual/trilingual resources in the form of bilingual word-lists, local stories, and description of culture in folk tales, folk songs, write ups, dramas, and narrations. Multilingual approach promotes inclusion and equity in education by addressing learners' linguistic hurdles and disadvantages associated with an unfamiliar language being the medium of instruction. The NEP2020 and the NCFSE 2023 prioritise interactive and experiential learning over rote learning and book memorisation. Since the purpose of education is not just accumulation of information, education should build students 'conceptual clarity and skills through experiential learning. It includes group projects, interactions, role plays, and direct experience of various social and natural phenomena.

5. Use of Culturally Relevant Resources: Education should move from the local contexts to the global contexts, and not the other way round. Education should be rooted in Indian culture and every educated person is supposed to have a sound understanding of his society, culture, people, and their problems. There is no use of talking about daffodils in an Indian school as the flower is alien socially and ecologically. It makes more sense to use Indian and local flowers, birds, trees, customs, fairs and festivals in the Indian classroom settings. It will create genuine interest and awareness among the students about their language, society, and people. In higher grades, the educational contexts can slowly move from the local contexts to the national and international contexts, allowing students to build a sound understanding based on analytical and critical thinking. Since languages develop not in isolation but in local contexts, the use and cultivation of the mother tongue is inseparably attached to the culture and society in which that language developed.

6. Assessment in MLBME: Oral tests and class participation can be made a part of assessment particularly at the foundational stage. Oral skills and creative ability should be tested alongside numeracy, literacy, and social awareness at the preparatory stage. Assessment should not be entirely based upon rote learning. It should judiciously accommodate psychomotor skills, socio-emotional skills,

and oral communication skills in mother tongue as well as other languages of school education. The results of assessments should be analysed and used to gauge the outcomes and also to plan backwash and future educational interventions.

7. Smooth Transition to School Language: In those social contexts where children's home language is a minor language or dialect without script and standardisation, the home language should be used for smooth transition to the school language. In such cases, children's home language is used in the early foundational stage and gradually through bi-lingual input children's ability is built in the school language by the time they reach the preparatory stage. In such cases, the mother tongue is used for oral purposes and scaffolding to facilitate students' smooth transition to the school language in which foundation literacy and numeracy are targeted as per the NIPUN Bharat Mission.

8. Use of Multiple Channels for Educational Inputs: It has been proved by the research that the educational input from multiple channels is more effective in the learning process. Therefore, in a multilingual class, educational inputs should be given through audio-visual means, demonstrations, chalk and talk method, as well as experiential involvement. Needless to say, the home language and the school language along with the third language should be accommodated in a suitable proportion as per the targeted competencies and learning outcomes.

Roadmap of Implementing Multilingual Education

The NEP 2020 introduces a transformative language policy to bring about a positive change in school education by bridging socio-economic divide and promoting inclusion and integration. The emphasis is on learning Indian languages and learning through Indian languages. The policy suggests making students' mother tongue the medium of instruction at the foundational and preparatory stages. The local dialects or minor languages (those without script and standardisation) will be respected and used for conceptual understanding aiming at smooth transition to the school language

where the medium of instruction is in an Indian language different from the children's mother tongue. It will promote and protect Indian languages and make learning enjoyable and effective. To implement the policy, NCERT prepared the National Curriculum Framework for Foundational Stage 2022 and the National Curriculum Framework for School Education 2023 in which basic principles, objectives, and pedagogical practices have been outlined. The major focus of the NCFSE is on making learning enjoyable, inquiry-driven, experiential, and inclusive. It prioritises the knowledge of Indian languages, culture, society, and knowledge traditions so that students develop into well-rounded citizens with a sense of pride in their culture and country. Well-versed in their social values and Indian knowledge systems, these students will develop ethics and human and constitutional values like empathy, respect, democratic spirit, scientific temper, justice and equality, etc. This type of educational objectives cannot be achieved without proper understanding of Indian languages and culture.

As per the guidelines given in the NCFFS 2022 and the NCFSE 2023, educational bodies like NCERT, SCERTs, and state governments have started preparing textbooks, supplementary materials, educational kits, and other educational materials. Some of these works include development of JADUI PITARA for the foundational stage, primers in non-scheduled languages, and bilingual learning materials. Much is still to be done by cooperation of various stakeholders of school education. A tentative roadmap has been outlined here.

1. Language Profiling and Need Analysis: Research prepares the foundation of any focused development and pin-pointed intervention. Therefore, implementation of MTBME also has the pre-requisite of need analysis and language profiling of different regions. Language profiling includes determination of number of speakers of a language and their percentage in the local population, languages that co-exist with a particular language in a particular area, relative prestige and popularity of these languages, use of

these languages in the formal and informal settings of family and friends, media, education, and official purposes. If a language is used in only informal circles and not in media, education and official use, it means the language is not properly standardised and has a limited reach. Preparing resources in such non-standardised languages and training teachers are challenging tasks, which require concentrated and sustained efforts. If a language is used in media, education, and official purposes, it means that the language enjoys a high popularity and has standardised grammar, spelling system, dictionary, and published literature. With limited efforts, the resource development and capacity building are possible in these standardised languages. Where anon-standardised language exists with a standardised language, the former can be used for transitional purpose at the foundational stage and the standardised language can be made the medium of instruction. However, profiling and documentation of these non-standard languages are required to develop preliminary materials such as bilingual glossaries, folk tales, and texts on arts and culture. Such a language profiling and need analysis will also help in determining the number of master trainers, teachers, and fund allocation required.

2. Preparation of Learning Materials: According to the language profiling report and need analysis, the learning–teaching materials are prepared. These materials may include textbooks with bilingual/trilingual glossaries after each chapter, bilingual/trilingual word-lists, wall posters, audio-visual materials, cultural texts, etc. Some supplementary learning materials are required to be developed locally at state, district, and school levels. Each teacher should be resourceful enough to use these materials and create their own materials and techniques as per the need of the students. Local experts in performing arts and creative skills, guardians, community leaders can also be engaged in for effective experiential learning.

3. Development of Pedagogy and Training Manuals: MTBME is still a developing approach in the Indian context. An approach includes method, techniques and tools along with

operational procedures of classroom transactions, assessment, post-assessment interventions (backwash), and record keeping. Therefore, the pedagogy for MTBME is required to be prepared, class-tested, and adopted. The pedagogy can use translanguaging, bilingual resources, interactive mode and accommodative attitude for mother tongues. Such pedagogy will be learner-centred and will encourage participative, interactive, and experiential learning-teaching techniques. On the basis of these experiences, comprehensive training manuals are required to be developed for capacity building for teachers and other stakeholders.

4. Preparation of Master Trainers: After preparation of training manuals, master trainers will be prepared by NCERT and SCERTs for the respective states. Master trainers should be well-versed with the languages and cultural resources of the regions for which they are prepared. Alongside, procedural understanding of pedagogical aspects, they should also be oriented in professional commitment as their role is very significant.

5. Capacity Building of Teachers and School Heads: Need-based training, orientation, and refresher programmes on MTBME approach should be organised at the block level, district level, and state level for the capacity building of teachers and school heads. A system of professional support and follow-up should also be created to give timely support to the teachers and school heads.

6. Monitoring and Support: Any well-designed system can collapse due to the absence of monitoring and support system. Therefore, effective implementation of MTBME requires a three-layer monitoring and support system. The system should include district level monitoring, state level monitoring, and national level monitoring. The system should be an online mechanism that shows real-time data of classes, materials, training, and funds. It should also have a mechanism of inspection and surveillance to ensure the proper function of the said system. If multiple systems are already in place, they should be integrated in one system for smooth operation, maintenance, and data collation.

7. Adaptation and Corrective Measures: All constructive interventions like MTBME are launched with an attitude of constant improvement and adaptation in materials, methods, and procedures. The stakeholders of school education will be required to observe, record, and share problems and best practices of MTBME in their regions so that corrective measures can be taken to enhance the quality and effectiveness of education.

8. Inclusion of Parents and Community: Social trust and support are also required to achieve the objectives of MTBME. Therefore, schools should engage with parents, community leaders, artisans, performers, and society in general for building trust, seeking support, and using their skills for educational purposes.

Conclusion

Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education is a revolutionary idea that can bring about constructive changes in education. It will prepare our students as well- informed and skilled citizens with deep respect for their language, culture and country. Such citizens with national pride and positive values will lead India to the greater heights. Rooted in their culture, these students will acquire the skills and competencies of the 21st century world and use them for their country and society. To bring about such a positive change, school education is being reoriented prioritising national interests and aspirations for building a sustainable future for our generations. The stakeholders of school education are required to consider the major considerations and the roadmap for smooth launch and effective practice of MTBME. Well-coordinated and concentrated efforts are required to achieve the success of MTBME in school education. Considerations and roadmap presented here are not exhaustive but indicative to give the stakeholders a line of thought in this direction.

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IJES, Volume LXI, 2025

Reimagining Indian Higher Education: Challenges and Transformations under the New Education Policy 2020

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Abstract

Over the years, the Indian education system has changed drastically, moving away from its earlier focus on spiritual and moral teachings to a more materialistic, career-driven mindset. This shift is largely driven by capitalism and modern influences, turning education into a commodity aimed primarily at securing jobs and social status, rather than encouraging critical thinking or intellectual development.

One of the biggest challenges facing higher education today, especially in government institutions, is the lack of proper infrastructure and outdated curricula. Teachers often find themselves overwhelmed with administrative work, leaving little time for actual teaching and mentorship. On top of that, corruption and political interference undermine the quality of leadership and governance in academic settings.

In response to these challenges, the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 takes a more holistic and flexible approach to education. It promotes a multidisciplinary curriculum that blends vocational training and skill development to boost employability. The policy also emphasizes research and innovation through the establishment of the National Research Foundation. Additionally, it aims to improve teaching

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standards, foster gender inclusion, and reduce regional disparities. One of its key features is the introduction of the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC), designed to support lifelong learning and create more flexible educational paths.

Despite the progressive ideas outlined in NEP 2020, putting these changes into practice remains a challenge, especially in rural and underprivileged areas. There are also concerns about whether vocational training will truly meet industry standards and whether education will continue to be treated as a commercial product. To truly transform India's education system into a globally competitive and inclusive model, it's crucial to address these lingering issues. By fostering both critical thinking and practical skills, the policy hopes to better equip learners for the fast-paced demands of the modern world.

Keywords: New Education Policy (NEP) 2020, Higher Education, Skill Development, Vocational Training, Multidisciplinary Curriculum, Educational Reforms, Corruption in Education

Introduction

"Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mineworker can become the head of the mine, that a child of farmworkers can become the president of a great nation. It is what we make out of what we have, not what we are given, that separates one person from another." (Mandela) This quote by Nelson Mandela aptly puts forward a glimpse into the power of education. Its transformative capabilities are not hidden from anyone. In ancient times, as the discussion is especially in the Indian context, education used to be behavioural, moral, and spiritual, paving the way of contentment for those who came in its contact. It used to be the purpose of education to limit the dependence of people on material sources. This purpose of education encountered drastic changes as the time itself witnessed the growing dominance of the physical world on its spiritual counterpart. Modernity brought

with itself a version of human beings who lived and yearned for the amenities provided by the same world they lived in. Life became materialistic to its core and the guide of life, that is education, went through a kind of metamorphosis that shifted its identity from the seeker of spiritual truths to a helper in attaining the worldly pleasures.

It has been the tradition since the dawn of time that the universe always maintains a strict relation between actions and their consequences. The same also happened in the context of the pleasure-seeking nature of education. As it became highly oriented with the attainment of livelihood and luxuries, it should not come as a surprise that the one that followed it was corruption. If the ultimate goal is the attainment of pleasure, then why should morals be a hindrance? That is the thinking that developed under the influence of greed for the materialistic standards of living. The education that is witnessed today is highly influenced by these thoughts.

The present state of education in India, especially higher education, is steadily deteriorating. Education has been reduced to a mere commodity after facing so many attacks of the capitalistic mindset for a long time. It serves more as a tool for earning money and worldly pleasures rather than prompting one to seek the ultimate truth. It is so much based on the materialistic approach that this entity itself varies according to the financial condition of the person who is trying to attain it. This trend can be noticed in the stark difference between private and government schools even on the primary and secondary levels. Private institutions consistently produce more talented students in comparison to government institutions. It is not because government teachers are less qualified. In fact, they often have to go through rigorous recruitment processes. Instead, it is due to the numerous non-teaching tasks they are burdened with. Government teachers are frequently assigned duties like election work and polio vaccination drives, which leaves them with limited time and energy for actual teaching. And to top that, the lack of a good infrastructure to oversee their work results in a lack of engagement with students.

Higher education is not altogether different. Here also the professors and university staff are caught up in activities unrelated to teaching. Political involvement is no stranger to higher education in India. It further complicates the situation, as many professors focus on aligning themselves with the ideology of the ruling party. They care more about the benefits availed by aligning themselves with the power instead of fostering an environment of independent thought. This pursuit of personal benefit compromises their role as educators and leaders of truth. These 'Vansajs of Chanakya' no more stand for the truth and only care about themselves. Once hubs of diverse ideologies and worldly wisdom, higher education institutions have now become monotonous, self-serving entities. Once they foster intellectual growth and critical thinking among students which now has turned to boot licking instead.

Moreover, the government's focus on increasing the number of institutions rather than improving their quality has led to a sharp decline in educational standards. About 80 percent of students graduating from humanities colleges and colleges offering traditional courses end up lacking essential skills. This is due to capitalism as it has shifted the focus toward technical and industrial education. As a result, humanities and traditional course offering institutions have been reduced to mere degree-distributing centers. They have lost their value as the places which indulged in the pursuit of learning the secrets of life.

Another reason for the deteriorating state of higher education in India is the severe lack of job opportunities, particularly for graduates with degrees in humanities and traditional courses. Completing a B.A. or M.A. in these subjects offers no guarantee of employment, forcing students to prioritize job prospects over academic learning. As a result, many students at state universities enroll in graduation programs with only the objective of obtaining a degree required for government job applications. Most of their time is spent preparing for competitive exams in private libraries rather than attending classes. These conditions have also affected the technological and medical fields to some extent. Though these fields

are being developed rather quickly, facing the issue of population is not easy even for them. To counter such problems, their qualities are also being compromised as evident with the chain of private colleges in the National Capital Region. It's rather worrisome indeed.

For many female students, these graduation programs are seen as a way to enhance marriage prospects rather than secure a career. It is not a secret that such programs do little to improve job opportunities. Consequently, at prime hours, only about 40 percent of students are present in humanities colleges and universities. Though it differs in the case of central universities, not everyone can get admission to such institutions. This low attendance has led to the closure of around 30 to 40 percent of colleges offering traditional courses. The focus today has shifted almost entirely toward producing a technical workforce through engineering and other professional colleges. The humanities education in the present times is neglected and undervalued to a great extent in comparison to the education facilitating technical skills.

This issue primarily affects government universities, as private universities mostly focus on the technical sector. In government institutions, everything other than teaching seems to take priority. Throughout the year, these universities remain occupied with conducting exams for various courses. The sheer number of courses offered, both in regular and private modes, means that exams are held almost continuously. As a result, professors are reduced to mere clerks, spending more time on administrative and examination duties than on actual teaching. This lack of classroom engagement further erodes the quality of education.

Corruption is another major issue that has enveloped the government universities. Even the highest position within a university—the position of vice chancellor—is often secured through political and monetary influence rather than merit. Not only universities, but even the colleges affiliated with them also face such concerns. In one such instance in Uttar Pradesh, the recruitment process for the post of Principal of colleges took place

in 2009. This recruitment was quashed first by the High Court and then finally by the Supreme Court in 2016 for not following the standards required. Won't this high level of corruption compromise the integrity of the educational system? Won't it further diminish the quality of academic leadership? There is no need to answer these questions. As a result of these corrupted behaviours, the focus of today's universities has shifted from providing education and nurturing personalities who benefit the nation to safeguarding personal interests and maintaining political connections.

Recently, an MLA from Rajasthan openly stated that the position of Vice Chancellor in a university can be secured with a *"Moti Attaché"*—a phrase implying a suitcase filled with a substantial amount of money. This admission gives a rather vivid glimpse into the extent of corruption in higher education, where even the most prestigious academic positions are up for sale. This revelation is just from one state but its presence in other states cannot be denied. Even our own Uttar Pradesh in no way has remained unaffected by such phenomena.

Other Problems of Higher Education in India

Higher education in India faces challenges that are not limited to those mentioned earlier. Its effectiveness and quality are hindered by various phenomena. One of the primary issues is the lack of adequate infrastructure and resources. Many educational institutions, even in this modern era, suffer from outdated facilities, insufficient libraries, and inadequate access to modern technology. Funding has not been significantly increased over the years and the consistently increasing population has to live under the exploiting tendency of this problem. The UGC is synonymous with a 'white elephant' as no real solution to these problems can be perceived to be put forward from the UGC's side. In the case of Indian higher education, food is still less than the number of mouths to be fed.

Another major concern is the outdated curriculum that the universities are still stubborn about. For instance, the curriculum of literature subjects is still based on classical literature, completely

ignoring the popular literature that is developing in the present. Despite rapid advancements on the world stage, many universities still follow traditional syllabi that fail to equip students with relevant skills. This leads to a gap between graduates and employment opportunities, causing high rates of educated unemployment.

The other problem that Indian universities are facing today is the lack of faculty. The recruitment process these days has become really questionable and it is facing a visible backlash from the public. Even after having a number of positions vacant in different aided and government colleges, the recruitment of faculty members has been lingering for quite some time now. Firstly, the filling of these vacancies is not considered a matter of immediate concern, and even if the recruitment process starts, it encounters various hindrances. Those hindrances are paper leaks, court orders for postponement of exams due to technical faults, problems in results, etc. The state of Uttarakhand has recently postponed an exam for the post of lecturer due to some technical problems with the advertisement of posts. Our own state has been struggling with the conducting of the exam that was advertised a long time back. And then the colleges have to compromise by hiring teachers on a contract basis. But the posts offered on a contract basis provide salaries which are not up to the standard of those posts. Low salaries and limited professional development opportunities deter talented individuals from pursuing teaching careers.

Additionally, the emphasis on rote learning rather than critical thinking and practical application significantly undermines the quality of education. Students are often pressured to memorize content rather than understand concepts, resulting in a lack of creativity and problem-solving skills. One such example is the UGC NET examination for the subjects in humanities. This exam forces the most subjective subjects to be studied in an objective form, destroying the essence of the knowledge they provide. The field that is affected the most by this approach is the field of literature. Due to this exam, students tend to forget the symbolic nature of literature, and instead of decoding it to get the lessons of life from it, they cram its content.

Furthermore, the commercialization of education has led to an increased focus on profit. There are many universities in India that can do anything for a bag of money. Even UGC has blacklisted a number of universities for providing fake degrees in exchange for money.

Changes in Indian Education Policy

India's education policy has undergone several changes since independence. The aims of these changes remained improving literacy rates, expanding access to education, and enhancing the quality of learning. However, despite these efforts, the education system still faces significant challenges that call for periodic policy revisions.

One of the most recent and comprehensive changes came with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. NEP 2020 aims to make education more flexible, and skill-oriented. It introduced multidisciplinary education, vocational training from a young age, and reforms in assessment methods.

However, while the policy outlines progressive ideas, its implementation remains a major concern, particularly in rural and underprivileged areas. The concerns over implementation are not entirely wrong as the policy advocates for changes like the use of regional languages for instruction purposes, for training through vocational skill courses, etc. The concerns have a valid argument behind them. For instance, if the government pushes for the use of regional languages in schools, will the private schools comply? So the implementation of NEP 2020 in its entirety is still a matter of confusion.

Still, the changes are always desired after a point in time. This need for periodic changes in education policy arises from the rapidly evolving global landscape. Technological advancements, the dynamic job market, and societal transformations demand that students possess not just theoretical knowledge but practical skills and critical thinking abilities. Policies must, therefore, adapt to equip students for the challenges of a modern, technology-driven world.

Moreover, education policies should address regional disparities, ensuring equal access to quality education for all sections of society. Inclusivity and affordability must be prioritized to bridge the gap between privileged and marginalized communities.

Furthermore, the emphasis on rote learning needs to be minimized, fostering creativity and problem-solving skills instead. Periodic policy revisions should also focus on teacher training and professional development to maintain high standards of instruction.

In conclusion, timely changes in education policy are essential to keep up with global advancements, socio-economic shifts, and the aspirations of a diverse population. A flexible, inclusive, and future-ready approach is vital for fostering a robust education system.

Aim of New Education Policy

The New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 of India aims to transform the education system by making it more holistic, inclusive, and skill-oriented. One of its primary goals is to shift from rote learning to critical thinking and creativity, fostering a deeper understanding of concepts rather than mere memorization. The policy emphasizes multidisciplinary and flexible education, allowing students to choose subjects based on their interests and career aspirations. It also seeks to integrate vocational education from an early stage, equipping students with practical skills alongside academic knowledge.

Another significant goal of the NEP 2020 is to promote inclusivity by ensuring equitable access to quality education for all, especially marginalized and disadvantaged groups. This involves increasing Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) at all levels of education and reducing dropout rates through targeted support. Additionally, the policy aims to improve the quality of teacher education and professional development, recognizing that competent and motivated educators are crucial for effective learning outcomes.

The NEP also envisions leveraging technology to enhance teaching, learning, and assessment, making education more

accessible and adaptable to modern demands. It aspires to establish India as a global knowledge superpower by fostering research, innovation, and a strong foundation in foundational literacy and numeracy. By focusing on all-inclusive development, the policy aims to cultivate responsible, skilled, and well-rounded individuals prepared for the challenges of the 21st century.

NEP and Higher Education Institutions

The New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 holds significant prospects for higher education institutions in India, aiming to revolutionize the academic landscape and make it more globally competitive. One of the most promising aspects is the shift towards multidisciplinary education, which encourages universities to offer a diverse range of subjects and allows students to explore different fields of study. This flexibility not only broadens academic horizons but also enhances employability by equipping students with versatile skills.

Another key prospect is the emphasis on research and innovation. The establishment of the National Research Foundation (NRF) under NEP aims to foster a strong research culture, offering financial support and promoting collaboration between institutions and industries. This is expected to elevate India's global standing in research output and quality.

The policy also focuses on improving the quality of teaching by enhancing faculty training and professional development. By encouraging continuous learning and incentivizing merit-based career growth, the NEP seeks to create a motivated and skilled teaching workforce, thereby improving the overall quality of higher education.

Digital and online education also receive significant attention, with the policy promoting the use of technology for distance learning and hybrid teaching models. This is particularly relevant in a post-pandemic world, where flexibility and accessibility are paramount.

Furthermore, the NEP's vision to increase the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) to 50% by 2035 will significantly expand access to higher education, especially for marginalized communities. By

promoting autonomy and accountability in institutions, the policy aims to create a more dynamic and responsive education system.

In essence, the NEP 2020 paves the way for a transformative shift in higher education, fostering inclusivity, research excellence, and global competitiveness.

Changes after NEP

The introduction of the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has brought several transformative changes to the landscape of higher education in India. One of the most significant changes is the shift towards a multidisciplinary and holistic education system. Higher education institutions are now encouraged to offer a flexible curriculum, allowing students to choose combinations of subjects across science, arts, and commerce, breaking away from rigid stream-based education.

Another major change is the implementation of a four-year undergraduate degree program with multiple exit options. Students can now earn a certificate after one year, a diploma after two years, a bachelor's degree after three years, and a bachelor's with research after four years. This structure provides flexibility and reduces dropout rates, as learners can re-enter the education system at different stages.

The NEP has also introduced the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC), a digital repository where students can store academic credits earned from various institutions and courses. This enables credit transfer and mobility between institutions, encouraging lifelong learning and skill development.

To promote research, the policy has established the National Research Foundation (NRF), which aims to fund and facilitate high-quality research in universities and colleges. This is expected to significantly boost India's global research output and innovation.

The policy also emphasizes the internationalization of education by facilitating collaborations with foreign institutions and attracting international students to Indian universities. Additionally, there is a

strong push towards digital and online learning, with the aim of leveraging technology to increase access and enhance the quality of education.

Teacher training and professional development have also been prioritized, with a focus on improving pedagogy and updating educators with modern teaching practices. By making higher education more inclusive, flexible, and research-oriented, the NEP 2020 aims to create a dynamic academic environment that meets global standards.

Upgrading Existing Institutions

Most of the higher education institutions are slowly turning obsolete due to the passage of time. It is the dire need of the time to transform them in order to get the most out of them. To achieve that purpose, The New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes the upgradation of existing higher education institutions to enhance quality, inclusivity, and level up on the global stage. One of the primary areas of focus is transforming traditional universities and colleges into multidisciplinary institutions. This involves expanding academic offerings, integrating diverse streams, and providing education that breaks the rigid boundaries between science, arts, and commerce.

Another significant aspect of upgradation is improving infrastructure and facilities. The policy encourages investment in modernizing classrooms, laboratories, libraries, and digital learning spaces. Institutions are expected to take the help of technology to create smart campuses that support online and hybrid modes of education. Upgrading digital infrastructure is particularly important to ensure seamless access to educational resources and virtual classrooms.

Furthermore, accreditation and quality assurance processes are being strengthened to ensure that institutions meet global standards. The policy advocates for greater autonomy for top-performing institutions while holding them accountable for maintaining high standards of education and administration.

Faculty development is another key area of upgradation. The NEP calls for continuous training and professional growth opportunities for educators, equipping them with modern pedagogical skills and subject knowledge.

Overall, the upgradation of existing institutions under the NEP 2020 aims to build a robust, flexible, and future-ready higher education system that nurtures critical thinking, innovation, and global competence among students.

Employment Oriented Education

The New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has introduced significant changes to make education more employment-oriented and skill-driven. One of the key aspects of the policy is its focus on imparting practical skills and vocational training alongside traditional academic education. This approach is particularly important in a rapidly changing job market where employers increasingly value hands-on experience and multidisciplinary knowledge.

The NEP emphasizes providing vocational education from the school level itself, continuing through higher education. This gradual and consistent exposure is required to bridge the gap between theoretical learning and practical application. Higher education institutions are encouraged to offer skill-based courses and establish strong connections with industries to enhance the chances for employment.

The Academic Bank of Credits (ABC), a feature of NEP 2020, also helps in making the process of employment easier. This system allows students to accumulate and transfer credits from various courses and institutions, making it easier to acquire diverse skills and certifications that are relevant to the job market.

Additionally, the NEP promotes multidisciplinary education, allowing students to pursue a combination of subjects that align with their career goals. This flexibility helps in building well-rounded individuals who can adapt to various professional environments.

Moreover, the policy addresses the need for continuous upskilling and lifelong learning, recognizing that rapid technological

advancements necessitate regular upgrading of skills. By fostering a culture of innovation and critical thinking, the NEP aims to produce graduates who are not only academically proficient but also industry-ready.

But a question arises here. Would the level of vocational training be of the standard that can help get a job adequate for making a living? When even the engineers from private universities are recruited on a meager amount of fifteen to twenty thousand rupees, what hope do the students trained in vocational skills have? Are fifteen thousand rupees enough to live in this modern world?

In essence, the NEP 2020 aligns educational outcomes with market demands, focusing on employability through practical training, skill development, and multidisciplinary education. But just getting a job cannot be the solution. There is a big requirement for the creation of jobs that can be considered of the standard that can afford an easy living in this ever-changing world.

Women in Higher Education under NEP

The New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 is a policy that pushes forward the idea of gender equality. It advocates for the inclusion of women in higher education as it rightly recognizes that a nation cannot progress towards being developed without the participation of half of the population. One of this policy's main goals is to lower the gap between males and females in the context of higher education by making education more accessible.

To achieve this, the policy is of the view of setting up more Gender Inclusion Funds, which are intended to support the education of girls and women, particularly those from marginalized communities. These funds aim to reduce financial barriers and provide scholarships, stipends, and other forms of financial assistance to encourage women to pursue higher education.

The NEP also emphasizes the need to establish safe and inclusive campuses. Higher education institutions are encouraged to provide secure hostel facilities, transportation, and a conducive environment to ensure that women feel comfortable and safe while

pursuing their studies. Additionally, the policy advocates for setting up support centers and counseling services to address gender-specific challenges and promote mental well-being.

Another important aspect of the NEP is its focus on flexible and multidisciplinary education, which benefits women by offering diverse learning pathways and vocational training. This approach not only widens career opportunities but also empowers women to choose unconventional fields of study without societal constraints.

The policy also seeks to enhance the representation of women in faculty and leadership positions within educational institutions. By promoting gender equality at all levels, the NEP aims to create role models and mentors who can inspire more women to pursue higher education and leadership roles.

In conclusion, the NEP 2020 strives to build an inclusive and supportive academic environment that encourages women's participation and success in higher education. This helps in fostering greater gender equality and social empowerment.

Research under NEP and the Goal of Developed India

The NEP (New Education Policy) 2020 focuses significantly on research and innovation. The NEP views research and innovation as critical pillars of India's progress towards becoming a developed country. As far as NEP is concerned, high-quality and competitive research is necessary for economic growth, advancements in the technological sector, and becoming a competitive force at the global level. Accordingly, the NEP is attempting to change the research ecosystem in higher education institutions in India.

One of the key initiatives under the NEP is the creation of the National Research Foundation (NRF). Its main goal is to cultivate a strong research culture by supporting exceptional projects. From science and technology to social sciences and humanities, it encompasses various fields. The NRF works to transform research into innovative solutions for real-world issues and offers both funding and mentorship.

The NEP also emphasizes the amalgamation of research into undergraduate education. This promotes the advent of inquiry and critical thinking from an early stage in a student. Higher education institutions are encouraged to create environments that can make research possible. The environments should be favorable to students where they have the freedom to actively participate in projects, internships, and collaborations with industries and research organizations. In addition to nurturing research skills, it also enhances prospects of employment as it equips students with practical problem-solving abilities.

The ultimate goal of fostering research through the NEP aligns with India's vision of becoming a developed nation by providing space to increase knowledge levels and innovation. A strong research foundation will facilitate advancements in sectors such as healthcare, agriculture, space technology, and digital infrastructure. By focusing on homegrown solutions to address key challenges, India can lessen its reliance on foreign technologies and position itself as a global leader in innovation.

In the end, realizing a developed India will only come to fruition with the emphasis on research provided by the NEP 2020. The policy intends to place the country as a global superpower by fostering a generation of thinkers, innovators, and researchers.

Flexible Education

With NEP 2020, India's education system has transformed radically. The recommendations in NEP are highly learner-centric and balance a wide range of learning objectives alongside fostering development and keeping up Indian education with international standards.

Perhaps the most transformational aspects of flexibility under NEP 2020 is taken care of by the multidisciplinary approach. Quite Contrary to the hitherto norm, where students were funneled into rigid channels labeled as Science, Commerce, or Arts; now they can choose subjects across the board based on their career goals and interests. In other words, one can study physics and music at

the same time, or economics and computer science, thus fostering a cross-functional repository of knowledge and skills.

The policy also provides for multiple entries and exits at different points of undergraduate education. One year, a certificate can be given. Two years, a diploma. Three or four years, a bachelor's degree, or a bachelor's degree with research, respectively. This kind of structure will particularly be of help to those for whom the going is tough, perhaps with work or other commitments, and may have to take time off their studies.

The Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) is a major part of NEP 2020. It digitally holds the academic credits acquired by a learner from various courses and institutions. It makes the credit transfer process extremely smooth, which allows students to stop and start back their learning process without any loss of already-made progress. Besides making a possibility for the notion of lifelong learning, it allows for the accumulation of credits over time on an individual basis- despite breaks or changes in their educational path.

Flexibility is further reinforced through the promotion of online and distance learning, enabling students to access quality education from remote locations. This is particularly relevant in a post-pandemic world, where hybrid models of education have gained prominence.

To summarize, the NEP 2020's focus on flexibility enables students to personalize their individualized learning paths, select interdisciplinary combinations, and persist with their learning at their own unique speed. By stepping away from rigid bodies, the NEP fosters learners' diverse capacities and enables them to count down the rapidly changing demands and needs of the world today.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that Indian higher education, though in the process of development, still has a lot to change. Its transformation under the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a bold attempt to address longstanding challenges and align education with

modern global standards. The issues like corruption, weak infrastructure, political influences, etc are becoming the reason for the downfall of higher education in India, It is necessary to get rid of them in order to safeguard not only the institutions but also the future of the nation. This new education policy offers a number of changes to transform education in India for the better but these changes are being built on the rotten foundations of the corrupted administration of the education sector. Though the policy itself is up to the mark, its implementation requires a bit more thought process on the part of the government.

To truly revolutionize Indian education, the government must prioritize quality enhancement alongside expansion. Strengthening institutional accountability, reducing bureaucratic burdens on educators, and fostering genuine academic leadership are essential for achieving sustainable educational development. Bridging the gap between policy and practice requires collaborative efforts from educational institutions, policymakers, and society. Firstly, a thorough inspection of the system is needed in the education sector and then the government can proceed further with execution, maintaining transparency. The present implementation seems to be a bit hurried and it is evident that the results will take time to appear on a significant basis.

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IJES, Volume LXI, 2025

Abuse-Revenge-Activism Laxmi's Struggle for Dignity in *Red Lipstick*

***S.Z.H. Naqvi**

Abstract

Our society is a heteronormative one—it perceives/ classifies human- beings into male and female binary only. But there are many persons who are NOT comfortable with this artificial distinction. Society considers gender and sexual identity as fixed and cohesive but the reality is that both these features are malleable—they are not intrinsic or inherent. A child born and pronounced a 'male' or 'female' at the time of its birth may, when they grow up, find themselves neither. Such persons may be gay, lesbian, transgender, etc. according to their choice. Such people come under the rubric of sexual minorities, distinct from the traditional society dictated binary tag. The identities of such queer people are fragmented and fluid. Laxmi Narayan Tripathi aka Laxmi is one such person who has narrated the painful saga of her life to Pooja Pandey, the writer, in *Red Lipstick* (2017). The autobiography candidly records her abuse in childhood, her revenge with vengeance and subsequently her struggle for demanding social acceptability to the sexual minorities through enactment of laws and other initiatives along with a long list of her comrades and their support in the struggle. For Laxmi, a

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transgender is someone who has transcended 'gender' and she has really achieved that. Born a male, she dons the garb of a slutty female to teach a lesson and shame her cousins and other relations who had forced themselves on a six-year-old innocent child. She has paid back to her tormentors in the same coin. By exposing them in her autobiography she has shown the mirror to patriarchy at large and has debunked their masculine supremacy. Thus, her revenge is complete and exemplary as she has exposed them before one and all. Her role as a queer activist has established her as the champion of the cause of not only hijras (she identifies herself as a hijra) but all the non-binary population. She amplifies the aspirations and expectations of the gender diverse persons 24/7.

The paper aims to analyse her tale of struggle to win social acceptability and dignity of life.

Keywords: heteronormative, binary, gender, sexual identity, transgender, queer, autobiography, patriarchy, hijra, gender diverse.

India has a rich cultural heritage with respect to trans people. In the Treta Yuga they were present when Lord Rama departed from Ayodhya to begin his 14-year exile. They waited for his return at the outskirts of the city and didn't go back, as the legend goes, because they were neither men nor women. The Lord had reportedly urged all the 'men and women' to go back to Ayodhya and wait for his return. In the Dwapara Yug we come across a description of Arjuna dressing as a eunuch, Brihannala, during the Agnatvas (living incognito in the last year of their exile) of the Pandavas. During the battle of Mahabharata, Shikhandi, whose sex had been changed from male to female, is said to have been instrumental in causing the death of Bhishma Pitamaha, an otherwise invincible warrior. Traditionally, we worship Shiva and Shakti, Ardhnarishwara, Yin and Yang, the cosmic, interdependent forces balancing each other to create a harmonious world. We come across references to the coveted positions of the hijras (a hijra is a male-to-female transgendered person, may be a transsexual, intersex, a cross-dresser

or a castrated male) in the harems of Moghul rulers. But, unfortunately, things changed for the worse during the British Raj. The very existence of the sexual minorities was criminalised. In the year 1871, the British colonial authorities while imposing conservative Victorian social codes criminalised hijra's performances, stripping them of legal protection and allowing them to be arrested without warrant. They were accused of committing falsely fabricated crimes such as kidnapping children, castrating them, being nasty with people and what not. They were regarded as a 'criminal tribe' and the law of the land denuded them 'of their civil rights' (*Red Lipstick* 200).

When we cast a close look at the condition of the sexual minorities in the society today, we find them in a pathetic condition. Shunned by their own family and the society, they live in abject conditions sans education, financial support, health care, and above all, love and care. They are shooed away wherever they are seen. They face physical abuse, marginalisation, ostracism, social stigma and exclusion from every possible avenue. They lead a life minus dignity. Strange are the ways of the society. On the one hand it is considered auspicious if they bless the newly wedded couple or the newly born child (known as *badhaai* - blessings) because, historically, Bahuchari Mata, the goddess of fertility, is regarded as the patron goddess of the hijra community but, at the same time, they are avoided whenever and wherever possible. As a result they are left with no choice but to turn to *basti/ mangti* (begging) and *pun/dhandha* (sex work) for their bare survival.

Red Lipstick is the tale of one such person- Laxmi Narayan Tripathi aka Laxmi, the eldest child, a son, born in a traditional Brahmin family of Gorakhpur. Laxmi relates her life-story to noted author, Pooja Pande. For the present paper I have chosen those parts of the autobiography which deal with two important aspects of her life, namely,

A- childhood abuse and subsequent revenge, and

B-Queer activism: Affirmation of identity and struggle for a dignified life.

In the very beginning of the autobiography, Laxmi equivocally asserts, "I was feminine *despite* being a boy." (2) and that, "I am a gay man" (3). Since Laxmi was outwardly a male but inwardly a female she was always cornered, stigmatised and ill-treated because her behaviour didn't conform to the accepted norms of the gender binary. Confused, she asked herself, "Who am I when it's just me, alone in my room? Who am I for the world? Are these two selves different, do they have to be?" (4) She was utterly confused about her true identity. Then she decided to accept herself as she was. Self-acceptance is the capacity to accept our flaws, strengths, abnormalities, etc. without comparison with others or judgement. Self acceptance means accepting our authentic selves without any judgement. Identity is a perception of self having the attributes of conviction, principles and experiences which make us different people. Comprehending and embracing our identity is vital for our mental health and well-being which helps us in experiencing happiness and a sense of fulfilment in life. Development of identity is influenced by societal recognition but, unfortunately, people identifying themselves as 'different' may encounter prejudice resulting in estrangement. Resultant marginalisation and subsequent trauma lead to profound feelings of disintegration of identity.

By overcoming external constraints and accepting their vulnerability, people develop a deep understanding of themselves. After examining everything about herself Laxmi "embraced the identity of a hijra deliberately;" (7). Having once decided that she was neither male nor female she remained firm and declared it to the whole world. After initial shock and hesitation, the family of Laxmi, now an open gay, showed magnanimity and, unlike other conservative families, accepted her as she was. The didn't shun or shoo her away. Laxmi tells us that in an interview her father said, "Nobody throws away a desi gheeladdoo, whether it comes out perfectly round or misshapen. My child is and will always be my child" (19). It is a different issue that the society doesn't take kindly to such people. Noted playwright Mahesh Dattani, writing on the issue of gender discrimination, says, "Society has no place for those

who do not fit into its mould. We are either accepted or rejected, based on criteria that are beyond our control" (*Tara* 112). When the members of the family realise that the decision taken by Laxmi is irreversible, they ensure that she doesn't leave the house and start living with the hijra community in abject unhygienic conditions. All attempts of her guru in the hijra community, Lata guru, to force her to leave her house to settle with other members of the community 'in a hijra ghetto' (*Red Lipstick* 151) are met with a determined opposition in the '*chatai* meeting' (154) attended by her mother. Her father told her, "Do whatever you want to do, I won't pressurize you, but please do it from home" (19). Acceptance by family and friends is a great source of strength, especially to those who are considered different. She gratefully remembers her parents and rightly says that parents "are your biggest assets" (63). There were friends and well-wishers also. Chhaya Patil, a friend of Laxmi, metaphorically described as a male for having a strong identity and a powerful personality, tied Rakhi to Laxmi every year. Laxmi rightly remembers her, "That's the ultimate love, isn't it? *To accept me for what I am, who I am* -to me that is a very big thing and *a true mark of love*" (38; my emphasis).

Laxmi narrates a heart wrenching incident. She was ('he', at that time) a six-year-old child, 'weak, ill and feminine in demeanour,' (167). She accompanied the family to her hometown, Gorakhpur, to attend a marriage. There her 21-year-old first cousin along with another cousin and their friends subjected her to unnatural (anal) sex and warned her not to talk about that to anyone. A small, frail child was abused by her own cousins. It was beyond her wildest imagination that she could ever be harmed by those she considered her own. Mark her painful words, "I never thought they would do anything wrong to me, that they *could ever dream of hurting me*" (167; my emphasis). As she grew up, she realised that she had greatly been wronged. With the passage of time her resolve to take revenge for the wrong done to her and the amount of hate for the male species grew in greater degrees. She admits this: "I thirsted for revenge and became a*vengeful bitch*, devoid of remorse, guilt,

repentance and shame" (168; emphasis added). In order to achieve her goal of shaming patriarchy, which she held responsible for all the problems faced by the sexual minorities, she became 'hijrotic'-'a blend of hijra and erotic' (37) as she explains her coined term. In her rage she left no stone unturned in insulting men. On the basis of her experience of sleeping with a number of men, relations included, she concluded that, "Indian men will actually fuck anything, but they are always in denial about it, because their masculinity would be questioned and patriarchy would suffer." (169) Manobi Bandyopadhyay, another noted transgender shares the same view in somewhat similar words. She says that in our society, "men were born with the right to philander, whereas women were born to bear the brunt of men's fancies" (*Gift* 96).

She clearly turned her femininity into sluthood. In order to torment men, she says that, "I would just leave them in the middle of it all, with their throbbing erections aching for climax-the absolute humiliation for any man" (*Red Lipstick* 169).

In this way sex became her personal tool of power in her journey of revenge and she paid back, in the same coin, "cousins, uncles, brother-in law's brothers " (173), sparing none. She realised that society denigrated gender fluid people, hence she attacked it saying, "*Men are like tissue paper-use and throw", "Done and dusted!" (160-61;* emphasis added).

Having shamed her tormentors and others she achieved, in the words of Milton, "calm of mind all passion (read hatred) spent" (*Samson Agonistes* 1758).

Once calm, *Laxmi* decided to dedicate herself to the cause of uplifting her ilk. The foremost question before her was, as has already been mentioned in the foregoing discussion, about her social identity-who she really was? The answer to this question was of utmost importance to her as she had realised that though born a male child, she was neither a male or a female. She says, "Am I a woman? I am not. But I'm not a man… Can a dick or a pussy define me?" (*Red Lipstick* 215). *Red Lipstick* is a rigorous criticism of the

concept of gender and sexual identity as fixed and cohesive. Both gender and sexuality are intrinsically malleable, and not inherent to a person. Queer identity is fluid, situational and fragmented. We can witness the conflict between the genuine 'I' and the socially determined 'I'. Sadly, one's identity is shaped through conformity to societal expectations or the requirements of maintaining different personas to meet various demands of the society one is a part of. As a result, a-genders submerge their identities beneath the socially determined identities or live in the society with multiple identities, often with persistent anguish that lies under the surface. Those people who are lucky to have escaped direct violence still carry unseen scars reflecting the extensive impact of marginalisation.

Simone de Beauvoir's confirmation that, "One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one" (*Second* Sex 301) is true for sexual minorities also. Continuing this argument, Judith Butler also said that gender was performative: "... gender proves to be performative... In this sense gender is always a doing..." (*Gender Trouble* 68) She opined that, "gender is neither the casual result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex" (44-45) and added, "... that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one" (45). Henry Kissinger, former Secretary of State of the USA is credited to have called Prime Minister Indira Gandhi an 'Iron Lady' for her exemplary courage and performance. So were Prime Ministers Golda Meir, Margaret Thatcher and Sirimavo Bandaranaike.

Laxmi was convinced that heteronormativity was a concept thrust upon people by the conservative patriarchy and that hijras serve as a fallacy of gender binary. She raises the curtain on the hijra life which is relegated to the filthy, dark and alienated regions of society and says that they are marginalised and victimised because their gender identity doesn't align with the sexual roles the society assigns to people. She notes that hijras are ordinary human beings with all the emotions and sentiments that are characteristic to humans. The *tritiya prakriti kinnar* (the third gender, also the title

of a book by Rishi Ajaydas) is denied its own gender category and is treated as aberrant. Commenting on the status of transgenders, Santa Khurai, a famous transgender of Manipur writes, "We homos know that our lives are difficult, but we cannot shed off our identity." (*Yellow Sparrow* 21). So, Laxmi decides to become an activist for the upliftment of not only her hijra community but all the sexual minorities. She declares, "I'd rather talk about people and human rights" (*Red Lipstick* 105), not about any single member of the sexual minorities like koti, gay, trans, sex workers, drug users, bar girls, etc. Her friends in the sexual minorities had convinced her that only struggle for the rights could give them dignity of life. She admits: I know that you have to ask for your rights, you have to demand them, again and again and again. You have to be out on the streets, you have to be visible, you have to make noise (196).

With a firm resolve she, along with her friends, established 'Astitva', a non-profit organisation for giving a platform to sexual minorities to raise their voice. She says, "We founded Astitva as a fight for our existence," (30) Anumber of other NGOs, e. g., Samarpan Trust, Pehchaan, Humsafar Trust, Sakhi Char Chowghi, Lakshya Trust, Anaam Prem, etc. are relentlessly working for uplifting these sections.

A milestone was achieved in 2015 when, with the help of social workers, namely, Rishi Ajaydas and Kamla Jaan (the first elected transgender Mayor of Katniin Madhya Pradesh), Kinnar Akhara (a religious order of the transgenders) was established. They participated in the Ujjain Kumbh in 2016. It was a recognition of transgender rights and their participation and inclusion in the religious and social events. Laxmi was nominated the Acharya Mahamandaleshwar of this Akhara which paved the way for social recognition and dignity for the agenders. On the legal front, Laxmi became an intervenor in NALSA versus Union of India and others case in the honourable apex court. The official website of Lawyers Collective (lawyerscollective.org) says that the case was aimed at seeking:

> ...recognition of identity of transgender persons in India...(and) inclusion of a third category in recording one's sex/gender in identity documents like the election card, passport, driving licence, and ration card; and for admission in educational institutions, hospitals, access to toilets, amongst others. (qtd. in *Red Lipstick* 197)

The case was decided on 15 April 2014 and recognised the 'third gender' legally. It also called for legal and social reforms to ensure equality for the genders, agenders included. Laxmi notes that the judgement is, "a golden moment for us- is an acceptance of our sexuality in the eyes of the law and that is a huge step forward in the right direction. That transgenders can live with dignity, something that each and every human being is entitled to, *should* be entitled to, is something we've all been fighting for" (74). Another legal battle was partially won when, while defining Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code (Unnatural Offences: carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal-provision of punishment for life or up to ten years and fine), the honourable apex court struck down the portion of the Section which criminalised consensual sexual liaisons between adults of the same sex.

However, all this is not enough. In spite of some positive steps taken by various state governments including Tamil Nadu, Orissa and Maharashtra, much more needs to be done. Sadly, these people can't even die with dignity. They are:

> ...made to feel that they had no existence, who were denied dignity in life, and in death. When a hijra dies, we wait for dusk, for everyone to fall asleep. Then we steal through the night like thieves to offer last rites to our comrades, escaping everyone's attention. Was this life? Or mere existence? (74)

But Laxmi is hopeful. She says, "Things have altered, they are evolving, and there is hope" (31). They need health care and honourable means of subsistence. They require fair access to education which will lead to employment. Meanwhile, they can be employed as security guards or police guards. The piece of advice

Vijay Nair aka Goda Bai, who performed the ritual of haldi-kumkum for Laxmi, gives her is equally important for all such persons: "Education is important-concentrate on that" (87). It is heartening to note that some of them are getting higher education and good jobs, despite many hurdles. They are recording their struggles in black and white. Living Smile Vidya did her post graduation and found a job; Shabeena Francis Saveri was awarded the degree of Ph D. Manobi Bandyopadhyay became an assistant professor and later, the first transgender Principal of a women's college. A few days ago there was a news that Dr N Jency, a Ph D in English, had been appointed an assistant professor at the prestigious Loyola College, Chennai. So, there is a ray of hope, howsoever feeble it may be. Let's hope that the wish of Pooja Pande, the writer of *Red Lipstick*, about the book may come true:

> …I hope this book with Laxmi at the centre of it urges and inspires us all to rethink our personal equations with who we are-our gender, our sexuality, and how we choose to define ourselves. And embrace the multiple identities that are possibilities. If not for ourselves, then for a better world, a greater legacy. (218).

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IJES, Volume LXI, 2025

The Politics of Mothercraft: Resisting the War Against the Womb in Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest*

***Suranjana Bhadra**

Abstract

With the aim to create networks across the world, neo-liberal globalization has actually complicated the economic system that sustains the First as well as Third World countries.

Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest* (2003) transports the audience to a dystopic technoscape that engages in human organ transplants and commercial surrogacy. The reduction of biological bodies to predatory products of capital generation would be the outcome of a perverse global industry. Even motherhood has been entangled in the global capitalist market that transforms it to an artificial mothercraft, an invasive appropriation of technology, which promotes the act of putting poor mothers for sale before the powerful First World countries. The onslaught of capitalism has led to the appropriation of motherhood and its commodification. But, the margins hold the orbit— Europe is undoubtedly the creation of the Third World and must pay its debt to the world. *Harvest* resists such sale of the womb and calls for a new global economy that will not only make development sustainable but also will make the benefits of development more equitable.

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Keywords: globalization, capitalism, mothercraft, politics, core, periphery

Bestowed with the potential of building bridges among nations across the world, Globalization actually emerged as 'an enormous corporate power grab' that drowns the world into the vicious cycle of economic crisis. The international trade agreements and neocolonial policies that have been imposed on the developing countries in the process of globalization justify the exploitation of the Third world countries without direct intervention of the advanced. Globalization raises controversies as it gradually mandates liberalization of capital markets that allow the cross-border flow of capital. Capitalism creating financial imbalances engenders widening gaps between the poor and the rich; it divides the world into unequally developed areas. It gives rise to social differences in its designation of differential wage and employment standards. Such a socio-economic system gradually promoted a tendency to interrogate the policies of global economic dependencies. Thus Globalization produces its discontents. Immanuel Wallerstein, makes an extensive study on the evolution of the capitalist system, in his *Modern World System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (1974). He differentiates among 'core', 'semi-periphery' and 'periphery' and their intertwined relationship in the global political economic system. According to Andre Gunder Frank the world economy is divided into metropolis and satellite. The world economy has been arranged in such a way that economic surplus flows from the satellite (periphery) to the metropolis (core). This is what Frank terms as the 'development of the underdeveloped'. Thus the development of the First World countries and the underdevelopment of the Third World countries are in fact bound in cause and effect relationship. The primary victims of this process are the poverty-stricken majority of labourers and urban workers of the 'peripheries'. The sectors run by transnational corporations prefer workers of Third World countries for they are cheaper, hardworking and are willing to work overtime with minimum wages. Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest* (2003)

anticipates the complexities of global dependency crisis that has emerged recently. Providing a glimpse of a surreal world, the drama offers a reverse discourse that dares to challenge and unmask the ideologies of justified exploitation of the Third World countries by the First World countries.

Transporting the audience to a future hyperreal world of 2010 Mumbai, Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest* (2003), prefigures "the challenges facing humanity in the next 21st century" (Padmanabhan 4). The play provides a grim picture of a dystopic world in which a North American transnational corporation called the Inter Planta Services engages in human organ transplants of affluent, aging and ailing clients. In the introductory note to *Harvest*, Padmanabhan states: "The inspiration for *Harvest* was the flourishing illegal trade in human organs in India. The buyers are Indians as well as non-Indians while the donors are poor villagers for whom the Rs 20000 they are typically paid for a kidney represents an unimaginable fortune" (4). The healthy body parts or whole bodies are purchased from impoverished, poor residents of the Third World countries who are offered no other option but to commodify themselves in this perverse economy only to quench their thirst for survival. Global capitalism sets different wage standards, different working hours, and different treatment of the human body for different areas of the world. In this drama, *Harvest,* Om Prakash is the helpless donor who contractually sells off his organs to the US based transnational company whose wealthy clients desire to purchase everlasting lives by successive, multiple body transplants. What is most shocking is the fact that along with the commodification of body parts women are the special targets as they are compelled to provide affective and reproductive labour to carry forward the future generation of the affluent North American receivers. Due to extreme poverty Om and his family become easy victims of organ trade. The technological gadgets like the contact module installed in their house conducts surveillance over the Prakash family so that they maintain healthy habits and in turn ensure harvesting of healthy body organs.

The entire family is subjected to disciplinary, dictatorial regimes that compel them to eat, drink and sleep as instructed by Gini, the wealthy and glamorous North American customer. Jeetu, Om's brother, labels the home as a "fancy prison" (Padmanabhan 56). The family is provided with the options of either starvation and have organs or selling of organs to feed oneself. Choosing from the same category offers no choice at all. This "conditionality refers to more forceful conditions, ones that often turn the loan[here job offer] into a policy tool" (Stiglitz 44). 'Conditionality' is the imposition of myriad of conditions as precondition for assistance that can never lead to better outcomes. Om Prakash and Jeetu are bound to 'risk' their existence for their existence. Om confirms his allegiance to the digitalized Ginni: "I live only for your benefit. You know that" (Padmanabhan 40). The ghost of imperialism persists through the neocolonial policies of institutions like the World Bank and IMF. The hypocritical mission of these institutions is to attenuate poverty, but the cost of combating poverty is repaid with the interest of deliberate self-sacrifice In *Neo-Colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (1965), Kwame Nkrumah asserts:

> Neo-colonialism is the worst form of imperialism. For those who practice it, it means power without responsibility and for those who suffer from it, it means exploitation without redress. (qtd. in Ghosh 190)

Neocolonialism promotes setting up economic dependencies and satellites.

The microcosmic world of the Prakash family lays bare the economic dependencies that operate between the core and the periphery as illustrated by the World System Theorists. The dream of a comfortable life alienates each member of the family thereby shattering all sorts of family bonding. The mother breaks up all umbilical ties to take refuge in the comfortable Deluxe Couch forever. She no longer hesitates to hand over his son to the agents of Inter Planta Services. When the Guard demands the Donor as resistance is useless, Ma (suddenly, pointing to Jeetu) says "Go on!

Take him before he runs!" (57). Trapped within such a vicious cycle, under developed countries have their economy structured and regulated by the expansion of the First World countries. Viewed in the context of neocolonial policies, Johan Galtung's claim—imperialism is founded on structural rather than explicit violence—made in his landmark article "A Structural Theory of Imperialism" (1971), takes on profound significance. According to Galtung, imperialism can take the form of structural imbalances that uphold inequality and dependency rather than overt conquest or the violent subjugation of peoples. According to him, 'the centre', or the developed capitalist countries, maintains control and domination over 'the periphery', or the developing world, not by the application of force but rather by establishing political, cultural, and economic institutions that guarantee a constant extraction of value. This indicates that underdevelopment is not the 'original state' of something that is inherent to so-called 'traditional societies'. Galtung's proposition helps explain why underdevelopment in certain countries cannot be linked to any permanent internal or cultural shortcoming. Rather, it is the outcome of what Galtung refers to as the abrupt and unequal flow of goods, money, and even human labour between the periphery and the centre. The disparity is subtle but pernicious: as dependency increases and wealth is diverted from the periphery, it creates the appearance that investment or development assistance is charitable when, in fact, it is a component of an extraction system.

Harvest takes a different turn when the real identity of Ginni is revealed to Jaya. Offering resistance to the conventions of 'dependencies', she questions the asymmetries of power relations. Power relations "invest the body, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs" (Foucault, *Discipline* 25). The pedagogical principles of Ginni are disseminated through certain disciplines that maim or silence subversive voices. In Act One, power and knowledge are disseminated through the family by Ginni. According to Foucault, power is not a conventional

scheme of domination-repression; its associations with pleasure are also to be taken into consideration. The individual is both an effect of power and the element of its orientation. The regime on power-knowledge and pleasure upholds all discourses of repressive hypothesis. The virtual images of Ginni on the screen are symbolic substitutes of their bodies. Such virtual images not only monitor but also seduce, tempt and interpellate. Ginni is considered to be the angel of the house by Om and his mother. Jaya offers resistance to such a life of imprisonment and slavery. When Om confirms that Ginni cares for them, Jaya asserts: "Oh yes, she cares—just as much as she cares about the chicken she eats for dinner" (Padmanabhan 47). Gradually power of conducting surveillance, in turn, creates its own resistance, the possibility of a 'reverse discourse.' The final twist comes in the play when it is revealed that Ginni is only "a computer-animated wet dream" (84)—a falsified image. In reality it is Virgil, an aged man who has undergone four body transplants in fifty years. Though Om was initially selected as the donor, it is Jeetu who finally donates his body. This has been schemed purposefully as Virgil desired to seduce Jaya, Jeetu's beloved. Virgil says: "We look for young men's bodies to live in and young women's bodies in which to sow their children—" (86). He too confesses that they have lost the art of reproducing and nurturing children.

As a contrast, Jaya desires to bear the sweet burden of motherhood. Her arms cry out to hold the baby in her arms and enjoy the bliss of motherhood that has been denied to her. For a woman, the journey through motherhood is not only a physical experience through pregnancy by nurturing of the embryo with her own blood, but it is also an emotional and affective experience. Virgil tempts and seduces her with the dreams of motherhood: "I'm real and warm and willing—this body which once belonged to Jitoo now contains a red-blooded all-American man!" (87). He finally asks Jaya for artificial insemination. Jaya resists this proposal as this is virtually impossible. She hankers after the pain of childbirth, the pain of pulsating with life. "Here, Padmanabhan is shedding

critical light on an 'international womb boom' in which racialized women, particularly in India, are increasingly being hired as gestational surrogates for infertile white couples. In this process, the surrogate is radically instrumentalized as a "Womb for Rent" (Kim 225). She vehemently opposes to be a gestational surrogate and provide her womb in return of material comfort. Women have often been made a part of the 'artificial world' but have refused to remain in the private realm created by men. It is the body of women that faces the greatest conflict in their assertion of motherhood. Jaya refuses the much cherished 'motherhood' the goal of her biological identity, only to resist the exploitation of her womb. She subverts the western global politics of subjection to 'mothercraft', a eugenics inspired training of mothers to bring up children in correct scientific conditions of health and hygiene. Her motherhood becomes a symbol of resistance to global capitalism. In the essay "Parenthood in the Era of Reproductive Outsourcing and Global Assemblages", Agnihotri Gupta says:

> In keeping with the consumer culture of our times and the free market of a globalized world, women's reproductive bodies and their body parts (such as eggs, embryos, uteruses) are entities which have been turned into commodities that are donated or traded, either for use by infertility specialists or research scientists. The 'reproductive industry' is mimicking capitalist industrialist production by searching new markets and cohorts of consumers, seeking cheaper labour power through practices including 'offshoring' and outsourcing (10).

The conceptual framework presented in Gupta's essay almost perfectly fits the notion of mothercraft. Gupta contends that in the era of "reproductive outsourcing," parenthood is a "global assemblage" (8)—a web of exchanges, technologies, and players (ranging from clinics and egg donors to surrogates and legal brokers) that come together to create the parental product. Motherhood's diminution into mothercraft is directly related to the outsourcing and fragmentation of reproductive labour.

In contrast to motherhood, mothercraft is a congregation of abilities that can be bought, sold, or mechanised rather than a state of being. Gupta's critical study highlights the growing d-eterritorialization and disaggregation of reproductive labour, which was formerly thought to be inextricably linked to the mother's physical, emotional, and cultural identity. She refers to the ability to distribute tasks like pregnancy, breastfeeding, and early childcare across global markets as "outsourcing." Motherhood, Gupta posits, is now craftable, exportable, and quantifiable rather than sacred, unique, or instinctive. This is a conceptual change rather than just a practical one. The processes that logically lead to mothercraft are the result of maternal functions becoming modular: one woman's gestation, another's genetic material, and still another's care—each segment linked to a financial ledger. Saskia Sassen's concept of "global circuits of survival" (255), in which domestic, intimate, and reproductive labour is assimilated into global capital flows, is in line with this. The word "craft" itself implies manufacture rather than nature, expertise rather than emotion, and this is precisely the transformation Gupta sees in reproductive outsourcing: the repackaging of motherhood as a set of tradable skills.

The ecstasy of motherhood has been entangled in the global capitalist market to render it as an artificial mothercraft, an invasive appropriation of technology, which promotes the act of putting poor mothers for sale before the powerful First World countries. The onslaught of capitalism has led to the appropriation and abasement of motherhood and its commodification. Global capitalism provided an impetus to the politics to control, dominate and reduce women to material object. Resisting such an act of crafting motherhood in her microcosmic world, Jaya, in *Harvest*, insists Virgil to come to her physically as a real living being, pulsating with love and humanity. Her womb is not an inert receptacle but has the capacity to permit or reject the germination of the embryo. Jaya asserts:

> Look, I've understood you now. I know you're stronger than me, you're richer than me. But if you want me, you

must risk your skin to get me. Even though it's really Jeetu's skin—I want you to risk it!(89)

Virgil cannot risk his life and come to Jaya for love. By compelling Virgil to undertake the 'risk' that was so long imposed on them, Jaya attempts to reverse the dominant capitalist discourse where the impoverished are only to bear risks. Motherhood signifies her inner strength, her source of power. Alternatively Virgil, the representative of the affluent First World countries, too must pay his debt to the underprivileged Indian family that strengthens Virgil to re-live his life and control his death. Jaya harps on the chord that the underdeveloped countries, like India, will no longer acquiesce in the aids and grants and become the 'sisters of charity' of the First World countries. Gestational surrogacy can never be the mode of repayment for the debt crisis that has trapped the Third World countries.

Advanced technology and medical science has facilitated infertile people to learn the new language of genetic mothering. Childbirth consequently turned to a technological feat. "Going by the name of New Reproductive Technology, it has been called the dismembering of women whose birthing process is held hostage by a section of the scientific and technological community" (Bagchi 92). This global trend of commercial surrogacy offers a multifaceted challenge at the crossroads where reproductive technology, human rights and socio-economic position intersects. Neo-liberal globalization tends to mask the politics of commodification of motherhood under the garb of Assisted Reproductive Technology which in fact exploits women who have to labour hard for subsistence. They pay the price of bare survival by bartering their motherhood or reproductive organs to the privileged nations. To quench the thirst for genetic children of prosperous countries, the wombs of women struggling with poverty are put to stake. This commodification of the very process of reproduction and birthing foregrounds the vulnerability of Indian motherhood. The female body is both a space and a machine. Jaya probably dreams of a space of her own, a space

where every woman can preside over her own body. In such a world women will be free from the shackles of commodification and will truly create new life, bring forth not only biological children, but also dreams and thoughts necessary to sustain, console and alter the essence of human existence. Human relationships will be renewed irrespective of their global subject positions. Sexuality, politics, intelligence, labour, power, motherhood and community will acquire new significances as the process of thinking itself will be transformed.

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IJES, Volume LXI, 2025

Articulating the Contours of Isolated Selfhood and Subjectivity in Prabha Khaitan's *A Life Apart: An Autobiography*

***Rajesh Kumar Lidiya**

Abstract

The present paper deals with the concept of Selfhood and Subjectivity in Prabha Khetan's *A Life Apart: An Autobiography.* In a patriarchal society, selfhood is defined by male-centred values. To challenge and subvert the patriarchal framework, female writers have used literature to put forward their own perspectives. The form of autobiography gives them more freedom to assert their subjectivity. Prabha Khetan has done the same in her work. My paper focuses on three primary aspects of her book: the revolutionary spirit, the pursuit of forbidden love, and the use of writing as a means of liberation.

Keywords: selfhood, subjectivity, absolute. Other, autobiography, autonomy

"The only person I knew and understood was myself and if this is how I become aware of the fundamental truth about oneself: that the price I paid was worth the lesson I learned."

Prabha Khaitan (*A Life Apart: An Autobiography* 260)

While the concept of self is inherently devoid of gender, sex, race, age, and class, feminists contend that it has been constructed in a

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manner that conceals the attributes of a white and heterosexual male. Simone de Beauvoir's incisive remark, as cited in *The Second Sex*, "He is the Subject, he is the Absolute – she is the 'Other'" (xxviii), encapsulates the fundamental reason why the concept of self and subjectivity has had significant relevance within feminist discourse. Being categorised as the "Other" entails being positioned lacking subjectivity and personhood. In essence, it reduces one to a simple physical existence. This is also the rationale that asserts that the concept of self as a cohesive entity has historically been more applicable to men than to women. Women's lives have often been perceived to be broken or conflicting due to the tension between their inherent autonomy and the repressive societal demands placed upon them. Comprehending one's identity independently from societal standards that perpetuate oppression may frequently complicate women's sense of self, subjectivity, and ability to act autonomously.

However, when considered in isolation, these challenges may be mistakenly attributed to individual shortcomings. Activities such as fostering solidarity among women, exploring lesbianism, participating in assistance networks for rape victims and battered women, and engaging in conscious awareness provide women a platform to express and actualize their sense of self. Additionally, these activities enhance the acquisition and improvement of their language skills, enabling women to articulate their distressing experiences better. Lois McNay in her book *Gender and Agency* explains that gender identities are not easily changeable but are deeply rooted in personal commitments and long-standing behaviours. Social settings influence how individuals perceive themselves, but some predispositions and habits may persist even after initial circumstances have ended. She notes: Gender identities are not free-floating: they involve deep-rooted investments on the part of individuals and historically sedimented practices which severely limit their transferability and transformability.

Although subject formations receive their shape from prevailing social conditions, certain predispositions and tendencies may still

continue to effect embodied practices long after their original conditions of emergence have been surpassed. This durability partly suggests that a coherent sense of self is not just an illusion but fundamental to the way in which the subject interprets itself in time. McNay argues that a consistent understanding of oneself is essential for life, as it shapes how people perceive themselves. The impact of social environment and personal history on gender identity is significant, and a strong self-concept is crucial for navigating experiences and self-perception. This intervention enhances the self-esteem of the individual woman by allowing them to introspect their encounters with the societal implications. In these settings, women discover a source of assistance in defying societal conventions, endeavours, and constraints to overcome individual hardships. These practices seem to alleviate women's stress of being seen as different, allowing them to voice their perspectives, take action, and exercise independence. This concept is not synonymous with independence and free will; it is enhanced through nurturing connections and encompasses an innate sense of accountability. The subjugation of women poses a threat to their autonomy through several means. In addition to shaping women's wants and creating a sense of detachment from their identities, internalised oppression also presents those in subordinate positions with many incentives to reduce conflict and improve their circumstances by catering to people in positions of authority. Patriarchal societies subjugate and restrict women's autonomy, whereas egalitarian communities aggravate women's sovereignty to bring them on equal footing with men.

Feminist critics believe autonomy is a dynamic and adaptive endeavour, including the cultivation of self-exploration, self-identification, and self-guidance abilities ("Feminist Perspectives on Self"). However, the process may be challenging and often elicits adverse reactions from those who adhere to patriarchal norms, particularly when the resistance is enacted at an individual level. The act of writing is inherently challenging, and the endeavour of composing a work of literature is particularly arduous. Among the

many literary genres, the composition of an autobiography is a particularly formidable challenge since it necessitates a sincere and genuine account of one's own experiences. Ram Sewak Singh and Charu Sheel Singh in *History of Indian Literature in English* quote Carolyn Heilbrun to point out how autobiography demands racking honesty, be it a male or a female writer: ". . . the woman herself may tell it, in what she chooses to call an autobiography; she may tell it in what she chooses to call a fiction; a biographer, woman or man, may write a biography, or the woman may write her own life in advance of living it, unconsciously and without realizing or naming the process" (Sewak and Sheel 175). Therefore, the genre of autobiography presents unique challenges, particularly for female autobiographers who navigate a world mainly governed by male influence and actively challenge patriarchal conventions. The construction of self and subjectivity is central to the study of any autobiography as the autobiographer is tasked with expressing his/her innermost truths of lived experience within the confines of human memory. However, this poses a challenge to the female autobiographers to externalise what gynocritics call "the feminine mode of experience" (Heinamaa 73), encompassing their thoughts, emotions, and perceptions of the external world. The portrayal of self in women's autobiography can be seen as a form of representation, as it requires the female autobiographer to adhere to principles of truth, sincerity, and honesty. This is particularly important as they navigate a predominantly male-dominated society.

To challenge and subvert this patriarchal framework, female autobiographers must engage with and adapt the literary tools available to them, ultimately seeking to redefine and reinvent them within a phallocentric system. Moreover, female autobiographers face significant challenges in having their voices acknowledged within a patriarchal societal framework. This paper explores how Prabha Khaitan navigates the revolutionary ethos and the intricate aspects of her isolated life, identity, and intimate relationship with a particular man in a tumultuous socio-cultural period. The emphasis

on individuality in Prabha Khaitan's work is particularly notable due to the problematic customs prevalent in Indian patriarchal culture. Numerous authors, regardless of gender, often acquiesce to and thereby sustain societal prejudices, while feminist writers actively challenge and either wholly reject or critically reassess these gender-based stereotypes. These misconceptions significantly influence several aspects of a woman's life.

This paper focuses on three primary aspects: the revolutionary spirit, the pursuit of forbidden love, and the use of writing as a means of liberation. The term 'post-feminism' has emerged as a comprehensive label encompassing a range of conceptual frameworks. In addition to examining egalitarian viewpoints, this analysis encompasses several ideas such as the 'brave new world,' 'female power,' 'androgyny,' 'pluralism,' and, to some degree, the theory of 'multiculturalism.' The terms' brave new world' and 'female power' pertain to a demographic of young women who exhibit qualities of courage, confidence, assertiveness, and competitiveness. These individuals possess a self-assured character and can establish their place in society without relying on the principles of feminism. Post-feminism encompasses the inclusion of debauched and unscrupulous females who possess the ability to challenge men through their feminine charm and assertive-aggressive sexuality. The genre of autobiography generates depictions of stereotypes and then subjects them to a critical re-evaluation through autobiographical narratives. Indian culture and a majority of Indian literary works depict women as very loving, gentle, dependent, and submissive. Furthermore, they often address women's issues, reinforcing the conventional values of Indian women, such as perseverance, devotion, and acceptance of their societal position. Throughout history, several social preconceptions have consistently been challenged and disproven by numerous examples. Historically, women have mostly been seen as individuals fulfilling the roles of mother, wife, mistress, and sexual object while adhering to customary societal expectations. Therefore, women in

literature are often portrayed as disconnected from reality and too simplified regarding their moral values or emotional expressions. They embody the roles of 'Sita' and 'Savitri' in India, portraying acts of sorrow and sacrifice. Over time, the representation of women, families, and society has undergone significant changes. Consequently, the analyses conducted by courageous female writers have also evolved, depicting a diverse range of realistic illustrations. Writing an autobiography is challenging for a female writer in a patriarchal societal structure.

Nevertheless, Prabha Khaitan departs from traditional fables and mythical narratives. Rather, she focuses on portraying the authenticity of women's lives. Susie Tharu and K. Lalita highlight the social and cultural limitations of autobiography and state that: Autobiography as a genre exhibits a certain ambivalence. The accent is on the personal. The existential contours of life and the preoccupation with intimate, even confessional, detail often obscure the fact that autobiography always draws on the repertoire of life scripts that cultures provide at particular junctures in their history. Recurrent themes in many nineteenth-century memoirs are the woman's joy in the love and support of a progressive husband, her education, and the new possibilities that opened to her. But even in relatively conventional accounts, we come across passages that give us a glimpse of many-faceted struggles involved: the pain of being constantly watched and corrected, the feeling that they were not good enough, the exhausting demands of the new housework, the uncertainty and anxiety involved in raising children in the new mode, outside the reassuring circle of the traditional family; the longing for the support of a world they had lost, and so on. (*Women Writing in India,* 160) According to Smith and Watson, the debate around identity, subjectivity, and agency has resulted in a complex connection between autobiographies and feminist and postcolonial critique. The genre, in conjunction with its established body of works, has been shaped by Western ideologies and narratives that emphasise the rational individual of the Enlightenment, the romanticised notion of the self in the era of Romanticism, and the

self-reliant figure of the epoch of Industrial Revolution (*Reading Autobiography* 4). Consequently, the genre of autobiography has been identified as a "male-oriented 'master narrative' of Western bourgeois culture" (*Reading Autobiography* 214). The genre of autobiography has lately been the subject of theoretical studies, particularly concerning the idea of performativity. Smith and Watson discuss the notion of "autobiographical occasions as dynamic sites for the performance of identities constitutive of subjectivity" (*Reading Autobiography* 214).

In addition to many essays, articles, and short stories published in magazines, Prabha Khaitan has authored six collections of poems, six novels, six books on philosophy and feminism, and several translations. She has translated Simone de Beauvoir's influential work, *The Second Sex* into Hindi as *Stri Upeksita* in 1991, showcasing her outspoken feminist beliefs. Her unwavering commitment to pursuing higher education in the field of philosophy, as well as her devotion to literature and to the field of feminism, made her deviate from the conventional choices expected of a woman hailing from a traditional Marwari household, thereby representing a kind of overt defiance. The autobiography titled *A Life Apart: An Autobiography* by Prabha Khaitan has been translated from Hindi to English by Ira Pande from the original Hindi version, *Anya se Ananya*. The book serves as a confirmation of her creative abilities. The autobiography is a testament to her multifaceted existence as a woman, writer, and entrepreneur. It encapsulates her unique perspective on the intellectual landscape, showcasing her passion for writing and her determination to succeed as a businesswoman in an era when the societal standing of women in Indian society was less favourable. *A Life Apart* is a manifestation of the protagonist's rebellious ideologies, capturing the essence of a romantic mindset and shedding light on the hardships endured by women. Prabha's autobiography exemplifies a remarkable instance of an introspective and immersive interpretation of her life, portraying the development of her perspective. Her writing brings a newfound awareness of self-discovery previously unknown to her. In her

foreword to the autobiography of Prabha Khaitan, Namita Gokhale introduces Prabha as a woman of extraordinary spirit and determination. Dr. Khaitan, hailing from the Churu district of Rajasthan, has been a renowned luminary in feminist literature, poetry, leather export industry, and social activism (*Life Apart* v). Prabha Khaitan, a prominent figure in Hindi literature, dedicates much of her life to become the second woman in a committed relationship with a married man. Hailing from a traditional Marwari family, she challenges the conventional norms and familial anticipations by choosing to lead an independent life as an unmarried woman. She establishes her enterprise and garnered admiration from her contemporaries and associates in the corporate sphere.

Despite her strong desire to be liked and valued by the one to whom she dedicates her existence, Prabha Khaitan leads a life characterised by her personal choices and principles. Accordingly, her subjectivity is constructed in her life narrative that comes out of a continuous struggle with societal norms and traditional thinking. Mansfield observes that "subjectivity (is) not of simple presences and absences but of potentially violent energies and conflicts, where negative feelings do not merely lapse from the conscious mind but where they are kept in place by a force against which they constantly struggle" (Subjectivity 30). Within the realm of Hindi autobiographical writing that is produced by women, Prabha Khaitan demonstrates a remarkable degree of authenticity in this literary work. Khaitan openly expresses her emotions, acknowledging her discomfort and unease stemming from her perceived lack of legitimacy as a woman. Furthermore, while detailing her journey towards self-empowerment, she reflects upon the gains and losses resulting from relationships society generally disapproves of. Through this process, she contemplates the role of society and the institution of marriage, interpersonal connections, the dynamics of intimacy and distance, the intersection of professional and personal spheres, and the complex and contradictory pressures experienced by women within these realms. The autobiography constructs a tapestry of multiple sub-narratives that depict the author's diverse and sometimes

conflicting identities. Monika Browarczyk, in her research paper titled "From the Other One to the Only One: Prabha Khaitan and Her Autobiography," evaluates that in addition to her prodigious contributions as a Hindi writer, she adeptly assumes several positions during her existence, including those of a feminist, intellectual, businesswoman, philanthropist, and, notably, someone who is in an intimate relationship with a married man. This portrayal highlights the author's position as a woman writer and accomplished businesswoman while it also acknowledges the complexities of her personal life in contemporary Indian society. This positioning results from an intricate interplay of various factors, including but not limited to gender, religion, caste, class, ethnicity, race, sexuality, age, and education. Like other female autobiographers, Khaitan employs many narrative techniques to navigate the complexities arising from her multifaceted identities (Browarczyk 92). Prabha is born into a wealthy and well-known traditional Marwari business family. Calcutta's jute industry has been the mainstay of her father's business. Prabha remembers, "Ours was generally regarded as the wealthiest family of the area, and we moved there in 1945, a time when India - and indeed the entire world- was on the threshold of a new age" (*Life Apart* 15).

However, she deliberately decides to pursue a career as an entrepreneur, in the field of leather exportation. Additionally, she gains recognition as a prominent writer in the Hindi language. Based on the available online sources, it may be inferred that her leather enterprise was a multimillion-dollar industry. In "*Book Review: A Life Apart"*, Alpana Chowdhury examines how 22-year-old Prabha Khaitan falls in love with an eye doctor Dr. Saraf in their first meeting who is over 40 years old then and a father of five children. She chooses to live a doomed life with him as 'the other woman' for almost 30 years, embracing social embarrassment and ruthless treatment from the self-centered Dr. Saraf. In addition, the romantic relationship between an inexperienced young woman from a traditional Marwari household and a highly accomplished medical professional has been in need of substantial compatibility. In her

autobiography, Prabha recounts how, at a later period of her life, after the demise of Dr. Saraf, a tumultuous period sets in characterised by the power dynamic in which the doctor gains complete control (Chowdhury). *A Life Apart* is a book that chronicles the author's early years, the sexual assault she endures in her infancy (which she has been told to conceal), her experiences in the United States, and the subsequent cultural disorientation she encounters. However, the primary focus of the autobiography centers on her enduring bond with Dr. Saraf throughout her life. She exhibits a strong sense of dedication to that man and his family. Khaitan recollects, "My life was compartmentalised into three distinct domains: business, creative writing, and emotional engagement. The first two endeavours showed promise; nevertheless, my circumstances failed to provide me with the desired tranquility and contentment" (*Life Apart* 247). All these accounts of her relationship find expressions in her autobiography that shape her subjectivity. Mansfield rightly observes: "Subjectivity is made by the relationships that form the human context … dominant amongst these are family relationships defined in terms of gender and sexuality" (Mansfield 52).

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IJES, Volume LXI, 2025

The Pervasive Atmosphere of Gloom and Melancholy in John Webster's Revenge Play *The Duchess of Malfi*

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Abstract

John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* stands as a supreme example of Jacobean tragedy, rich in characterization, atmosphere, and moral intensity. This paper explores how Webster transforms the traditional revenge play into a profound study of human suffering, corruption, and fortitude. His characters—the Duchess, the Cardinal, Ferdinand, and Bosola—are drawn with psychological depth, blending virtue with vice and purity with passion. The Duchess emerges as one of the most delicately portrayed women in Renaissance drama, embodying both spiritual grace and human frailty.

The discussion unfolds through Webster's masterly use of characterization, the pervasive atmosphere of gloom, melancholy and scenes of haunting dramatic effect that mirror the complexities of the human soul. The paper highlights Webster's subtle art of diction, imagery, and style that contribute to the play's overwhelming tragic power. The fusion of horror and beauty, sin and sanctity, revenge and redemption reveal Webster's originality and moral vision. Ultimately, *The Duchess of Malfi* transcends the boundaries

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of a mere revenge tragedy, achieving the stature of a timeless work of art—one in which Webster stands shoulder to shoulder with Shakespeare in evoking pity, terror, and admiration for the nobility of the human spirit.

Keywords: Jacobean tragedy, Revenge play, Moral intensity, Fortitude, Tragic vision, Renaissance drama, Spiritual grace, Human frailty, Redemption, Pervasive atmosphere, Gloom, Melancholy, Pity, Terror.

Among the Jacobean dramatists, the figure of John Webster rises above all others barring Shakespeare. It is worth noticing that his eminent position is attained merely from two of his plays — *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi*. The age of Webster saw old values, ideas and beliefs breaking down new ones getting established. Medievalism was coming to an end and Modernism was stepping in. The conflict between the old and the new brought in pessimism and melancholy into English society. Naturally, his plays present an atmosphere of gloom and melancholy.

There is no direct documentary evidence for when *The Duchess of Malfi* was written. However, from analysis of imagery and other indirect evidences, critics conclude that the play must have been written between 1612 and 1614. The story of *The Duchess of Malfi* can be traced to *Novelli* (1554) of the Italian author Mattero Bandello. It was freely adapted into French by Belleforest in 1565 under the title *Histories Tragique*. William Painter, in turn, adapted the French stories in English under the title *Palace of Pleasure* in 1667.

Webster deviates from the source story to serve his conception of tragedy. While Painter's Duchess is a lascivious woman who is justly punished. Webster presents her as a more attractive character. Practically, the whole events of Act IV and Act V are Webster's innovations. Some of the additions were aimed at creating spectacular effects. Webster developed the character of the Duchess into a person of gracious spirit. Her passionate attachment to her second husband and their children are delicately portrayed.

The dramatist makes the Cardinal and the Duke more convincing. Also, the brothers – Cardinal and Duke Fardinand are effectively distinguished.

Webster chose to write the play in the Elizabethan tradition of a revenge play. Seneca had established the tradition in the first century Italy. The Italian tradition reached England along with other Renaissance ideas. Thomas Kyd wrote his *The Spanish Tragedy* under the Senecan influence. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* also continued the tradition. The best of Webster, *The White Devil* and *The Duchess of Malfi*, both are attempts in revenge tradition. *The Duchess of Malfi*, however, does not show the revenge motive as convincing. The revenge motive shown in the tyrannical brothers is far from noble. It arises not as a sacred duty but out of selfishness and vindictiveness. The sympathy of the readers and playgoers remains with the victims rather than the revenge seekers. Webster has made the avengers, obnoxious and loathsome, while in a traditional revenge play they are object of admiration and sympathy. On the other hand, the readers admire the innocence and fortitude of the Duchess. In this new twist given to the revenge tragedy, Webster shows an originality. Norman Rabkin aptly remarks;

> Like *The White Devil*, *The Duchess of Malfi* is quirky. Much of what troubles critics who dislike it stems from their failure to recognize how much of the play is conventional or from their rejection of the conventions they recognize. On the other hand, Webster seems to go out of his way to exaggerate those conventions. (4)

Webster achieves great advance over contemporary playwrights in the art of characterization. His skill in delineating realistic characters and making them convincing is amply clear in *The Duchess of Malfi*. The central figure, the Duchess, faces her misfortune with a stoic fortitude and calm resignation. Juxtaposed to her are the Machiavellian trio - the Cardinal, the Duke, and Bosola. But his characters are not purely white and black. They are all complex personalities. The Duchess, though innocent, has some

flaws. She is one of the most delicately portrayed women characters, and only some of the Shakespearean women go beyond her in vividness and subtlety. Webster has his own weak points in character portrayal. He hasn't convincingly shown the cause of the hostility of the brothers towards the Duchess. The Cardinal oppresses her for marrying someone below her rank. But this does not explain why he opposes her marriage in the first Act. Ferdinand, too, doesn't show any real cause for his opposition to the marriage. Then he admits that he has an eye on the wealth of Malfi. But Webster does not show how he could aim at getting it when her son by the first marriage is already the Duke of Malfi. Thus, Ferdinand's motive remains a mystery. In Bosola, too, one notices some defect in characterization. Though he becomes conscious of the injustice shown to the Duchess, he continues to inflict pain on her, adding to the torments designed by Ferdinand. Joyce E. Peterson rightly observes :

> Unfortunately, the more the Duchess comes to be regarded as the redeeming spirit of the play, the more it must be regarded as a play that sorely needs redeeming. For if Webster intendedus to see the Duchess solely as a charming, somewhat frail, but ultimately innocent and transcending individualist trapped in adecadent and evil society, there is much in the play that is undeniably ambiguous, obscure, or inconsistent-if not flatly contradictory. (3)

The Duchess of Mafi is a play pervaded by an atmosphere of gloom. Bosola is already melancholic when the play begins. The Duchess and Antonio become melancholic as the plot progresses. The first Act ends with Cariola's words that the Duchess's marriage is a 'fearful madness', foreboding the overcoming gloom. The ghastly warnings, the Duke and the Cardinal give to the Duchess, have already cast the shadow of melancholy earlier. The words, 'the marriage night is the entrance into some prison', 'honey-dew that's deadly', 'give the devil such', 'more properly be said to be executed' etc. cast an ominous shadow over the play from Act I.

The scene where Antonio takes leave from the Duchess is murkily sad. She says,

"…In the eternal church, sir,

I do hope we shall not part thus".(Act III, Scene V, L. 84-85)

And then continues wistfully,

"Let me look upon you once more, for that speech

Came from a dying father".(Act III, Scene V, L. 102-103)

Antonio is affected and he replies,

"My heart is turn'd to a heavy lump of lead,

With which I sound my danger: fare you well".(Act III, Scene V, L. 106-107)

The midnight scene where a deadman's hand is given to the Duchess, the spectacles of the dead bodies of Antonio and the children, Bosola tormenting the Duchess through his comments, the ghastly singing of the madman, and the arrival of the stranglers with bell and rope and the climax when the Duchess is strangled are all horridly gloomy. The gloom helps to reveal human nature and the inevitable human suffering. Misfortune, Webster means to say, is not heaven-sent. It is caused partly by one's own actions and partly through the villainy of others. The Duchess has a weakness for the too much human craving of the flesh that makes her remarry, and that too below her rank. This triggers a train of oppressive acts devised by the brothers who are by nature cruel and ruthless. Bosola, the unscrupulous soldier, readily becomes a tool in their hands in tormenting and executing the Duchess. Webster shows the bestiality of human beings through the trio. In Duchess, he portrays how fortitude and dignity can face the degradation and savagery of human beings.

The Duchess's wooing and marrying of Antonio has its dramatic effect. From times immemorial, the Knight winning his princess has extended an undiminishing charm to human. Antonio realises his lowly status and points out his unworthiness. Then the Duchess emboldens him, telling,

…You do tremble:
Make not your heart so dead a piece of flesh,
To fear more than to love me. Sir, be confident:
What is't distracts you? This is flesh and blood, sir;
'Tis not the figure cut in a alabaster
Kneels at my husband's tomb. Awake, awake, man !"

(Act I, Scene III, L. 193-198)

After the marriage ceremony witnessed only by Cariola, the Duchess tells Antonio:

"We now are man and wife." (Act I, Scene III, L.238)

And blushing with a combination of intense love and shame,she requests him,

"I would have you lead your fortune by hand
Unto your marriage- bed." (Act I, Scene III, L. 242-243)

The small talk between the lovers in bed chamber is another scene resplendent with love and tenderness. It is bed time and Cariola too joins the lovers in jesting.

The Duchess has fallen into the hands of Ferdinand, and her brother has resolved to torture her with all of the agonies which can be conceived by mortal man. But Webster does not, like many of his predecessors, lose his head at this critical point in his plot, and rush blindly into seeking slaughter. The quantum of torture which our Machiavellian has adopted for the punishment of his sister Duchess, is not of that gross physical nature but of a horrid psychological and emotional trauma. He hurts the mind of his victim rather than her body, and compasses her death only after having led her through the dismal recesses of a labyrinth of woe. He adopts all of the gloomy process of death, all of the devastating horror of madness, and all of the tortures of woeful anticipation to plunge his victim into the poignant agony of despair. Then after, having consummated all his cruel purpose, feels his own mind cracking under the extreme pressure. The Duchess bears up under her

suffering with that fortitude which has characterized her throughout the drama.

Certainly, the climax of the play is reached when the Duchess is strangled. She faces her fate with dignity and courage. The manner in which Cariola faces her death, juxtaposes against the Duchess's calm and resigned attitude. She had already lost her desire in life after seeing the spectacle, where Antonio and her children were shown as dead. The madman were sent in to drive her to despair. But she keeps cool, and rather appears resigned.

When Bosola comes in, as a tombmaker, and makes his cruel remarks, they do not unnerve her. She says,

" I am Duchess of Malfi still" (Act IV, Scene II, L. 143)

Later Bosola tells her that he is the bell man and that his aim is;

"'Twasto bring you

By degrees to mortification." (Act IV, Scene II, L. 181-182)

But in no way is she frightened by the impending death, and she faces death calmly and even like a true Christian kneeling. Surely, the Duchess arouses our pity, but we admire her more.

When stranglers go away with Cariola's body, the Duchess is not fully dead. She regains her consciousness for a short time, adding to the horror of strangling. There is a striking similarity between this scene and the one in which Desdemona briefly comes back to consciousness, before her death, in Shakespeare's *Othello.*

Webster is a subtle writer, an artist who makes his diction, style and imagery contribute to the total effect a play has on the audience. Webster chooses his diction, like Marston and Tourneur with the aim of awakening terror and awe. Webster uses certain kind of images, very often, to create an atmosphere of decay and death.

The Duchess of Malfi is undoubtedly a great play. Webster has made a great tragedy out of the revenge story modifying the tradition in his own way. There is a blending of tragedy with pathos,

of pity with terror, which is superb and in this he is at par with Shakespeare.

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IJES, Volume LXI, 2025

Reflection of Casteless Society in Sudraka's *Mrichchhkatika*

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Abstract

Sudraka is one of the greatest dramatists in Sanskrit literature. He has written many plays. Among them one is Mrichchhkatika which means a little clay cart. This drama is based on the love story of Charudatta and Vasantasena. Charudatta is a poor Brahamin while Vasantasena is the nagaravadhu of Ujjayini. At the end of the story Vasantasena becomes the wedded wife of Charudatta. Through this play Sudraka has tried his best to present the picture of the society of his own period. So the play is revolutionary since it talks of casteless society.

Keywords: Mrichchhatika, Sanskrit, Nagarvadhu, Society, revolutionary.

Sudraka holds a unique place in Indian classical literature. Indian classical literature includes Pali, Prakrit, Sanskrit etc. So far as Sudraka is concerned, he stands out as a great dramatist in Sanskrit literature. The life sketch of Sudraka is found in the Prologue (*Prastavna*) to the play. It is said that Sudraka was the king of kshatriya. He was brave and handsome. He had profound knowledge in Rigveda and Samveda. Besides this, he was an erudite

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scholar of mathematics and science. He had also acquired knowledge in art and dancing. He was taken to be the expert of artistic dance. Therefore, he had a deep knowledge about the life of courtesan. He was adept in making the elephants trained. He was a great worshipper of Lord Shiva. He performed the Ashwamedha Yajna sacrifice. He also proved his supremacy in warfare. Apart from these things, he has written dramas such as Mrichchhkatika, Vinavasavadatta, Padma prabhritaka. In Mrichchhkatika, Sudraka has tried his best to present the real picture of society of his own time. Therefore, the present paper aims at exploring the reflection of casteless society in Sudraka's Mrichchhkatika.

Mrichchhkatika is a *prakaran* in Sanskrit literature. *Prakaran* is a branch of drama which contains ten acts. Its main characters are common persons of the society. They are not kings, queens, gods and goddesses. They do not belong to any royal family. Its theme is derived from the social issues and the life of common persons. It always focuses on the experiences of the ordinary persons. It never relates the story of royal family, rather it is often concerned with the life of a common man, his love, and his disappointments.

Mirchhkatika is a Sanskrit play which deals with the love story of Charudatta and Vansantsena. Charudatta is the hero of this drama. He is the poor Brahamin of Ujjayini. He comes of a merchant class family. He has a glorious past. His ancestors were rich merchants of Ujjayini. He has inherited his glory from his forefathers. Charudatta is a kind-hearted person. He is famous for his generosity. He is a man of helping attitude. Therefore, he always helps the needy persons. It is his charity that has made him a pauper. Presently, he is leading a poverty stricken life along with his wife, Dhutta and his son, Rohasena though he is renowned for his intellectuality. But time has adverse effect on him and he has become an impoverished person. That is why, he always feels disgusted with his poverty when the criper of poverty grows on the tomb of richness, it becomes poisonous. This idea gets a vivid expression in the following lines:

> Charudatta: But when a man is reduced to penury after he has enjoyed luxury, he lives like a dead man, existing only by keeping up his body. (66)

Charudatta always remains under pressure because of his poverty. He thinks that poverty has made his life miserable. It is a silent killer. It has destroyed his life. It has made him alienated to his friends and relatives. The people of Ujjayini are indifferent to him. Their behaviour towards him has completely changed. Therefore, he wants to take shelter in the forest. According to him, poverty is the fire of grief and sadness which burns the heart of man. Poverty is the abode of all types of sufferings. A pauper person never gets due respect in the society. He falls prey to his own circumstances. This idea is reflected in the following lines:

> Charudatta: Friend, poverty in the case of man is the abode of anxiety, it is the source of the highest insult; it is a different phase of enmity; it breeds disgust in the friends; it is the exciter of the hatred of his kinsmen and of the general public. (67)

Charudatta is a man of handsome personality which attracts all the persons who look at him. Among them one is the nagarvadhu of Ujjayini whose name is Vasantasena. She has a great affection for Charudatta. She secretly loves him. She has been waiting for a golden opportunity to see him. At one night Vasantasena who is a courtesan is going on highway and she is chased by Sakara who is the brother– in-law of Palaka the king of Ujjayini. He wants to possess Vasantasena, but she does not like him. She often rejects his proposal. Therefore, he wants to hold her forcibly, and she is running away to save herself from the clutch of Sakara. When Vasantasena feels helpless, she enters the house of Charudatta and disappears in the darkness of light. At that time Charudatta is offering his evening prayer. He is quite unaware of this incident. Sakara also goes inside the house of Charudatta and starts looking for Vasantasena, for he has infatuation for the beauty of Vasantasena. His two slaves, Vita and Chita are also with him. Actually, at the time of Sudraka, human beings were sold and bought as cattle and commodities. This practice was prevalent in the society.

Therefore, they are supporting Sakara against their will, because they know that Charudatta is a virtuous and righteous person of Ujjayini. It is his poverty which has made his life crippled. Sakara does not succeed in getting Vasantasena, and he returns to his destination along with Vita and Chita. In this way we may say that the power of Sakara gets defeated before the virtues of Charudatta.

Later on, Vasantasena is introduced to Charudatta. Charudatta feels humiliated as he has behaved indecently with an unknown lady. This idea is reflected in the following lines:

> Vidushaka: This is Vasantasena, who has fallen in love with you since her visit to the garden of cupid. (80)

Vasantasena is a rich courtesan of Ujjayini. Her body is laden with ornaments. Charudatta asks her for forgiveness. Vasantasena is expert in the art of love. She wants to remain in close contact with Charudatta. She requests him to keep her ornaments in his custody for safety. Charudatta accepts her proposal and takes her ornaments in his custody. It is night. Therefore, he suggests his friend, Maitreya, to leave her to her residence. But Maitreya tells that people will disturb him at night. So he persuades Charudatta to give his company to his lady love. Then, Charudatta and Vasantasena start for their destination. This idea is expressed in the following lines:

> Charudatta: (with love) Lady Vasantasena, here is your house, you may now get in.
>
> Vasantasena: (Looking at him lovingly; exit). (83)

Both the lover and the beloved bid farewell to each other. They part with each other. But the seeds of love have germinated in their tender hearts. Vasantasena reaches her house, but she always remains lost in the memory of Charudatta as she has left her heart in the custody of Charudatta. This incident is taken into notice by her personal attendant, Madanika. She wants to know the name of a man who has stolen her heart. Vasantasena tells her that he is not a king or a millionaire, but a man of extra quality of Ujjayini. This idea reflects in the following lines:

Madanika: I got it! Is he that same gentleman who favourably received by mistress when she sought his help?

Vasantasena: Well, what is his name?

Madanika: Why he resides in the merchant's quarter.

Vasantasena: Girl, I asked you his name.

Madanika: My lady, he, of auspicious name, is called the noble Charudatta.

Vasantasena: (Joyfully) Excellent, Madanika, excellent! You know it rightly. (85)

Vasantasena is also a great psychological observer in the field of love. Therefore, she has selected Charudatta as her lover. But the love between them has to face many difficulties. The casket full of ornaments deposited in the house of Charudatta is stolen by a thief whose name is Sarvilaka. He also belongs to a Brahmin family and he is the lover of Madanika, the personal attendant of Vasantsena. Sarvilaka wants to make his beloved free from the slavery of Vasantsena by paying her money. Therefore, he gives ornaments to Madanika, who recognizes the ornaments. She, then, gets angry with him. Vasantasena overhears their conversation, and so, she wants to know whether he has done any harm to Charudatta and his family members. Sarvilaka replies in the negative. This statement of Sarvilaka makes her happy Sarvilaka is introduced to Vasantasena by Madanika as a messenger and friend of Charudatta. Vasantasena is well acquainted with the past developments. Therefore, she tells Sarvilaka that Charudatta has conveyed her that the person who will come with ornaments should be given a reward. Sarvilaka's heart is filled with gratitude to Charudatta. This idea is reflected in the following lines:

Sarvilaka: (to himself) Ah! I have been found out by her! (Aloud) Excellent, noble Charudatta excellent! Men should always make an effort to acquire virtues. A virtuous person, poor though he may be, cannot be the equal of (i.e. is superior to) persons who are rich, but not virtuous. (120)

Here Vasantasena feels that virtue is superior to wealth. According to her, the accumulation of wealth is ephemeral while

the attainment of virtues is permanent. A man comes to this world; he earns money a lot; he leads his life lavishly; and he leaves this world. Nobody remembers him. But there is a man who is poor. He sacrifices his life for the society. That is why, he is remembered by everyone after his death.

Charudatta, later on, comes to know that the ornaments have been stolen from his house. He is much shocked at this news. He finds himself in trouble. What to or what not to do is a problem before him. Dhutta, who is the wife of Charudatta, comes to know about this incident. She is also much disturbed. She attempts to take out her husband from this difficult situation. Therefore, she sends her own golden necklace to Vasantasena through Vidushaka. Vidushaka does not have high opinion for Vasantasena. She lives in a big palace which is divided into seven parts. Vidushaka is wondered to see the glamour and beauty of this mansion. After crossing the seven gates of the palace he reaches the living room of Vasantasena and talks to her. This idea gets a vivid expression in the following lines:

> Vidushaka: May madam listen! His honour Charudatta placing his folded hands on his head, begs to say.
>
> Vasantasena: (Folding her hands) What does he command?
>
> Vidushaka: I lost that golden casket at gambling, in the confident belief that it belonged to me. And I do not know where that gambling master, the king's emissary is gone (at present).
>
> Vasantasena: (To herself) How? Although it was stolen by a thief, still he says, out of his magnanimity, that it was lost at play! Hence it is that I love him! (129)

Vasantasena feels proud of her choice. She is fully aware of the fact that the ornaments have been stolen by Sarivlaka who is Madanika's lover, but Charudatta takes the blame upon himself. It shows the kind heartedness of Charudatta. Vidushaka gives her the golden necklace of Dhutta and Vasantasena accepts it. She also expresses her intense desire to see Charudatta. But it is raining cats and dogs. The peacocks are dancing with their uplifted wings. The clouds are flying in the sky

as the bees do. The weather is cloudy. The wind is blowing very fast. On the other hand, the storm of love is also blowing at the heart of both lover and beloved. Charudatta has also been waiting for Vasantasena desperately. Ultimately, Vasantasena arrives there, but she has got completely drenched. Therefore, she changes her dress and appears before Charudatta. Charudatta becomes happy to see his lady love. He also expresses the emotions and feelings of love for her. The love between them is in full swing. They talk to each other for sometime, and then, they make a plan to meet in the old garden, Pushpakarandaka. Charudatta arranges a carriage for her. Vardhamanaka is a vehicle driver. So he is asked to take Vasantasena to the garden. He parks his carriage near the house of Vasantasena, but he returns to his house to bring cushion. In his absence, Aryaka who is a fugitive person conceals himself in the vehicle. The carriage driver takes the vehicle to the garden. Charudatta sees Aryaka in place of Vasantasena. On the request of Aryaka, Charudatta gives him all protections. On the other hand, Sthavaraka, the driver of Sakara, has also parked his carriage there. In confusion, Vasantasena gets into the vehicle of Sakara. The vehicle is brought to the garden by Sthavaraka where she meets Sakara. Sakara is pleased to see Vasantasena, but Vasantasena is in trouble. He wants to make physical relation with her. He proves to be failure in his mission. Therefore, he tries to kill her. When she becomes senseless, he covers her body with dry leaves in the garden. In fact, Vasantasena does not die. Her life is saved by a Buddhist monk who gives her water. She regains her senses. Sakara hatches a conspiracy against Charudatta. He files a case at the court against Charudatta that he has killed Vasantasena. Charudatta is summoned in the court. The judge asks him so many questions and Charudatta defends himself stoutly. This idea is reflected in the following lines:

> Charudatta: Ah, you, talker of nonsense! You are not thoroughly wetted by the waters of the clouds in the sky, like the tips of the wings of a chasa bird, (and still your face is darkened, without any cause)What you assert is false. For, this face of yours loses its lustre like the lotus in the winter. (196)

The judge does not believe that Charudatta is guilty. In the meantime, a city officer whose name is Viraka reaches there and files a case against another officer, Chandanaka. He says that Chandanaka has prevented him from investigating the carriage in which the fugitive Aryaka has been found though he has told me that Vansantasena is sitting inside the carriage. Now the tide turns against Charudatta. At the same time, Vidushaka also comes to the court. When he sees Sakara he starts quarrelling with him as his intention is against Charudatta. During this period the ornaments which he has brought to return to Vasantasena, fall on the ground. This evidence goes against Charudatta and he is found guilty. Charudatta does not give satisfactory answer. Vidushaka pressurises Charudatta to speak the truth, but he is not in a position to reveal the reality and he says to Vidushaka:

> Charudatta: Friend, The royal eye is weak, and it cannot perceive the truth in this matter. If I were to tell, it would be humiliation, and there would be inglorious death. (201)

In this way, Charudatta is convicted. King Palaka announces death sentence to Charudatta. The colour of the face of Charudatta has completely changed. Sadness is clearly seen on his face. The karvira flower is put on his neck. He is taken to cremation ground by two chandals. The chandals are aware of the facts that Charudatta can never kill a woman for money. Common people are also making a noise, for they know that Charudatta is a virtuous person. When the procession along with Charudatta is going to the final destination, Vasantasena comes into sense and she asks the Buddhist monk, Samvahaka, about the noise and the crowd of the people. The Bhikshu informs that Charudatta has been given death penalty for killing a woman, Vasantasena, and robbing of her jewellary. This news perplexes Vasantasena. This idea has been expressed in the following lines:

> Mendicant: (Hearing it excitedly) O worshipper of Buddha! Charudatta is being taken for being killed on a charge of having murdered you.

> Vasantasena: (in agitation) Oh, alas! Oh alas! How is it that the worthy Charudatta is being killed on account of me, the unlucky one! Sir, please show me the way very quickly. (218)

Both Vasantasena and the Buddhist monk run very fast towards the cremation ground where Charudatta is to be killed. Charudatta also arrives at the cremation ground. All preparations have been made to kill him. Two chandals has been appointed for this work. In the first attempt the chandal fails in killing him as the sword falls from his hand in reverse direction. This may be called a divine intervention. Once again the chandals make their preparations to kill Charudatta. Suddenly, they hear a voice and they see that a woman along with a Buddhist monk is coming towards the cremation ground. They recognize Vasantasena. They are happy to see Vasantasena. They think that now they will not kill an innocent person. This may be called the triumph of divine justice over the prejudiced justice of king Palaka who is influenced by his crooked brother-in-law, Sakara. In this way the life of Charudatta is saved. Even chandals also express their emotions and feelings which are reflected in the following lines:

> Chandal: The king's order to us is not such to this effect that we should kill Charudatta along with his son. Here, go away, boy, of with you! (They show him out) Here's the third proclamation-station. Beat the drum! (They proclaim once more) (215)

Sakara sees Vasantasena on the cremation ground. He is very much wondered to see her. He runs away from the cremation ground as he knows full well about his future. Charudatta is also surprised to see Vasantasena. He thinks that Vasantasena has once again come to this earth from heaven to save his life. Vasantasena also begins to weep and the chest of Charudatta is drenched with the tears of Vasantasena. This idea is vividly expressed in the following lines:

> Charudatta: (full of wonder)… Has she come back again from heaven with a desire to restore me to life? Or is she

some different lady resembling her in appearance, that has come here? (220)

Vasantasena narrates the whole story of what had happened with her in the garden. In the meantime the news comes to Charudatta that Palaka, who is the tyrannical king of Ujjayini, has been killed by the cow herd Aryaka. He also becomes happy to know that Aryaka has become the new king of Ujjayini. The heart of Ayaka is also filled with pleasure when he knows that Charudatta and Vasantasena are safe. Sarvilaka informs Charudatta that king Aryaka is grateful to him and he has provided him (Charudatta) the kingdom of Kusavati. Sakara is brought as a culprit before Charudatta. His feet and hands are tied with iron chains. He falls on the feet of Charudatta and asks him for pardon. This idea reflects in the following lines:

Sakara: Wonderful! ……Yes. I will approach that very same person, who is kind to those that seek his protection. (thinking so, he goes forth). Noble Charudatta, Save me! Save me! (he throws himself at his feet) (224)

King Aryaka gives a social stamp on the love boad of Charudatta, a worthy Brahman and Vasantasena, a courtesan. Vasantasena becomes the wedded wife of Charudatta. This idea is reflected in the following lines:-

Sarvilaka: Madam Vasantasena, the king is highly pleased with you and has graciously bestowed on you the title of a wedded wife! (228)

Dhutta who is the wife of Charudatta, reaches there long with her son, Rohasena. They are happy to see Charudatta alive as the wife has got her husband and the son has met her father. Maitreya is also pleased to see his friend. Radanika feels elevated to look her master. The meeting of all these persons may be called family reunion. In this way the play ends with happiness.

Through this play Sudraka has tried his best to present the real picture of the society of his time. He has also used minor characters in this play as Shakespeare has used minor characters in his plays.

These characters in Shakespeare's plays are grave-diggers, clowns, calibon, Ariel, sycorax, Puck etc. Likewise, Sudraka has also used small characters such as slaves, chandals, carriage-drivers, shampooer, female attendants etc. The game of dice and gambling was also in practice at the time. The polygamy system has also been portrayed in this play. The caste and class have not been rigidly followed in this drama. Vasantasena and Madanika are coutisons of Ujjayini. Still they are married tko Brahmans. Vasantasena is in love with Charudatta and a moment comes when their love culminates into marriage. Vasantasena gets the status of a wedded wife by the order of king Aryaka. Similarly, It happens with Madanika who is the attendant of Vasantasena. She is married to Sarvilaka who also belongs to a Brahmin family. Vasantasena is well known her richness and Charudatta's poverty is also known to all. But they become wife and husband. Thus it is quite clear that during Sudraka's period the class distinction did not matter, rather the wealthy persons and poor persons had the freedom to get married.

To sum up, we may say that Sudraka is a social revolutionary. He has tried his best to remove caste and class distinction from the society. Aryaka, who is the son of a cowherd, is made the king of Ujjayini by dethroning King Palaka. Charudatta is a poor Brahmin, but he becomes the head of Kusavati. Sarvilaka is appointed as the counsellor of king Aryaka though he is a poor person. All of them become successful in their life only because of their merit which matters much. By virtue of merit Sudraka has tried to establish a casteless society where merit has been given importance, not a man on the basis of caste, creed and religion. The merit should be the yardstick of success of a person, not his caste or class.

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IJES, Volume LXI, 2025

Nature and Life Lyrics: Tracing Autobiographical Elements and Indian Way of Life in Ruskin Bond's Select Fiction

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****Vipin Kumar**

Abstract

Ruskin Bond, undoubtedly, is one of the doyens of Indian English Writing across multiple genres, with over seven decades of services to his readers. His writings appeal to a wide range of readers which include nature lovers, children and teenagers, adults who enjoy simplicity and nostalgia, and readers who seek emotional depth and warmth in blending of Indian and western cultures. His short story collections selected for the study, i.e. *The Night Train at Deoli and Other Stories* and *Time Stops at Shamli and Other Stories* deeply reveal the major themes of his writings. The aim of this study is to analyze the autobiographical elements present in these stories, his love for nature, and his affinity towards the Indian way of life. This study seeks to understand how Bond connects with readers by masterfully weaving his personal experiences and cherished life memories into literature, bringing them to life. Despite being of European origin, his connection with the Indian way of, his emotional attitude towards the simplicity of this place and the beauty of nature, emerge prominently in these works. Though there

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are glimpses of every aspects of human life in his fiction, the autobiographical approach is more dominant. The aim of this study is to underline the resonance of Bond's life and milieu in his writings.

Keywords: Autobiographical Writings, Indian Lifestyle, Love for Nature, Short Stories, Personal Experiences

Ruskin Bond is a master of the shorter forms of fiction, both novella and short story. *A Dictionary of Literary and Thematic Terms* describes short story as "A fictional narrative, the length of which varies, but which rarely exceeds 20,000. Any longer work is usually classified as a Novella or short novel. (301) *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* notes about the short story:

> A prose narrative of indeterminate length, but too short to be published separately as novels or novellas usually are. According to Edgar Allan Poe, it is a story that concentrates on a unique or single effect and one in which the totality of effect is the objective. A short story may be concerned with a scene, an episode, an experience, an action, the exhibition of a character or characters, the day's events, a meeting, a conversation or a fantasy. (653)

Ruskin Bond's short stories deal with all the themes of the short story mentioned by the Penguin Dictionary. He has also written short stories of varied length, some very short and some very long. It was with short stories that he had begun his writing career. Even when we look at his earliest exercises in this genre, we are surprised to find that immature though they are, they contain the seeds of his mature works. The early collections of his short stories, such as *Tales Told at Twilight, Panther's Moon, Man-Eater of Manjari* and *Love is a Sad Song* were out of print within a decade or so of their publication. However, the key stories of these collections survived and reappeared in later collections when the works of Ruskin Bond gained popularity among the general readers. Some of them were rearranged according to the theme. One example of it is *The Panther's Moon and Other Stories* which contains some

hunting stories along with "The Panther's Moon" which had appeared in an early collection.

Two collections of short stories –*The Night Train at Deoli* and *Time Stops at Shamli* are the most representative collections of Ruskin Bond. Together they contain many of his short stories that have made him famous as the writer of short stories. The first story in *The Night Train at Deoli,* "The Woman on Platform 8" is one of Bond's most anthologized short stories in the school curricula in India. It narrates a chance encounter of a boy with a woman when he was waiting for his night train alone on the railway platform. The story begins with an autobiographical fact. Bond had to make a train journey alone when he was going back to Bishop Cotton School in Shimla. He was in the second year of the boarding school and was twelve years old at that time. Bond begins his short story at this very point. Arun was a twelve years old boy and was in the second year of his boarding school. He was travelling alone and, having come to Ambala by bus, was waiting for the night train at the railway platform. When he was feeling bored and lonely, he heard a woman's voice asking if he was alone. She was a middle-aged woman with a pale face and dark kind eyes. She wore no jewels, and was dressed in a plain white sari, but there was a dignity about her that commanded respect. Arun told her that he was travelling alone, and there was still an hour before the train came. The woman asked him to come with her and have something to eat. He was hesitant, but the woman did not give her a chance to say no after he ate in the railway restaurant, both of them returned to the platform. Soon a school friend of Arun, Satish, who was also going by the same train, arrived there with his mother. Satish's mother asked the woman if she was Arun's mother, and she replied in the affirmative. Arun was surprised but he did not contradict her. Satish's mother went on saying to Arun that it was good that he was not alone, and that children should not talk to strangers. The writer ends the story on a touching note:

> I was smarting under the patronizing tone of Satish's mother, who obviously thought mine a very poor family: and I did

> not intend giving the other woman away. I let her take my hand in hers, but I could think of nothing to say. . . . The guard walked up the platform, blowing the whistle for the train to leave. I looked straight in the eyes of the woman who held my hand, and she smiled in a gentle, understanding way. I leaned out of the window then, and put my lips to her cheek, and kissed her. (16-17)

Arun kept watching her till the train slowly left the platform. The kindness shown to a lonely boy by an unknown woman underlines the value of human emotions. These little acts of compassion and concern make life valuable.

The title story of this collection, "The Night Train at Deoli" is one of Bond's popular stories. In the 'Introduction' to the book, Bond writes, "The Night Train at Deoli' is a favourite with many of my younger readers; that longing for something, someone, just out of reach is familiar to them." (10) This story is about the chance encounter of an eighteen-year- old boy with a basket selling young girl at a rather deserted railway platform. The writer gives a romantic description of the railway station:

> The train would reach Deoli at about five in the morning, when the station would be dimly lit with electric bulbs and oil lamps, and the jungle across the railway tracks would just be visible in the faint light of dawn. Deoli had only one platform, an office for the stationmaster and a waiting room. The platform boasted a tea stall, a fruit vendor, and a few stray dogs; not much else, because the train stopped there only for ten minutes before rushing on into the forests. (52)

The boy always wondered at the train stopping at that station because nobody boarded the train and nobody got down as well. Nothing seemed to happen there. But once something did happen for the boy. A girl came down the platform, selling baskets. It being a cold morning, the girl had wrapped a shawl across her shoulders, but she was walking bare-footed. Her clothes were old but she was walking gracefully and with dignity. When she came to the window near which the boy was sitting, she stopped. The boy says, "She had a pale skin, set off by shiny black hair, and dark, troubled

eyes. And then those eyes, searching and eloquent, met mine. (53) She stood there for some time, but did not say anything. Nor did the boy speak, but when she moved on, the boy came out of his compartment and walked to the tea stall. The girl, who had followed him, asked if he wanted to buy a basket. The boy at first refused, but then bought a basket. Before they could say anything, the guard blew the whistle and the boy had to return to his compartment. The boy narrates:

> I watched her as the platform slipped away. She was alone on the platform and she did not move, but she was looking at me and smiling. I watched her until a signal-box came in the way, and then the jungle hid the station, but I could still see her standing there alone . . . I sat up awake for the rest of the journey. I could not rid my mind of the picture of the girl's face and her dark, smouldering eyes. (53)

On his return journey from Dehradun two months later, he was looking for her when the train reached Deoli, and he felt a surge of excitement when he saw her walking on the platform. She smiled when she saw him, thus indicating that she remembered him. The boy came out of his compartment and met her near the tea stall. He was overwhelmed with a tender emotion and wanted to end fleeting meetings like those –"I felt the impulse to put her on the train there and then and take her away with me; I could not bear the thought of having to watch her recede into distance of Deoli station." (54) He told her that he had to go to Delhi, and she replied that she had nowhere to go. Before he could say anything more, the guard blew the whistle and the boy began to move to his compartment. Before boarding it, he told her that he would come again, and asked if she would be there. The girl nodded.

This, however, was the last time the boy saw the girl. He was very eager to meet her when once again he was on his journey to his grandmother's house in Dehradun. The train stopped at Deoli and the boy searched the whole length of the platform but there was no trace of the girl. The stationmaster was a new one and did not know the girl. The tea shop-owner admitted having seen her,

but said that she was not coming now, and he did not know from where she used to come. The boy boarded the train with a heavy heart. He decided that one day he would break his journey at Deoli and search for the girl. But somehow, he could never do so. Every time, he reached Deoli railway station, his eyes searched for the girl, but she could not be seen again. Nor could he ever forget the girl.

In the 'Introduction' to *The Night Train at Deoli*, Ruskin Bond writes:

> The longings after something lost. Perhaps that is the dominant theme in my stories. It is a longing that has been experienced by all of us at various times in our lives unless one has become desensitized by power and money. The longing, the yearning, is there in the early stories and it is there in the latter stories. (10)

This is the theme of his short story, "A Love of Long Ago". It begins with the description of how the narrator, while going to Delhi, used to be eager to catch a glimpse of the first- floor balcony of an old building where a row of potted plants added colour to its colourless façade. The plants reminded him of the girl who had come into his life for a few blissful weeks and then gone out of it forever. He had been unable to forget her and the sight of the plants revived the memories of his young love. The girl's name was Kamla and she once lived in the same building where the narrator lived. She had a laughing face, which easily broke into smiles, and mischievous, sparkling eyes. The narrator had fallen in love with her, and she with him. Whenever, they got an opportunity, they used to meet stealthily for short moments or steal a hasty kiss. The girl was poor, but the narrator, who was aiming to be a writer and had not been very successful so far, was also not well off. Still, when he heard that her parents were marrying her to a widower forty years of age, he declared his own intention of marrying her. In the eyes of her parents, this young man without much of a prospect was not a desirable match, and so she was married to a man much older than her but considerably rich. When she went

away, she took with her the narrator's potted plants, with the promise that she would display them on the balcony of her husband's house so that he might see them whenever he went to Delhi. This is what he used to do on his journeys to and from Delhi. He had once seen her on the balcony and waved to her to which she had responded. However, on this particular occasion he found that the balcony was bereft of plants. He stopped to enquire about the family, and was told that the elderly man had died and his wife, being childless, had sold the house and gone to her native place in the hills. That was the end of the narrator's love story which left a longing in his heart.

This short story has a reference to Ruskin Bond's own love affair, the most serious one in his life, when he was gradually moving on in his writing career but had not achieved much success or financial security. The failure to marry the girl he loved passionately, rankled in his heart all his life. And this gave birth to two of his most remarkable short stories – "Love is a Sad Song" and "Time Stops at Shamli". Both are very long short stories. The former short story shows the ups and downs in the love of the writer, who is a thirty years old young man, for the girl, Sushila, who is much younger than him. The second story is about a chance meeting with Sushila who lives in Shamli with her husband. Both the short stories deal with the intensity of love, at least on the part of the hero, and the poignancy of the lost love.

In "Love is a Sad Song", it is through the recollections of the narrator that the sad story of his love is unfolded. He is thinking of Sushila who he imagines would be doing her household works in her home or may be trying to study for her examination. She would be surrounded by members of her family in her grandmother's crowded house. Then he remembers the time when she had come to stay with him for a few weeks. He had known Sushila since the time when she was a small girl, but when she came to visit him a year ago, she was sixteen and her brother, Sunil, who had come with her, was twelve years old. Her uncle, Dinesh who lived with the writer was twenty-three and the writer himself was "almost thirty – a fearful and wonderful age, when life becomes dangerous

for dreamers." (211) The narrator recounts his changed emotions towards Sushila:

> A year ago my feelings about you were almost paternal! Or so I thought . . . But you are no longer a child; and I am a little older too. For when, the night after the picnic, you took my hand and held it against your soft warm cheek, it was the first time that a girl had responded to me so readily, so tenderly. Perhaps it was just innocence; but that one action of yours, that acceptance of me, immediately devastated my heart. (213)

M.P. Sinha and others rightly observe, "His mention of the picnic reminds us of the picnic in *The Room on the Roof* and Rusty's kissing of Mrs. Meena Kapoor and her response. Here we find the same scene replicated in a slightly different way." (136) The situation of kissing in both the works is not merely 'slightly different'; it has in fact been reversed. In the novel, it was the young boy Rusty who had started kissing and older Meena had responded; here the older narrator kisses the young girl who responds. The writer creates a very romantic scene of love in this short story:

> Gently, fervently, I kissed your eyes and forehead, your small round mouth, and the lobes of your ears, and your long smooth throat; and whispered, 'Sushila, I love you, I love you, I love you', in the same way that millions and millions of love-smitten young men have whispered since time immemorial. (213)

A new element in the story is added when Sushila tells the narrator that a boy in Delhi, whom we later know to be Pramod, is fond of her. On one pretext or another he had been trying to see her and had even written a letter to her. The narrator grows jealous but is assured by Sushila that there is no emotional response from her side. Later on in the story, Pramod visits the narrator in Dehradun and seeks his help in securing Sushila's love. The narrator first conceals the fact that he himself is in love with that girl, but affected by the sincerity of the boy reveals to him his own emotions towards Sushila. Pramod is dismayed at this news.

It is, however, not Pramod who proves a hindrance in the path of the narrator's happiness. It is the social circumstances which ultimately prove unsurmountable for him. Dinesh, who had once seen Sushila lying close to him, had first been disturbed as he felt betrayed, but the narrator assured him that his love was sincere and not a passing infatuation. He told him that he wanted to marry Sushila. Dinesh was aware of the difficulties in the path of this marriage, perhaps more than the narrator himself was aware of. He advised him to wait for a year or two before announcing his intention of marriage to others. The narrator agrees but after some time he grows restless. With an intention to seek further support, he approaches Sushil's mother who is as surprised as Dinesh was. She finally says that though she has no objection to this marriage, she has no voice in this matter. In fact, it the grandmother of Sushila who has the final authority in this matter. The narrator then makes an appeal to the elder brother of Dinesh, Ravi who says that he will do whatever he can to convince the grandmother.

The matter ultimately is settled but not in the favour of the narrator who has no weighty consideration in his favour except that he loves Sushila. But in India, marriages, at least in those days, were not settled on the basis of love. The weightiest consideration then as even now is the financial security that a marriage can provide. A writer who had no settled income fell short of such a consideration. He asks Sushila, through Sunil, to wait till she becomes eighteen years old, because then she will be able to take her independent decision about her marriage. Though Sushila agrees to wait, Sunil tells the narrator that there is someone else on the scene, an officer in a bank who also owns a car. In a way, he warns him not to be very hopeful in this regard. Though the story ends on this vague note, the narrator loses all hope of marrying Sushila. He has but to bear the pain of separation, and content himself with the happy memories that love had once provided him.

"Time Stops at Shamli", the title story of the next collection of Ruskin Bond's short stories, also features Sushila. The narrator meets her when he is staying in a hotel in a very small town, Shamli.

But, the result, so far his union with his beloved is concerned, is again dismal.

Ruskin Bond has written "Time Stops at Shamli" as a sequel to "Love is a Sad Song", even though he has introduced in it characters that have nothing to do with the love story of the writer and Sushila. Till the half of the story, we find no connection between this story and the earlier story, but once Sushila appears on the scene, the connection is established firmly. In the conversation between the writer and Sushila, there is a reference to Pramod, the other lover of Sushila in the earlier story, as well. Sushila says to him that she wants to talk about Sunil and others and about the days when she was very happy. In the two years since her marriage, she has already started feeling old. At first, the writer wants to ask her about her marriage and whether she is happy or not, but then all this seems immaterial to him. He, however, cannot help feeing that there was nothing common between Sushila and Dayal. He seemed incapable of appreciating her charm and warmth. He was even older than him, and so he could not have been Sushila's choice. The writer thinks that as Sushila was childless, even this binding factor was missing in their marriage. All these things make the writer thinking in terms of taking her away from that place, to care for her and protect her. He asks her to come away with him, but she refuses, saying that she was married, and that she had to think of her parents who would be heartbroken and humiliated if she took such a step. She says to the writer:

> I am not happy and I do not love him, but neither am I so unhappy that I should hate him. Sometimes, for our own sakes, we have to think of the happiness of others. What happiness would we have living in hiding from everyone we once knew and cared for. Don't be a fool. I am always here and you can come to see me, and nobody will be made unhappy by it. But take me away and we will only have regrets. (57)

Thus, Sushila seems to have matured considerably in those two years of her marriage. The writer does not seem to agree with

her because, as he says, he could not understand those who, though living unhappily, were afraid to break away from that existence because of the fear of something worse happening in that case. Then he realizes an important factor of Indian social life which lays two rules for men and women separately. A man could look after himself without seeking the approval of the society, but for a woman social approval and security was vital, "for a woman loves security as much as a man loves independence". (57) The story ends with these lines, "Somehow, I was not disappointed. I had never really expected her to come. Unattainable Sushila would always be more bewitching and beautiful than if she were mine." (66)

Like other works of Ruskin Bond, "Time Stops at Shamli" is also full of beautiful descriptions of Nature. Bond has captured vividly the beauty of the garden, surrounding grove and the water stream that flows nearby. But, like some other early works, this story also provides a beautiful description of rain. First, we have a description of the raindrops falling on the faces of the lovers sitting by the side of the stream and then a sensuous description of Sushila quite wet in the rain. Bond has drawn a beautiful picture of sky:

> The clouds were breaking and coming together again, twisting and spiralling their way across a violet sky. The sun was going behind the Siwaliks. The sky there was blood-shot. The tall slim trunks of the eucalyptus tree were tinged with an orange glow; the rain had stopped, and the wind was a soft, sullen puff, drifting sadly through the trees. There was a steady drip of water from the eaves of the roof on to the window-sill. Then the sun went down behind the old, old hills. (59)

When the rain came again at night, it came with all the fury it could muster.

Autobiographical elements have always played a very significant role in the fictional works of Ruskin Bond. We could see this in his love stories. Drawing upon his own experiences of love he has created some very moving love stories. Other major events and experiences of his life have also been recreated in his fictional

works. He was very close to his father who was the only emotional support for him in his formative years. He talks very warmly of the time that he had spent with his father in Delhi, Shimla and other places in his autobiographies. But his father does not appear significantly in his fictional works. His father died at the age of forty, and Ruskin was devastated at his death. He could not even attend his funeral because his father had died in Calcutta while he was in his school at Shimla. Nobody at that time had thought of arranging his journey to Calcutta. He could see the grave of his father many years later when he visited Calcutta. He, however, wrote a short story, "The Funeral" in which he describes a small child looking at the funeral of his father from a distance as he was not allowed to attend it. About this story which appears in *Time Stops at Shamli,* Bond writes:

> 'The Funeral' is the most recent story in this collection. It describes an incident that is as fresh in my mind today as it was almost fifty years ago. When it comes to loving and living and dying, there is no such thing as being modern and fashionable. Something will never change. (10)

The short story begins with the scene where the coffin of the child's father is lying before the burial. The emotions of the boy recorded in the story are Bond's own when the boy says that here lay the man who mattered most to him in the world. All others – uncles, aunts and even grandparents – did not matter, least of all the mother who was hundreds of miles away with another husband. He had not seen his mother, like Bond himself, since he was four years old, that was a little more than five years ago. Bond had lost his father when he was ten years old, and had separated from his mother at the age of four, though he was reunited with his mother after his father's death. About the boy's father, the writer records that his father was not a very sociable man. His world was largely confined to books, music, flowers, stamp collections, and more than anything else, his small son. This was true of Bond's own father. It was decided by the relatives present that the boy would not attend the funeral, as he was very small. The boy saw through the window

of his house the funeral procession moving out of the house. Then he slipped out of the house through the back door and reached the main road, keeping a distance from the funeral procession. He reached the cemetery and concealing himself, watched the ritual of the burial. He was choking with emotion, but since morning he had not shed a single tear, nor uttered a single word. A well-meaning missionary had consoled him with the words that God needed his father, but the boy was baffled: "And had God in the same way, laid claim to the thousands of men, women and children who had been put to rest in those neat and serried rows? What could he have wanted them for? Of what use are we to God when we are dead, wondered the boy." (13) When the coffin was put in the grave and covered with handfuls of earth, people began to depart. The boy who was hiding behind a tree felt lonely and frightened. He returned home the same way he had come there.

Thus, these works of Ruskin Bond introduce us to the writer in an ample way. All his thematic concerns as a writer are present in these works. Bond has been a subjective writer, drawing material for his works from the life he lived and the people he had known. Despite his European ancestry, his love for India and the Indian way of life are quite apparent in these works. We get a glimpse of his love for Nature, and also of his insight into personal memories, human emotion and occasional mystery.

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IJES, Volume LXI, 2025

An Analysis of Gender Dysphoria and Other Challenges in A. Revathi's *The Truth About Me: A Hijra Life Story*

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Abstract

An infant is labelled as boy or girl at birth. This labelling of gender is oftentimes mistaken for sex of the infant. Gender is a social construct while sex is a biological construct assigned to an infant at birth. At times, individuals sense that they do not identify with the sex assigned to them at birth. Even before they come of age, they are aware that they are different from others, trying to fit in. Society imbues its norms upon an individual making him or her unable to be themselves. It expects individuals to behave a certain way, like a certain thing, which is approved by it. Similarly, it is expected of a man to be attracted to a woman and vis-a-versa. Individuals that are attracted to same sex, identify themselves as gender non-conforming form or think that that they are of the incorrect sex, form a part of the LGBTQ community. The acronym LGBTQ stands for Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer. Individuals that identify themselves as are a part of this community. The term transgender from the acronym LGBTQ and their struggles are explicated along with personal experiences by A. Revathi in her autobiography in *A Truth About Me: A Hijra Story*.

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Keywords: LGBTQ, transgenders, identity, gender studies, society, sex, gender non-conforming, heteronormative society.

Introduction

Society is aware of the acronym LGBTQ and its full form Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer. Nevertheless, does society know and understand its actual meaning of it? Society is so ignorant that it has forgotten that the LGBTQ community is a part of it. In today's times, individuals have become more aware of the happenings around them but their own convenience. Individuals stare at a transgender begging for money in a Mumbai local but will turn a blind eye to fetch them employment. Transgenders have been an integral part of Indian culture since one can remember. The character of *Shikhandi* can be seen playing an integral role in the Indian epic *Mahabharata*. *Ardhanarishwara*is also considered important from an inclusivity stand point in society. Despite the transgender community being a vital part of Indian culture and society, it is always considered to be outsiders. However, after decades of struggle, transgenders have liberated and made their own place in society through legal and social battles.

The Truth About Me: A hijra life story is an autobiographical novel by A. Revathi a transgender activist and transgender herself. She has thrown light on the challenges that she, as a transgender had to face throughout her life and especially during her childhood and adolescence. A. Revathi is a transgender activist who joined *Sangama*, an NGO for sexual minorities as an office assistant and became the director later. Her work towards transgenders is noteworthy and through her work she has redefined the way society looks at them. She has provided them with employment opportunities alongside counselling for their mental health.

Through this autobiographical novel, *The Truth About Me: A hijra life story*, A. Revathi presents her personal experiences, struggles she had to face during her childhood for being an effeminate boy, sexual harassment, mental and physical torture by

her own family and a dilemma faced by her for being different. She has attempted to make the common man aware of the transgender community that is otherwise hated for their appearance and mannerisms. She has revealed how bullying in the childhood has affected adult life. *The Truth About Me: A hijra life story* (henceforth called *The Truth About Me*) has also uncovered the negative image perceived about the transgender community by the society. In her autobiography, A. Revathi tries to portray a clear picture about the transgender community and eliminate their misconception about them.

Overview

The Concept of LGBTQ:

The LGBTQ is an acronym for Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender and Queer. The Queer theory falls under the broader concept of this LGBTQ theory. It challenges heteronormativity, heterosexuality and examines gender non-conforming individuals' experiences in society, providing critical perspectives on the concept of heterosexuality and heteronormativity. It gives insights on how power structures in conventional hetero-centric society work.

The Queer theory is an interdisciplinary theory that questions the traditional idea of sexuality and gender. It elucidates on how heteronormativity has been forced to become an integral part of society, imbuing upon individuals how they have been caged into a certain societal notion. Queer theory throws light on the concept of gender being a social construct alongside penetrating deeper into the aspects like identity. The promotion of gender fluidity is a part of the Queer theory.

In the past, LGBTQ was a concept that was not discussed openly in public. Nonetheless, in today's times it has become a widely discussed and defined concept. The emergence of the Queer theory can be traced back to the 1980s making it a framework for evaluating the conception of gender and sexuality. Describing each term of the LGBTQ acronym, we get a clear understanding of the Queer theory. L stands for lesbian, that is, a homosexual female

who is sexually attracted to another homosexual female. G in the LGBTQ stands for gay, a homosexual male who is sexually attracted to another homosexual male. To explain further, B in the initialism stands for bisexual. These individuals are sexually or romantically attracted towards both males and females. T stands for transgenders. They are individuals who have a different identity from the sex they are assigned to at birth. For instance, an individual assigned male sex at birth might identify himself as a woman later in life, making a decision on becoming or transitioning as a female. Such individuals are called transgenders.

Transgender studies or trans studies form a part of LGBTQ theory. It is a term referred to individuals that do not conform to the sexual identity given to them at birth. They identify themselves as different from the rest. Society has assigned a certain role to every individual based on the sex assigned at birth. Transgender studies reject such societal norms and the roles forced upon the individuals. The primary focus of transgender studies or trans studies is how gender identity operates in various frameworks like social, medical, legal, and cultural. It also focuses on social acceptance, primary healthcare, and legal aid for the transgender community.

This research paper concentrates on trans embodiment, transphobia, self-determination and finally transition as different stages of acceptance of the transgender community illustrated with the help of the text *The Truth About Me: A hijra life story* (henceforth called *The Truth About Me*) by A. Revathi.

Identity Deprivation, Familial Rejection and Social Mockery:

The Truth About Me is an autobiography of A. Revathi, a transgender activist, author, and transgender herself. In this work of writing, she has brought forth her experiences as a transgender from childhood to adulthood, giving the readers a firsthand-like experience into her life being a boy with a woman's feelings. She has put forth the challenges transgenders have to face to find their own identity and before coming out. Along with identity crisis, she has portrayed the confusion one has to face regarding their sexuality

at an early age, deprivation of a normal familial and love life, and emotional support from the family. A. Revathi has revealed the bullying she had to go through as an effeminate boy from her friends and relatives, lack of acceptance resulting in progressing depression, and in a way, she also felt satisfied that she was perceived as woman-like which was her inner-most thought.

A. Revathi was born a boy who was named Doraisamy by her parents. Perceived to be different from other boys, seemingly more effeminate, was bullied by his male friends in school. As a child, his mother adored him and protected him as he was the youngest of all. He had two brothers who were uneducated but were working along with their father for their family business. Doraisamy and his sister were the younger siblings of the family. More than his sister,

Doraisamy took interest in the household work that was supposed to be his sister's responsibility as she was a girl. Here, it is observed that children, since childhood, are conditioned to do tasks according to their gender. Doraisamy was expected to study and help with the family business while his sister was expected to do household chores. Doraisamy would enjoy doing what his sister was supposed to do around the house. For instance, making a *kolam* design around the house. Conventionally, this task is supposed to be performed by women along with cleaning and cooking. He was bullied and beaten by his brothers for being girl-like and enjoying cooking and cleaning. It is evident from this, that his family never supported him for being himself but rather, beat him for it.

Doraisamy faced a similar scenario at school. Boys in the school tortured him rather than including and accepting him. They teased him for being girl-like and bullied him for the way he spoke.

> Since I wore the same uniform every day to school, frequent washing had worn down the seat of my shorts. My classmates used to stick a bit of rolled paper into the tear, clap their hands loudly and screen 'Post box!' I would go all hot and angry and hurl obscenities at them, as I have heard women do. This would set them off even more, and they would chant, 'Girl-boy!' 'Ali!' 'Number 9!' My heart would

> sink at these words, but I also felt faintly gratified and even happy that these boys actually conceded that I was somehow a woman. (Revathi, 6)

Though Doraisamy felt humiliated about the teasing by his classmates for being girl-like, he felt weirdly satisfying as he always felt like a woman from within and had not expressed it freely yet. He took this teasing as a validation from society of him being a woman. He was oddly pleased by the fact that his mannerisms were perceived by other people as that of a woman.

In his childhood, Doraisamy felt a sense of discomfort with himself. He felt awkward as a boy, not knowing what was happening. He felt more connected to girls and their games and chores rather than other boys and their rough play. Feeling perplexed, he did not know what was happening to him and why people around him behaved differently with him. From this it is evident that a sense of being different is always prevalent within the minds of persons belonging to the LGBTQ community. Due to lack of help, openness in the society and most importantly, family support, they are unable to find what they feel and at an early stage. Rather than understanding them, society is demeaning and humiliating them for being different.

Society perceives it as unnatural and is reluctant to offer help. The concept of Gender Performativity by the renowned poststructuralist Judith Butler was first introduced in the 1990s in her work *Gender Trouble* which is aptly applicable to this work of writing. She has studied how society penalizes an individual for being gender non-conforming or for non-normative gender expression in her work. From this instance mentioned above, it is evident that the people around Doraisamy, let them be his family members or friends, have always looked down upon him for being distinct. His articulation of being non-normative is considered as a sign of weakness making him a soft target for society.

As a child, Doraisamy (now Revathi) subconsciously, was always aware of his distinct behaviour. He felt more connected to his mother and sister rather than his brothers and father.

He liked dressing up like his sister and mother. In fact, he once stole his sister's clothes dressing up and behaving like her. His body language was that of a girl making him look feminine. For this, he was picked up and bullied by people around him, by classmates and shockingly enough, by his own teachers. This is evident from an incident mentioned in the work of writing, where he is called upon by his teacher and harassed.

> I think I was punished not just for being distracted, but also because I spoke like a girl, holding my body coyly like one. I remember being caned for 'not being brave like a boy. And since I did not play boys' games, I got punished by the PT teacher too. He would box my ears and yell, 'Are you a girl or what? Pull your trousers down, let me check.' He would make as if he was going to strip me and I would start crying. The other boys laughed. (Revathi, 6)

Under the guise of punishment for not performing well in class, the teacher beat Doraisamy for being feminine. His choice was not considered at all even in the smallest aspects such as games which is still the case. Compelled to play with boys, he would be scared rather than be happy about it. Gathering all his courage, when he would deny doing so, he would be sexually harassed by threatening to pull his pants down to "check" whether he is a boy. The Theory of Heteronormativity is discernible from the above example. It studies the behavioural patterns of males and females and fixates them respectively. Here, Doraisamy is a victim of the heteronormative society. It is observed that when Doraisamy denies playing games that are supposedly for boys, he is oppressed and abused by his teacher. He is expected to behave in a masculine manner showing manly traits.

This shows how society has ingrained hatred within itself for people who are different from the so-called norms. It wants a person to behave according to the set rules which might not always be correct. In contrast to humanity, discipline is perceived to be the first thing on a person's mind. Torturing a person for the sake of maintaining order is a greater virtue than humanity. Transgenders

are not even considered human by most of the world. They are either given God-like treatment or are insulted and penalized for being themselves.

It is also evident from this example that educational institutions hold a cis-heteropatriarchal mindset. Educational institutions are responsible for educating and developing a child in an allround manner. Yet, it has a negative impact on Doraisamy. Instead of accepting him for who he is and incorporating him seamlessly without discrimination, Doraisamy's school victimized him. This cis-heteropatriarchal mindset is prevalent in all Indian schools. This is the main reason why children like Doraisamy, who are not sure of their identity, are tortured. Educational institutions should embrace such individuals, incorporating the values of inclusion rather than marginalization.

Doraisamy's affinity towards his school was astonishing as he had the will to learn and become an eminent person one day. Nevertheless, he could hardly ever pay attention in class due to a constant anxiety of getting beaten up by older boys for being womanly. Again, the question on cis-heteropatriarchy in educational institutions comes forth. Other students, especially boys, made fun of Doraisamy as he was not like them. Educational institutions, especially schools, should sensitise their students to diversity, not only with respect to social classes and castes, but also with respect to genders. Schools are perceived to build and regulate order within their students and to sensitize them to the changes happening around them. However, Doraisamy's school does the opposite of what it ideally is supposed to do. It is evident from the following example:

> At school, I felt fear looking at the big boys, those in Classes 11 and 12. And they were always on the lookout for me. They had marked me out from the others.
>
> Whenever I walked past them on the school grounds, they would yell, 'Hey girl-boy' and hit me on the head with their balled-up fists. They would pinch me on my chest, and taunt me saying, 'When you played Chandramathi, what did you stuff your chest with? On the days this happened, I did not

> want to sit next to boys in my class, for I felt coy and shy. On the other hand, I felt drawn to the boys who did not tease me, and I imagined I was in love with them. This confused me- I was a boy and yet I felt I could love other boys. Was this right or wrong?
>
> I could not talk to anyone about my confusion. (Revathi, 9)

Doraisamy's restlessness regarding his identity or the lack of it thereof, is clearly explicated through this paragraph. His bewilderment about his behaviour and the feeling of immense mortification is caused due to lack of expression. He is unable to express his sentiment due to the absence of family's validation. His rejection by his own family is a typical trait where there is a family member that is gender non-conforming. His fear of rejection by family stopped him from freely communicating his emotions. Furthermore, Doraisamy feared the violence that he had to face for articulating himself.

When given a chance, Doraisamy would dress up as a woman and fulfil his wishes of becoming a woman. When he would be assured that no one was watching, he would dress up as a woman, admiring himself in the mirror. He did get such an opportunity to disguise himself as a woman for the *Mariamman* temple festival. He was offered the role of a *kurathi*, a female temple dancer. He was hesitant at first due to the fear of his family and the violence that would follow. Nonetheless, he convinced himself that he was doing something for the god therefore, his family would spare him the beating. Doriasamy, dressed up as a woman for the temple festival and performed at it, leaving the villagers wondering who the girl was. "To the world, it appeared that I was dressing up and playing a woman, but inside, I felt I was a woman." (Revathi, 9). His family did not have a problem with him dressing up for the festival; they had a problem with him dressing up as a woman. "Okay, so you dressed up, but why as a girl?" (Revathi 13).

Escape, A Fractured Delusion:

At puberty, Doraisamy started noticing changes in his body and felt an urge to become a woman. He felt like he was trapped in

a man's body and got repeatedly attracted romantically towards men. However, due to heteronormative behavioural burdens, he repressed his emotions. Constant repression of emotions led him to consider suicide as the only option to relieve himself of mental pressure. In the following example, due to the absence of familial and societal acceptance, individuals from the LGBTQ community are compelled to end their life. The members of society are not keen on making them feel a part of them. This is made obvious by Revathi from the example that follows:

> I wondered why God has chosen to inflict this peculiar torture on me, and why He could not have created me wholly male or wholly female. Why am I a flawed being, I wondered often. I might as well die. I thought. (Revathi, 14-15)

The Theory of Heteronormativity has been ingrained in the minds of individuals, may they be binary or non-binary, that a gender non-conforming individual is made to feel that they are flawed. Moreover, it has been a deep-rooted belief that an individual can be considered whole or complete only if they are confined to the heteronormative structure. Transgenders like Revathi, who were once Doraisamy or male, are not given an opportunity to feel normal even once, in their own skin. Such assumptions of society can devastate the mental well-being of an individual.

Unable to bear the burden of being a woman in a man's body, Doraisamy finally found a way to flee. On the pretext of attending coaching classes, he went to a place that had visited to find solace from the outer world, and met other individuals like him. He found this place safe enough to express his feminine side and behave naturally. This led him to the idea of fleeing to Delhi, where he discovered that he could become a complete woman by getting gender reassignment surgery.

Having run away to Delhi, he found his *guru* who accepted him for who he was which made him think that people here would accept him for who he was. And from then on, he started his new life with the *hijra* community. However, he had to face the harsh

reality of draping himself in a saree and begging from shop to shop. Doraisamy was delusional that this community was accepted with open arms by society. In contrast, the transgender community was much more hated than he was as a different child. They were considered inferior and yet people gave them money to receive their blessings. This puts forth an example of societal norms being dubious; changing things as per its convenience. Transgenders are given the status of God but are denied their right to live a normal life.

The Challenges of Transitioning: Assault and Deprivation from Basic Human Rights:

The transgender community is denied basic human rights such as access to medical treatment. Discrimination can be observed to be prevalent between transgenders and other gender conforming members of society, from the following example in the work of writing.

> There were many women and men occupying the beds, accompanied by their families. We realized that this was a regular hospital where people came to get treated for different ailments. Within the hospital compound, there was a smaller building with a red-tiled roof. We found that this was the place for our sorts of operations. (Revathi 68)

Apart from being denied proper medical care, transgenders face deprivation of lavatories. They are disallowed in public restrooms for both males and females as they are neither of the two genders accepted by the heteronormative society. Instead of helping them through their difficulties, people glance scornfully, commenting, "Why can't you be like other men?" (Revathi, 80). All they need is a glimpse of sympathy for them in the eyes of others along with the basic human right to relieve themselves.

After the gender reassignment surgery, Doraisamy came to be known as Revathi to everyone within her community. She even tried to find a job as a woman but was denied for being a *hijra*. Therefore, Revathi had to resort back to begging in addition to

doing sex work, where she was physically and sexually abused along with being looted. It is evident from an incident described by Revathi in this work, that the transgenders must face physical and sexual abuse at the hands of the people they sexually please for money. They are threatened to be murdered by them if the transgenders deny it. "But let me tell you this: wherever you go in this Mumbai, I'll follow you. And watch it, I am going to throw acid on your face" (Revathi, 98). Revathi recounts this incident in her autobiography as she wants the members of society to be conscious of the fact that it is not as easy as it seems for the transgenders to survive. They are denied job opportunities marginalizing them to the outskirts of the social system. They are presented with violence for the smallest thing they do like begging. The transgenders encounter assault even at the hands of the police authorities for no apparent reason which can be evidently observed in this autobiography.

> …those who were carried by police for no fault of their own, who were beaten with whips and lathis and stamped upon by police boots, had electric current run through their bodies, who could only leave after paying the police a hefty bribe. (Revathi, 133)

Transgenders are brutally tortured by the authorities who are supposed to protect everyone alike, leaving them unable to fend for themselves. Electrocution is the last resort even for someone who has committed a third-degree murder, however, the members of the *hijra* community must suffer it for the mere act of begging. As it is said, bribing makes everything possible, the transgenders must pay a hefty bribe to save themselves for crimes they have not committed. This leads to the understanding that society is not the factor that the *hijra* community must suffer at the hands of "…those who suffered from sexually transmitted diseases and did not receive proper medical care and therefore died". (Revathi, 133)

Another factor to ponder with respect to safety is that of medical aid received by women, let alone transgender community. It is evident from the above-mentioned example that there is

ignorance about transgenders physiology leading to consequent primary healthcare services provided to transgenders by the government. The transgender community fends primarily by begging and sex work. They are uninformed or even ignorant about the risks that pertain to unprotected sex which are sexually transmitted diseases, like HIV which can lead to death if proper treatment is not received. The government also shows no interest in the well-being of this community in specific as they are a minority.

Loss of Legal Entitlements due to Transition:

Like every citizen following the heteronormative structure has some rights in society, Revathi too was keen on achieving them. She wanted herself to be a complete citizen of the society that she lived in and legally. Her struggle for her rights set an example for the others of the *hijra* community, making them aware of their own entitlements. Besides buying a scooter for her daily commute, Revathi decided to procure a license making her way through legalities. This shows the sense of responsibility she had for society as presented in the following instance: "Like everybody else, I wanted to be law-abiding, so I decided to obtain a driving license". (Revathi, 224)

It is distinct that even though transgenders follow the legal path to become respected citizens of society, they are deprived of their legal rights as humans, compelling them to resort to illegal means. From *The Truth About Me*, A. Revathi makes it evident that transgenders are made to feel ashamed for who they are, besides denying them of any rights. She portrays it with the help of an incident in her life while getting her driver's license where the authorities denied her the license stating "We've never had such a case before. I can't grant a licence to this person…" (Revathi, 225). The transgenders are stigmatized by the ruling authorities for being who they are. Nevertheless, Revathi became successful in obtaining a license in her own, new name. This marks one of the greatest triumphs in life.

Gradual Acceptance by Family and Society:

Nothing more than family support matters to the LGBTQ community. The members of the community long for acceptance and support from their own family. Revathi's parents, like the parents of other transgender individuals, denounced her for being abnormal. Initially dismissing it to be a mere phase, they tried to take Revathi to various temples for cure.

However, when they realized that their efforts were futile, they disowned her as their child rather than accepting her for who she was.

It can be observed that once Revathi had started providing for the family needs with the money she sent home irrespective of the way it was earned, her parents started accepting her for who she was. Who once perceived Doraisamy as a son he never had, had accepted Revathi. "My father helped me with the ration card" (Revathi, 224) to obtain her driver's license where she is required to have her name on the ration card. Witnessing the support by Revathi towards their family, in contrast to her brothers, her parents suddenly realized her value leaving them no choice but to accept her as their own.

It can be witnessed through this autobiography that employment can change the way a trans individual looks at themself. The statement "I was given a job…" (Revathi 241) proves that Revathi was happy to finally be able to lead a life she had always dreamt of. Because of social organizations like Sangama that offer jobs to the LGBTQ community, its members have reinstated their status in society and their families. They feel accepted and wanted by their families and, to a certain extent, feel seen alongside being treated equally with the other gender conforming members of society, boosting their self-confidence. Transgenders are benefitted from such non-profit organizations as the counselling they offer makes them guilt-free of their being. This could be observed from A. Revathi's autobiographical work when she presents the readers with her first experience at Sangama.

> I felt that it was wrong to be a hijra, and to do sex work. However, working in Sangama I was beginning to realise that none of it was my fault— the way the world perceived me and refused to accept me, in the manner in which it snatched away my rights and made it difficult for me to earn a living except through begging and sex work, and violence it contemptuously inflicted on me. (Revathi, 244)

Conclusion:

"Just how dalits have come to oppose the violence inflicted on them" (Revathi, 247), the *hijras* also have overthrown the oppression and mistreatment given to them. The transgenders have partly liberated themselves and many alike by fighting personal, social, and legal battles. A. Revathi urges other gender conforming members of society to not turn a blind eye towards the LGBTQ community and especially the transgenders. They have and still are struggling to achieve complete liberation from the heteronormative and cis-heteropatriarchal society that stigmatizes and marginalizes them. A. Revathi expresses her gratitude towards organizations like Sangama that work towards empowering the sexual minorities like hers, helping them achieve their ambitions, legal and medical rights.

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IJES, Volume LXI, 2025

The Known and the Estranged: Interrogating Borders with special reference to Balraj Sahni's *Mera Pakistani Safarnama*

***Vivek Sachdeva**

Abstract

Besides ushering in communal and sexual violence, Partition uprooted millions of people from their homelands. People sharing the common culture were separated from each other. Owing to the identity politics, Partition made the homeland of many an estranged country. *Mera Pakistani Safarnama* written by Balraj Sahni, a famous film personality and Punjabi writer, is an account of his visit to his homeland in the post-Partition context. The paper studies the strong longing to revisit the 'home' that the author feels to visit the homeland and his mixed feelings in Pakistan, now a different country. Understanding the relationship between travelling and the inner self, the paper attempts to understand what kind of self emerges during the author's visit to Pakistan; it also discusses how the traveller's self evolves during the travel, and it also tries to understand the author's relationship with Pakistan and borders.

Keywords: Travel writing, self, memory, Partition, homeland, borders

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My friends living in this country
My own country I visit like a guest
My friends dwelling in their homes
My own home I visit like a guest.

—Ahmed Rahi (*Translation is mine*)

The Partition of British India has invited the critical attention of historians, literary critics, cultural critics and scholars from other disciplines. Countering the nationalistic discourse of the Partition, literary responses narrate Partition from the point of view of the ordinary people. Besides trauma, communal violence, sexual violence against women and the hardships of migration, the loss of home is another recurring theme in Partition literature. Anjali Gera Roy states that there is an estimate that fifteen million people were displaced during the Partition, who had no other choice but to abandon their homelands forever. Partition separated people from their homelands and also from people with whom they shared their language, culture and heritage. Uprooting people from their homelands implanted a permanent feeling of homelessness and a strong longing for home in their minds. The magnitude of the incongruity of the decision to divide a country into two on the basis of religion is so large that it has done no good for either of the two nations. Consequently, many literary writers, historians, feminists, cultural critics and literary critics have questioned making new borders and drawing new boundaries during the Partition. Moving away from 'historian's history,' in Gyanendra Pandey's words, many historians have used literature, films and oral narratives to understand what Partition meant to those who suffered and how they remember it after so many years of the historic event. Historians such as Ayesha Jalal "distanced "themselves from Partition's "traditional archives", which they rightly consider as subservient to colonial or nationalist political agenda" (Casting 156). The contribution of Ritu Menon, Kamla Bhasin, Urvashi Butalia and Veena Das has given a fillip to understanding Partition through memories of survivors, breaking the silence in the mainstream historiography of Partition.

While there are accounts of those who witnessed Partition, suffered the violence associated with it and survived, there is another facet of memory and Partition that is equally important a source to understand the Partition. Tarun K. Saint has discussed political memoirs to divulge the untold story of the Partition to "bring to the fore some of the moral ambiguities pertaining to Partition violence and its afterlife" (Saint 75). Alok Bhalla has written in the introduction of his anthology of partition stories, "I have put together this anthology of stories about the Partition not in order to exorcise the past, but in the hope of initiating an ethical inquiry into the history of my age and place" (x). Jill Didur's book *Unsettling Partition: Literature, Gender, Memory* aims to explore "how literature and literary criticism play a role in bolstering or questioning the production of hegemonic nationalists' imaginaries in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh today" (6). Bhalla's attempt to initiate an "ethical inquiry" also hints towards interrogating the romanticised communal or 'national' identities, to question borders and boundaries, to understand how the Partition impacted the lives of common people and created a gulf between an individual and the homeland. With these ideas in mind, this paper focuses on a travelogue written not by a politician or a diplomat, but by a famous film personality and a noted Punjabi writer. This paper studies *Mera Pakistani Safarnama*, written by Balraj Sahni, to engage with the theme of longing for home, interrogating borders in post-Partition times. This paper tries to understand what aspects of Pakistan the author discusses in his travelogue; what kind of author's self emerges while narrating the account, and how he negotiates with the reality of two nations – India and Pakistan in post-Partition times.

Travel has been considered to be one of the ways to enlighten the human mind. Its fruits were "the adornment of mind and the formation of the judgement" (Fussell 39). While writing on travel writing, Fussell makes a clear distinction between home and abroad; self and other. In his understanding, traveller is etymologically "is one who suffers *travail*" (39). During a journey, while exploring the unknown territory, the traveller also explores himself/herself.

Every travel is undertaken for a different purpose. Some travels are undertaken for pleasure, and sometimes, travel is a means to explore new lands, people and cultures; at the same time, some travels are undertaken to satisfy the philosophic quest for the unknown, and some travels are undertaken to revisit the known territory. In every case, travel is deeply linked to the inner self. The attitude of the traveller while gathering visual impressions of the unknown territory, people and culture is influenced by the location and gaze of the traveller. The self of the traveller gets extended when a traveller writes down the experiences. The self is formulated not only during travel, but also while writing the travel experiences. This establishes a relation between the traveller's self and the author's self. Marguerite Helmers and Tilar Mazzeo almost open their book saying that as "travelers write about their experiences, they capture more than descriptions of place: they reveal something of their time, place, personality, circumstances, and prejudices" (1).

Travel and travel writings both are mediated through the consciousness of the traveller and "through social and literary ways of seeing" (Helmers and Mazzeo 3). In most of the European travel writings during the Romantic era, one finds a strong articulation of the self while exploring the unknown and exotic. Thus, questioning the idea of objectivity in travel writing while they are travelling away from home to explore the unknown world. In European travel writing, the orientalist self is formulated while exploring the unknown, the exotic or the *terra cognito*. These travellers have described new landscapes, new flora and fauna, new landscapes and new people. The traveller responds to people, their culture, their lifestyle and also to the civilisation. How and what a traveller responds to defines traveller's relation with the land he/she is exploring.

If in travel-away-from-home, there is an urge to explore the new or the unknown, in travel-back-to-home, the purpose is different. In travel-back-to-home, the person wishes to go back to the roots. While travelling in outer space, the traveller visits the familiar territory and also the space of memory. The moment or time frame

when the travel takes place and the purpose behind the travel determine the nature of the traveller's self, which are important parameters to understand a travel account, making time and space coming into a unique conjunction during the venture. The distinction between travel-away-from-home and travel-back-to-home is central to understand the travel account given by Balraj Sahni.

Mera Pakistani Safarnama by Balraj Sahni is a travel-back-to-home account, where home is understood beyond the four walls of the house and is associated with the homeland and memories associated with it, from which the author was separated during the Partition. The premise is that in the memory of the author exists the idea of 'home,' which includes the cultural ethos that the author used to share with people across the border. Like the archetypal *homo viator*, Balraj Sahni travels 'home' to revisit the land of memories, culture and heritage he belongs to. Going back to time and space, he is going back to the roots of his identity. *Mera Pakistani Safarnama* is an account of his visit to Pakistan thirteen years after the Partition. The travelogue is marked with his longing for the lost home. The author reveals a strong desire to revisit the 'home' that he has been separated from by the Partition. The enthusiasm and excitement that the writer expresses in his travelogue demonstrate his longing for his homeland. Balraj Sahni's desire to visit Pakistan is also rooted in the urge to go back to his roots, to revisit his homeland. In the opening paragraph of the travelogue, Balraj Sahni expresses his desire to visit Pakistan because he feels strongly attached to the land, its people and culture. While convincing his mother about his proposed visit to Pakistan, he says, "Mata ji, please think for a minute. I'll go to Pindi, I'll go to Bhere, I'll see old houses, I'll see my childhood friends (9)." (*Translation is mine*)

Mera Pakistani Safarnama is an account of Balraj Sahni's visit to Pakistan in 1962. He was born in 1913 at Bhera in Sargodha, now in Pakistan. He had a Bachelor's degree in Hindi and a Master's degree in English literature. Before taking acting as a career, he had taught at Shanti Niketan and had worked with Mahatma Gandhi.

After coming back from England, where he worked as a Hindi radio announcer, he became an active member of the Communist Party and joined the Indian People's Theatre Association. Towards the later years of his life, he started writing in Punjabi. His two travelogues are extremely popular. One is *Mera Pakistani Safarnama* (My Travelogue to Pakistan) and the other is *Meri Russi Yatra* (My Travelogue to Russia). He started his film career in 1946. A year later, when the partition took place, Balraj Sahni was living in Bombay, now Mumbai, where he continued to live after the Partition.

His description of Pakistan is marked with a strong sense of nostalgia. When the train is about to enter Pakistan, he is curious to know what Pakistan would look like. He wonders - "What would it look like? Would there be forces on both sides? What kind of border would it be? Will there be barbed wire? How long would it be?" (*Translation is mine*) However, in his memory exists the landscape of Pindi or Rawalpindi and the congested city of Lahore. As a student, he never identified himself with the materialist culture of Lahore. As compared to the simple lifestyle and values cherished by people in a *mofussil* town like Pindi, he found Lahore as a city of depleted moral values, deceit and shallow appearances. But while visiting Pakistan after Partition, when his train reaches Lahore, a sudden sense of elation overcomes his earlier biases against the city. There is a feeling of homecoming. He says, "It is not memories that have woken up- there is only a deep sense of settling down, some sense of relief; as if a bird, after having flown far and distant places in the scorching sun, hungry and thirsty, rests in its nest" (20). He does not know "from which unknown quarter, love and respect have sprung" (20) (*Translation is mine*) for the city. He talks about the lush green grass of Lahore, big healthy trees with dense shade, its fertile soil, roses in full bloom, which he had experienced for the first time when he came to Lahore to study from Pindi.

The visual impressions he describes while visiting various sites become an important component of the way cities and towns have

survived in his memory. In his visual impressions of the location lies the memory which has shaped his experience of beauty and love for the city. He revisits the places of his memory while seeing different sites in the city, such as in the lawn with Doctor Nazir, the Sikh National College, the shrine of Mian Meer, Shalimar Bagh, where he smoked for the first time, and he also talks about his cycling through the city, hoping to find his love. He exults looking at Peshawari tongas (tanga – the horse cart), which were different from Lahori tongas. His description of the landscape, trees, flora and fauna becomes integral to his memory and identity. Simon Schama establishes connections between memory, landscape and home. In his scheme of ideas, trees and forests constitute lasting visuals of the landscape, which contribute to creating an idea of home. According to Schama, "landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock" (Schama 7). Landscapes are integral to imagining a nation and culture. As in the realm of memory, personal memory intertwines with the collective memory, by visiting the places associated with his personal memory, the author revisits all those sites that form his cultural memory. While travelling, as the topography is "mapped, elaborated and enriched as a homeland" (Schama 15), the author revisits the landscape of memory, the cultural landscape and his inner self.

Among various places that he visits, there is a special mention of his visit to Heer's house. Before Balraj Sahni actually visits Heer's house, he expresses his strong desire to visit the village of Heer. He has narrated his visit with such excitement that it also builds the reader's excitement to read about his visit to Heer's house. Balraj Sahni's strong urge to visit Heer's house shows his deep association with the culture of Punjab. It is not merely his romanticisation of the lost culture or nostalgia for the bygone days, but it is also part of his literary sensibility and Punjabi identity. Like Sufi poetry written in Punjabi, *Heer* is an integral constituent of the shared culture of Punjab. Verses from *Heer* are sung passionately even today on both sides of the border. *Heer* is a part of the folklore

of the entire Punjab i.e., East Punjab (India) and West Punjab (Pakistan). Balraj Sahni frequently quotes from *Heer*. In Balraj Sahni's description of Heer's house, quoting verses from the literary saga by Waris Shah, survives the literary heritage of Punjab, which is personal, yet collective. He appreciates the work for its literary qualities and also invokes John Keats to describe Waris Shah's spontaneity as a poet. *Heer* survives in the collective unconscious of Punjab as an embodiment of love, a personification of beauty and a strong feminine voice that questioned the religious priests during the trial in Waris Shah's narrative. She is the embodiment of the spirit of Punjab. Visiting Heer's house, the author is going back to his cultural roots, 'home' and identity. Besides Waris Shah, he extensively quotes from Punjabi and Urdu poets in his travelogue. Balraj Sahni writes, "Khurshid could make out that, most of all, it was the pull of the Punjabi language that brought me to Pakistan…" (171).

Home is not always understood in relation to the hearth or the physical place. Home is also how we understand or imagine ourselves, and "the role and the self we choose to occupy" (Graulund 55). Balraj Sahni finds himself at home with his Pakistani counterparts, irrespective of the fact that he was meeting most of them for the first time. In the author's imagination, the idea of 'home' or 'homeland' is not confined to a village or a town; rather, it includes the entire cultural landscape of Punjab, half of which was divided during the Partition. It is his deep sense of belonging to the culture of Punjab that defines his position and attitude while visiting Pakistan. Balraj Sahni's travel account brings to the surface separation from homeland as one of the major casualties of Partition. The idea of home and absurdity behind uprooting someone from the homeland has been aptly portrayed in Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar*, Krishna Sobti's "Sikka Badal Gaya", Joginder Paul's *Khwabro* and Manto in "Toba Tek Singh."

Rune Graulund in "Travelling Home: Global Travel and the Postcolonial in the Travel Writing of Pico Iyer" invokes Sidhartha Pico Iyer to develop his understanding of the relationship between

travelling and the self. Citing Iyer, Graulund says that "travel is not an exercise that includes discovery and the advancement of information of the Other; rather, real travel only takes place once we become aware of his own position in relation to an exterior world that does not, in fact, have very much (if indeed anything) to do with the foreign, the different and the Other" (Graulund 59). No travel or traveller is pure, innocent or unmediated. It is shaped, determined and influenced by the traveller's attitude. Travelling and writing the travel account both formulate the self in relation to the Other. The authorial self of the traveller expresses itself in the travel account, which the reader becomes aware of while reading the travel account.

The nature of the traveller's self is different when somebody visits a known place or travels back to home from the traveller's self who explores an unknown territory. As the former traveller travels deep into the familiar landscape, the layers of history and memory unfold. What makes Balraj Sahni's travel account unique is that the territory Balraj Sahni travels is not imagined as *terra incognita* - the Other; rather, in this case, the author is well familiar with the territory. As the territory is associated with his past and lives in his memory, it can be seen as an extension of the author's self. It is the territory situated in his memory that he desires to re-visit. He is not travelling the unknown Other; rather it is the known Other. Balraj Sahni is familiar with the location, territory and the places he visits, but it has been otherized during the Partition. Separating the author from his homeland, the Partition has caused a fracture in his inner self. The author seeks to reconnect with the memory of what he has been separated from. His nostalgia, a strong desire to revisit his home, the sites of memory and the cultural landscape determined the nature of the traveller's self and the author's self. The self of the author, while re-visiting the known, is in a state of constant unravelling. In such a state, the boundary between the personal and the outer, the subjective and the objective and the Self and the Other is blurred.

However, his excitement to visit Pakistan is also punctuated with apprehensions given to him by the political reality. There are practical and bureaucratic challenges he faced during his visit. He is supposed to report at the police station of every town or village he visits, reminding him of the Indian national identity he was carrying in Pakistan. The travel account also brings our attention to the challenges posed by national identities and borders. The borders drawn between the two countries have permanently separated him from his home(land), which he can reclaim only in his imagination, not in reality. Balraj Sahni expresses the distance he feels. He says - "I was now in Pakistan, in the country of Muslims, in a foreign country, *ikgairmulkvich* (16)." Balraj Sahni calls that land his *pushtainiwatan*." His own *watan* (homeland) is something he has kept alive in his memory, which has been estranged into a *gairmulk* (a foreign country). Thus, Balraj Sahni's visit to Pakistan is similar to visiting the imaginary homeland, experienced more at the level of mind and emotions. It may be a known territory, but alienated; his homeland, but now a different country; something he belongs to, yet not his own. There is a gap between the imagined homeland and reality, a concomitant of history, identity politics in the region and implementation of the two-nation theory. These questions bring to the surface the conflict Partition has created between him and his homeland.

The memory of the Partition riots contradicts the memory of home, nostalgia, resulting in a constant dialectic of making and unmaking of the self. His account reveals that memory does not operate in a linear fashion. Sometimes, in memory exist opposing episodes and incidents. On a couple of occasions, he also writes about the violent past, the bloodshed caused by Muslims and the women they raped. Consequently, he becomes conscious of his identity being different from theirs. Caught in the conflict between Self and Other, his cultural identity clashes with his religious and national identities. However, the progressive ideology he cherishes helps him counter the surging emotions based on identities and the memory of the violence. There are contestations between cultural

identity, national identity and the ideological worldview. Multiple voices intersect one another in his self. The sensitive, self-critical and reflective Balraj Sahni is aware of the challenges that the Partition has thrown at both nations. Scott D. Juall discusses that displacements in time and space, travellers and travel writers reflect on themselves and also the experiences they have while travelling. "The process of reporting on encounters with Others thus encourages writers to mediate equally on themselves" (3). His constant engagement with the Other formulates his Self. He negotiates with the memory of Partition violence and idealism. Thus, the self of the writer is not homogeneous, crystallized or fixed; rather, it is a state of fluidity that constantly forms and re-forms, as conflicting elements clash in his mind. He oscillates between his national identity (Indian) and cultural identity (Punjabi), and there is a conflict between the humanitarian worldview and the traumatic memories of Partition, anger against Muslims and his liberal humanist ideas. The journey brings out his inner conflict with all its ambivalences.

In *Mera Pakistani Safarnama*, Balraj Sahni's nostalgia is not merely for the home town, but for the common culture that people shared before the Partition. Balraj Sahni visits various cities in Pakistan, such as Lahore, Jhang, Pindi, Taxila and Sargodha. He maps the geography, culture and history of Punjab in his travelogue. He identifies with the people of Pakistan. The common culture, literary heritage, and landscape constitute his cultural memory. The cultural ethos of Punjab and the trauma of separation from his homeland make his longing for his homeland stronger. He does not merely crave to see his ancestral house, but the entire geographical and cultural landscape of Punjab, mixing the personal with the collective. The more he travels deeper into Pakistan, the more he becomes aware of the loss that the Partition has caused him. In the undercurrents of elation and excitement, the pain of losing the homeland is palpable. The irrational act of carving out two countries torments him. The political and diplomatic problems that both countries are facing make him question the borders drawn following

the two-nation theory. Ahmed Rahi, the famous Pakistani poet, came to see off Balraj Sahni at the Lahore railway station. After witnessing the emotions written on Balraj Sahni's face, Ahmed Rahi penned down his emotions in a poem titled "To Balraj Sahni."

You, from the foreign land, who once lived in my country
The pain that is mine is the pain that is yours
Your soul screamed leaving this place
My heart cried coming from there
What greater grief could there be
You crave for this place, I crave for that
How do we count the broken hearts
Millions here and millions there
How brutally the nest was destroyed
a straw here, a straw there.
And an equal number of them are here

—Ahmed Rahi

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IJES, Volume LXI, 2025

Echoes of the Epics :Popularity, Poetics and Politics of Negotiating Narratives in the Mythical Fiction of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Koral Dasgupta, and Kavita Kane

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Abstract

There has been immense impact and influence of ancient Sanskrit epics- the Ramayana and the Mahabharata on Indian culture and civilization since its inception. The greatest epics have shaped our sense and sensibility, refined manners and morals, navigated the direction of our life and living, inspired our vision and ignited our mission. Sanskrit epics still continue to contribute in the development and dissemination of popular contemporary culture in India and across the globe. Its essence and presence is evident on our thoughts, language, literature, digital media, adaptation, translation, Transcreation, retelling, transformation, cinema, television, serials, web series etc. Myth is used as a new voice of feminism and as a tool for social transformation in this age of globalization. Contemporary Indian English fiction blends myth and modernity to highlight current social evils, intellectual pollution and cultural corruption. It also tries to cure and curb injustice, exploitation, discrimination and oppression through reinterpreting and revisiting mythical narratives that support and patron patriarchy.

The proposed research paper will delve deep into the relevance and richness of our Sanskrit epics and their presence

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and proliferation on our society and culture across the globe. It will examine the influence of Sanskrit epic texts on Indian English literature especially fiction. It will also explore the politics of portraying mythical narratives in our popular culture which includes language, literature, cinema, film adaptation, translation and digital media. The present research paper will evaluate the retellings of the Ramayana and the Mahabharta in the fiction of Chitra Banerjee, Kavita Kane and Koral Dasgupta. The dominant and prevalent myths still continue to transform our life, system and society. But some of the writers use the same mythological narratives to counter the hegemony and hierarchy, and to subvert stereotypes.

Keywords: Ramayana, Mahabharata, Mythical Narratives, Retelling, Politics, Culture, and Literature.

Introduction

Myth has been an integral part and parcel of our life from the history of human civilization in some way or the other. Our greatest epics are the unbounded treasure of myths which influence, impact and inspire us since its inception into our culture and literature. S. Anand Raj in his research work *Multi-Visions in English Language and Literature* opines that:

> Issues of present world find their parallels in the myths and fables of the past which lend new meanings and insights through analogy reinforcing the theme. By transcending the limits of time and space, myths provide flashes of insight into life and its mystery. They form an integral part of the culture consciousness of the land, with their associative layers of meanings, their timelessness and relevance to contemporary issues. (52)

The portrayal of female characters such as Kunti, Draupadi, Sita, Surpnakha, Urmila, Mandodri, Tara, Urvi etc. in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata accepted and celebrated in the past but post modern narratives challenge and critique traditional depictions which have created through patriarchal lens. There has been a paradigm shift in depicting divine female characters from 'tretayug' and

'dwaparyug' to the modern age. The most renowned and contemporary Indian English writers like Chitra Banerjee, Koral Dasgupta, Kavita Kane, Amish Tripathi, Devdutt Pattnaik, have been trying to subvert the mythical and exploitative gaze and conventional image of women characters through which they have been recognized in the society. The women characters of the epics long have been silenced and suppressed, subjugated and exploited due to the domination of patriarchal narratives which have established superiority of male over female and treated them as servants and slaves in the family and society. We often notice such portrayals in films, web series, serials, cartoons, customs, advertisements, anywhere and everywhere. Traditional echoes of epics can be heard and noticed across literatures and cultures. The reformistic and transformative steps have been taken to deconstruct patriarchal notions and emotions of myths and provide autonomy and agency to these female characters who have been deliberately discriminated and unnecessarily tormented. These women writers are the champion of change and become the voice of the voiceless.

The present research paper explores the character of Ahalya, Daraupdi, Kunti, Mandodri, Sita and Tara from feminist, psychoanalytic and subaltern perspectives. The paper also critiques the poetics, popularity and politics of portraying panchakanyas in the best and the greatest epics of the world namely the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. It also highlights the complexity of politics that has been involved in negotiating mythical narratives in Indian English texts and contemporary contexts.

Koral Dasgupta is one of the most popular, prolific and prominent writers in the 21st century who is known to the world for her magnum opus The Sati Series. Panchkanya became her passion and obsession and that's why she decided to engage with these five silenced and subduded characters in our great epics. It is a common beliefs among people that if anyone would take the names of panchkanyas, they will be free from their sins.

Ahalya Draupadi Kunti Tara Mandodari tatha.
pancakanyasmarennityammahapatakanashaka.

(Ahalya, Draupadi, Kunti, Tara and Mandodari— the virgins five remembered regularly destroy the greatest failings).

The verse says memorising these five maidens gives humans freedom from severe sins.

Indian mythology has a huge impact on art, culture, literature, education, politics of India. Where The Sati Series of Koral Dasgupta has provided a ground for reconsideration of the marginalised female mythological figures. The female mythological characters have been freshly portrayed in the modern context representing the contemporary power dynamics. The research have focussed on evolving discourse on gender by using Derrida's deconstruction as a tool to dig deeper to revile layers of meanings these texts has to offer. Contemporary writings of these mythologies offer various perspectives on the standardization of the customs and cutures. Dashupta clarifies the difference between two terms namely panchkanyas and satis. Koral Dasgupta states:

> The panchkanyas of Hindu mythology were Ahalya, Kunti, Draupadi, Mandodati and Tara- while the five Satis were Sita, Sati, Savitri, Damayanti and Arundhati. The distinction of two different title arose primarily because various versions of the epics have taken the liberty to celebrate women as per the popular beliefs of an era and, of course that of the translators. 'Sati' has been defined by a school of thought as the women's unconditional devotion towards and dependence on their men. It casts the women as loyal followers strongly supporting the vision of their men or helping them overcome social and emotional complications. These women are depicted as sacrificing and selfless, yet invincible in drafting their own position of strength and supremacy.

Most of the Indian writers hesitate when they narrate the stories of the our mythical female figures. The writers often try to escape their sexuality since it is considered unethical and taboo. However, Dasgupta freely and frankly talks about female dreams and desires, sexuality and sensuality of both Draupadi and Kunti. This integral part of female sensuousness has not been kept aside. She aesthetically and graphically depicts their sexual encounters to exhibit

it is the part and parcel of their physical desires and emotional gratification. They are not saintly figures but they are the human characters made of bone and flesh getting swayed by their physicality and carnality. There is interaction and encounter between Kunti and Lord Indira whether in dream or in reality. This ethereal experience has been described beautifully: "At the unconditional attention, all perceptions of beauty deserted me; suddenly, it didn't matter whether I had large eyes or plump lips or a voluptuous body. I was the muse of the lover; I was the need of his heart. I was perfection, whatever that meant." (Kunti 6). The way Koral Dasgupta portrays this sexual exposure is indicative of the desire to love and get loved by irrespective of socio-cultural boundaries. When it comes to Draupadi, her carnality gets aroused when Arjun is around her. It is expressed passionately by the novelist. "Standing close to him, I could hear the thumping of his heart. They were the beats of my life too, [...] Arjun's burning desire to savour life was Draupadi born to quench again and again." (Draupadi 95-96) The terms 'beats of life' 'burning desire', 'quench' and 'savour' reflect they feel their sensuality and sexuality. Such graphic expressions show the carnal desire, depth and diversity of the physical and emotional bond they share. The intensity and ecstasy of their passionate feelings is something that makes these characters as humans. These expressions of Kunti and Draupadi also exhibit how they negotiate with their identity as a lover.

Dasgupta goes beyond common , often mono- dimensional depiction of mythological female figures. She portrays five virgins as complex human beings with struggles, desires, and vulnerabilities of common man and woman. This humanization provides for a deeper psychological sensibility and sensitivity which connect with their angst, aspirations, sorrow and suffering. Dasgupta's psychological perspective is her use of first-person narratives and a close third-person perspective that focuses on the characters' emotions and ideas. This stream-of-consciousness style, permits the readers to observe the internal conflicts, chaos and decision-making ability in everyday life. By adopting female consciousness,

Dasgupta subverts patriarchal interventions of these myths. She examines how these female characters navigated societal demands, exploitations, and their own sense and sensibility within limited gaze and image. Dasgupta's novels critically explores the psychological odyssey of women seeking and placing their autonomy in the ambience that often sought to reject it. She explores how these characters, despite facing innumerable obstacles and plethora of problems, gain courage and confidence and make choices that reflect their own identity and individuality.

The Palace of Illusions : A Novel (2008) and *The Forest of Enchantments* (2019) by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni have been the ground breaking and pioneering novels in the area of negotiating mythical narratives. Helene Cixous wrote that, "Woman must write her self; must write about women and bring women to writing, women must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history by her own movement" (254). Chitra Banerjee has been trying to provide autonomy and agency to women through these mythical narratives so that complexities of characters and themes, and politics of representation, gender discrimination, love, marriage and sexuality may get new orientation and interpretations in the current scenario. The contemporary women writers like Chitra Banerjee, Koral Dasgupta, Kavita Kane and Saiswaroopa Iyer become the voices of epic characters and reinvent and reimagines epics in a way that compel us to think differently and understand gravity of the patriarchal policies which have silenced and suppressed half of the population in the name of gender. They try to educate, empower and emancipate women of our society through their landmark works and changes can be caught in the society where women participation is rapidly increasing in all walks of life. The image of 'new woman' has been created by Chitra Banerjee in the characters of Sita and Draupadi through the subversion and deconstruction of conventional concept of woman that is passive, submissive, slave and secondary.

> The works of the women authors who subverts and reconstructs the mythical narrative, thus, rejects the past/

> previous patriarchal structure completely in order to create new history for the women in myths as well as for themselves, thereby creating the "new woman" through the body of their texts. Writing hence is a sort of escape from the material reality to create a new reality – the author's own consciousness of her body, her own text, which creates the new space, a textual space that moves towards a revolution required for a world free of the expectations dictated by the society. (Buragohain & Gogoi 313).

*The Forest of Enchantment*s has been written from the perspectives and lenses of Sita and it has been aptly translated as '*Sitayan'* in Hindi. It also explores the other marginalized characters such as Surpanakha, Kaikeyi, Urmila and Mandodari and provides agency and autonomy to such silenced characters. Chitra Banerjee has given different direction and dimension to the event of 'agnipariksha'. Now plethora of people who are conscious of the liberty and loyalty of women have started questioning each and every scene which silence and subjugate female characters in the name of gender. Gone are the days when the people of our society accepted all the wrong doings against women. Sita makes Ram aware of the consequences of this serious action :

> If you reject me now, word will travel across Bharatavarsha, and men everywhere will feel that they, too, can reject a wife who has been abducted. Or even been touched against her will. Countless innocent women – as innocent as I am – will be punished because of your act. Is this dharma? Is that what you want?

Ram failed to treat Sita as an individual and he always looked at her as an obedient and subservient wife. Sita realised this bitter truth later through various incidents and accidents. She felt that she was considered as an object without any dreams and desires, passion and potential, and not as a subject who could decide and determine things for herself.

Sita refuses to come to the palace after Ram discovers that Luv and Kush are his sons and future heirs. Her elation was very

high but it got punctured when she came to know that Ram was planning for another '*agnipariksha'*. Sita strongly reacted against this conspiracy and realised that her action to return to the palace through retest would set a wrong example for the generation to come. Divakaruni has created Sita in the contemporary gaze and image which is the subversion of her traditional notion of a female character. She emerges as the strongest voice and asserts her individuality and identity.

The entire Ramayana is full of such incidents and events which need to addressed in the context of current scenario so that fresh interpretations may shape the society in a better way and uproot the superstitions and social evils particularly pertaining to women in the society we live. Multiplicity of meanings is the need of the hour so that the plethora of perceptions and perspectives may be added for the inclusive picture of a single event. It will also provide autonomy and agency, individuality and identity to the silenced marginalised female characters. Amish Tripathi has also done this in his popular novel *Sita: The Warrior of Mithila.* His portrayal and perception of Sita is entirely different from what we see and observe in the Ramayana.

Chitra Banerjee, in her novel *The Palace of Illusions,* rewrites the Mahabharata from Draupadi perspectives which are times challenges and subverts the patriarchal notion of the greatest epic. Generally, it is perceived that the Kurukshetra war took place because of Draupadi. Draupadi is held responsible for all the death and destruction in the war fought between Pandvas and Kauravas. But this issue is being questioned, challenged and subverted in her narratives.

> Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* and *The Forest of Enchantments* are representative of a new perspective in Indian feminist scholarship. They, together with many other recent myth-fictions are striving to locate an indigenous root for Indian feminist scholarship which seeks to shy away from its colonial legacy. The search for a new identity result in the retellings of the great Indian epics from the perspectives

> of Draupadi and Sita. The inadequacy of the Western feminism to understand the aspirations and reality of Third World Women's experiences, and its attempt to generalize them have led Indian feminist writers, even diasporic Indian writers like Divakaruni to examine their own cultural past, history, and myths to enrich the Indian feminist repertoire. (Mazumder & Bheemaiah, 47)

The influential work *Karna's Wife: The Outcaste's Queen* made Kavita Kane a renowned writer. She is committed to challenge the convention and reinvent the literary tradition by deconstructing mythical characters. By doing this she had proved her points and reimagined the subaltern and marginalised female figures of the Mahabharata. She has negotiated with the dominant mythical narratives and provided new dimension and directions to our greatest epic. Uruvi, asserted her individually and identity through her unconventional choice and subverted the social dynamics and prevalent patriarchy of that time. She was a committed woman who fought for her own lover, Karna, created her space and scope, and secured fir herself a safe position in the society. She was, however, not willing to give up her own values on the shrine of her community. Kane has not portrayed her as a divine figure but as a human. Uruvi has been depicted as more practical and professional as we are in our society. Silenced and suppressed Uruvi has given sufficient opportunity to modernise Karna's story as well as the downtrodden and deprived sections of our society.

Feminism is both a movement and an ideology that represents an effort to achieve the goals of equality, dignity, rights, emancipation, and empowerment of women by applying various creative paths and means.

When we think of the Ramayana the things that come to our heads and hearts are the 'Maryada Purshottam' Ram, the most revered, loyal and devoted woman Sita, and the self-sacrificing brother Lakshman, we also remember the evil intentions of Kaikeyi and monstrous devil Ravan. But often we forget to talk about the most devoted and dedicated wife of Lakshman – Urmila. She has

been the most marginalised character of the Ramayana because we have seen the entire story through the lens of Rama and Sita. No one has given enough space and scope for her penance and sacrifices. Kavita Kane highlights the character of Urmila and gives her voice which has been long silenced and suppressed. In Sita's Sister, she narrates the Ramayana from Urmila's lens. Kavita Kane becomes the champion of the women characters who have not been given any attention and identity.

Chitra Banerjee, Kavita Kane and Koral Dasgupta have tried their best to give us the new lens to look the other sides of the narratives. The fresh perspectives that we get from these female writers change our perception of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Banerjee deals with the popular and dominant characters like Sita and Draupadi and make them the protagonists of the stories which they weave. While Koral Dasgupta and Kavita Kane select least known, subaltern and silenced characters who have never been recognized for their immense contribution to the family and society. At times, their narratives differ but at times they move in the same directions. The objectives of these three female writers are similar but their styles, attitudes and approaches differ significantly. Banerjee transforms the story and subverts the stereotypes which has created hierarchy in which men are superior to women. Draupadi and Sita in Divakaruni's fictions are not portrayed as mere victims, nor they are presented as ideal women. They are human beings with all the emotions; they have their joy and sorrow, success and failures. What makes them stand out in these new readings is their ability to speak up, their desire to chase their dreams, their agency to rise from the ordinary to the extraordinary, and, most importantly, their self-respect. They represent the new women of India in the 21st century who no more wants to be represented as merely broken figures in a patriarchal social structure, but desires their own voices to be heard.

However, Koral Dasgupta does not differ and deviate from the conventional story but her perception is unique and incredible. She adds psychological depth, desire and diversity to the characters of

panchkanyas in her Sati Series. Kavita Kane challenges the patriarchal and prevalent narratives and provides voice to the voiceless, autonomy and agency so that our attitudes towards marginalised characters may change and we may perceive the epics from different lenses and frameworks. She works on social justice and tries to provide it to lesser known female figures from our epics. They also differ in their narrative style, depiction of themes and story telling .

Conclusion

The feminist revisionist fictions subvert the patriarchal voices and provide the readers with feminist perspectives. They offer re-imagined re- contextualized narratives of Indian epics in female voices. The term and 'Feminist Revisionist Fiction' followed by some of the contemporary writers who opens started a new theoretical technique 'Revisionism'. Contemporary feminist writers are of the opinions that Revisionism is one of the narrative styles which are used toretell and reconstruct the epics and other mythical texts. It provides voice to the unspoken side of the mythological texts. In this patriarchally orchestrated society, everything is narrated from the points of view of dominant male. In traditional narratives women were depicted as submissive, slave and servant who may be as fragile things and weak creations who may be exploited mentally and physically. Chitra Banerjee, Koral Dasgupta and Kavita Kane are the revisionists who work on the idea of social justice and the representation of the female figures in literature. The politics of portrayal is so profound and paramount that these writers struggle hard to be the voice of the voiceless and champions of the downtrodden.

Chitra Banerjee, Koral Dasgupta and Kavita Kane look at our ancient socio-cultural mythical stories with fresh lens that propels multi dimensional frameworks and highlights multiplicity of truths. Their works emphasize on the exploration of new India which attempts to create a dynamic unconventional identity without any discrimination. They seek to explore and create and the female-centric literary tradition to assert their subjectivity, individuality and spirituality. The larger sections of human history, literature and

philosophy have observed the world through male gaze and consider women as the other, subservient and slaves who are born to bear the children, and look after home and hearth with their back-breaking labour.

However, with the inception and advancement of feminist perception and passion and the rise of women's literary voices, there has been constant efforts to deconstruct and revisit these mythological narratives. Women writers like C. Banerjee, K. Dasgupta and K. Kane have attempted to rewrite mythical narratives with an anti-patriarchal sensibility, evaluating the themes of autonomy and agency through their literary works. These interruptions have provided space and scope for the creation of narratives that emerged from the lens of female characters rather than through the male-dominated perspective of conventional myth-making. The literary proclamation of these narratives signifies a form of resistance against the systemic erasure of female identity and individuality.

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IJES, Volume LXI, 2025

Tribal Literature and Culture: Reflections on Ecological Consciousness

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Abstract

The voices of the tribal people, their cultural heritage and ecological consciousness are getting recognition worldwide through translation of the tribal literatures into English. The concept of ecocriticism in literature was first introduced in English literature in the late 1970s by William Rueckert in his article titled "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism". Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, and Lawrence Buell are the pioneers of ecocriticism. Thus, it is a late 20th century development in literature, nevertheless its roots or the depiction of relationship between nature and human may be traced back to the Elizabethan Age. Ecological consciousness, conservation of natural resources such as water, vegetation and forests, have been a recurrent and forceful theme in the Tribal literature in the forms of oral literature, songs, ballads, dance-drama and so on since time immemorial. The tribal people may be unlettered but they certainly are not uneducated as far as the notion of interdependence, harmony sense of association with the ecology are concerned. The aim of this research is to reflect upon voices of

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ecological concerns, imprudent urbanization and the sense of revolt against incessant attempts of modernization and deforestation reflected in the tribal culture and literature. These issues will be analyzed with special reference to the poems of Haldhar Nag and Anuj Lugun. Some references to other tribal literary forms and cultural practices will also be included to analyze these issues at length.

Keywords: Tribal Literature, Tribal Culture, Ecocriticism, ecological consciousness, resistance

Introduction

Ecocritical consciousness in literary writings and critiques of literary works in the light of interrelation between ecology, nature and human have been relatively recent trends that emerged in the 1970s, specifically in American literature. Thereafter, its focus gradually expanded to the critical enquiries of Indian literatures and literatures of the European countries. The whole notion of ecological sensitivity and its depictions in literature lie in the resistance to anthropocentric culture motivated by the medieval views of Christianity. The departure of men from nature with their established superiority have several mythological and religious roots in "Judeo-Christian teleology", that propounds the prerogative of human beings over all elements of nature. The medieval Christian story of the creation of this world – making men all powerful and their ability to name birds, rivers, plants and planets – further established human dominance, their distinctiveness and the duality of man and nature. This view is against the eastern theological beliefs and practices of the antiquity, especially the pre-Christian Greek theology (White Jr. 8-9). The intellectualism of Greek theology shares certain common ground with its oriental counterpart. These theological conceptions are in sharp contrast to the voluntarist Christian theology of the West, which implies the conquest of the whole universe by human beings, thereby treating of natural objects as if they were mute and dumb without life (10-11).

The Enlightenment Humanism, though good and fruitful in several ways, estranged the connection between human beings and the natural world entangling them together as the exploiter and the exploited – the articulate and active human and the mute and passive nature. With the spread of scientific advancements, especially after the eighteenth century, the whole world became an active agent with teleologist attitude to exploit the existence of natural world for serving the human purposes without any theological and moral constraints – of course there were some sporadic resistance to this approach and advocacy for animism and interdependence of all beings (12-14).

In the 1990s, some notable scholars such as Lawrence Buell, Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, who started working collaboratively, established ecocriticism as a movement and literary genre. These scholars were associated with ASLE. Glotfelty became the first academician to hold the position of Professor of Literature and the Environment at the University of Nevada, Reno. This university also housed the Centre for Environmental Arts and Humanities from 1995-2002. All these developments played a decisive role in the establishment of this influential literary movement. This genre of literary theory received momentum with the publication of some seminal works such as *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996) by Glotfelty and Fromm, *The Environmental imagination* (1995) by Buell (Chandalia 55). This movement may be understood as a literary and cultural theory that explores the relationships between literature, culture and ecology. It examines the ways in which literary representations of ecology and nature, interaction and complex relationship between all forms of species and the relation between natural world and human culture are understood. Glotfelty defines it as 'the study of the relation between nature and the physical environment' (qtd. in Rangarajan *Ecocriticism: Big Ideas and Practical Strategies* 5). Since the inception of this genre, the effort to define it has brought into consideration a wide range of socio-cultural, ethical, environmental

and anthropocenic issues within the premises of ecology. Defining the terms, Terry Gifford points out that '[E]cocriticism is a form of cultural critique which, in searching out the motives and consequences of human interactions with the natural world, also investigates the ways in which literature reflects, shapes and challenges dominant attitudes towards the environment (Gifford xii-xiii).

Nature and all the species of this world have been treated as mute objects only serving as the means to achieve the human ends. This is what Lyotard means while writing about ecology as "the discourse of the secluded". This phrase can aptly be applied to ecocriticism, as the main focus of this movement is to make ecology articulate. Nature has been treated as a marginal subject and rendered as a mute participant in human discourse of culture, especially after Enlightenment Humanism. While ecology and ecocriticism are suggestive of embeddedness and interdependence of all species and objects, environmental criticism suggest the central position of humans 'surrounded by everything that is not us, the environment', and this stance is in sharp contrast with the implication of the word "eco" (Glotfelty xx). However, it is difficult to clearly demarcate the lines between ecocriticism and literary environmental studies, as they address similar issues, the focus and purpose of their critical paradigms differ partially. While the former explores the reciprocal relationships between human culture and the natural world, as represented in literature, the latter examines how literature reflects and shapes cultural attitudes toward the environment.

The Indian Tradition

The Indian tradition of ecocriticism can be traced back to the publication of *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya* (1989) by Ramchandra Guha. The other notable scholars include A. Raghu and K. Ramachandran who contributed immensely to the exploration of intersection between literature, culture and environment. However,

the systematic and formal beginning of this tradition could be possible with the induction of the course on Tamil Poetics by Nirmal Selvamony at Madras Christian College in the year 1980. *Persona in Tolkappiyam*, a translation of Tamil texts based on his eight-year research in this field, served as a major source to the course. Later on, this course was renamed as "Ecoliterature" in 1996. The launching of the Indian chapter of ASLE, formation of a well-organised group OSLE-India (Organization for Studies in Literature and Environment - India), and Selvamony's publication of the three booklets entitled *tinai-1, tinai-2* and tinai-3, which contained substantial discussion of Tamil traditions of poetics, arts, culture and landscape, further strengthened the establishment of Ecocriticism as a literary genre in India. Some of the important figures such as Scott Solvic, Watson Soloman, Murali Sivaramakrishnan, Rayson Alex and Selvamony himself, associated with all these academic advancements, contributed immensely to the evolutionary phase of ecocriticism (Alex 2). The ecological aesthetics came to fore with the translation and appreciation of the classical Tamil texts in this phase. The whole Upanishdic and Vedic knowledge system, besides their religious profundity, embraces the whole world as one big family and abounds in teaching of respecting the five elements of nature. Ragini Kapoor aptly uses the term "Eco-Indo Aesthetics" 'which combines both Indian Aesthetics and Ecological Aesthetics to appreciate nature and its yet-to-be-comprehended rules' (60).

There is a similarity between primordial nature of orality of the tribal literature and age-old depictions of man's association with nature in Indian literatures and scriptures. Ecological consciousness and resistance to degradation of nature and ecological disorders form an essential subject matter in almost all forms of tribal literature. The themes of ecological balance and harmony abound in the Indian scriptures and classical literature. And, this harmony and genuine concern of natural degradation and ecological imbalance find strong voices in most of the tribal literatures with

a proclivity for poetic composition. This tendency may be explained in terms of "the specific history of Adivasi poesis rooted in orality" (John 458). Poetry of Anuj Lugun and Haldhar Nag, translated into English by Dr. Pragya Shukla and Surendra Nath, respectively, gives an impression of the orality due to their syntactic structures flow of words, and conversational-narrative style.

Anuj Lugun, born in 1986 into a Munda family, has been conferred upon several prestigious awards including the Sahitya Akademi Yuva award in 2019. The resistance to imbalance in the ecological symbiosis of the tribal life and culture underscores most of Lugun's poems. Attempts of ecological disturbance takes on a variety of forms including the British missionary activities, colonial oppressions and so on. The theme of "Women of Ulgulan" by Lugun, as the title suggests, is the revolution against British colonial oppressions. "Ulgulan" stands for Rebellion. But, embedded with this theme is the love for the land and its ecological symbiosis. And women play a crucial role in establishing this harmony. Lugun depicts a vivid image of the routine works of women, in which an inherent love for nature can be seen. Women rise in revolution when they perceive a threat to their land and to their ecologically balanced ways of living. The water vessels they balance on their heads are compared to the earth. There is a connotation of their significant role in balancing the earth itself. Lugun succinctly point out the solidarity of the revolutionary women:

> 'Women of revolution/To Lovers of Earth/Appear beautiful/
> And formidable/To enemies of Nature.'

Another poem titled "I Wish to Sing One Last Song for My Land" powerfully deals with the theme of resilience. The whole poem serves as an allegory of the struggles of the tribal people for preserving the harmonious coexistence of all living and non-living beings. The poem presents a deep concern for the ecological imbalance and natural degradation due to industrialization and urbanization. The unexamined human expansion and intervention into nature lead to a disturbed wildlife resulting in animals invading

human settlements and agricultural lands. The root cause of this conflict lies in the priority given to economic growth and urbanization at the cost of ecological sustainability. Similar theme of harmonious subsistence with nature in the traditional tribal life and the catastrophic effects of modern life style is well depicted in the poem titled "World of Hearths". The harmony with nature and ecological interdependence are stressed by the repetitions in the following lines:

> 'Fire aplenty for the hearths /Wood aplenty for the fire /
> Trees aplenty for the wood'.

And the belongingness of the poet to this tribal world and a sense of deep roots of tribal culture are emphatically asserted in the opening lines of the poem.

Again, a strong resistance to unscrutinized modernization and the ecological disorder caused by expansion of cities and human interference into nature is depicted in the poem titled "Should You Decide to Come". The poem challenges those who posit a threat to the ecological integrity of the tribal culture and landscapes. The poem is a strong voice for the biodiversity and tribal religious beliefs that support it, while categorically indexing the consequences that people were likely to face if the eco-cultural integrity is disturbed.

In his poem, "Adivasi", Lugun protests against the labels of identity and categorization imposed upon the tribal communities, and the stereotypes and misconceptions attached with them. The indigenous people were viewed by the British colonizers as primitive, a subject who needed to be civilized and this same view persists even today. The contrast between the mainstream theological and religious principles, and the spontaneous understanding inducted in the tribal lifestyle and reverence for ecologically harmonious coexistence are strongly voiced in this poem, entailing the futility of the civilizational missions operated for unifying the tribal communities with the mainstream society. The symbols of religious significance, deep philosophical renderings

of the *Bhagvadgîtâ*, etc. of the mainstream are naturally induced in the tribal society without any religious theorizing and preaching. Thus, tribal communities do not need any religious sacrament of the mainstream to lead an ecologically conscious life and this is well depicted in the poem titled "Their Symbols".

Despite the growing urbanization and imprudent, incessant deforestation drives in the name of development, the poet has pinned his hope for the conservation of nature and ecology. The belief in and hope for ecological balance still lingers deep in the heart, and this is the theme of the poem "Environment":

> 'Some feelings/Remain hung still, on the branches/Some blessings/Abide still, on the boughs/Some prayers/Lie still, on the branches/Some people/Still revere the trees.'

The poem "Our Love" may be interpreted as an honest appeal to the modern people to establish connection with our earth and the whole ecology. This understanding is necessary for the survival and harmonious coexistence on this planet. He asserts that those who can connect their lives with trees, rivers and birds, will have to wage a war against the threats looming on their survival and existence. The poet declares his "strife" against the forces that cause a threat to nature that is muted and subjugated by the humans for its material gains. The metaphor of "smell of Mahua" in the poem is a powerful symbolic assertion of the significance of nature in the lives of the tribal people. Their habits, works, relationships including love, are incomplete without their metaphorical counterparts in the vast web of ecology. This is well connotated in this poem, when the poet feels the fragrance of Mahua in the lock of her beloved, and this fragrance makes her "enchanting" and "captivating". Nature's powerful presence in life and relationships and its indispensability make it an integral part of the tribal culture.

Tribal cultural traditions and environmental concerns are embedded in Lugun's poetry with a strong note of resistance to violation of ecological balance and recuperation of environment.

The narrative structure of orality in his poems powerfully presents his challenging tone to the human interference, urban expansion and incessant industrialization that posit a serious threat to ecology and human survival itself.

Nature, collective memory of ancestors and mythology are distinctively embedded in the poems of a Sambalpuri poet, Haldhar Nag, born in the Bargarh district of Odisha, India. He is a renowned tribal folk poet, who was awarded Padma Shriin 2019. "The Old Banyan Tree" is Nag's first publication in a local magazine. The poem is about interconnection between rural life and nature. The stature of the tree is very high in the eyes of society and the poet himself. The tree stands as a witness to all the rituals of human life from birth to death for generations, besides being the witness to various phases of life and activities. The imagery of tree as a mute witness reminds us of the contrast between human vocality and muteness ascribed to all the elements of nature by humans:

> 'It sees, it knows, it hears, it finds/But it speaks not a word/
> It stands like a mute witness.'

The tree is ascribed the qualities of a human being, thereby challenging the prerogative of humans' abilities, and their specialties. The poet depicts a deep sense of ecological consciousness by ascribing various roles to the tree in various seasons, substantiating the notion of animism.

Another poem by Haldhar titled "River Ghensali", depicts the symbiotic relationship between man and nature. The journey of the river from its birth to death or loss of existence into the sea is paralleled with journey of life from birth to death.

> 'You are heading to the deep seas,/I too am heading to rest
> in peace.'

Such ecological symbiosis finds voice in several of his short poems. The river in the poem originates in the poet's village, Ghens, Bargarh district of Odisha. Poems such as "Cuckoo" and "Bulbul" show poet's deep empathy for all living creatures on this

planet. The notion of animalism is supported in the conclusive lines of these poems.

The Poem titled "The Dove is My Teacher" is a significant poem that symbolically presents the human greed for expansion and development. Human's trap of development is treated as a subtle threat to the harmonious coexistence of the man and the natural world. The whole ecological balance in nature is disturbed due to man's greed. This poem gives contrasting images of love, affection and sense of fidelity among birds on the one side and greed, traps and illusion that are characteristics of human life on the other. The poet points out in the poem in a very subtle way:

> 'Male and female doves are divine soul(s)/ In the body called tree they dwell./Illusion is the trap that's strung;/ Grain is greed and children attachment,/Hunter is the time of doom.'

The poet advocates that the cyclic seasons are for the benefit of all creatures on the planet. He portrays all seasons and depicts how important it is in the life of every living being. In the similar vein, a long poem titled "The Year" presents the cyclic changes of the seasons with an ecopoetic consciousness depicting the specific changes and how such changes are essential for life on the planet. One example of this is the poem titled "Make No Silly Excuses", where Nag points out the significance of seasons and allegorically deals with human's selfish demeanour and arrogance that make them question the very system of ecology:

> 'According to season comes wind and rains, /According to season summer and winter. / You merely think of filling your stomach, / But for the good of the world is the weather.'

The theme of use of chemicals and pesticides and their hazardous effect on human and animal lives run throughout the poem titled "Warning". The poet, thus, presents how the use of foreign methods of farming harmfully affects the ecological system:

> 'Chemicals and pesticides have polluted water, air and soil, O! / Down with illness and diseases, death beckons at half the age.' And again,
>
> 'Discard chemicals and hybrid rice, / Farm with cow-dung manure'

The poem "Mahua Tree" powerfully depicts the interdependence of human and nature. The significance of Mahua tree in human life is limitless ranging from firewood to cook food to treatment of ailments of various kinds. The poet confers it a high esteem and treats it as the God. This depicts the tradition of nature worship that is essential part of the tribal culture. People's interaction with nature, their survival and symmetrical relationship with it and maintenance of ecological health are some of the basic elements of tribal culture and thus, it is inherently transferred from one generation to the other. Their lifestyle confirms to their survival, interconnectedness and interdependence without positing any threat to the ecological balance.

The poet, in the poem titled "The Spring Tune", gives a vivid image of various kinds of flowers and flowering plants during the Spring season and with how they are related to the rhythms of everyday life of human beings. Nag also shows his deep-rooted respect and gratitude to the forest for its essential role in sustenance of human life. He thus speaks:

> 'We bow in reverence, Goddess of the Jungle / At your feet we bow, O Mother… Fifty six crore life forms you feed, Goddess / You feed O Goddess.'

The repetition in this stanza signifies as well as reinforces the importance of nature for all living beings and the unconditional respect for ecology in the tribal culture, as the very existence of life depends on it.

Representation of ecological consciousness and ecological concerns is not restricted to poems only. It is strongly depicted through various socio-cultural traditions, folklore and folktales popular among tribal communities. In this paper, two specific

instances of oral literary traditions of the Bhil tribal society of Rajasthan, that represent the deeply rooted tribal-cultural worldview of ecology, are discussed briefly. Gavari – a folk-dance drama – popular among the tribal communities of Rajasthan, depicts a ritual worship of goddess Gauri and Lord Shiva. Its theme is the origin and growth of this universe, and civilization and agriculture. According to the Bhil mythology Shiva and Gauri are the sources of the genesis, destruction and regeneration.

Bharat – a folk ballad –is sung for nine days continuously in villages and hamlets, depicts strongly the theme of rational utilization of natural resources. This is in sharp contrast to the unending modernization and displacement of ecological balance with industrialization. Through the story of a young Bhil Dharia, the ballad presents an extremely relevant contemporary message that unexamined exploitation of natural resources for the development has catastrophic consequences. Moreover, this loss cannot be supplemented with human efforts to restore natural order – it needs intervention of the divine forces. The crux of the ballad is the magnitude of challenges human beings have to face for the restoration of the ecological balance (Chandalia 57).

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IJES, Volume LXI, 2025

Unfolding History of India in Kirsty Murray's *The Lilliputians*

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Abstract

Kirsty Murray's *The Lilliputians* (2010) is a historical novel that is an enticing blend of historical facts and imaginative storytelling. Murray weaves the fictional narrative and real events together as she portrays the time of colonial India during which a troupe of young Australian performers visits India as well as other parts of Asia. The story of the children's theatre group visiting the Asian subcontinent is based on a real incident of the fall of the Pollard's Lilliputian Opera Company. This paper aims to explore Murray's in-depth research and vivid depiction of India during British colonial rule while adeptly integrating the journey of her characters, the Australian theatre group children to India during this period.

Through the discussions among the troupe children, the readers gain insight into the complexities of turbulent colonial times in India. The nationalistic sentiments and sacrifices of Indian nationalists involved in the fight for

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freedom are laid bare through the dialogues among the story's characters.

Keywords: History, India, Australia, Culture, Colonial, British

Kirsty Murray, an acclaimed and award-winning writer from Australia, is known for her remarkable literary works written for children and young adults. Kirsty Murray's novel *The Lilliputians* (2012) is one such interesting novel written by her that transports the readers into the early twentieth century when India was under British rule. The story of *The Lilliputians* is set in 1909-1910 when the troupe of a children's theatre company travels to different places under the guardianship of Mr. Arthur Percival. Kirsty Murray galvanises this story with the characters of young girls and boys who are stars of Percival's Lilliputian Opera Company. *The Lilliputians* is a historical novel based on a true incident of the falling apart of a children's theatre group named Pollard's Lilliputian Opera Company. The children, who had travelled from Australia with manager Arthur Pollard for tour performances in July 1909, refused to stay with him while in India in February 1910 and tried to earn their fares to return to Australia.

This research examines Murray's *The Lilliputians* as a piece of historical fiction that portrays the time of British colonial rule in India when a children's theatre group from Australia visits India to perform. Though she is from Australia, Murray has done a commendable job in researching about the places and historical details of India during colonial rule and has intricately weaved them with the main story of the children's troupe.

Writing historical fiction is an arduous task that demands a lot of research. Murray's depiction of the children's troupe navigating colonial India illustrates the depth of research and creative skill that the genre of historical fiction demands from the author. There has always been a debate about whether historical fiction is worthy of recognition in the literary arena or not. Some critics have criticised historical fiction on the ground that it does justice neither

to history nor to fiction, while others have spoken in favour of this genre. Harry E. Shaw (2005) says that "historical fiction is problematic because historical narrative can never be complete" (Hatavara 241). Herbert Butterfield defends the genre of historical fiction and writes about the "symbiotic" relationship between history and historical fiction:

> Whatever connection the historical novel may have with the history that men write and build up out of their conscious studies, or with History, the past as it really happened, the thing that is the object of study and research, it certainly has something to do with that world, that mental picture which each of us makes of the past the historical… novel is a 'form' of history. It is a way of treating the past. (qtd. in Groot 48)

Godwin also speaks in favour of the form of historical fiction. He believes that the writer of historical fiction "collects his materials from all sources, experience, report, and the records of human affairs; then generalises them; and finally selects, from their elements and the various combinations they afford, those instances which he is best qualified to portray, and which he judges most calculated to impress the hearer and improve the faculties of his reader" (qtd. in Groot 18). This shows that well-researched details form an important component of historical fiction and Murray has undoubtedly done her research seriously. Murray did quite a lot of research before she took to writing her engrossing novel. Murray mentions how she chanced upon this incident related to children's theatre group when she had gone to meet Peter Freund. It was during her visit to Peter Freund, an Australian theatre historian, that he took out an essay entitled 'Children Half Price – An account of the demise of Pollard's Lilliputian Opera Company' from his drawer and expressed his opinion that someone should write a children's book about it (Way and Macintyre 14). When Murray read the essay, she was enticed by it but she knew the complexity of working on it. She knew that the hefty research was a daunting task but "Peter's challenge

haunted" her (14). Murray feels indebted to Peter Freund for presenting her with this "challenge" (Acknowledgements 323). She felt it was a compelling subject matter and after doing her research, she came out with her enthralling novel *The Lilliputians*. Kirsty Murray speaks about the complexity of writing historical fiction: "... writing historical fiction isn't simply about following a single story line. It requires so much more so my research ranged across dozens of related topics. And there's something very spooky about the way things can start to connect up when you get in the right headspace with a story. Almost like magic . . ." (Way and Mclntyre 15).

Historical novels are not just about history but about the writer's magic of conjuring up some events and characters to take the readers into a realm of the past to live it, which is interesting and engaging. Historical novels "add flesh to the bare bones that historians are able to uncover" and provide a clearer indication of past events and circumstances, though all the details may not always be entirely accurate (Phillpott 1). On talking about writing *The Lilliputians*, Murray says that she could not find many secondary sources on the Empire theatre circuit in Asia, but from her research she discovered that many British and Australian theatre troupes had toured the British Empire, including Asia, India, and South Africa. She found only one history book, *The Pollards* by New Zealand historian Peter Downes that covers the Pollard Lilliputian Opera Company, providing valuable but limited information on the 1909/10 tour she was to write about in her novel. Murray was also helped out by Downes as he provided her with additional material for her research (Way and Mclntyre 15). In the Author's Note of *The Lilliputians*, Murray gives some details about the incident which is the inspiration for her storyline of this novel:

> This novel is based on a true story... Percival's Lilliputian Opera Company is based on a real theatre group (Pollard's Lilliputian Opera Company)... Drawing from court records and newspaper reports, this novel is a reconstruction of

> their last, disastrous tour... In July 1909 Arthur Pollard boarded the steam ship.... In his charge were 29 children aged between seven and eighteen years of age who had been trained to sing and dance popular music-hall hits of the era.... Eight months later, in February 1910, the tour ended in scandal when the children walked out on their manager.... In the months that followed, the children attempted to earn their fares back to Australia while complicated legal proceedings raged in the High Court of Madras. (319)

Kirsty Murray accessed the State Library of Victoria (SLV), travelled to India and took up the residency at the University of Madras in India to deepen her investigation of the historical backdrop for her story. Murray shares that apart from SLV, she was fortunate to gain access to material in the performing Arts Museum collections (Melbourne), the Nehru Memorial Library (Delhi), the British Library (London)" (Acknowledgements 324). Murray expresses her gratitude to Asialink which "in conjunction with the Australia-India Council" funded her residency at the University of Madras and provided her "with an opportunity to discover India" for herself because of which she could "retrace the route that the children had taken in 1909-1910" (324). Murray visited locations in India that the children had toured, which she thought were essential to visit for authentically depicting the places she referred to in her novel. Though many British records of the time period were missing, she was able to access some court records in Chennai (Way and Mclntyre 16). Murray has done commendable work in writing a novel that unfolds the journey of the young stars of Percival's Lilliputian theatre group as they travel to different places and have varied experiences. During their stay in India, the children come to know about certain aspects and incidents related to India's struggle for freedom from colonial rule.

Murray brings forth the nationalistic spirit of Indians and the ongoing stirrings for freedom through the dialogue between the characters of the story. She refers to various actual historical incidents that took place in India during the colonial times when

the Indians were yearning for their freedom from the rule of the British. A reader who is interested to know more about the references in detail needs to research about them using other resources. It is rightly said that "for the more curious of us it [historical novel] leads us to historical sources so that we may learn the true facts about the events or people that we have just read about" (Phillpott 1). The day the Lilliputian troupe performs at the Minerva Theatre in Calcutta, it is half empty. The children are confused with this reaction from the Indian audience so Lionel and Charlie, young troupe members share with them the probable reasons for this. While reading the newspaper Lionel expresses his concern about the season not being good and says, "Since the Alipore bombing, people aren't keen to come out at night. Didn't you notice? Even the babus and nabobs and boxwallahs, all those rich Indians, the ones who would have come ordinarily, even they stayed away" (Murray, Lilliputians 156). Poesy, another troupe member, is surprised to hear this and Lionel, trying to show his knowledge, elaborates upon the incident about two English ladies "blown to smithereens" as a bomb was thrown in their carriage (156). Charlie interrupts Lionel saying that those people did not want to kill the women but their target was some British judge or someone other dignitary. Charlie further exclaims that the Indians want independence and Lionel lays emphasis on the fact that they want freedom from British rule. As the discussion goes on, they talk about the Indian nationalists and speak about Ghosh who was "being painted as a freedom fighter" (157). Lionel then reads out from the newspaper the statement given by the babu lawyer in praise of Ghosh: "Long after he is dead and gone, his words will be echoed and re-echoed not only in India but across distant seas and lands" (157). Murray has used the actual statement made by Chittaranjan Das, Aurobindo Ghose's Defence council in the Alipore Bomb Trial, 1909. He had used this statement while presenting his defence arguments in court which said: ". . . long after this controversy is hushed in silence, long after this turmoil, this agitation ceases . . . .Long after he is dead and gone

his words will be echoed and re-echoed not only in India but across distant seas and lands" (Heehs 180-81). By having the boy read out Chittaranjan Das's tribute to Ghosh from the newspaper, Murray not only highlights a significant moment in India's nationalistic struggle but also uses a real courtroom statement to lend authenticity to her work of historical fiction. Alipore Bomb case was an important trial in the history of Indian nationalism. A plot had been hatched to put an end to the life of Douglas Kingsford, the Chief Magistrate of the Presidency Court of Alipore. He was considered to be "ruthless and cruel" by the people of Bengal (Choudhary 32). Sri Aurobindo Ghose was one of the major accused in the Alipore bomb case, the other two being Khudiram Bose and Prafulla Chaki. Bose and Chaki, on the evening of April 29, 1907 threw a bomb in the carriage thinking it to be of Douglas Kingsford but they mistakenly threw the bomb in the carriage in which a mother and daughter were sitting (Choudhary 34). Instead of Kingsford, the two English ladies got killed. While Chaki committed suicide, Bose was hanged; both parted at a young age of eighteen from this world (Choudhary 34-35). Sri Aurobindo Ghosh was also accused by the British government for his involvement in this bombing plot but he was finally released from prison (Choudhary 35). Aurobindo Ghosh was a name "that the British knew to be on the forefront of the swadeshi and boycott movement" (Hoda, ch.1). Through the dialogue between the troupe children, the readers gain insight into the sacrifices and challenges faced by the Indian people involved in the fight for freedom. They become aware of the resistance of the Indians against colonial oppression and also of their nationalist spirit.

On one occasion, Mr. Arthur expresses his resentment as he says that the "Swadeshi business" is adversely affecting their show in India (Murray, Lilliputians 158). Poesy questions Tilly, a troupe member, about it as Tilly tries to explain to her: "They are boycotting British goods . . . Anything British for that matter. They think if none of the Indians buy British things or come and see our shows, that it will drive the Britishers out of the country" (158).

The Swadeshi Movement emerged in 1905 as a reaction to the Partition of Bengal. It was rooted in the ideology of "*Atmasakti*" or self-reliance, symbolising an assertion of national dignity as well as resistance to colonial policies of the British. Indian nationalists realised that the partition was a deliberate strategy of the British to create communal divisions. The movement sought both to oppose the partition and to revive indigenous industries through the boycott of foreign goods such as cloth, sugar, and salt. It witnessed mass participation, including women, students, and rural communities, and involved acts such as the public burning of foreign goods and the tying of rakhis to promote Hindu-Muslim unity. Over time, the movement evolved to include acts of passive resistance, with participants withdrawing from colonial institutions such as British-run schools, courts, and administrative structures. According to Hoda, Swadeshi was the "call to boycott all that was perceived to be British—goods, services, schools, colleges, institutions, courts, administration, ideas, customs and conventions" (ch. 1). The children discuss the patriotic fervour in Indians for their freedom. Lionel expresses his resentment for not having audience for their show. He says, "We'll have no audience while the Indians are marching up and down the streets, protesting" (159). Mr. Percival is also disturbed as the audience was not turning up to watch the performance of the Lilliputian troupe, thinking them to be white-skinned British people and this meant loss in business.

Murray deftly integrates real historical events seamlessly into the narrative as the reader comes to know about these major historical events through the conversation of characters in the story about these incidents. She brings forth the aspect of the Swadeshi movement, the patriotic sentiments of the Indians and the rise of Indian nationalism during the colonial times in India.

On the visit of the children's troupe to Allahabad, a sorrowful incident happens as their matron, Miss Thrupp's infant nephew, Timmy Thrupp, passes away. The troupe children visit the cemetery at Kyadganj for the funeral of little Timmy Thrupp. Poesy notices that most of the graves there are dated 1857; she

tells Charlie that it is called "Gora Qabristan" and it is perhaps named so as it has something to do with Mutiny. Charlie, a good thinker and analyser, says that the Indians call it an Uprising. An interesting dialogue takes place between Poesy and Charlie:

> 'They don't call it the Mutiny. The Indians call it the Uprising.'
>
> 'But it was a mutiny,' I said, thinking of what I had read. 'The British are in charge, after all.'
>
> 'India isn't a ship.'
>
> 'I don't understand you sometimes, Charlie.' (Murray, Lilliputians 180)

Murray has brilliantly brought out different perspectives of those historical times by this small conversation, where Poesy seems to acknowledge quite easily the rule of the British, but Charlie refuses to blindly accept British power. Murray makes the reader contemplate about this aspect through the dialogue between the two children of the troupe. The word 'mutiny' versus 'uprising' shows the distortions in history and how it is brought forth in different ways in different places. Also, Charlie saying that India is not a ship reflects the importance of the idea of freedom from colonial rule, as India was an independent country which was forcibly taken over by the British as a colony. The reference here is to an important incident of the Uprising of 1857 in India when India was under Britain's colonial rule. In words of Noorul Hoda: "Since the very beginning of British rule, the people of India questioned Britain's legitimacy and moral authority to impose alien rule over a sovereign people. This resentment cascaded into the Great Revolt of 1857, also known as the First War of Independence" (ch. 1). At immediate level, the enragement of the Indian soldiers in the British army led to the revolt. The soldiers in Meerut refused to use the newly introduced Enfield rifle in which greased cartridges made of a mix of animal fat had to be bitten off before loading (Hoda, ch. 1). These "new Enfield rifle bullets were coated with grease made from the fat of cows (sacred to Hindus) and

of pigs (anathema to Muslims). Since the cartridges had to be bitten before being used, the Hindu and Muslim sipahis [soldiers] interpreted it as a part of a plot to force them to adopt Christianity" (Pati xx). This hurt the religious feelings of the soldiers and the soldiers as well as the civilians "went on a rampage shouting maro firangi ko [kill the white people]" (E. Thorpe and S. Thorpe, HC.111). From here the revolt spread to Delhi and further to Kanpur, Lucknow, Banaras, Allahabad and other parts of the country. Gora Qabristan is the graveyard where there are tombs of the British people killed in the attack by the revolutionaries of 1857. On June 6, 1857 the revolutionaries attacked the fort where many British officers were killed; it was only after this uprising that a cemetery was built in Kydganj and the bodies of the British people killed in the incident buried here (Mishra). Therefore, it is called the Gora Qabristan which means "Grave of the White People" (Murray, Lilliputians 180).

Through the discussion of the historical incidents of the Indian nationalistic movement, such as the Alipore bomb case, the *Swadeshi* movement and the Uprising of 1857, readers gain an understanding of the complexities and consequences of these events, thereby opening doors for contemplation and exploration of the socio-political dynamics of colonial times in India. By drawing the readers into this period, the novel encourages them to reflect upon and understand the historical nuances of India during British rule. Murray has indeed done justice to the genre of historical fiction as she vividly depicts the complexities of the times during the colonial rule in India. Sorting through documented data from historical events carefully, Murray incorporates historical themes into her work while her imagination and creativity bring forth her narrative to life with diverse characters teeming with life from a bygone era. She strikes a subtle balance between in-depth research and creative storytelling. By doing intense research and drawing the raw material from history, she has enticingly intertwined the journey of her characters amidst colonial times in India. India's struggle for its freedom from colonial rule finds a parallel in the

Lilliputian troupe children's fight for voice and dignity in *The Lilliputians* as they decide to free themselves from the domination of Mr. Arthur, thereby making the novel a poignant reflection of the aspects of resistance and freedom.

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IJES, Volume LXI, 2025

Mysticism in the Poetry of Paramahansa Yogananda

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Abstract

Mysticism is closely connected to Indian Knowledge System. It is the core of Indian literature. Mystic poets have their great contributions to it through different Indian languages. Mystical poetry, an important genre of Indian poetry, is the expression of a poet's quest for spiritual union with the Divine or His manifestations. The contemplative language, charged with a sense of unity, creates the poetry that becomes more like a prayer. Kabir, Tulsi, Surdas, Mirabai, Vidyapati, Tukaram, Akka Mahadevi, Vivekananda, Tagore, Aurobindo, Yogananda and many others, through their literary expressions, have enriched mystical poetry of India. Among all the poets of this tradition, Paramahansa Yogananda, though more popular for his book *Autobiography of a Yogi* (1946), is the least explored mystic poet. His two collections of poems: *Songs of the Soul* (1923) and *Whispers from Eternity* (1929) epitomize the true "Mystical Prayers of Poetic Beauty" and seek scholarly attention. This paper is a study of mysticism as precisely delineated in these two collections. Textual analysis has been used as a research method.

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Keywords: Mysticism, spiritual union, experience, Paramahansa Yogananda

Introduction

Mysticism has more than one definition. *The Encyclopedia of World Religions* defines it "as profound religious experience" (308). *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines it as "the belief that direct knowledge of God, spiritual truth, or ultimate reality can be attained through subjective experience (such as intuition or insight)" (www.merriam-webster.com).*Oxford Learners Dictionary* defines it as "the belief that knowledge of God or of real truth can be found through prayer and meditation rather than through reason and the senses" (www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com). Spurgeon writes that the term mysticism is "irresponsibly applied in English" and "it is unquestionably true that mysticism is often used in a semi-contemptuous way to denote vaguely any kind of occultism or spiritualism, or any specially curious or fantastic views about God and the universe" ("Mysticism in English Literature"). In the same article, Spurgeon clarifies that mysticism is "the flame which feeds" a mystic's "whole life; and he is intensely and supremely happy just so far as he is steeped in it" ("Mysticism in English Literature"). Dan Merkur in *Britannica* defines mysticism as "the practice of religious ecstasies" (https://www.britannica.com). Jones and Gellman in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* write that "'mysticism' is best thought of as a constellation of distinctive practices, discourses, texts, institutions, traditions, and experiences aimed at human transformation, variously defined" (https://plato.stanford.edu). Rajesh Ranjan writes that, "Mysticism can broadly be defined as the human phenomenon of relating to God through direct experience, rather than through knowledge, and mystics are considered to be sages who have the vision to pierce the thing and look beyond the timeframe" (89). All these definitions support the poetry of Paramahansa Yogananda to be called mystical.

Unity and experience are two keywords of mysticism:" *Sarvabhootasthitam yo maam bhajatyekatwamaasthitah; / Sarvathaa vartamaano 'pi sa yogee mayi vartate.*" (He who, being established in unity, worships Me who dwells in all beings,—that Yogi abides in Me, whatever may be his mode of living.) (*The Bhagavad Gita* 6.31). This view is strengthened by the preceding one: "*Yo maam pashyati sarvatra sarvam cha mayi pashyati; / Tasyaaham na pranashyaami sa cha me na pranashyati.*" (He who sees Me everywhere and sees everything in Me, he does not become separated from Me nor do I become separated from him.) (*The Bhagavad Gita* 6.30). Individual soul is a part of Brahman, the Absolute. Indian spiritual culture believes in oneness. There is a belief that all humans emanate from One Supreme Power.

Imperishable is the Lord of Love.
As from a blazing fire thousands of sparks
Leap forth, so millions of beings arise
From the Lord of Love and return to him.

(*The Mundaka Upanishad*, Part 2, lines 1-4)

This realization brings one close to God and leads one to a unique experience of spiritual journey through blissful moments. Evidently, Nature and Imagination are two sources of achieving 'revelation of divinity'. Nature in its all forms stimulates imagination of a poet to a transcendental experience that causes great poetry. The poetry of Yogananda has the same elements that vindicate the sublime thoughts including spiritual detox as a requisite. His poetry is very close to the poetry of Kabir, Tulsi, Surdas, Mirabai, Vidyapati, Tukaram, Akka Mahadevi, Vivekananda, Tagore and Aurobindo that strengthened Indian mystic tradition, i.e. direct experience of the Divine through their poetry.

What mystic joy one finds in the poetry of Yogananda, the similar divine joy one finds in Kriya Yoga that he popularise don foreign lands. Yoga is one of the oldest heritage of India signifying

the amalgamation of the culture and spirituality of this ancient land. Yoga practices engender mystical powers. Yoga "refers to the union of the individual soul with the Divine" (Sastry 261). It is close to the meaning of the word Upanishad "what destroys ignorance and gets man near to God" (qtd. in Chatterjee and Datta 318). Kriya Yoga "consists of advanced techniques of meditation whose devoted practice leads to realization of God and liberation of the soul from all forms of bondage" (*Yogoda Satsanga Society of India*). And "liberation from bondage to the flesh" is known as "the highest good" in Indian philosophy (Chatterjee and Datta 313). Yogananda aimed at the same through his poetry and Yoga with due respect to modern science, the messengers of God, and all religions and cultures of the world. His works epitomize and fortify spiritual consciousness and spiritual culture.

Theories of Mysticism and Mystics

Indian theories of mysticism are considered to be the oldest ones. Vedas, Upanishads, *The Bhagavad Gita,* Indian Philosophical Systems, and Buddhist and Sufi writings are credited with the origins of the theories of mysticism followed by many other writings including the western ones. Though there are multiple theories of mysticism in which Indian theory of *Aham Brahmasmi* (I am Brahman.) predominates (*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*). About this theory, Geoffrey Parrinder in his book *Mysticism in the World's Religions* (1976) argues, "One is not united to Brahman, one is it." (14) Human being is a spark of the divine. Due to attachment to material possessions and pleasures one gets detached from one's original identity. Patanjali's *Yoga Sutras* is another important treatise that prescribes "discipline for self-purification" and the attainment of divine light. This light makes the mystic believe that God is "the original root of the entire cosmic manifestation" and the aim of human life is to "water the root." (Prabhupada 3). This is the way to get released "from the cycle of birth and rebirth, and to be united with the Supreme Being"

(Nilsson 21). For Mirabai "the Supreme Being" "was symbolised in the human, personal, beatific, and joyous form of Krishna." (Nilsson 21) For Tulsi, it was Rama; for Tukaram, it was Lord Vitthal. Tukaram writes: "Makeme homeless, wealthless, childless, / So that I may remember you" (qtd. by Nemade 42). Nemade writes that "Tukaram's communion with his God, Vitthal, takes a variety of forms. … He surrenders his own self to God, seeks atonement with him, tries to get even the agony of separation from him" (44). For Guru Nanak, "love for the Divine takes the form of the yearning for union of the love-sick female with husband gone away to far-off lands for gain or adventure" (Talib 68). This mystic yearning is common in Indian literature written in different languages.

For a mystic, "man is a moral agent" (Walli 326). He has to transcend the material world to achieve a higher spiritual truth. This is the path to unite with the divine. Spurgeon divides mystics in four categories: Love and Beauty Mystics, Nature Mystics, Philosophical Mystics, and Devotional and Religious Mystics. He puts Shelley, Keats, Rossetti and Browning in the first category as Love and Beauty Mystics; Vaughan and Wordsworth as Nature Mystics; Donne, Coleridge, Tennyson and Carlyle as Philosophical Mystics; and Crashaw, Herbert and Blake as Devotional and Religious Mystics (https://www.gutenberg.org/). Reardon quotes R.C. Zaehner and argues that Zaehner calls "nature mysticism as a 'mysticism of matter' and the mysticism of isolation as the 'mysticism of pure Spirit.'" (37) Parrinder provides foundational knowledge of mysticism of the East and the West. He differentiates between religion and mysticism: "Mysticism is considered to be more than an esoteric and unusual religious perception, and a recent study of 'inglorious Wordsworths' discovered that there are transcendental experiences in childhood and adolescence among many people even in industrial societies." (Parrinder 4) Salvation is the ultimate goal of a mystic but sometimes asceticism is misunderstood with mysticism. Though the former is concerned

with "inner-worldly" and the latter with "other-worldly" (Weber 544). India predominates in creating great spiritual literature that attracts Western scholars who have done serious study of Indian philosophy and created a great wealth of knowledge useful in Indian Knowledge System.

The Poetry of Paramahansa Yogananda

Songs of the Soul

Songs of the Soul has one hundred and one poems brimming with mystical experience. Seeing the cover page of the book and reading its title, the first aphorism of *Brahma-Sutras comes to one's mind that is athato brahman jigyasa ("Now is the time* to enquire about Brahman – the absolute truth,"*1.1.1)*. This book is "an outpouring of Paramhansaji's direct perceptions of God – God in nature, in man, in everyday experiences, and in the spiritually awakened state of *Samadhi* meditation." (Publisher's Note, *Songs of the Soul* xvii) The first poem "Consecration" begins with the praise to the Almighty and ends with the lines: "Hands folded, I come now to give / What's Thine. Receive!" (lines 13-14). This is the total dedication of the poet to God. Frederick B. Robinson writes in the Preface to this book: "This collection of verses is clearly the revelation of one who has searched his own soul and found therein something akin to those forces of eternity which bring forth life and love, death and sorrow, the material universe and spiritual verities." (xix) Spiritual principle engenders joys, therefore, the poet requests the reader to "Abandon the weeds of old worries." and "Garner only seeds of joys and achievements" ("The Garden of the New Year" 7, 9). He believes in sowing "valiant seeds" that can bring fragrance in life and develop "rare flowering qualities" ("The Garden of the New Year" 13,15). Though this path is not easy, and one undergoes many difficult tests but a true devotee marches on and fights with all evils ("My Soul is Marching On"). God-realisation awaits for only those who have burnt "faggots of all desires," chant within themselves, and "never stop calling Him deeply/ In the temple of

unceasing love" ("When Will He Come?" 8, 31,32). The seekers find "His hands showering blessings" when "little pleasures", "fickle festivity", "fortune", "praise" all provide them the same delight but "mirth, fame, wealth / Proud possessions", "fires of passions, pleasures, / and intoxicating friendships / Oft hide His presence" ("The Secret of Life" 3-41). In this situation one has to believe in the secret of spirituality that "When none stand[s] by, He comes to take your hand" ("The Secret of Life"47). This belief develops the state of '*sthitapragya*' in a devotee. After this achievement "Beds of flowers, or vales of tears" do not bring attitudinal change in a devotee ("Shadows" 1). The agents of Nature seem talking to him: "The murmuring brook e'er tries to tell / In lisping sounds so well" and "The birds aspire to sing" ("One That's Everywhere" 12,13,16). This progression or transformation brings one close to "dazzling golden light" where every living and non-living entity offers an image of the Omniscient ("One That's Everywhere" 9). With his "sacred heart" the poet urges the reader ("Where I Am" 28):

> Sing songs that none have sung,
> Think thoughts that ne'er in brain have rung,
> Walk in paths that none have trod,
> Weep tears as none have shed for God, ("The Noble New" 1-4).

Through his poems, the poettries to wake up the 'sleeping' souls and make them 'unchained' and 'uncaged':

> Naught can bind me
> If I bind not myself.
> None can free me
> If I know not I am free. ("Freedom" 18-21)

The poet is deeply moved by the agents of Nature and realises his union with the Divine. It gives him ecstasy of delight and enables him to dwell "In roses and daffodils, for a time" ("Freedom" 32). He wants to stay "forever" "behind bars of

beauty / Of violet-sun-gold rays" but he does not want to live in "a golden heavenly cage" ("Freedom" 34, 35, 37). He wants to be "the tiniest cosmic spark" and able to throw "the rocks of worldly strife" out ("Freedom" 49, 52). He wishes to be "the clouds", "babble of the brook", "And the voice of the nightingale" ("Freedom" 53, 54, 55). He wishes to merge with the beauty of Nature to reach "the shores of bliss" ("Freedom" 58). He wants to be the voice of all to think "the thoughts of all" then "The hearts of all will be my heart; / The souls of all will be my soul; / And the smiles of all, my smile" ("Freedom" 62-65). In his poems, the poet presents his inner experiences and "super conscious conceptions" that are the gems for the seeker of truth. In this world, nobody is high or low, rich or poor, all are the images of the One, Almighty. "This identity is the real and only Truth, and is to be owned up to if one is desirous of liberation from the wheel of *samsara* and all sense of limitation." (Prasad 14)

The poetic beauty of the poem "Fountain of Smiles" is mesmerizing. The poet wishes to "Spread the gospel of 'Smile!'" everywhere and requests the reader to "Purify all homes with thy healthy smiles" (54-55). At the same time, he warns them not to welcome "sarcastic smiles", "bandit smiles", "serpent smiles", "volcanic smiles", "melancholia", hatred, and "hypocrisy" in order to strengthen love and brotherhood. This is the spiritual culture that the poet aspires for. Being an awakened soul, he bows down his head "in sweetest reverence" for his Master and sees Him everywhere, in everything: "Where'er I looked, whate'er I saw, / Thy tender Peeping Eyes / My soul did draw" ("Paupack's Peak" 59, 64-66). In the heightened state of consciousness, he yearns for the "precious joy" and writes that "In new-born light / I see what's right: / To live for Thee and Thine" ("For Thee and Thine" 21-23).

"Make Us Thyself" is a brilliant poem written in Tagore an mould. By using the phrases "everlasting joy", "ever-blissful Self", "dreaming within Thy dream" in the last stanza of this poem, the poet shows his acute passion to enter another life that is spiritual

union, free from the cycle of birth and death. This is the climax of *Bhakti Yoga (divine* love), "the great and easy remedy for the attainment of 'purity of mind' followed by perfect identity with Him." (Prasad 50)

"Thy Call", "Blood of the Rose", "Thy Divine Gypsy", "Thou and I are One", "I was Made for Thee", "What Use", "Scenes Within", "Variety", "The Black Eyes", "My Cosmic Mother's Face", "Breathe in Me", "What is Love", "The Little Eternity", "The Tattered Dress", "Friendship", "I am He", "Samadhi", "In Me" and "Divine Love's Sorrow" are some of the poems, besides others in *Songs of the Soul*, that too deal with the messages of transcendental love, eternal beauty, spiritual growth, and mystical union.

Whispers from Eternity

Mysticism begins with the initial pages of this collection. Yogananda treats his poems as "invocations" and "offer[s]" them "at the shrine of humanity" (Introduction xii). He believes that "One Father dwells impartially in the fullness of His glory" in all places of worship and "Cosmic Heart is ever throbbing equally" in all "religionists" (Dedication page vii). Amelita Galli-Curci in her Foreword to this collection writes about the book as "the priceless gem of Self-realization" as it has all characteristics of a religious scripture (xi). The poet does not mention a particular religion in his works that he adheres to, because religion has its boundary. He goes beyond racial, regional and religious boundaries in exploring mysticism. This approach helps him find the Absolute, "in man and Nature". In Introduction to the book, the poet writes that "Divine recollection is the simplest way to achieve God-communion" (xiii). According to Spurgeon, a mystic believes in spirituality, not in reason. He believes that "intellect" helps one to "apprehend material things" and "spirit" helps one "to apprehend spiritual things" ("Mysticism in English Literature"). Mystical knowledge does not need "logic, language, the senses" but "a very special nature" (Markovsky and Frederick 1). Many poems of Yogananda have the same messages that one finds in the poems

of Kabir, one of the major exponents of Bhakti Movement in India that produced a number of mystic poets both of *Sagun* (with attributes) and *Nirgun* (with attributes) schools. Satyanarayana Reddy compares the poetry of Yogananda with that of Metaphysical poets (211-26). For Yogananda, God is "the Great Preceptor" who dwells in all, therefore, he treats all religions and scriptures alike: "The diverse religions are branches of Thy one / immeasurable tree of truth" ("The Melody of Human Brotherhood" 5-6). He respects plurality of approaches to mysticism and believes in "a myriad living thoughts of devotion" that have universal appeal ("We Unite to Worship Thee, O Spirit!" 1-2). He finds his soul in every soul, therefore, he wants "to shed tears of love for all beings" ("May I Forgive All" 1-2). Being immersed in devotion, he wishes to learn from his Master "to lead all stumbling and stubborn ones to Thee" and "Let me never retaliate when people wound me with unkindness" ("May I Forgive All" 11-12, 26-27). The poems "I am Thy Hummingbird", "Give Me the Humblest Place within Thy Heart", "May I Act from Free Choice, Not Habit", "I Yearn to Hear Thy Unique Voice", "May Human Love Become Divine Love", and some others are the "devotional outpourings" that bring him close to Tagore.

Conclusion

The poetic works of Paramahansa Yogananda have enriched the spiritual wealth of India. His mystical experiences run through the lines of his poems in *Songs of the Soul* and *Whispers from Eternity*. Besides the *Bhagavad Gita*, Upanishads and other scriptures of India, he has poured the essence of all other religions in his poems that make his works more holy. This paper has tried to explore mysticism through various approaches and the poetry of Yogananda as having gems of spiritual awakening. Attempt has been made to provide the views of other mystic poets and unveil how Yogananda has tried to establish the relationship between an individual soul and the universal soul in his poetry in order to develop spiritual consciousness and spiritual culture in the world for the cause of everlasting joy to mankind.

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IJES, Volume LXI, 2025

W.S. Merwin: Spiritualism in his Select Ecopoetry

***Ram Pravesh Singh**

Abstract

William Stanley Merwin (1927-2019), a celebrated contemporary poet of America, was a visionary literary genius. With more than sixty books and thirty awards during his almost seven decades of literary career, Merwin became only the second poet whose works were published as *Collected Poems* by The Library of America in his lifetime. Son of a presbyterian minister, he started writing hymns for his father. His experiences were enriched with a wide range of travelling in America and Europe, creating literature both mundane and divine. In 1976, Merwin moved to Maui in Hawaii to learn Zen Buddhism with a teacher, Robert Aitken, and also to restore a comprehensive palm garden there, which had been destroyed by modern technocrats. His poetic output in Hawaii depicts a devastating picture of the natural landscape and extinction of ethnic groups and their society, language and culture. Earlier, Merwin was an activist struggling against the Vietnam War. His poetry written in his third and last stage includes *The Shadow of Sirius, The Moon Before Morning* and *The Garden Time*, revealing a heightened sense of human

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consciousness. The fragile nature of Nature, the mysteries of memory and perception, and the inescapable fact of our mortality find expression in his own poetics, which is marked by unpunctuated style, spiritual insight and the unarticulated unrealized side of existence. In the last stage of his life Merwin realized the supremacy of Indian spiritualism as 'single root' whose branches are spread all over the world covering the entire human civilization.

Keywords: Visionary, Mundane, Divine, Zen-Buddhism, Extinction, Ethnic Groups, Mystery, Mortality, Unpunctuated, Unarticulated, Existence.

Merwin's Glorification: William Stanely Merwin [1927-2019, an eminent contemporary poet, writer and translator of America, was a great literary genius. Son of a Presbyterian minister Merwin stepped into his literary career auspiciously at the very early age of five years when he wrote hymns for his father. He flourished as a prolific writer.

More than sixty books and thirty awards to his credit are enough to glorify his dignity in the modern world. A National Book Award Winner and the Poet Laureate of USA during 2010-11 he was honoured with almost all prizes given in the field of American literature. Born, brought up and educated in America Merwin's vast range of travelling to European countries, Mexico, Japan, etc had enlarged his experience. He learnt many languages and studied cultures of different nations which shaped his multi-dimensional personality.

He was a worshiper of non-violence. He opposed all destructive forces. He was an activist of anti-Vietnam war movement. An organization known as American Writers Against the Vietnam War was an umbrella organization created in 1965 which organized readings, meetings and joined rallies and demonstrations against the Vietnam War. Merwin actively protested the horror of war.

Merwin, A Zen Buddhist: In 1976 Merwin moved to Hawaii to study Zen Buddhism with its master Robert Aitkin. He eventually settled there and purchased a barren former pineapple

plantation in Haiku on Maui in 1977. He slowly restored the land using ecologically sustainable methods and property hosted nearly five hundred species of palm tree. The MerwinConservancy, found by himself in 2010 endeavoured to create a database mapping and cataloguing the collection which received permanent protection from the Hawaiian Islands Land Trust in 2014. Merwin documented his experiences in What is a Garden? [2015]. Rigorous practice of Zen Buddhism and natural landscape influenced his later poetry. Many of his poems are immersed in nature with a fresh sense of numinousness while also mourning the loss of that nature to human greed. He condemns the felling of the sacred forests and the extinction of species.

Merwin a visionary artist, intends to integrate the East and the West. He seeks peace in meditative transcendence which may be visualized in his life and literature. He appears to be tackling the mysteries of life and impending death with his power of imaginative creation. The influence of Buddhism on his poetry is visible as he returns to the present moment for relief from tempestuous memory. In a few lines from "Still Morning" this view may be glimpsed:

It appears now that there is only one
age and it knows
nothing of the age as the flying birds knows
nothing of the air they are flying through
or of the day that bears them up
through themselves
and I am a child before there are words.

(*The Essential W.S. Merwin,* 284)

Here Merwin's 'spiritual truth of eternal now' finds expression. A short poem "Dew Light" is a brilliant piece of art depicting living picture of Merwin's doctrine of 'eternal now':

Now in the blessed days of more and less
when the news about time is that each day

there is lessof it I know none of that
as I walk out through the early garden
only the day and I are here with no
before or after and the dew looks up
without a number or a present age.

(*The Essential W.S. Merwin*, 294)

The poet lives in natural environment with peaceful ease at' the present moment. He does not care for the passage of time, of the past or of the future. It is the best way to avoid the tension of old age, its related weaknesses and the fear of death. This is wise and brave attitude of living life in the old age. Feng Dong dedicated his book *Desire and Infinity in W.S. Merwin's Poetry* to him in a very beautiful manner:

A man
sat by the side of river
listening to the turning of the wheel
only there was no wheel to turn
he just sat there listening
day and night passed
the first light of dawn
travelled through the green trees
he looks up at the unnamed sky
waiting for
the alien blessing
to come

(*Desire and Infinity*—dedication to Merwin)

It is very fine piece of art in the admiration of the poet. A brief extract from the conclusion of Feng Dong's above mention book may be relevant and will enrich the discourse:

> Merwin's writings are so diversified in their styles and concerns that any single approach may seem reductive. My psychoanalytic and philosophical readings while revealing

> the essential dynamics, have left unsaid other important aspects such as his practice of Zen Buddhism which saves his later poetry toward Eastern spiritualism and the way his aesthetics of the open form relates to other contemporary poetics- for example, the projective verse of the Black Mountain practitioners. Definitely ecopoetics with all its recent dynamics should be added to this list. (*Desire and Infinity*, 178)

Mysticism in Merwin's Poetry: Merwin's poetry, at times, appears to be obscure. What he intends to convey obliquely becomes riddle. It is a traditional device for wisdom literature. There is an affinity which everyone must have noticed between the poetry and the riddle. Merwin dedicates a poem to his wife Paula in which his tone is mystic. The reader envisions the poet's longing for immortality:

> Let me imagine that we will come again
> when we want to and it will be spring
> we will be no older than we ever were
> the worn griefs will have eased like the early cloud
> through which the morning slowly comes to itself
> and the ancient defenses against the dead
> will be done with and left to the dead at last
> the light will be as it is now in the garden
> that we have made here these years together
> of our long evenings and astonishment.
>
> (*The Essential W.S. Merwin*, 294)

It is a love poem dealing with the theme of true love which is reminiscent of William Shakespeare's sonnet "Let Me Not ToThe Marriage of True Minds" declaring that true love survives till the doom. But Merwin imagines that they will come again. Perhaps his mind is obsessed with the Indian philosophy of rebirth. He is talking about their next life. They will be astonished to see the garden of palm plantation they have revived in this life.

Merwin's heart felt desires are kept alive as hope to come again may be possible. He was outrightly a conservationist. His tone turns mystical here.

Indian Influence on Merwin: Merwin's literature covers a vast .range panorama of the civilized world. His translation of some Sanskrit love poems from ancient India under the heading of *The Peacock's Egg* is clear evidence that he was quite conscious of the Indian scriptures and devotional poetry. As T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats felt peace of life in Indian religious mythology. Merwin also appears to derive salvation from India's devotional poetry. "The Nomad Flute" may be interpreted in this light. Merwin's concept of 'eternal presence' must be kept in mind; I have with me / all that I do not know/ I have lost none of it. The first stanza of the poem is remarkable:

> You that sang to me once sing to me now
> let me hear your long lifted note
> survive with me
> the star is fading
> I can think farther than that but I forget
> do you hear me.
>
> (*The Essential W.S. Merwin*, 283)

Here 'the star is fading' has sense that the poet is getting old and he coul o a lot of things but his memory is weakened. Merwin, a devotee of Lord Krishna is hankering here for the union with Him, 'let me hear your longlifted note/survive with me'. The poet in this poem visualizes the scenario of Vrindavan during day time when Lord Krishna as a cow herd boy used to cast a magic spell by playing flute while grazing the cows with gopis and gwalas who are none other than His devotees in divine reality. Not only humans but all living beings had gone spell bound in ecstasy of the divine songs of Krishna's flute playing. Maharas of Vrindavan at night is world famous divine dance at the tune of Lord Krishna's flute. It has nothing mundane. Lord Shiva along with Mata Parvati once

took part in the Maharas in a disguise form of a gopi. He was caught by Lord Krishna and so Lord Shiva is worshiped in Vrindavan as Gopeshwar Mahadev. When Merwin talks of 'night song morning song' he is lost in the spiritual world of Vrindavan. In an interview with Joel Whitne when asked about the inspiration of Zen literature Merwin's response was vivid:

> I mean, there was a whole background in how mysticism from both East and West—I mean Eckhardt and Plotinus and Spinoza—these people were and they remain extremely important to me. I'm certainly not a Christian and I have nothing to do with Christianity. I mean I don't oppose it, but I don't that way at all. To me there's something that just don't work in the whole area of monotheism. The first Buddhist text that ever caught my attention [this was when I was back in my early thirties] was the Diamond Sutra. The Diamond Sutra is still very important. And to me Taoism was a very bit as important as Buddhism, and it remains so. So it is complicated.
>
> Take them away, names like Buddhism. I'm patient of them. There is something beyond that, beneath all that, that they all share, that they all come from. They are branches from a single root.
>
> (Joel Whitney's interview with W.S. Merwin)

After that the interviewer asked another question. In my opinion 'a single root' of Merwin here is nothing but the Sanatan Dharm of India. Merwin might have realized his salvation through the spiritualism of Sanatan Dharma.

Conclusion

Merwin's vision in his matured stage of 80s is enlarged enough to the fruitful realization of Par Bramha Parmeshwar manifested in diverse practical aspects of spirituality. From Jesus Christ to Lord Krishna via Lord Buddha W.S. Merwin appears to have achieved his salvation where Bhakt and Bhagwan become all in one symbolically depicted as the Maharas of Vrindavan.

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IJES, Volume LXI, 2025

Understanding Suffering and Tragic Consequence in *Macbeth*: A Philosophical Inquiry

***Sudesh M.B. Bhowate**

Abstract

Suffering whether through illness, death, displacement, or poverty is a universal condition, often mirrored in literature as a means of exploring personal and societal crises. In Shakespearean tragedy, such suffering typically stems from a disruption of moral order caused by a central figure's ethical failure, leading to both personal ruin and collateral damage among the innocent. In *Macbeth*, this framework is vividly realized. Macbeth's ambition and betrayal initiate a moral collapse that extends suffering to those around him, reflecting the real-world impact of one individual's fall on an entire community. Shakespeare's tragedies align structurally with moral narratives like biblical parables and Eastern Jataka tales, which warn against moral transgression and stress the value of ethical conduct. The play's conclusion evokes Aristotelian catharsis, offering emotional release while reinforcing moral awareness. This paper thus analyzes *Macbeth* through religious and philosophical lenses, focusing on suffering, moral failure, and the principle of cause and effect. It argues that Shakespeare's vision of tragedy serves as both a reflection

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of human vulnerability and a call to uphold moral order in society.

Keywords: Suffering, drama, tragedy, values, ethics, morality, Righteousness, cause and effect, Christianity, Buddhism, literary suffering, etc.

Introduction

Since antiquity, literature has served as a reflection of human suffering, often depicting visible and invisible threats that evoke fear and trauma. Mythological and historical narratives capture the emotional toll on victims, offering insight into the human condition. W.H. Hudson while commenting upon the aspect of our reading of the literature maintains: "But it is to their literature that we must turn if we would understand their mental and moral characteristics, realize what they sought and achieved in the world of inner activity, and follow through the stages of their changing fortunes the ebb and flow of the forces which fed their emotional energies and shaped their intellectual and spiritual life." (Hudson, 41) Shakespeare's tragedies, particularly *Hamlet, Othello, King Lear,* and *Macbeth*, mirror this tradition. His works portray suffering driven by betrayal, ambition, and the collapse of moral order. Unlike impersonal threats, Shakespeare's antagonists often emerge from within the protagonist's circle. Drawing from both biblical parables and Indian tales like the Jataka and Panchatantra, Shakespeare emphasizes the consequences of ethical failure. *Macbeth* exemplifies this structure: a once-noble general falls to destructive ambition, causing widespread suffering including his own.

The play reflects the principle of cause and effect, where Macbeth's downfall unfolds through his own choices. As A.C. Bradley notes, tragedy is "essentially a tale of suffering and calamity conducted to death" (Bradley, 7). This inquiry also aligns with Christian theology, which sees suffering as a result of original sin but not always as personal punishment. As Boyle explains, "suffering has meaning as punishment... but that's not to say all suffering is the result of one's sin" (Boyle, 100). In this way,

Shakespearean tragedy, particularly in *Macbeth*, becomes a vehicle for exploring suffering as both a moral and existential phenomenon.

Christian doctrine also aligns with the idea of cause and effect, as expressed by Apostle Paul: moral actions yield inevitable consequences, "not rewards... but the inviolable results of specific behaviors" (*The World of Righteousness*, 2006). This theological framework resonates with the structure of Shakespearean tragedy, where the protagonist's downfall reflects the moral consequences of their choices. Audiences are moved not only by the hero's fate but by their own moral introspection, experiencing *catharsis* a purgation of emotion which remains the central aim of classical tragedy.

Buddhism offers a profound framework for understanding suffering through its foundational doctrine the Four Noble Truths which recognize suffering (*dukkha*), its origin in craving (*tanha*), its cessation (*Nibbana*), and the path leading to its end, the Noble Eightfold Path. As Buddha emphasized, "the center of his Dhamma is man and the relation of man to man in his life on earth" (Ambedkar, 121). Suffering, according to Buddhist thought, arises from desires and ignorance, with every action (*kamma*) inevitably producing results (*vipaka*). As Narada notes, "Happiness and misery... are inevitable effects of causes" (Narada, 354). Particularly, acts of killing bring karmic consequences such as "brevity of life, ill health, constant grief... and constant fear" (Narada, 375). Thus, Macbeth's descent into fear, guilt, and psychological torment after his crimes aligns closely with the Buddhist principle of karmic causation.

Beyond religious doctrine, literature itself serves as a vehicle for examining the nature and meaning of suffering. It portrays suffering as a transformative force, either leading to redemption or downfall Literature interrogates life thoroughly to understand the reasons for sufferings and struggles of the characters. "We read stories of the tragedies of others, partly as a form of escapism from our own troubles but also to reinforce our conviction that

suffering is meaningful, as the conflicts in literature are almost always resolved (though perhaps not always to our satisfaction). In this way, literature involving suffering often restores our faith in justice and aids us in grappling with the question of why we suffer at all." (*Literary Sufferings*, 2012). Shakespearean tragedy, with its emphasis on poetic justice, mirrors this dynamic by revealing how moral violations lead to inevitable consequences, ultimately restoring the audience's belief in justice and resilience in the face of adversity.

From a religious and philosophical perspective, *Macbeth* presents suffering through three interrelated forms: first, the suffering and death of innocents, second the grief experienced by their kin, and third, the eventual downfall of the wrongdoer. The play's central conflict arises from Macbeth's unchecked ambition, which disrupts the moral order and initiates widespread suffering. Macbeth, once a trusted general of King Duncan, betrays that trust after being lauded for his valor against the traitor Macdonald. Duncan's fatal flaw lies in his misplaced trust, making him a victim not only of Macbeth's treachery but also of his own innocence a condition akin to *Avijja* (ignorance) in Buddhist terms.

Duncan's inability to perceive the true nature of those around him, including Macbeth and Macdonald, illustrates the vulnerability of virtue in the face of ambition and deceit. His suffering underscores the tragic irony that those who uphold the moral fabric often fall victim to those who unravel it. Thus, *Macbeth* encapsulates the layered dimensions of suffering personal, relational, and moral rooted in the interplay of ambition, ignorance, and betrayal. While speaking with Malcom, King Duncan reveals his frustration upon the Macdonald:

> "There's no art
>
> To find the mind's construction in the face. He was a gentleman on whom I built
>
> An absolute trust". (*Macbeth*, line no. 279-282)

Despite recently facing betrayal by Macdonald, King Duncan exhibited no suspicion when placing his trust in Macbeth. So impressed by Macbeth's loyalty and valor, Duncan arrived at his castle accompanied by Malcolm, Donalbain, Macduff, and others, intending to stay overnight an act that proved fatal. This decision reveals Duncan's fundamental flaw, which in Buddhist terms aligns with *Avijja* (ignorance or lack of insight). His inability to perceive potential deceit, even in the wake of prior treachery, underscores a tragic blindness to human ambition and moral corruption. Duncan's trust, though virtuous, ultimately renders him vulnerable to Macbeth's concealed intentions. He didn't get any clue or suspect foul play to occur in Macbeth's Castle:

> "This castle hath a pleasant seat. The air nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
>
> Unto our gentle senses." (*Macbeth*, line no. 418-420)

King Duncan, disarmed by Lady Macbeth's warm hospitality, failed to suspect the deadly plot unfolding around him. His inability to judge the intentions of those he trusted led to his assassination by Macbeth, the very man he had honored. Another significant victim is Banquo, who, unlike Macbeth, resists the witches' prophecy. Aware of his moral duty, Banquo refuses to betray the king, cautioning Macbeth against placing faith in such temptations. His integrity contrasts sharply with Macbeth's descent, reinforcing the theme of moral choice amidst ambition. When Banquo sees Macbeth is elated with the prophecy, he tries to make Macbeth realize the path of the prophecy is somewhat betrayal to the king and country:

> "Were such things here as we do speak about? Or have we eaten on the insane root
>
> That takes the reason prisoner"? (*Macbeth*, line no. 177-179)

Banquo makes him aware of the severe consequences of the second prophecy:

> "That, trusted home,
>
> Might yet enkindle you unto the crown,

Besides the thane of Cawdor.

But 'tis strange. And often times, to win us to our harm,

The instruments of darkness tell us truths,

Win us with honest trifles, to betrays

In deepest consequence." (*Macbeth*, line no. 223-229)

Banquo served as a moral anchor for Macbeth, cautioning him against compromising virtue. However, Macbeth, consumed by ambition and fear, grew increasingly threatened by Banquo. Present on the night of Duncan's murder, Banquo sensed something amiss but could not fully grasp the treacherous atmosphere. Following the king's death, he was the first to question those present, signaling his growing suspicion:

"In the great hand of God I stand, and thence

Against the undivulged pretense I fight

Of treasonous malice". *Macbeth*, line no. 876-878)

Banquo, once a moral counterweight to Macbeth, became a threat in Macbeth's eyes due to his unwavering loyalty to King Duncan and the witches' prophecy favoring his lineage. When Banquo began voicing concerns publicly, Macbeth's insecurities intensified. Viewing Banquo and his son Fleance as obstacles to his power, Macbeth orchestrated their assassination. Though Fleance escaped, Banquo was murdered becoming a casualty of his own virtue and Macbeth's growing tyranny. Unlike Duncan's murder, which left Macbeth conflicted, Banquo's killing marked a decisive turn in Macbeth's descent, reflecting his full submission to ambition and moral decay. Banquo's fate exemplifies the Buddhist principle of cause and effect: his integrity led to his death at the hands of the corrupted.

A further extension of innocent suffering appears in the murder of Lady Macduff and her son. Following Banquo's death, fear gripped those loyal to Duncan's lineage. Macbeth, increasingly paranoid and haunted symbolized by Banquo's ghost viewed Macduff's loyalty to Malcolm as a direct threat. In response, he

ordered the murder of Macduff's unprotected family. Lady Macduff's confusion over her husband's flight is telling: "What had he done to make him fly the land?" (*Macbeth*, line 1656). Her question underscores the fear and suspicion of the time, as well as the tragic cost of resistance. Their deaths, like Banquo's, further expose the scale of Macbeth's moral collapse and the tragic reach of unjust power. Lady Macduff knew that such an escape of Macduff from the country might invite allegations as a traitor:

> "His flight was madness. When our actions do not,
> Our fears do make us traitors". (*Macbeth*, line no. 1656).

She is the lady of wisdom but left helpless unguarded by her husband. Upon the absence of her husband, her suffering and fear of death could be seen from her dialogue with Ross:

> "Wisdom? To leave his wife, to leave his babes,
> His mansion and his titles in a place
> From whence himself does fly? He loves us not;
> He wants the natural touch; for the poor wren,
> The most diminutive of birds, will fight,
> Her young ones in her nest, against the owl". (*Macbeth*, line no. 1663-1668).

Lady Macduff and her son fall victim to the hostile environment shaped by Macbeth's growing tyranny and Macduff's absence. Their association with Macduff, who had fled to support Malcolm, positioned them as targets in Macbeth's attempt to suppress dissent and eliminate threats to his rule. In a parallel development, Macbeth consults the witches and Hecate to gain insight into his future, intending to manipulate fate. The first apparition warns him explicitly: "Macbeth! Macbeth! Macbeth! Beware of Macduff! Beware of the Thane of Fife! Dismiss me. Enough" (*Macbeth*, lines 1559–1560). This ominous prophecy immediately triggers Macbeth's resolve to act against Macduff and his family, intensifying his descent into calculated violence.

"Then live, Macduff; what need I fear of thee?
But yet I'll make assurance double sure
And take a bond of fate. Thou shalt not live,
That I may tell pale-hearted fear it lies,
And sleep in spite of thunder." (*Macbeth*, line no. 1571-1575).

Macbeth's decision to eliminate Macduff's family stems from his growing paranoia, not justice. By this point, Macbeth has moved beyond moral hesitation, immediately hiring murderers to target Macduff's innocent and unprotected family. Macduff's escape leaves his wife and son vulnerable, leading to one of the play's most brutal scenes—the murder of a child and his mother. This instance further illustrates the Buddhist principle of cause and effect, as Macbeth's fear-driven violence escalates unchecked.

The second dimension of suffering in *Macbeth* involves the grief of surviving kin. Malcolm and Donalbain, sons of King Duncan; Fleance, son of Banquo; and Macduff, husband and father to the slain, all endure profound emotional loss. While death is a natural part of life, its unnatural, violent occurrence intensifies the emotional rupture. The young princes, unable to challenge Macbeth and fearing for their lives, flee to England. Their response to Duncan's murder reflects both shock and a dawning suspicion, especially from Malcolm, who begins to discern Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's hidden roles in the unfolding tragedy.

"What will you do? Let's not consort with them.
To show an unfelt sorrow is an office
Which the false man does easy. I'll to England". (*Macbeth*, line no. 0884-0886).

Malcolm and Donalbain, shaken by their father's brutal murder and fearing for their own lives, fled to England. It took nearly seventeen years for Malcolm to overcome this trauma and mobilize support to challenge Macbeth. In the final act, his dialogue with Macduff reveals a matured leader prepared to assume the

throne. Malcolm also expresses deep awareness of the suffering endured by the people under Macbeth's tyrannical rule, highlighting his sense of responsibility toward restoring justice:

> I think withal
> There would be hands uplifted in my right; And here from gracious England have I offer Of goodly thousands. But, for all this,
> When I shall tread upon the tyrant's head
> Or wear it on my sword, yet my poor country
> Shall have more vices than it had before,
> More suffer, and more sundry ways than ever,
> By him that shall succeed. (*Macbeth*, line no. 1804-1812).

The suffering of unrighteous man on throne was well narrated by Ross when he joins the Malcolm and Macduff in England with the sad news:

> Alas, poor country,
> Almost afraid to know itself. It cannot
> Be called our mother, but our grave, where nothing
> But who knows nothing is once seen to smile;
> Where sighs and groans and shrieks that rent the air
> Are made, not marked; where violent sorrow seems
> A modern ecstasy. The dead man's knell
> Is there scarce asked for who, and good men's lives
> Expire before the flowers in their caps,
> Dying or ere they sicken. (*Macbeth*, line no. 1942-1951).

Fleance, though a minor character, endures significant trauma. Witnessing Banquo's murder and hearing his father's final cry: "O treachery! Fly, good Fleance, fly, fly, fly! Thou mayst revenge O slave!" (Mowat, 2020: lines 1202–1203) marks his abrupt entry into suffering. His subsequent disappearance from the play suggests a narrative space left for the fulfillment of the witches' prophecy regarding Banquo's lineage.

Macduff, meanwhile, bears profound emotional suffering. Leaving his wife and son unprotected in a climate of fear, he later learns of their murder with intense guilt and grief. His decision to prioritize political duty over personal safety intensifies his remorse. In the England scene, Ross's conversation with Malcolm and Macduff subtly prepares for the devastating news. Upon hearing it, Macduff's response reflects both personal anguish and a renewed resolve for justice:

> I cannot but remember such things were
> That were most precious to me. Did heaven look on?
> And would not take their part? Sinful Macduff,
> They were all struck for thee! Naught that I am,
> Not for their own demerits, but for mine,
> Fell slaughter on their souls. Heaven rest them now. (*Macbeth*, line no. 2015-2020).

The murder of Macduff's family intensifies his grief and ignites his determination for revenge, ultimately becoming the force that brings Macbeth to his downfall. Macbeth's fate exemplifies Shakespeare's recurring principle of cause and effect, grounded in a natural sense of justice. The third form of suffering in *Macbeth* be falls the wrongdoers—Macbeth and Lady Macbeth—whose unchecked ambition initiates the chain of tragedy. Spurred by the witches' prophecy and driven by Lady Macbeth's persuasion, Macbeth overcomes initial moral hesitation to murder King Duncan, setting off a descent into guilt, paranoia, and further violence.

Lady Macbeth, once the chief instigator, becomes a victim of her own ambition. Like Eve tempted by knowledge, she is drawn to power and unable to reverse the course she has set. Both she and Macbeth descend into sleeplessness and psychological torment, their inner peace destroyed by the crimes they committed. Macbeth's attempts to manipulate fate through the witches reflect his growing desperation. With Banquo's murder, the consequences intensify, revealing the corrosive effects of ambition.

Macbeth eventually recognizes the futility of his actions and the emotional numbness they have caused, admitting, "I have almost forgotten the taste of fear" (*Macbeth*, line 2270). His reflection to Seyton exposes a hollow soul, suggesting that the true cost of his ambition is not just death, but the total erosion of his humanity:

> Seyton!—I am sick at heart,
> When I behold—Seyton, I say!—
> This push will cheer me ever, or disseat me now.
> I have lived long enough. My way of life
> Is fall'n into the sere, the yellow leaf?
> And that which should accompany old age,
> As honor, love, obedience, troops of friends,
> I must not look to have, but, in their stead,
> Curses, not loud but deep, mouth-honor, breathe
> Which the poor heart would fain deny and dare not- Seyton!
> (*Macbeth*, line no. 2180-2189)

Macbeth's reflection reveals his emotional emptiness and loss of passion for life. Overwhelmed by guilt and the loss of close allies, he becomes a hollow figure. His tragic fate seems foreshadowed from the moment he inherits the title of the traitor Macdonald, suggesting Shakespeare's subtle invocation of fate's machinery. Lacking an heir, both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are condemned to existential suffering. Their sleeplessness and persistent insecurity reflect the psychological toll of their crimes. The principle of cause and effect governs their downfall in Macbeth's death in war and Lady Macbeth's suicide. Her mental collapse is evident in her haunting dialogue with the Doctor, revealing the irreversible consequences of guilt:

> The thane of Fife had a wife. Where is
> She now?—what, will these hands ne'er be clean?—No
> Moreo'that, my lord, no more o' that. You mar all with this
> starting." - - -

Here's the smell of the blood still. All
The perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little
Hand. Oh, Oh, Oh! (*Macbeth*, line no. 2079-2090)

The Doctor recognizes the psychological toll of Lady Macbeth's guilt, while Macbeth, though weary of his sins, responds emotionally to her death. At this moment, Malcolm's army advances through Birnam Wood fulfilling the witches' prophecy. Despite this omen, Macbeth clings to the belief that no man born of a woman can harm him. His downfall is sealed when Macduff reveals his cesarean birth and kills Macbeth. Thus, the prophecy that fueled Macbeth's ambition ultimately ensures his demise. His failure lies in misinterpreting the prophecy by witches, ignoring its implicit warning against pursuing power through unethical means.

Over the past five centuries, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* has continued to serve as a catalyst for moral reflection across generations. The tragic downfall of the ambitious General Macbeth initiates a profound discourse on the dangers inherent in the pursuit of unlawful power. Shakespeare's tragedies revolve around essential questions of morality, which function as a balancing force in the human world. Moral codes are foundational in regulating human behavior within social contexts, and they are vital to maintaining societal harmony. When these moral frameworks are violated, the resulting consequences extend beyond the individual transgressor, inflicting suffering upon innocent others as well. One of the central tenets of Buddhist philosophy, anicca—the idea that "nothing is permanent"—is mirrored in many global religious traditions, either implicitly or explicitly. Macbeth's suffering stems from his ignorance of this fundamental truth and his failure to foresee the consequences of his actions. The Buddhist concept of karma and its vipâka (fruition or result) is particularly relevant to Macbeth's fate; he ultimately faces the consequences of the karmic seeds he has sown.

In Western philosophy, Aristotle emerges as a key figure in the discourse on ethics and moral reasoning. As he emphasizes, "He insists that ethics is not a theoretical discipline: we are asking what the good for human beings is not simply because we want to have knowledge, but because we will be better able to achieve our good if we develop a fuller understanding of what it is to flourish" (Stanford, 2001). Aristotle encourages reflection on one's conduct through a moral lens, suggesting that individuals must possess a fundamental understanding of what is good and bad in the context of social life. His notion of the "highest good" is defined by three qualities: "it is desirable for itself, it is not desirable for the sake of some other good, and all other goods are desirable for its sake" (Stanford, 2001). Macbeth's tragic flaw lies in his misunderstanding of this concept; in pursuing personal happiness and ambition, he disregards the broader consequences for himself, his family, and his society. Once a revered general under King Duncan, Macbeth's transformation from a symbol of valor to a perpetrator of regicide results in a complete collapse of his public image and moral integrity. His betrayal brings immense suffering not only upon himself but also upon those around him. Immanuel Kant, another prominent moral philosopher, discusses the "metaphysics of morals" as a system of a priori moral principles applicable across all human societies. According to Kant, "Kant's analysis of the common moral concepts of 'duty' and 'good will' led him to believe that we are free and autonomous as long as morality, itself, is not an illusion" (Stanford, 2004). Macbeth, while loyal to King Duncan, operated within a moral framework; however, his act of regicide represents a fundamental breach of both ethical duty and societal law. His inability to comprehend the gravity of his elevated position as a general ultimately led to his moral and psychological disintegration.

Shakespearean tragedies, particularly *Macbeth*, remain timeless in their capacity to engage readers and audiences in continuous ethical inquiry. They challenge each generation to consider the

implications of violating moral codes and the ethical boundaries that govern human conduct.

Conclusion

Suffering is an inescapable element of the human condition, and across religious and philosophical traditions, it is both a reality to be endured and a challenge to be transcended. Shakespeare's tragedies particularly *Macbeth* offer profound insights into this condition, mirroring the moral frameworks of biblical parables and Eastern Jataka tales. In these narratives, the fall of a central character disrupts the moral order, unleashing suffering not only upon the wrongdoer but also on the innocent those who, through ignorance (avijja) or loyalty, become collateral damage in the pursuit of power.

Macbeth exemplifies how unchecked ambition, guided by temptation and a misreading of fate, leads to personal and collective ruin. The protagonist's moral descent causes irreparable harm to those around him, yet it also sets the stage for a restoration of order by the survivors. Figures like Malcolm and Macduff represent the reassertion of justice and virtue, counterbalancing the chaos initiated by Macbeth's transgressions.

Ultimately, Shakespeare presents a world governed by the principle of cause and effect: moral failings inevitably yield consequences. Through suffering be it of the virtuous, the innocent, or the guilty Macbeth offers a timeless meditation on the ethical foundations of society. It reminds us that when moral integrity collapses, the ripple effects extend far beyond the individual, and only through recognition, resistance, and renewal can order be restored.

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IJES, Volume LXI, 2025

Dislocated Identity: A Critical Exploration of Diasporic Experiences in Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters*

***Iffat Shaheen**

Abstract

In this age of multiculturalism where the whole world has become a "global village"; a large section of world population leaves between two divergent domains. The journey of uprooting and re-rooting is not so easy. The migrants are always in a conflict as their minds are always entangled among the strands pulling in completely different directions. They suffer with racial prejudices, language problem, and cultural trauma on the one hand while struggling to recreate their new identity on the other.

The present paper attempts to analyze Bharati Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters* from cross-cultural perspective. *Desirable Daughters* is a remarkable novel of Bharati Mukherjee which portrays a traditional Indian Brahmin family and narrates a contemporary American story of a woman who is in many ways broken with traditional norms but still remains tied to her native country. Mukherjee, an American writer of Indian origin herself struggled to adjust to the traditions and cultures, which is depicted by the medium of her female protagonists. She writes mainly about the immigrant experiences in general and of women in particular. Her writings depict the inter-

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cultural traumaen countered by the Asian immigrant women by virtue of entering into contrasting American culture from diverse indigenous environments.

Keywords: multiculturalism, globalization, uprootedness, conflict.

Home is where you belong!

In this age of multiculturalism where the whole world has become a "global village"; a large section of world population leaves between two divergent domains. No matter to which part of the globe they go they are always in a conflict as their mind are always entangled among the strands pulling in completely different directions. The journey of uprooting and re-rooting is not so easy. They suffer with racial prejudices, language problem, and cultural trauma on one hand while struggling to recreate their new identity on the other hand. It seems as if they are trying to cross the river of life, keeping a foot each in two different boats headed in opposite directions. Though every migrant has a different experience, there are shared emotions that are triggered by being in the diaspora: "the past is a country from which we have all emigrated, that its loss is part of our common humanity." (Rushdie, 12)

In spite of the members of diaspora being scattered far and wide across the globe, the diaspora literature is the most common medium among the mediums of films, songs and concerts bringing them all closer. The diaspora literature has made, establishing connection between their homeland and the remaining world possible. The diaspora writers in their displaced condition have been generating meritorious literature for decades. They are engrossed in portraying the culture of native and adopted land with equitable ease for multiple readerships. Also, they have with them loads of memories and voice a fusion of national and international affairs which encompass real and imaginative experiences. The diasporic writings chiefly pivot around the search for identity, rootlessness, nostalgia, insider and outsider syndrome etc. The

plots are different, the subjects vary, but the bits are drawn from the two different worlds that simultaneously coexist in the conscience of the diasporic writers.

Bharati Mukherjee, an immigrant writer who has undergone the phase of transition from expatriation to immigration scrutinizes the problems and the conditions of the third world immigrants from India, who strive hard to assimilate in the New World. The novels written during her earlier Canadian phase delineates physical violence and racial discrimination. The protagonists of her fiction as well as in her collection of short stories are portrayed as victims of racism, sexism and other forms of social oppression. On analysing Mukherjee's novels it is found that her writings depict the inter-cultural trauma encountered by the Asian immigrant women by virtue of entering into contrasting American culture from diverse indigenous environments.

Diaspora as a type of consciousness represents the dislocation, shifting and split-identities, fragmented self and finally transformation and transition. Mukherjee's characters suffer the loss of self, and the sense of alienation and loneliness creates a fragmented self. This change either compels them towards hybridization or assimilation or else results in a complete isolation from the society. Tara, the protagonist of Mukherjee's *Desirable Daughters* is presented as an empowered woman who divorces her husband and enjoys sex liberally with her live-in-lover, Andy. Tara becomes Americanized by divorcing her husband Bish, which is undreamt in an Indian society and her living with her live-in-lover Andy is a proof of her Americanization. She is proud of her free-spirited lifestyle and assimilation in the adopted land but some circumstances force her to look back to her roots. The book jacket review, rightly notes: "It is both the portrait of a traditional Brahmin Indian family and the contemporary story of an American woman who had in many ways broken with the tradition but still remains tied to her native country."

The chaos in Tara life comes with the arrival of Chris Dey, who introduces himself as her nephew and her elder sister, Padmadias her mother. The arrival of Chris Dey shatters the American life of Tara, questioning about her family tradition and cultural values. Tara on feeling offended by Chris Dey intruding her life resorts to her Brahmnical upbringing and yells:

> how dare you call us your mashi, your maternal aunts, how dare you go to my sister or come to me, how dare you an imposter in laughable clothes demand anything of us how dare you invade our homes with your sinister lies about being a part of our family (35).

Tara protected her family reputation by denying the evidences which the young boy showed. But she was shocked and outraged as it was certainly unimaginable that her sister could become pregnant out of wedlock especially because they were groomed in an orthodox Bengali Brahmin family that taught girls to be docile and virtuous. Chris Dey not only puts Padma s upbringing in question rather put all the three "Desirable Daughters" in a dock.

> To be Calcutta *bhadralok*, as we Bhattacharjees were, was to share a tradition of leadership, of sensitivity, of achievement, refinement, and beauty that was the envy of the world. That is the legacy of the last generation of Calcutta high society, a world into which we three sisters were born…(22)

Tara, though did not accept any evidence given by this boy but some -where or the other she wanted to affirm his genuineness and thus call her sister, parvarti . But she denies of any such existence. She believes that the reputation of the Bhattarcharjee family is immune to scandal of any sort. She does not tolerate anything that question the tradition of the family– "Have you become so American that you don't realize how absurd your request is? (97)." She even warns her to leave aside this completely worthless matter but the curiosity within her forces her to delve far into the historical past of her family.

The curiosity to find the truth forces her to visit her elder sister, Padma in New Jersey where she finds herself shuffles between twin identities. During her visit in New Jersey she instantaneously gets into the garb of 'choto bon' (186), the younger sister, a role aided by similarity of language, clothes and food belonging to the past. Talking in native Bengali language with Padma, Tara ponders, "It was wonderful returning to my native language, rediscovering that mocking tone just shy of aggression. I liked the person I became when I spoke it." (176).

Both the sisters have been living in the west, the path taken by both of them have made them total stranger. Padma who has been living in the United States for nearly twenty five years has become more Indian than what she was in Calcutta. She even condemned Tara for going through the divorce. She thinks that her little sister had become too "American". On the contrary Tara does not approve of her sister's lifestyle, because her sister's behavior is not a symbol of her desire to return to Indian tradition but rather a cowardly act to respond to the difficulties of cultural transition. And her distancing from other Indian and the culture is not the denial of her Indianness but rather a way not to feel an alien in a new environment: "...I loved my family and culture but had walked away from the struggle to preserve them... I barely knew any Indians." (180-81)

Instead of trying to preserve the India of her past, Tara moved forward toward what she believed was the possibility of change and progression. While her Didi recreates the India of her childhood. Tara works to create a world in which she does not have to live in the past.

Tara's identity also is constantly changing and evolving, yet she does not want to lose the identities she has possessed nor her connection to Indian culture. When Didi brings Tara to Jackson Heights for shopping she is attracted to the Indianness of the place:

> The attraction of Jackson Heights, for me, had always been people pleasures: side walks full of Indians, every face is

> Indian, every shop and storefront features Indian jewelry…the smells and the noises are familiar; Seventy-eight Street and all the side streets are clogged by double-parked cars and delivery vans…but wherever, it's intoxicating. (199)

Tara admits that she has somewhat distanced herself from the Indian culture but still it holds an importance in her life. Both American and Indian cultures are appreciated in different way. She enjoys the American life, the independent life but at the same time she always tries to maintain her Indian identity. Vandana Singh rightly comments about the protagonists of Bharati Mukherjee, "Though the female protagonist is comfortable with her American identity still she identifies with her Indian roots". (Singh, 189)

She finds herself in a conflict between old modes of thinking and new forms of consciousness that have been created. It seems as if she is struck within both American and Indian culture and each one occupy an important place in her life, "maybe I really was between two lives." (*Desirable Daughters,* 251) Tara's assertion that she is both, being simultaneously an Indian and an American, help her gain the "fluid identity." She finds that she comprises multiple selves accepting or rejecting certain aspect of both Indian and American culture. She comes to term with the idea that she never will have a single identity but rather be dispersed between being Indian and American:

> The rhetoric of modern San Francisco makes me invisible. I am not "Asian"…yet I'm still too timid to feed my Ballygunge Park Road identity into the kitchen Garburetor. That dusty identity is as fixed as any specimen in a lepidopterist's glass case….I am not the only Indian on the block. All the same, I stand out, I'm convinced. I don't belong here, despite my political leanings; worse, I don't want to belong. (78-79)

The ordeal that she undergoes, the knowledge and the experiences she gains from the society in which she lives, shapes her identity and her final transformation spreads a positive note

of tracing back the history of her ancestor. The land of opportunity and freedom has only made her to come to a realization of the glorious past of her native Indian civilization.

Edward Said has well said in his *Culture and Imperialism* that "Survival in fact is about connection between things." (336), Mukherjee's immigrant fiction also holds this predominant theme of survival. Transforming identities, the blending of the old and new cultures and values are essential factor to survive in a multicultural society like America. Mukherjee's fiction exposes the bare reality that cultural clash is not necessary for a happy entity, but a refashioning of the self without completely discarding their traditional heritage might be an invigorating experience. The refashioning of the self may be a tedious journey, but the final assimilation is definitely going to pave a way for globalization. Mukherjee in mirroring the problems of postcolonial world sets aside the artificial constraints of the society and proves that nothing is static or fixed, but everything is in a state of fluidity. She proves that the boundaries are only man-made, but a man's mental terrain has no such restriction. Thus she presents a pluralistic vision of the world and through her narrative she dismantles the political and generic borders. Migration, displacement and dislocation lead to the quest and the discovery of their self.

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IJES, Volume LXI, 2025

The Interplay of Individual Agency and Structural Constraints in Vikas Sharma's *Hope Against Hope*

***Aparna**

Abstract

Vikas Sharma's *Hope Against Hope* is a seminal work that intricately explores the tension between individual agency and structural constraints within the socio-economic and cultural milieu of contemporary India. This essay critically examines how Sharma's story illustrates the difficult balancing act between individual goals and structural constraints. It's a comprehensive critical analysis of how Prof. Sharma's narrative portrays the complex negotiation between personal aspirations and systemic limitations. Through detailed examination of character trajectories, thematic preoccupations, and narrative strategies, the study argues that Sharma's text foregrounds hope as a sustaining force that enables individuals to assert agency despite formidable socio-political and economic barriers. The analysis places the book in the larger contexts of existential philosophy, social justice, and post-colonialism. It also highlights the ways in which literature can serve as a tool for empowerment and resistance.

By delving into the complexities of Prof. Sharma's text, the study sheds light on the transformative power of literature in inspiring individuals to navigate challenges and

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strive for change. Through its multidimensional analysis, it underscores the importance of storytelling as a means of fostering resilience and advocating for social change.

The analysis situates the novel within broader discourses of postcolonialism, social justice, and existential philosophy, drawing on critical theories by Anthony Giddens, Frantz Fanon, and Albert Camus.

Keywords: Individual agency, Structural constraints, Resilience, Post-colonialism

Introduction

In *Hope Against Hope*, Vikas Sharma crafts a narrative that is as much a social critique as it is a philosophical meditation on the human condition. The text foregrounds the lives of individuals who struggle to assert their agency amid a labyrinth of structural constraints—economic hardships, educational deficiencies, familial obligations, and political turbulence. This research paper critically examines the dialectical interplay between individual agency—the capacity to make autonomous choices—and structural forces that delimit and shape such choices. The author's work reveals how hope functions as both a personal and collective resource in resisting and negotiating these constraints. This analysis draws on textual evidence to highlight the nuanced portrayal of socio-economic realities and individual resilience in the novel. Sharma's work shows how hope serves as a resource for individuals and communities to push back against and navigate these impediments. To enhance our understanding of Sharma's narrative, sociological and postcolonial theoretical frameworks are employed in this analysis.

Sharma's narrative vividly portrays characters whose agency manifests through persistence, intellectual growth, and moral courage. The story of Nishan Singh, a student burdened by poverty and academic failure, is emblematic of the triumph of individual effort over structural impediments. Despite securing only 42 percent in his M.A. Pre-examination and initially lamenting, "I've

lost my career... destined to be a peon or at the most a clerk" (11)

Nishan Singh's determination and resilience ultimately lead him to excel in his studies, earning a Ph.D. and becoming a respected academic in his own right. His journey serves as a powerful reminder of the transformative potential of education and hard work in overcoming adversity.

Nishan's transformation under Sharma's rigorous guidance demonstrates the power of personal resolve: "Within six months, he learnt communication skills and could write 80 percent correct answers and speak for ten minutes on different authors". (13)

Nishan Singh's journey from despair to success is a testament to resilience and the transformative power of education and guidance. His story serves as an inspiring example of overcoming challenges and giving back to the community.

This metamorphosis underscores the efficacy of agency exercised through discipline and education, suggesting that systemic shortcomings can be mitigated by individual will.

Similarly, the character Alam exemplifies the capacity for self-transformation. Initially shy and unable to present a paper, Alam gains confidence and eventually succeeds in the Indian Administrative Service examination, illustrating the empowerment that comes from seizing educational opportunities: "He expressed his views on Inflation in India with full self-reliance, and was declared selected for M.B.A.". (22)

Sharma's depiction of such characters affirms the belief that agency, when coupled with access to knowledge and mentorship, can enable individuals to transcend socio-economic barriers.

While celebrating agency, Sharma does not ignore the weight of structural constraints. The narrative repeatedly emphasizes the economic hardships and social inequities that circumscribe the lives of characters. The pervasive problem of inflation is articulated early in the text: "Due to inflation of nearly 10 percent almost every

year, it became difficult to pull on the family of five members with just five hundred rupees per month". (9)

This economic reality forces characters like Nishan Singh to balance academic aspirations with survival imperatives, compelling them into tuition jobs and other compromises.

The text also exposes institutional failures, particularly in education and healthcare, which reproduce and perpetuate inequality, as quoted from the text :Most of the farmers get no proper medical aid as the physician and the staff nurses hardly visit the Primary Health Centre. Such systemic neglect not only endangers physical well-being but also limits opportunities for social mobility.

Moreover, Sharma highlights the constraining influence of familial and cultural expectations. The complex web of kinship, property disputes, and arranged marriages is a recurrent motif. For example, Jag Mohan's navigation through his family's property and political alliances reflects the interplay of personal desire and socio-political obligation: "Due to the mercy of God, I have made this choice… If your parents are ready to bless us, there is no other hurdle." (166)

The prominence of arranged marriages, dowry negotiations, and caste-based considerations reveal the persistence of tradition as a structural force shaping individual lives.

Sharma's novel does not portray agency and structure as binary opposites but rather as engaged in a dynamic dialectic. Characters like Jag Mohan exemplify this negotiation as they assert personal ambitions within the parameters set by family, economy, and politics. Jag Mohan's transition from a penniless youth to a successful businessman is mediated through strategic alliances and familial support: "I have discussed your offer with him and he has not yet given his final verdict in this matter. If you remain passionate like this, nothing will come out of it. Have patience, Yaar." (131)

This interaction reveals how agency operates not in isolation but through engagement with structural realities. Jag Mohan's

ability to navigate and adapt to these structural realities showcases his resilience and determination in achieving his goals. By seeking support from his family and forming strategic alliances, he is able to overcome obstacles and succeed in his entrepreneurial pursuits. His willingness to listen and consider different perspectives also demonstrates his open-mindedness and ability to collaborate effectively. Overall, Jag Mohan's approach highlights the importance of persistence and flexibility in navigating complex social and economic environments. His proactive attitude and willingness to learn from failures further contribute to his success, setting him apart as a dynamic and forward-thinking entrepreneur. Jag Mohan's ability to embrace change and innovation positions him as a leader in his field, inspiring others to follow in his footsteps.

Conversely, the narrative acknowledges the inescapable limits of agency. Nanny's repeated miscarriages serve as a poignant metaphor for the fragility of individual aspirations against biological and existential constraints: "Nanny conceived three times in eleven months but had a miscarriage all the time… She blamed her fate as if she was born to remain a childless woman." (164)

This biological destiny symbolizes the broader unpredictability and vulnerability inherent in human life, emphasizing that agency is often circumscribed by forces beyond control. Ultimately, the narrative suggests that while individuals may strive for autonomy and self-determination, they are ultimately subject to the whims of fate and circumstance. Nanny's experience serves as a stark reminder of the harsh realities of life, where personal agency is often limited by external factors beyond one's control. This theme of fate versus agency is a recurring motif throughout the novel, highlighting the tension between individual desires and societal expectations. Nanny's struggle to reconcile her own aspirations with the constraints imposed by her circumstances reflects a universal human experience of grappling with the limitations of free will. As the story unfolds, Nanny's journey sheds light on the complexities of navigating one's own path in a world that is not

always conducive to personal growth and fulfilment. Through her character, Hurston delves into the intricacies of power dynamics and social norms that can shape an individual's sense of autonomy and self-determination. Ultimately, Nanny's story serves as a poignant reminder of the ongoing struggle for agency and self-fulfilment in the face of societal pressures. Hurston's exploration of these themes resonates with readers who may also find themselves torn between their own desires and the expectations placed upon them by others.

A recurring theme in *Hope Against Hope* is the conceptualization of hope as an active form of agency. Sharma frames hope not as passive optimism but as a deliberate, often painful, affirmation of life in adversity: "Hope is eternal… It was not the end of her love story with Jag Mohan. Rather, it was the beginning of a new chapter as guardian, mentor, caretaker and mother of the child." (186)

This assertion positions hope as a critical resource enabling characters to envision and strive for better futures despite structural impediments. Philosophically, the text aligns with existentialist perspectives on freedom and responsibility. Characters are portrayed as responsible agents who must create meaning within constraining contexts. This is illustrated in Nanny's reflections: "We receive what we give. And in our life alone does Nature live!" (167)

Such lines resonate with the existentialist emphasis on authentic action as a means of self-constitution.

The novel *Hope against Hope* also functions as a socio-political critique embedded in a postcolonial context. The depiction of economic disparities, communal tensions, and political struggles highlights ongoing challenges in India's development: "Farmers had taken their food items, and cooking tools to the capital and free lunger served their physical needs." (52)

The narrative critiques government inefficiencies, social unrest, and the persistence of feudal attitudes, situating individual struggles

within larger historical and political frameworks. The narrative critiques government inefficiencies, social unrest, and the persistence of feudal attitudes, situating individual struggles within larger historical and political frameworks as the characters navigate a complex landscape of power dynamics and societal norms that hinder progress and equality. Through these challenges, the narrative sheds light on the complexities of development in a country grappling with deep-rooted issues and the need for systemic change. The characters' journeys highlight the obstacles they face in breaking free from the constraints of tradition and hierarchy, showcasing the impact of these barriers on personal growth and societal advancement. As they confront these challenges, the narrative underscores the importance of addressing deep-seated issues to pave the way for a more equitable and prosperous future. By addressing these obstacles head-on, the characters in the story inspire hope and resilience in the face of adversity. Their experiences serve as a powerful reminder of the transformative power of perseverance and collective action in overcoming entrenched barriers to progress. Through their struggles and triumphs, the characters demonstrate the potential for positive change when individuals come together to challenge systemic injustices. Ultimately, the story highlights the transformative power of unity and determination in breaking down barriers and creating a more inclusive society for all.

Moreover, the text's emphasis on education, empowerment, and social justice aligns with postcolonial aspirations for equity and national progress: "Let good sense prevail among people. Let the students of A.M.U. dedicate themselves to new books of each branch of learning and become pure Indian scholars." (180)

This call for intellectual and social awakening reflects a broader postcolonial discourse on nation-building. It stresses how important education is for making society fairer and more forward-thinking, and it stresses how important it is for people to seek knowledge and power. The text promotes a vision of a united and

enlightened nation moving toward a better future by encouraging students to study a wide range of subjects and become well-rounded scholars. This vision fits with the values of a modern, democratic India that sees education as a way to improve society and the country as a whole. Students are encouraged to make a real difference in their society and culture by focusing on intellectual growth and academic exploration. The text's goal is to give people the skills they need to deal with a world that is getting more complicated by promoting a culture of lifelong learning and critical thinking. Concludingly, it wants to raise a group of leaders who are not only smart but also caring and responsible in their communities.

This way of teaching is important for making people who are well-rounded and can adapt to the changing needs of the world. Students are taught to care about others and get involved in their communities so that they can use what they learn to make the world a better place for everyone. This whole-person approach to education also stresses how important it is for students to work together and get along with others, which will help them do well in a variety of settings. People are encouraged to think beyond themselves and work toward common goals for the greater good by creating a sense of community and connection. This all-encompassing education model also puts a lot of stress on students' ability to think critically and solve problems, giving them the skills they need to deal with tough situations. People can overcome challenges and make their communities better by encouraging a growth mindset and resilience.

Sharma employs a reflective and episodic narrative style, blending autobiographical elements with fictional accounts. This method effectively situates individual stories within broader social realities. The detailed psychological development of characters such as Jag Mohan, Nanny, Pummy, and Minti humanizes abstract socio-economic themes, fostering reader empathy and engagement.

The interspersing of philosophical musings, literary references, and socio-political commentary enriches the text's intellectual texture. For example, the frequent allusions to Shakespeare, Kalidas, and Indian epics connect personal experiences to universal themes of human frailty and perseverance (Sharma 36-37, 140-143).

The narrative also addresses the socio-cultural constraints rooted in family and tradition. The complex family dynamics, as seen in the Gupta and Tiwari households, reveal tensions between personal desires and societal expectations. For instance, the marriage arrangements and conflicts over property illustrate the weight of tradition and economic power: "As a matter of fact, Jag Mohan and his four friends… had helped him in the election period and made him win the election. Now Pushpendra Mohan wanted to prepare a background for the assembly seat from Khurja." (130)

Political patronage and familial alliances emerge as critical factors shaping individual destinies, often restricting autonomous choices.

Conclusion

In *Hope Against Hope*, Vikas Sharma presents a layered and nuanced exploration of the interplay between individual agency and structural constraints. The narrative reveals how personal determination, hope, and resilience persist in the face of economic hardship, institutional failures, and social expectations. Sharma's work highlights the complexities of negotiating freedom within social systems, offering a profound meditation on human endurance. Ultimately, the text champions hope as both a personal ethic and a political imperative, advocating for transformative agency amid structural challenges.

In order to place individual stories within social realities, Sharma uses a contemplative, episodic narrative style that combines fictional and autobiographical elements. Socio-economic themes

are humanized and empathy is fostered by the psychological depth of characters like Minti, Nanny, and Jag Mohan.

Through their struggles and triumphs, readers are invited to reflect on the interconnectedness of personal agency and societal constraints. Prof. Sharma's nuanced portrayal of these characters serves as a powerful reminder of the resilience and strength that can be found in the face of adversity. Overall, the authors' storytelling technique allows for a deeper exploration of the complexities of human experience and the ways in which individuals navigate their social environments. By weaving together personal and societal narratives, Sharma offers a rich tapestry of insight into the human condition.

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IJES, Volume LXI, 2025

Reimagining Bharat and India through the Lenses of Oriental Literature

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Abstract

The interplay between "Bharat" and "India" represents a complex tapestry of cultural, historical, and philosophical identities, often viewed through the reductive lens of Orientalism. This paper explores how Oriental literature has shaped and, at times, distorted the perceptions of Bharat—the civilizational ethos rooted in ancient traditions—and India, the modern nation-state. By analyzing key texts from colonial and postcolonial periods, including Edward Said's critique of Orientalism, Rabindranath Tagore's poetic visions, and contemporary Indian English literature, this study reimagines these dual identities. Oriental literature, often marked by exoticization and stereotyping, has historically framed Bharat as a mystical, timeless entity, while India is portrayed as a fragmented, postcolonial construct. This paper argues for a nuanced reclamation of these narratives, emphasizing indigenous perspectives that challenge Western constructs. Through the lenses of myth, spirituality, and

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modernity in works like R.K. Narayan's novels and A.K. Ramanujan's folk retellings, it examines how Bharat's pluralistic heritage dialogues with India's globalized identity. The study critiques the Eurocentric gaze while highlighting how Indian authors subvert Oriental tropes to assert agency. By weaving together postcolonial theory, cultural memory, and literary analysis, this paper proposes a reimagined framework where Bharat and India coexist as dynamic, interwoven identities, resisting homogenization. This approach underscores the need to decolonize literary representations and embrace a multifaceted understanding of Indianness.

Keywords: Bharat, India, Orientalism, postcolonial literature, cultural identity, decolonization, Eurocentrism, spirituality, modernity.

Introduction

The dual identities of "Bharat" and "India" encapsulate a profound interplay of cultural, historical, and philosophical dimensions that have long fascinated scholars, writers, and thinkers. Bharat represents the ancient, civilizational ethos of the Indian subcontinent, rooted in its rich traditions, spiritual philosophies, and pluralistic heritage. India, by contrast, signifies the modern nation-state, forged through colonial encounters, independence struggles, and contemporary global aspirations. These two constructs, though intertwined, are often framed differently in literary discourses, particularly through the lens of Oriental literature, which has historically shaped global perceptions of the subcontinent. This paper seeks to reimagine Bharat and India by critically analyzing how Oriental literature has portrayed these identities, often through exoticization and stereotyping, while highlighting indigenous narratives that challenge such representations and assert cultural agency. By examining colonial and postcolonial texts, this study aims to decolonize literary portrayals and propose a nuanced framework where Bharat and India coexist as dynamic, interwoven identities.

The term "Bharat" evokes a civilizational continuum, drawing from ancient texts like the *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas*, which describe a land of diverse cultures unified by shared spiritual and philosophical values (Thapar, 2014). Bharat is not merely a geographical entity but a cultural imaginary, encompassing myths, rituals, and a sense of timelessness. In contrast, "India" emerged as a political construct, formalized during British colonial rule and cemented with the establishment of the modern nation-state in 1947 (Guha, 2007). This dichotomy is not merely semantic but reflects differing worldviews: Bharat as an enduring, pluralistic civilization and India as a contested space navigating modernity, globalization, and postcolonial identity.

Oriental literature, as critiqued by Edward Said in his seminal work *Orientalism* (1978), has played a significant role in shaping Western perceptions of Bharat and India. Said argues that Orientalism, as a discourse, constructs the East as an exotic, mystical "other" to legitimize colonial dominance. (3) In this framework, Bharat is often romanticized as a land of ancient wisdom and spirituality, frozen in time, while India is depicted as a chaotic, modern entity struggling with the burdens of postcoloniality. Colonial texts, such as those by William Jones or Rudyard Kipling, exemplify this tendency, portraying Bharat as a repository of esoteric knowledge while framing India as a fragmented, governable entity (Cohn, 1996). Such representations, while influential, often distort the lived realities of the subcontinent, reducing its complexity to stereotypes.

However, indigenous voices have consistently challenged these portrayals, offering alternative visions of Bharat and India. Writers like Rabindranath Tagore, R.K. Narayan, and A.K. Ramanujan have reimagined these identities through literature that blends tradition with modernity. Tagore's works, such as *Gitanjali* (1912), articulate a universalist vision of Bharat rooted in spiritual humanism, transcending colonial binaries. Narayan's novels, like *Malgudi Days* (1943), ground Bharat in everyday life, presenting

a localized, relatable identity that resists exoticization. Similarly, Ramanujan's retellings of folk tales, such as those in *Folktales from India* (1991), reclaim Bharat's oral traditions, emphasizing their diversity and dynamism. These works counter the Orientalist gaze by foregrounding indigenous agency and cultural multiplicity.

The significance of Oriental literature lies in its dual role: as a tool of colonial misrepresentation and as a site of contestation where Indian writers assert their narratives. By analyzing these texts, this paper uncovers how Bharat and India have been constructed, deconstructed, and reimagined. The study draws on postcolonial theory to critique Eurocentric frameworks and explore how Indian literature negotiates the tension between tradition and modernity. This approach aligns with Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity, which posits that postcolonial identities are formed through cultural negotiations that defy fixed categorizations (Bhabha, 1994). By applying this lens, the paper examines how Bharat's civilizational ethos dialogues with India's modern aspirations, creating a hybrid identity that resists homogenization.

The objectives of this study are threefold: first, to analyze how Oriental literature has historically framed Bharat and India; second, to highlight indigenous responses that subvert these portrayals; and third, to propose a reimagined framework where these identities coexist as dynamic and pluralistic. The scope encompasses colonial texts, such as Kipling's *Kim* (1901) and E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924), alongside postcolonial Indian literature, including works by Tagore, Narayan, Ramanujan, Salman Rushdie, and Arundhati Roy. These texts offer a rich corpus for exploring the interplay of myth, spirituality, and modernity in shaping Indian identity.

Decolonizing literary representations is a central aim of this study. As Ania Loomba notes, decolonization involves not only political independence but also the reclamation of cultural narratives from colonial distortions (Loomba, 2015). By foregrounding indigenous voices, this paper challenges the Eurocentric gaze and

emphasizes the agency of Indian writers in redefining their cultural identity. This approach resonates with Dipesh Chakrabarty's call to "provincialize Europe," urging scholars to center non-Western perspectives in global discourses (Chakrabarty, 2000). In doing so, the study seeks to move beyond binary oppositions—East vs. West, tradition vs. modernity—to embrace a multifaceted understanding of Indianness.

This paper is structured to trace the evolution of Bharat and India through literary lenses. It begins with a theoretical framework grounded in Said's Orientalism and postcolonial theory, followed by an analysis of colonial-era portrayals of Bharat. It then examines modern India in Western and Indian literature, highlighting tensions and negotiations. The core of the study explores indigenous reimaginings, focusing on how Indian authors reclaim Bharat's heritage while engaging with India's globalized identity. Finally, it synthesizes these insights to propose a dynamic framework for understanding Bharat and India as interwoven identities. In conclusion, reimagining Bharat and India through Oriental literature requires a critical engagement with both colonial legacies and indigenous responses. By deconstructing Orientalist tropes and amplifying Indian voices, this study underscores the resilience and plurality of Indian identity. It argues that Bharat and India are not mutually exclusive but complementary facets of a vibrant cultural narrative, one that continues to evolve in dialogue with its past and present.

Theoretical Framework: Orientalism and Postcolonialism

The exploration of Bharat and India through the lenses of Oriental literature necessitates a robust theoretical framework to unpack the complex interplay of cultural representations, power dynamics, and identity formation. This section establishes the theoretical foundation for the study by drawing on Edward Said's concept of Orientalism and postcolonial theories that address the reclamation of indigenous narratives. These frameworks provide critical tools to analyze how Oriental literature has historically

constructed Bharat and India, often through distortion and stereotyping, and how Indian writers have responded by subverting these representations to assert cultural agency. This dual approach illuminates the tensions between colonial legacies and postcolonial aspirations, offering a lens to reimagine Bharat and India as dynamic, interwoven identities.

Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) serves as the cornerstone of this study, providing a critical lens to examine how Western literature has framed the East, including Bharat and India. Said defines Orientalism as a discourse through which the West constructs the East as an exotic, mystical, and inferior "other" to justify colonial domination. (3) This framework is particularly relevant to understanding colonial portrayals of Bharat, often depicted as a timeless land of spirituality and mysticism, and India, seen as a chaotic, modern entity requiring Western intervention. Said argues that Orientalist texts, such as those by William Jones or Rudyard Kipling, create a binary opposition between the rational West and the irrational East, embedding power dynamics that legitimize colonial authority. (Said, 40)

In the context of Bharat, Orientalist literature romanticizes its ancient traditions, portraying it as a repository of esoteric wisdom frozen in time. For instance, Jones' translations of Sanskrit texts, such as the *Bhagavad Gita*, while pioneering, framed Bharat as an unchanging, spiritual entity, divorced from its lived realities (Cohn, 1996). Similarly, Kipling's *Kim* (1901) constructs India as a vibrant yet disorderly landscape, requiring British governance to impose order (Kipling, 1901). These portrayals, as Said notes, reduce complex societies to stereotypes, stripping them of agency and historicity. (94) By analyzing these texts, this study critiques how Orientalism has shaped global perceptions of Bharat and India, often overshadowing their diversity and dynamism.

Postcolonial theory offers a counterpoint to Orientalism, emphasizing the agency of colonized societies in reclaiming their narratives. Scholars like Homi K. Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty

Spivak highlight how postcolonial literature challenges Eurocentric frameworks by foregrounding hybridity, ambivalence, and subaltern voices (Bhabha, 1994; Spivak, 1988). Bhabha's concept of hybridity is particularly relevant, as it posits that postcolonial identities emerge through cultural negotiations that defy fixed categorizations. (2) In the context of Bharat and India, hybridity manifests in the interplay between traditional heritage and modern aspirations, as seen in the works of Indian writers who blend myth with contemporary realities.

Indian authors have actively subverted Orientalist tropes, reimagining Bharat and India through indigenous perspectives. Rabindranath Tagore's *Gitanjali* (1912) exemplifies this, presenting a universalist vision of Bharat rooted in spiritual humanism that transcends colonial binaries. Tagore's work challenges the exoticization of Bharat by emphasizing its philosophical depth and global relevance. Similarly, R.K. Narayan's *Malgudi Days* (1943) grounds Bharat in the everyday lives of ordinary people, resisting the mystical stereotypes perpetuated by Orientalist literature. A.K. Ramanujan's *Folktales from India* (1991) further reclaims Bharat's oral traditions, showcasing their diversity and vitality as a counter-narrative to Western homogenization. These works illustrate how postcolonial literature asserts cultural agency, reframing Bharat and India as dynamic entities.

Spivak's concept of the subaltern also informs this study, highlighting the need to amplify marginalized voices within Indian literature (Spivak, 1988). While Orientalist texts often ignore the diversity of Indian society, postcolonial writers like Arundhati Roy and Salman Rushdie address the complexities of caste, gender, and regional identities, offering a more inclusive vision of India (Roy, 1997; Rushdie, 1981). By centering these voices, postcolonial theory enables a reimagination of Bharat and India that embraces plurality and resists reductive stereotypes.

The Bharat-India dichotomy is a fertile ground for applying Orientalism and postcolonialism, as it encapsulates the tension

between civilizational heritage and modern nationhood. Orientalist literature often constructs Bharat as a static, spiritual ideal, while portraying India as a fractured, postcolonial state. This binary, as Said argues, serves to reinforce colonial power by denying the East's contemporaneity. (113) Postcolonial responses, however, bridge this divide by presenting Bharat and India as interwoven identities. For instance, Tagore's vision of Bharat as a universalist civilization dialogues with India's modern aspirations, creating a hybrid identity that defies Orientalist categorization.

This framework is crucial for understanding how Indian literature negotiates the legacy of Orientalism. As Dipesh Chakrabarty suggests in *Provincializing Europe* (2000), decolonizing knowledge requires centering non-Western perspectives to challenge Eurocentric narratives. (4) Indian writers achieve this by reclaiming Bharat's cultural heritage while engaging with India's globalized identity. For example, Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) weaves Bharat's mythological past with India's postcolonial present, creating a narrative that resists both Orientalist exoticization and nationalist homogenization. Similarly, Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) explores the intersections of tradition and modernity, exposing the social complexities of India while rooted in Bharat's cultural ethos.

By combining Said's critique of Orientalism with postcolonial theories of hybridity and subalternity, this study provides a comprehensive framework to analyze the literary construction of Bharat and India. It critiques the distortions of Orientalist texts while celebrating the agency of Indian writers in redefining these identities. This approach underscores the need to decolonize literary representations, moving beyond binary oppositions to embrace a pluralistic understanding of Indianness. The framework sets the stage for subsequent sections, which will explore colonial portrayals, indigenous responses, and the synthesis of Bharat and India as dynamic, interwoven identities.

The historical portrayal of Bharat in Oriental literature, particularly during the colonial era, provides a critical lens through which to understand the construction and misrepresentation of Indian identity. The colonial encounter with Bharat, beginning in the 18th century, coincided with the rise of Orientalism, a Western intellectual framework that sought to define and dominate the East through knowledge production. (Said, 12) British scholars and administrators, such as William Jones, played a pivotal role in this process by translating and interpreting Indian texts, thereby shaping Western perceptions of Bharat. Jones, founder of the Asiatic Society in 1784, translated works like the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Shakuntala*, presenting Bharat as a land of ancient wisdom and spiritual profundity (Cohn, 1996, p. 24). While his efforts introduced Indian literature to the West, they often framed Bharat as static and other worldly, emphasizing its philosophical and religious traditions at the expense of its contemporary social dynamics. This selective portrayal aligned with Said's critique of Orientalism, which argues that the East was constructed as a timeless, homogenous entity to contrast with the progressive West. (94)

Rudyard Kipling's literary works further exemplify this Orientalist framing. In *Kim* (1901), Kipling depicts Bharat as a vibrant yet chaotic landscape, populated by mystics, holy men, and diverse cultures, all under the benevolent gaze of British rule. The novel's protagonist navigates a romanticized Bharat, characterized by bustling bazaars and spiritual quests, yet the narrative reinforces colonial authority by portraying the subcontinent as ungovernable without Western intervention. Kipling's portrayal, while evocative, reduces Bharat to a series of exotic stereotypes—sacred rivers, ascetic yogis, and ancient ruins—that obscure its historical and cultural complexity. As Bernard S. Cohn notes, such representations served to legitimize colonial governance by constructing India as a land in need of order and modernization. (10)

Other colonial texts, such as James Mill's *The History of British India* (1817), further entrenched these stereotypes by dismissing Bharat's intellectual traditions as primitive and superstitious (Mill, 1817). Mill's work, influential in shaping British policy, portrayed Bharat's civilization as stagnant, justifying colonial intervention as a civilizing mission. This narrative not only marginalized indigenous knowledge systems but also erased the diversity of Bharat's cultural practices, from regional languages to localized traditions. The cumulative effect of these texts was to create a monolithic image of Bharat as a mystical, unchanging entity, detached from the lived experiences of its people.

The Orientalist portrayal of Bharat had profound implications for both global perceptions and the cultural identity of the subcontinent. By framing Bharat as a land of spiritual excess and temporal stagnation, colonial literature reinforced a binary between the rational West and the irrational East, as Said argues. (40) This binary not only justified colonial domination but also shaped how the West—and, to some extent, Indians themselves—perceived Bharat's cultural heritage. For instance, the romanticization of Bharat's spirituality, as seen in Jones' translations, led to a global fascination with Indian philosophy, evidenced by the influence of texts like the *Upanishads* on Western thinkers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson (Keay, 1988, 56). However, this fascination often came at the cost of oversimplification, reducing Bharat's diverse traditions to a singular narrative of mysticism.

Within the subcontinent, these portrayals had a complex impact on cultural identity. The colonial emphasis on Bharat's ancient past prompted a revivalist response among Indian intellectuals, who sought to reclaim their heritage as a source of pride. Figures like Swami Vivekananda, in the late 19th century, countered Orientalist stereotypes by presenting Bharat's spiritual traditions as universal and rational, challenging the notion of inferiority (Vivekananda, 1893). However, the colonial framing also created a sense of dislocation, as Indians were confronted

with a version of their culture filtered through a Western lens. This tension, as Dipesh Chakrabarty observes, forced colonized societies to navigate their identity within the parameters of European modernity, often marginalizing indigenous ways of knowing. (34)

Globally, the Orientalist depiction of Bharat contributed to a skewed understanding of the subcontinent, perpetuating stereotypes that persist in contemporary media and literature. The image of Bharat as a land of snake charmers, sacred cows, and eternal spirituality, while rooted in colonial texts, continues to influence Western imaginations, as seen in early 20th-century travelogues and films. (Prasad, 72) These representations not only exoticized Bharat but also obscured its socio-political realities, such as the vibrant intellectual debates and cultural pluralism that characterized the subcontinent. The legacy of these portrayals underscores the need for postcolonial literature to challenge and reframe Bharat's identity, a task undertaken by writers like Rabindranath Tagore and R.K. Narayan, who sought to present a more grounded and pluralistic vision.

The portrayal of India as a modern nation-state in both Oriental and postcolonial literature reflects a complex negotiation between colonial legacies and indigenous aspirations. Unlike Bharat, which Orientalist texts often framed as a timeless, mystical civilization, India in the modern era is depicted as a dynamic, yet fractured, postcolonial entity grappling with the tensions of modernity, globalization, and cultural identity. This section examines how Western literature, rooted in Orientalist perspectives, constructs India as a chaotic space in need of order, while Indian authors respond by subverting these stereotypes, offering nuanced portrayals that bridge tradition and modernity. Through close analysis of key texts, such as E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924), V.S. Naipaul's critical works, Rabindranath Tagore's spiritual nationalism, and R.K. Narayan's localized narratives, this study highlights the contrasting depictions of modern India and the role of indigenous voices in redefining its identity.

Western literature, particularly in the early 20th century, often perpetuated Orientalist tropes by portraying modern India as a chaotic, fragmented nation struggling to reconcile its ancient heritage with postcolonial realities. E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924) is a seminal example, depicting India as a land of cultural misunderstandings and irreconcilable differences between the British colonizers and Indian subjects. The novel's Marabar Caves episode, with its enigmatic and disorienting echoes, symbolizes India as an incomprehensible and chaotic entity, reinforcing the Orientalist view of the East as mysterious and ungovernable. (Said, 201) While Forster critiques British colonialism, his portrayal of India as an elusive, almost mystical space perpetuates stereotypes of disorder and irrationality, aligning with Edward Said's argument that Orientalism constructs the East as a foil to Western rationality. (40)

Similarly, V.S. Naipaul's works, such as *An Area of Darkness* (1964), present a critical view of modern India as a nation trapped in dysfunction and cultural stagnation (Naipaul, 1964). Naipaul, a writer of Indian descent but shaped by a Western perspective, describes India as a land of poverty, inefficiency, and unfulfilled potential, echoing colonial narratives that frame the subcontinent as a problem to be solved. His portrayal, while nuanced, often reinforces stereotypes of India as chaotic and backward, overlooking its resilience and diversity. As Ania Loomba notes, such representations reflect the lingering influence of Orientalism, which casts postcolonial societies as perpetually deficient in the face of Western modernity. (112) These texts, while engaging with India's modern identity, tend to emphasize its challenges—poverty, bureaucracy, and cultural fragmentation—over its agency and dynamism.

The impact of these portrayals is significant, as they shape global perceptions of India as a nation struggling to modernize while burdened by its past. Such narratives often obscure the vibrancy of India's postcolonial transformation, including its

democratic achievements and cultural pluralism, as highlighted by historians like Ramachandra Guha. (15) By focusing on chaos and exoticism, Western literature perpetuates a reductive image of India, necessitating indigenous responses to counter these distortions.

Indian Authors' Responses to Oriental Tropes

Indian authors have actively challenged Orientalist portrayals by crafting narratives that assert cultural agency and reimagine modern India as a space of resilience, complexity, and hybridity. Rabindranath Tagore, a towering figure in Indian literature, offers a powerful counter-narrative through his works, particularly *Gitanjali* (1912) and his essays on nationalism. Tagore's vision of India is rooted in spiritual humanism, blending Bharat's civilizational ethos with a universalist outlook that transcends colonial binaries (Tagore, 1912). In his essay *Nationalism in India* (1917), Tagore critiques both Western imperialism and narrow nationalism, advocating for an India that embraces its pluralistic heritage while engaging with global modernity. (132) His portrayal of India as a dynamic, inclusive nation challenges the Orientalist depiction of a chaotic or stagnant society, emphasizing instead its philosophical depth and cultural unity.

R.K. Narayan's works, such as *Malgudi Days* (1943), further subvert Orientalist tropes by grounding modern India in the everyday lives of its people. Narayan's fictional town of Malgudi serves as a microcosm of India, capturing its social intricacies, humor, and resilience without resorting to exoticism. Unlike Forster's or Naipaul's portrayals of India as chaotic, Narayan presents a relatable, localized India where tradition and modernity coexist harmoniously. His stories, such as "The Doctor's Word" or "A Horse and Two Goats," depict ordinary Indians navigating postcolonial challenges with dignity and agency, countering the Western tendency to frame India as disordered. As Leela Gandhi argues, Narayan's work exemplifies a postcolonial strategy of "reclaiming the mundane," which resists the exoticizing gaze of Orientalism by celebrating the quotidian. (152).

Narayan's narratives also challenge the stereotype of India as a monolithic entity by highlighting its regional diversity. His focus on South Indian life, with its distinct cultural and linguistic traditions, underscores the plurality of modern India, aligning with Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity, which sees postcolonial identities as products of cultural negotiation. (2) By presenting India as a tapestry of local experiences, Narayan counters the homogenizing tendencies of Orientalist literature, offering a grounded vision that resonates with Bharat's civilizational diversity. The responses of Tagore and Narayan illustrate a broader trend in Indian literature to reclaim and redefine modern India's identity. Their works bridge the gap between Bharat's cultural heritage and India's postcolonial aspirations, challenging the chaos and backwardness tropes perpetuated by Western authors. This reclamation aligns with Dipesh Chakrabarty's call to "provincialize Europe" by centering indigenous perspectives in global discourses. (4) By foregrounding India's agency, these authors reshape its literary representation as a nation of resilience, pluralism, and dynamic modernity.

In conclusion, the portrayal of modern India in Oriental and postcolonial literature reveals a stark contrast between Western stereotypes and indigenous counter-narratives. While texts like Forster's *A Passage to India* and Naipaul's *An Area of Darkness* depict India as chaotic and deficient, Indian authors like Tagore and Narayan offer nuanced portrayals that celebrate its cultural richness and adaptability. These responses not only challenge Orientalist distortions but also reimagine India as a vibrant, pluralistic nation-state, bridging Bharat's heritage with modern aspirations. This section sets the stage for exploring how contemporary Indian literature further reclaims Bharat's traditions while navigating India's globalized identity.

The reclamation of Bharat and India's identities through indigenous literature represents a powerful response to the distortions of Orientalist narratives. While colonial texts framed Bharat as a mystical, timeless entity and India as a chaotic

postcolonial state, Indian authors have countered these stereotypes by reimagining both identities through narratives that blend myth, spirituality, and modernity. This section explores how indigenous writers, such as A.K. Ramanujan, Salman Rushdie, and Arundhati Roy, decolonize literary representations by reclaiming Bharat's pluralistic heritage and negotiating India's modern identity. By foregrounding folk traditions, subverting Orientalist tropes, and addressing contemporary socio-political realities, these authors assert cultural agency, presenting Bharat and India as dynamic, interwoven identities that resist homogenization.

Reclaiming Bharat through Myth and Tradition

A.K. Ramanujan's work, particularly *Folktales from India* (1991), exemplifies the reclamation of Bharat's cultural heritage through its rich oral traditions. Ramanujan, a poet and folklorist, compiles and retells stories from diverse regional and linguistic traditions, showcasing Bharat's pluralism and vitality (Ramanujan, 1991). Unlike Orientalist portrayals that reduce Bharat to a monolithic spiritual entity, Ramanujan's folktales highlight the multiplicity of voices—Tamil, Kannada, Bengali, and more—that constitute its cultural fabric. Stories like "A Flowering Tree" weave themes of spirituality, gender, and community, grounding Bharat in lived experiences rather than exotic abstractions. As Leela Gandhi notes, such retellings challenge the colonial tendency to freeze non-Western cultures in time, emphasizing their ongoing relevance and adaptability. (150)

Ramanujan's work also underscores the role of spirituality in reimagining Bharat. Rather than the esoteric mysticism of Orientalist texts, his narratives present spirituality as an everyday practice embedded in community life. For instance, his translations of Bhakti poetry, such as those in *Speaking of Siva* (1973), reveal a devotional tradition that is both personal and socially engaged, countering the colonial portrayal of Indian spirituality as detached or otherworldly (Ramanujan, 1973). This approach aligns with Dipesh Chakrabarty's call to "provincialize Europe" by centering

indigenous epistemologies, allowing Bharat's traditions to speak on their own terms. (4) By reclaiming myth and oral traditions, Ramanujan restores Bharat's agency, presenting it as a living civilization rather than a static relic.

The pluralism inherent in Ramanujan's work further challenges the homogenizing tendencies of Orientalism. His focus on regional diversity—stories from rural South India, tribal communities, and urban settings—reflects Bharat's multifaceted identity. This pluralism, as Homi K. Bhabha argues, is a hallmark of postcolonial hybridity, where cultural identities are negotiated rather than fixed. By foregrounding these diverse voices, Ramanujan reimagines Bharat as a dynamic cultural continuum that informs modern India's identity.

Negotiating Modernity in Indian English Literature

Indian English literature, particularly in the works of Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy, navigates the tension between Bharat's heritage and India's postcolonial modernity, offering a vision of hybrid identity that subverts Orientalist stereotypes. Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) is a landmark text in this regard, weaving Bharat's mythological past with India's tumultuous postcolonial present. The novel's protagonist, Saleem Sinai, born at the moment of India's independence, embodies the nation's complex history, blending folklore, history, and magical realism. Rushdie's narrative challenges the Orientalist depiction of India as chaotic by presenting its diversity as a source of strength and creativity. His use of myth, such as references to the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, grounds India's modernity in Bharat's cultural heritage, creating a narrative that is both local and global.

Rushdie's work also subverts the Western tendency to frame India as a land of disorder. By employing magical realism, he transforms India's complexity into a vibrant, imaginative tapestry, rejecting the reductive binaries of East versus West. As Ania Loomba notes, Rushdie's narrative strategy exemplifies postcolonial literature's ability to reclaim agency by embracing hybridity and

multiplicity. (145) *Midnight's Children* thus reimagines India as a nation that draws on Bharat's pluralistic traditions to navigate its modern challenges, from partition to globalization.

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) further enriches this reimagination by exploring the intersections of tradition, modernity, and social inequality in postcolonial India. Set in Kerala, the novel delves into the lives of a Syrian Christian family, weaving Bharat's cultural traditions—such as Kathakali dance and caste hierarchies—with India's modern struggles, including class conflict and political change. Roy's lyrical prose and focus on marginalized voices, particularly those of women and lower-caste individuals, challenge the Orientalist portrayal of India as a homogenous, chaotic entity. Her work aligns with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of the subaltern, emphasizing the need to amplify marginalized perspectives to construct a more inclusive Indian identity. By blending Bharat's cultural richness with India's socio-political realities, Roy presents a nuanced vision of a nation in flux.

Subversion of Oriental Stereotypes by Contemporary Authors

Contemporary Indian authors like Rushdie and Roy actively subvert Orientalist stereotypes by presenting India as a site of agency and transformation. Unlike colonial texts that exoticize Bharat or depict India as dysfunctional, these writers foreground the resilience and creativity of Indian society. Rushdie's playful narrative style and Roy's incisive social critique dismantle the Western gaze, offering instead a vision of India that is both rooted in Bharat's traditions and engaged with global modernity. Their works challenge the notion of a singular Indian identity, embracing instead the multiplicity that defines both Bharat and India.

This subversion is particularly evident in how these authors address the legacy of colonialism. Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* critiques the lingering effects of British rule while celebrating India's ability to forge a new identity, while Roy's novel exposes

the social inequalities perpetuated by both colonial and postcolonial structures. Together, they reimagine Bharat and India as dynamic entities that resist the homogenizing tendencies of Orientalism, aligning with Bhabha's notion of cultural hybridity. In conclusion, indigenous reimaginings by authors like Ramanujan, Rushdie, and Roy decolonize the literary representation of Bharat and India by reclaiming cultural traditions and negotiating modern realities. Through myth, spirituality, and social critique, these writers challenge Orientalist stereotypes, presenting a pluralistic and dynamic vision of Indian identity. Their works bridge the gap between Bharat's civilizational heritage and India's postcolonial aspirations, offering a framework for understanding these identities as interwoven and resilient.

The interplay between Bharat and India reflects a dynamic relationship between cultural continuity and modern transformation. Bharat, as a civilizational construct, encompasses the subcontinent's diverse traditions, languages, and spiritual practices, as seen in texts like the *Mahabharata* and the *Upanishads.* (Thapar, 2014, 23) India, as a postcolonial nation-state, embodies the aspirations of a democratic, globalized society forged through the struggles of independence and modernization. (Guha, 15) Rather than viewing these identities as oppositional, Indian literature presents them as interwoven, with Bharat's heritage informing India's modernity and vice versa.

Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity is particularly relevant here, as it posits that postcolonial identities emerge through cultural negotiations that blend tradition and modernity. (2) Indian literature embodies this hybridity by weaving Bharat's myths and spiritual ethos with India's contemporary realities. For instance, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981) uses magical realism to intertwine Bharat's mythological heritage with India's postcolonial history, creating a narrative that celebrates the nation's complexity. This synthesis underscores the resilience of Indian identity, which

draws strength from its civilizational roots while navigating modern challenges.

The need for pluralistic representations is critical to reconciling Bharat and India. Literature must reflect the subcontinent's diversity—linguistic, religious, and social—to avoid the pitfalls of homogenization. As Leela Gandhi argues, postcolonial literature's strength lies in its ability to reclaim marginalized narratives, fostering an inclusive vision of identity. (152) By presenting Bharat and India as interwoven yet pluralistic, authors like Tagore, Narayan, Ramanujan, Rushdie, and Roy offer a framework that resists both colonial stereotypes and nationalist over simplifications. In conclusion, the synthesis of Bharat and India in indigenous literature reconciles cultural continuity with modern aspirations, challenging the dichotomies imposed by Orientalist narratives. Through works that blend myth, spirituality, and socio-political critique, Indian authors assert agency, presenting a dynamic and pluralistic vision of Indianness. Literature serves as a bridge between Bharat's traditional heritage and India's globalized identity, fostering a nuanced understanding that embraces diversity and resists homogenization. This reconciliation not only decolonizes literary representations but also reimagines Bharat and India as vibrant, interwoven identities that continue to evolve.

Future Directions: Decolonizing Literary Studies and Fostering Inclusive Narratives

The decolonization of literary studies offers a promising avenue for future research, building on the insights of this study. Decolonizing literature involves moving beyond Eurocentric frameworks, as advocated by Chakrabarty, to prioritize indigenous perspectives and methodologies. This includes amplifying marginalized voices—regional, linguistic, and socio-economic—that have been sidelined by both colonial and nationalist narratives. Future studies could explore lesser-known Indian literatures, such as those in regional languages like Tamil, Bengali, or Assamese, to further highlight Bharat's pluralism. Additionally, interdisciplinary

approaches combining literature with history, anthropology, and cultural studies could deepen our understanding of how Bharat and India are constructed across different media.

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IJES, Volume LXI, 2025

The Portrayal of Tribal Identity and Marginalization in Indian English Novels

***Sanjay Kumar**

Abstract

This research paper conducts an in-depth analysis of the portrayal of tribal identity and marginalization in Indian English novels, focusing on Arun Joshi's *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971), Kamala Markandaya's *The Coffer Dams* (1969), Gita Mehta's *A River Sutra* (1993), Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006), and Mamang Dai's *Legends of Pensam* (2006). Employing postcolonial and ecocritical frameworks, the study explores how these narratives depict the tension between tribal traditions and the forces of colonialism, industrialization, and globalization. The paper argues that while some texts romanticize tribal life as an escape from modernity, others expose the systemic exploitation and cultural erosion faced by these communities. By incorporating direct quotations, it highlights the literary amplification of marginalized voices and critiques of social injustice, offering a comprehensive understanding of tribal representation in Indian English literature.

Keywords: Tribal identity, Marginalization, Indian English novels, Postcolonial criticism, Ecocriticism

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Introduction

Indian English literature, shaped by its colonial legacy, has historically centered on the experiences and aspirations of the urban, educated middle class, often leaving the voices and lived realities of India's tribal communities on the periphery. Despite constituting over 8% of the nation's population, groups such as the Adivasis, Santhals, and Adis have largely remained marginalized within mainstream literary narratives. These communities possess vibrant oral traditions, intricate belief systems, and a profound, reciprocal relationship with the land—features that are seldom foregrounded in Indian English fiction. However, when their stories are represented, they offer unique and critical perspectives on questions of identity, resistance, and the ongoing struggle for cultural preservation.

Postcolonial critics argue that tribal narratives in literature play a dual role: they reflect the historical injustices faced by these communities—such as forced displacement, loss of ancestral lands, and erasure due to development projects—and simultaneously serve as powerful acts of agency and reclamation. Through literary engagement, tribal characters and their stories become sites for negotiating identity and contesting socio-political subjugation. This paper investigates how select postcolonial Indian English novels address these themes, illuminating the ways literature both mirrors and interrogates the broader dynamics of exclusion and resistance in Indian society.

The analysis is deliberately limited to original English-language works from the postcolonial period, thereby focusing on the creative choices Indian authors make in representing tribal life without the mediation of translation. Central themes explored include the cultural clash between tribal and mainstream societies, the exoticization and stereotyping of tribal identities, struggles for environmental justice, and narratives of empowerment. By drawing on close readings and textual evidence, this study seeks to highlight how Indian English literature can challenge systemic marginalization,

advocate for recognition, and contribute to a more inclusive understanding of the nation's diverse identities.

This study employs postcolonial theory, drawing on Edward Said's *Orientalism* to analyze the exoticization of tribal communities as "primitive" foils to modernity. Ecocriticism, as articulated by Lawrence Buell, informs the exploration of environmental marginalization, where tribal identities are inseparable from their ecological contexts, threatened by industrial incursions. Subaltern studies, inspired by Ranajit Guha, emphasize the silencing of tribal voices and position literature as a site of resistance and reclamation. These frameworks collectively enable a multi-dimensional analysis of identity and marginalization.

Analysis of Selected Novels

Arun Joshi's *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971)

Arun Joshi's The Strange Case of Billy Biswas offers a nuanced exploration of tribal identity through the unique lens of an urban intellectual's fascination and subsequent immersion. The novel centers on Billy Biswas, an anthropologist from an affluent, cosmopolitan background, who ultimately forsakes his privileged existence to live among the Bhil tribe in central India. Billy's journey is driven by an almost mystical yearning for connection and authenticity, which he believes can only be found in the embrace of tribal life. Joshi writes, "The forest was his sanctuary, a world where the soul could breathe free from the shackles of civilization" (45), establishing the forest—and by extension, tribal existence—as an idyllic refuge from the alienation and artificiality of modern urbanity.

Joshi's depiction of the Bhil tribe is deeply romanticized, presenting them as living in perfect harmony with nature and embodying a form of purity lost to the modern world. This idealization is most vividly illustrated in the character of Bilasia, a tribal woman who becomes Billy's partner. Bilasia is described as possessing an unrestrained, elemental vitalit, "Her laughter rang

like a wild stream, untainted by the artificiality of the city" (67). Through her, and through Billy's immersion in tribal rituals and customs, the novel constructs the tribe as a repository of unrepressed sexuality, emotional authenticity, and cultural innocence. In sharp contrast stands Billy's urban wife, Meena, who embodies repression, social conformity, and the emotional sterility of city life. The narrative thus establishes a clear binary: tribal freedom is set against urban constraint, nature against civilization, instinct against intellect.

However, this idealization is not without its problems. Joshi's portrayal, while sympathetic, is also shaped by the outsider's gaze—a perspective that exoticizes and, at times, orientalizes tribal life. The depiction of tribal rituals as "a primitive rhythm, a call to the earth that the modern world had forgotten" (102) risks reducing complex cultural practices to mere symbols of lost authenticity. Critics argue that such representations perpetuate stereotypes, presenting tribes as static, mystical, and fundamentally "other," rather than as real communities with their own internal struggles, changes, and aspirations. The narrative's focus on tribal life as a form of escapism for a disillusioned urban intellectual gloss over the harsh realities faced by these communities, such as poverty, marginalization, and the impact of modernization.

The tragic culmination of Billy's journey—his death at the hands of the authorities—underscores the profound marginalization of tribal communities. The state's reaction to Billy's assimilation into tribal society is one of suspicion and violence, reflecting a larger societal unwillingness to accept alternative modes of existence. "The forest claimed him, but the law reclaimed the land" (245) poignantly captures the tension between the individual's search for meaning and the relentless advance of modernity. Ultimately, Joshi's novel uses Billy's existential alienation to highlight the fraught relationship between tribal identity and modern society, exposing both the allure and the limitations of the romanticized escape that tribal life represents. In doing so, it raises

important questions about authenticity, belonging, and the costs of cultural idealization.

Kamala Markandaya's *The Coffer Dams* (1969)

Kamala Markandaya's novel The Coffer Dams delivers a powerful critique of tribal marginalization, foregrounding the complexities and injustices faced by indigenous communities in the name of modern development. Set against the backdrop of a large dam construction project in the Malnad region, the novel centers on the experiences of the local tribal population, who are systematically displaced by a project spearheaded by Western engineers. Through her nuanced storytelling, Markandaya underscores the environmental, cultural, and human costs of such progress, questioning the very foundations of developmental ideology.

At the heart of the novel is the plight of the Malnad tribes, led by the dignified and determined Bashiam. Their way of life, intimately tied to the land and the river, is thrown into turmoil when construction begins. Markandaya poignantly illustrates the existential threat posed by the dam, "The river was their lifeblood, and now it was being dammed, their homes drowned under concrete" (89). The river, an emblem of continuity and sustenance, becomes a symbol of loss and environmental injustice as its flow is disrupted to serve distant interests. The narrative thus critiques the way modern projects, often justified in the name of progress, disregard the ecological and cultural dependencies of indigenous populations.

Compounding this dispossession is the exploitation and expendability of tribal laborers. The tragic accident that claims the lives of forty workers lays bare the human cost of industrial ambition: "Forty men lay dead, their bodies a testament to the cost of progress" (154). This moment is not simply a personal tragedy but an indictment of the systemic structures that devalue tribal lives, treating them as collateral damage in the pursuit of economic goals. Markandaya's vivid storytelling exposes the racial and

economic hierarchies that underpin the project. The Western engineer Clinton epitomizes the cold rationality and indifference of the outside world, his focus on efficiency and results coming at the expense of empathy and justice. In stark contrast, Helen, an outsider herself but keenly sensitive to the suffering around her, observes the tribes' rituals with a sense of reverence, "She watched their rituals with a reverence he could never understand" (112). Through Helen, Markandaya offers a counterpoint—a recognition of the intrinsic value of tribal culture.

Despite overwhelming odds, the tribes are portrayed not as passive victims but as resilient agents of resistance. Bashiam's defiance, "We will not leave our land, even if the waters rise" (130), powerfully asserts a deep-rooted ecological and cultural identity that cannot be easily erased. Markandaya imbues their rituals and festivals with a sense of enduring defiance, describing them as "a defiance sung in every drumbeat" (175). These cultural expressions become acts of resistance, asserting continuity in the face of erasure and oppression.

Aligning with ecocritical perspectives, Markandaya foregrounds the irreversible impact of modernization on both the environment and the social fabric of tribal life. The Coffer Dams thus stands as a testament to the resilience of marginalized communities, even as it indicts the forces that threaten their existence. Through her incisive critique, Markandaya compels readers to reconsider the true cost of progress, emphasizing the need for empathy, justice, and a deeper respect for indigenous ways of living.

Gita Mehta's *A River Sutra* (1993)

Gita Mehta's A River Sutra is a richly layered novel that intricately weaves tribal narratives into the broader cultural tapestry of India, using the Narmada River as a central, unifying metaphor. The river, flowing through the heart of the country, becomes a witness to countless stories—spiritual, romantic, and social—each revealing the immense diversity and complexity of

India's people. Among these narratives, Mehta foregrounds the lived experiences of rural and tribal communities, using their stories as both a celebration of cultural uniqueness and a critique of their marginalization.

One of the most compelling threads in the novel is that of a rural tribal girl involved in an inter-community marriage. Through her character, Mehta explores the richness of ethnic customs and the internal conflicts that arise from negotiating multiple cultural identities. The girl's heritage is poignantly captured in the line, "Her songs carried the weight of her ancestors, a melody lost to the cities" (78), highlighting the sense of loss that accompanies the erosion of traditional ways in the face of urbanization and modernization. The tribal girl's voice represents not only her personal struggle but also the broader plight of many indigenous communities—whose oral traditions, songs, and beliefs are often dismissed as relics, yet form the backbone of their cultural memory and resilience.

Mehta's storytelling resists exploitative or exoticized depictions of tribal life. Instead, the novel celebrates tribal folklore, as illustrated by the storyteller's account, "The river holds their legends, their laughter, their tears" (102). Here, the river is not just a physical entity but a living archive of memory and emotion, intertwining human experience with the natural world. By embedding tribal stories within this mosaic, Mehta offers readers access to worlds that are generally underrepresented or misrepresented in mainstream narratives. This approach serves as a counter-narrative to the urban dominance pervasive in Indian literature and society, urging a recognition of the depth and dignity of tribal cultures.

However, *A River Sutra* does not shy away from the realities of marginalization. Cultural domination and assimilation pressures emerge as significant themes, especially through the girl's internal conflict, "She stood between two worlds, neither fully hers" (145). This line encapsulates the tension of hybridity, portraying the

psychological and social strain of existing at the intersection of tradition and modernity, tribal and non-tribal identities. Yet, amid this struggle, Mehta grants her tribal characters space for recognition and agency—acknowledging their resilience and adaptability, rather than depicting them as passive victims.

A powerful aspect of the novel is the secular and inclusive vision embodied by the Narmada River. As one character observes, "It binds us, Hindu and tribal, in its flow" (200). The river's continuous movement and its central place in diverse rituals and myths allow it to transcend sectarian boundaries, symbolizing unity amid difference. Through this motif, Mehta suggests that while assimilation and cultural loss are persistent threats, there is also a possibility for coexistence and mutual recognition.

In essence, *A River Sutra* strikes a delicate balance: it celebrates the beauty and resilience of tribal identity, critiques the forces of marginalization and assimilation, and ultimately envisions a shared humanity connected through the enduring spirit of the river. Mehta's narrative stands as both an elegy for vanishing traditions and a hopeful testament to cultural continuity.

Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006)

Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* offers a compelling portrayal of tribal and ethnic identity through the lens of the Gorkha insurgency in Kalimpong, a region marked by postcolonial fragmentation and perpetual contestation over belonging and recognition. Desai deftly weaves the personal struggles of her characters with the broader socio-political unrest, illuminating the enduring marginalization of ethnic Nepali communities—often grouped as "tribal" or "indigenous"—in the Indian nation-state.

Set against the tumultuous backdrop of the 1980s Gorkhaland movement, the novel captures the simmering discontent and political awakening among the region's Nepali-speaking population. This demand for recognition is rooted in a long history of exclusion, both by colonial powers and by the dominant post-independence

Indian polity. The assertion "We are not Indians, we are Gorkhas," voiced by a young rebel (134), crystallizes the community's struggle for self-definition against imposed national identities, highlighting the complex layers of tribal and ethnic consciousness that resist homogenization.

Desai's narrative interrogates the cyclical poverty experienced by characters such as the cook and his son Biju. Their daily existence is described as "a loop of hunger and hope, erased by borders" (87), underscoring how arbitrary political boundaries and systemic neglect perpetuate deprivation across generations. The lives of these characters, oscillating between aspiration and disenchantment, mirror the larger existential uncertainty faced by marginalized ethnic groups. The insurgency, with its eruptions of violence and displacement, becomes both a symptom and a symbol of this ongoing quest for justice and recognition. "The hills burned with their dreams" (198), Desai writes, encapsulating the fervor and desperation that fuel the movement even as it devastates lives and landscapes.

In critiquing superficial multiculturalism, Desai exposes the tensions beneath India's professed diversity. The novel shows how official narratives of unity often mask deep-seated inequalities and exclusions. Multiculturalism, in this context, fails to guarantee substantive inclusion for tribal or ethnic minorities, whose histories and aspirations are routinely ignored or suppressed. The violence and displacement that accompany the Gorkha insurgency are not simply aberrations, but consequences of a system where belonging is precarious and conditional.

Historical legacies—colonialism's divisive policies and the uneven reach of globalization—compound these challenges. Biju's migration to the United States, motivated by a desire to escape poverty and marginalization, ultimately leads him into another cycle of exploitation and alienation, "He left to escape, only to find the same chains abroad" (245). This experience underscores the global dimension of ethnic and tribal marginalization, revealing how

the promise of mobility often gives way to new forms of dispossession and invisibility.

Thus, *The Inheritance of Loss* foregrounds the insurgency's roots in the lived realities of ethnic oppression, portraying Gorkha—and by extension, tribal—identity as both embattled and resilient. Through her nuanced depiction of individuals caught between history and hope, Desai challenges readers to reconsider simplistic notions of national unity and progress. Her novel stands as a poignant meditation on the costs of exclusion, the complexities of belonging, and the enduring power of defiance among marginalized communities.

Mamang Dai's *Legends of Pensam* (2006)

Mamang Dai's *Legends of Pensam* offers a rare and authentic portrayal of Northeast Indian tribal life, blending myth, memory, and history into a lyrical narrative that foregrounds the voices and experiences of the Adi community. As a member of the Adi tribe herself, Dai brings an insider's perspective, which not only enriches the novel's ethnographic detail but also imbues it with a deep sense of belonging and responsibility toward cultural preservation. Through her storytelling, Dai both documents and interrogates the complexities of ethnicity, cultural assimilation, and resilience in the face of historical trauma.

The novel opens with an evocative declaration, "The stories of our land are etched in the rocks, sung by the rivers" (12). This sentence sets the tone for a narrative in which landscape, memory, and identity are inseparably intertwined. Dai skilfully weaves together folktales, oral traditions, and historical events, creating a tapestry where myth and reality coalesce. In doing so, she challenges the notion that tribal histories are static or peripheral, instead asserting their centrality to the lived experiences of the Adi people. The blending of myth and history becomes an act of resistance, a way to reclaim agency over the narrative of the community and resist the homogenizing pressures of assimilation.

The novel does not shy away from confronting the darker chapters of Adi history, particularly the trauma of colonial incursions. "The British came with guns, and our songs turned to silence" (89) poignantly encapsulates the abrupt rupture inflicted by external domination—a silencing of cultural expression and autonomy. Yet, even as Dai documents these moments of loss, her narrative is suffused with a sense of endurance. The community's rituals, songs, and stories serve as repositories of memory and identity, carrying forward the legacy of a people who have faced displacement and marginalization but continue to assert their presence.

A recurring theme in *Legends of Pensam* is the idea of liminality—of living between worlds. "We live between the forest and the town, neither fully one nor the other" (145). This articulation of hybrid identity reflects both the physical geography of the region and the broader existential predicament of the Adi people. They are caught between tradition and modernity, between ancestral lands and the encroaching influence of urban life. Dai's depiction of this liminal existence complicates binary notions of tribal and non-tribal, suggesting instead that identity is fluid, adaptive, and constantly negotiated.

Dai's attention to gender adds another layer of complexity. She highlights the gendered marginalization experienced by Adi women, "The rituals exclude us, yet we hold the stories" (178). While women may be barred from certain formal practices, they emerge as vital custodians of oral tradition and collective memory. This focus on women's roles underscores the multifaceted nature of marginalization and resilience within the community.

What distinguishes *Legends of Pensam* is its authenticity and its refusal to romanticize or simplify tribal life. Dai's work stands as both a preservation of Adi heritage and a critique of the forces—colonial, modern, and patriarchal—that threaten its continuity. By centering tribal voices and experiences, Dai affirms the value and vitality of indigenous knowledge, ensuring that these

stories, etched in rocks and sung by rivers, will endure for generations to come.

Comparative Analysis

The novels reveal diverse portrayals of tribal identity. Joshi and Markandaya focus on exploitation and romanticism, with Joshi's "forest sanctuary" (45) contrasting Markandaya's "drowned homes" (89). Mehta and Dai emphasize cultural preservation, with Mehta's "river legends" (102) and Dai's "etched stories" (12) celebrating resilience. Desai bridges these, linking tribal struggles to global migration (245). Common threads include environmental ties and resistance, though the degree of agency varies, from Joshi's passive tribes to Dai's active narrators.

Conclusion

Indian English novels portray tribal identity as a contested space, balancing romanticization with critiques of marginalization. Joshi and Markandaya expose exploitation, while Mehta and Dai preserve cultural narratives. Desai adds global dimensions. These works advocate for recognizing tribal voices, challenging systemic injustices. Future research could explore contemporary tribal-authored works to expand this discourse.

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IJES, Volume LXI, 2025

Songs of Silence: Gender, Memory, and Resistance in Gour's *Requiem in Raga Janki*

***Sanket Kumar Jha**

Abstract

This article explores *Requiem in Raga Janki* by Neelum Saran Gour as a powerful work of feminist historiography and postcolonial cultural recovery. Cantered on the fictionalized life of Janki Bai Ilahabadi, a courtesan and classical singer in colonial India, the novel challenges dominant historical narratives that have long erased or exoticized women performers. Drawing on feminist theorists such as Joan Wallach Scott, Veena Oldenburg, and Gayatri Spivak, the article argues that Gour constructs a literary counter-archive through narrative fragmentation, multilingualism, and layered memory. The analysis further engages New Historicist frameworks to examine how colonial and nationalist discourses shaped—and constrained—female artistic agency. Janki's selective self-presentation, refusal of commodification, and aesthetic autonomy are read as acts of cultural resistance embedded within patriarchal and colonial structures. The article also interrogates the narrator's partial perspective and the ethical tensions of speaking for the subaltern. By combining feminist historiography with New Historicist critique, the

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study reveals how *Requiem in Raga Janki* not only revives a silenced voice but also interrogates the conditions under which such voices are archived, remembered, or erased. The novel ultimately affirms fiction as a legitimate mode of historical knowledge and feminist resistance.

Keywords: Feminist Historiography, Courtesan, Postcolonial Memory, New Historicism, Cultural Resistance.

Introduction

Neelum Saran Gour, an eminent Indian author and scholar, has significantly contributed to contemporary Indian literature through fiction, short stories, nonfiction, translation, and literary criticism. Born and based in Allahabad, Gour's literary sensibilities reflect her deep engagement with the region's cultural and historical contexts ("Neelum Saran Gour," HarperCollins). Among her most acclaimed works is *Requiem in Raga Janki* (2018), winner of The Hindu Literary Prize and the Sahitya Akademi Award, affirming her stature within Indian English literature. Her writings typically interweave multilingual narratives—English, Hindi, and Urdu—thereby capturing the complex cultural tapestry of her setting.

Requiem in Raga Janki stands out for its unique feminist historiographic approach, offering a fictionalized reconstruction of the life of Janki Bai Ilahabadi, a courtesan and renowned Hindustani classical singer from early 20th-century colonial India. Gour recovers a voice systematically excluded by patriarchal and colonial historiography, weaving Janki's narrative through oral histories, cultural memory, and imaginative reconstruction. The novel's opening statement, "Maybe you can get a book out of all this. Me, I'm content to turn this raga into a requiem" (Gour 1), succinctly highlights its dual purpose—as both elegy and archival recovery. Framed by Toni Morrison's famous dictum, "If there's a book you want to read and it hasn't been written yet, then you must write it," Gour's work deliberately addresses the historical erasures of women artists.

In colonial India, courtesans or *tawaifs* occupied ambivalent spaces: esteemed as custodians of classical music, yet marginalized due to their gender, caste, and associated sexuality. As scholars Veena Oldenburg, Rekha Misra, and Anna Morcom argue, colonial morality combined with nationalist discourses significantly altered perceptions of respectability, systematically excluding courtesans from legitimate cultural history. Gour's novel explicitly critiques this exclusion, placing the courtesan figure not merely at the narrative's centre but as its cultural and moral conscience. The novel further reveals the intersections between beauty, caste, gender, and artistic legitimacy, presenting Janki's life as one marked by the complexities of public admiration and private suffering. Gour illustrates this poignantly through scenes such as Janki's celebrated yet sorrowful '*chaudah-hazari'* event, emphasizing the personal costs borne by women performers.

This study seeks to address two central research questions:

1. How does Gour employ feminist historiography through fictional narrative to recover marginalized voices?
2. In what ways does a New Historicist lens illuminate the novel's role as a cultural artifact resisting patriarchal and colonial documentation?

Arguing that *Requiem in Raga Janki* functions as a feminist counter-archive, this paper examines how Gour's narrative strategies—polyphonic voices, narrative fragmentation, and embedded archival silences—assert the legitimacy of female artistic agency within India's cultural memory.

Feminist Historiography: Recovering Gendered Pasts

Feminist historiography challenges traditional historical narratives by exposing their patriarchal foundations and recovering marginalized women's voices. In her seminal work *Gender and the Politics of History* (1988), Joan Wallach Scott emphasizes that gender is not merely a topic but a fundamental organizing principle shaping historical accounts. Scott further asserts that

feminist historians must engage with narrative, memory, and imagination as legitimate epistemological tools to address power dynamics inherent in historical representation (Scott 42). Expanding this argument in *The Fantasy of Feminist History* (2011), Scott emphasizes the importance of exploring intersections between historical memory and imaginative reconstruction, underscoring that reclaiming women's pasts requires rethinking conventional historical boundaries.

Gerda Lerner, similarly, argues in *The Creation of Patriarchy* (1986) that the historical invisibility of women arises from systemic exclusions rather than accidental omissions. Postcolonial feminist scholars such as Lata Mani and Kumkum Sangari expand these critiques, particularly within the context of colonial India. Mani, in her influential essay "Contentious Traditions" (1987), illustrates how colonial and nationalist debates over practices such as *sati* used women's bodies symbolically, thus erasing genuine female agency even as women became emblematic of national identity (Mani 119).

These theoretical insights form the foundational context for analysing Neelum Saran Gour's *Requiem in Raga Janki*. Gour actively resists gendered historical omissions by fictionalizing the life of Janki Bai Ilahabadi, a prominent courtesan largely erased from conventional accounts of Indian classical music history. Whereas traditional narratives valorise male *ustads* and *gharanas*, courtesans' crucial role in preserving and transmitting classical art forms has often been marginalized or erased entirely. By reconstructing Janki's life through fiction, Gour fills these archival voids and foregrounds female artistic agency.

The novel's opening explicitly signals these archival ambitions: "Maybe you can get a book out of all this. Me, I'm content to turn this raga into a requiem… I'm no hireling of your museum, understand this. I am an artist and we artists had our pride… For the sovereignty of excellence was our cause". (1)

Here, the narrative deliberately positions itself both as elegy and archival intervention, challenging traditional historiographic assumptions about objectivity and factual purity. Further, Gour's narrator stakes narrative control through memory and affective storytelling: "I am a rasika of the remembered word and a hoarder of treasured tales… It's my stories that make up my song." (2)

This aligns closely with New Historicist insights, articulated by scholars like Stephen Greenblatt (1980), who argues that historical truths are invariably mediated by power, discourse, and ideology.

Gour's narrative method involves interweaving anecdotes, oral history, rumor, and performance—explicitly rejecting positivist ideals of singular historical truth. By narrating Janki's ascent through the subjective testimonies of contemporaries—musical peers, male patrons, biographers—Gour exposes how memory and subjectivity mediate historical representation. The novel directly challenges historical "objectivity" by thematizing narrative multiplicity and contested trauma: "There are three different accounts of the stabbings and no one knows which the authentic one was… Janki's own account is a carefully constructed fiction." (36).

These competing narratives illustrate patriarchal interpretations of Janki's life, with characters expressing cattiest and misogynistic judgments such as, "She had too much pride for a woman of her kind." (79) In doing so, the novel critiques historical structures that marginalize and silence women's voices.

Central to Gour's feminist historiography is her nuanced portrayal of courtesans or *tawaifs*, historically recognized as accomplished custodians of classical music, dance, and literature yet simultaneously stigmatized due to their caste, gender, and sexuality. Scholars like Veena Talwar Oldenburg ("Lifestyle as Resistance," 1990), Rekha Misra (*Women in Mughal India*), and Ruth Vanita (*Dancing with the Nation*, 2018) highlight how colonial and nationalist narratives systematically erased courtesans' artistic and political contributions to legitimize new moral

frameworks. Gour engages with this scholarly tradition, presenting Janki not as a passive figure marginalized by colonial modernity but as an active, strategic cultural agent.

Gour's characterization of Janki thus defies stereotypical portrayals. From a young age, Janki exhibits remarkable musical talent and intense commitment, mastering multiple ragas before age sixteen and frequently surpassing male contemporaries (Gour 23). However, Gour poignantly depicts the gendered violence and bodily exploitation underlying her public achievements: "She sang that night, with her bandaged hand hidden under her dupatta." (45) This underscores the embodied resilience and cost of female artistic labor.

Critically, Gour portrays Janki's agency not as overt rebellion but as strategic negotiation within patriarchal structures. Reflecting Oldenburg's argument, Gour's narrative emphasizes Janki's refusal to marry a powerful patron, asserting, "He was my mehfil, not my master." (97) This act of resistance embodies what Chandra Talpade Mohanty terms "situated agency," where autonomy is exercised within and against existing constraints (Mohanty 74). Such complex agency highlights Gour's nuanced feminist historiographic recovery, offering a counter-narrative to simplified victimhood or empowerment paradigms.

Thus, Gour's narrative strategy aligns closely with feminist historiography's transformative potential, reshaping traditional notions of historical truth, authorship, and memory. By using fictional reconstruction to foreground marginalized women's voices, *Requiem in Raga Janki* exemplifies the feminist historiographical imperative articulated by Scott, Lerner, and Mani—challenging not only historical erasures but the very mechanisms that produce historical knowledge itself.

New Historicism and the Courtesan in Colonial Context

New Historicism, advanced notably by scholars Stephen Greenblatt and Louis Montrose, provides a critical lens for analysing literary texts within their specific historical and cultural

contexts. Greenblatt, in *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (1980), conceptualizes literature as a part of the broader "circulation of social energy," shaped by and shaping the dominant ideologies of its era (Greenblatt 6). Louis Montrose similarly emphasizes the "textuality of history and historicity of texts," highlighting that historical narratives and literary texts are mutually constitutive, mediated by representation and power (Montrose 20). This perspective proves particularly productive for examining Gour's feminist historical reclamation in *Requiem in Raga Janki*.

Set against the backdrop of colonial Allahabad, Gour's novel portrays a socio-political environment fraught with contradictions—where nationalist movements striving for cultural purity coexisted uneasily alongside colonial policies redefining public morality. Courtesans, or *tawaifs*, found themselves at the centre of these ideological tensions, occupying spaces simultaneously revered for their cultural contributions and stigmatized due to gendered and colonial morality:

> They said Janki was no longer what she used to be. They said the city had changed and people were no longer interested in mehfils and thumris. They said her voice had grown too full of pain to carry the lighter lyrics. The colonial regime was reorganizing priorities: respectability, regulation, and recoding of public morality. Janki, as a public figure, was an uncomfortable reminder of an era they were eager to bury. (143)

Scholars such as Lata Mani and Tanika Sarkar argue that nationalist ideologies often sought cultural legitimacy by relegating women—and particularly courtesans—to symbolic representations of tradition, thereby excluding their actual participation in public cultural life:

> The local press wrote gushing accounts of her performance, yet one editorial questioned whether such women, however talented, should continue to occupy public space. 'The spirit of the new India,' it wrote, 'needs chastity more than artifice.' The duality was unbearable—celebrated on stage and erased in discourse. (166)

Gour explicitly engages with this historical contradiction by depicting Janki Bai Ilahabadi's life as both celebrated and subjected to intense public scrutiny. The novel's central episode, the famous *chaudah-hazari* event, exemplifies this tension, revealing how colonial and nationalist morality mediated public perceptions of female artistry. As Janki's admirer showers her with silver coins amounting to Rs 14,000, the spectacle is simultaneously admired for artistic brilliance and condemned for perceived vulgarity. Gour poignantly underscores Janki's private suffering amidst public celebration, noting, "She didn't appear to be happy. She seemed ineffably weary, sad." (24) Here, Gour highlights the complexities surrounding courtesan performances, exposing how colonial modernity commodified female artistry even as it subjected women performers to moral scrutiny and marginalization.

Moreover, Gour critically examines how emerging technologies of cultural production—particularly the gramophone—reshaped courtesan identities in colonial India. As Anna Morcom argues in *Courtesans, Bar Girls & Dancing Boys* (2014), early music recordings favored male performers from established gharanas and sanitized repertoire suitable for middle-class consumption, thus marginalizing courtesans' rich cultural contributions: "She agreed to one recording, reluctantly. Afterwards, she sat in silence for hours, then said: 'What use is that disc? Can it convey the tremor of the room when the raga swells? Can it hold the gaze of the audience?' She never recorded again." (157)

Gour portrays Janki's resistance to such commercialization through her cautious relationship with recording technology. Janki's suspicion toward mechanical reproduction— "A machine can catch the swara but not the soul" (154) —symbolizes her resistance to colonial modernity's attempt to sanitize and commodify her artistry. This stance, rather than signalling an outright rejection of modernity, reflects a nuanced critique of how technology selectively mediates cultural memory and artistic legacy.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's influential essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" further contextualizes Gour's narrative strategy. Spivak argues that subaltern voices are frequently mediated and distorted by dominant epistemological frameworks (Spivak 104–109). Gour's decision to narrate Janki's story through a male narrator directly engages with this complexity, questioning whether authentic subaltern voices can ever fully be recovered without mediation. This narrative choice underscores Gour's self-conscious critique of historical authority and representational power.

Additionally, Partha Chatterjee's insights from *The Nation and Its Fragments* (1993) resonate significantly with Gour's portrayal. Chatterjee demonstrates how nationalist ideologies confined women symbolically to the domestic and traditional sphere, limiting their presence in modern political and cultural arenas (Chatterjee 117-134). Janki's assertion of autonomy—"He was my mehfil, not my master" (97)—constitutes an explicit challenge to these restrictive nationalist ideals, reclaiming public space on her own terms and redefining cultural legitimacy beyond domestic and conjugal norms.

Thus, employing a New Historicist approach enables a nuanced understanding of how Gour's narrative actively reconstructs the complex interactions between gender, colonial modernity, nationalism, and cultural production. Rather than passively recounting history, Gour strategically disrupts dominant ideological narratives, reclaiming courtesan voices through a feminist counter-archive that explicitly resists the historical erasure perpetuated by patriarchal and colonial documentation systems.

Conclusion

Neelum Saran Gour's *Requiem in Raga Janki* constitutes a compelling feminist intervention in reclaiming marginalized histories of courtesan culture in colonial India. As demonstrated through this analysis, Gour employs narrative fragmentation, multilingual strategies, and fictional historiography to critically challenge patriarchal and colonial erasures of women's artistic agency.

Through the figure of Janki Bai Ilahabadi, Gour reconstructs the courtesan as both a cultural subject and a site of resistance, intricately weaving the contradictions posed by colonial modernity and nationalist ideals of respectability.

Integrating insights from feminist historiography and New Historicism, this study underscores how Gour's narrative serves as a feminist counter-archive. Rather than simply recovering silenced voices, Gour critically interrogates the historical and ideological apparatuses that marginalized these voices in the first place. Drawing on theoretical frameworks articulated by Joan Wallach Scott, Gerda Lerner, Lata Mani, Veena Oldenburg, Stephen Greenblatt, Louis Montrose, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, this paper has argued that Gour not only reclaims but also rigorously critiques the systems of representation and memory that erased courtesan legacies.

Significantly, Gour does not romanticize courtesan lives; instead, she presents nuanced portrayals of female agency, embodied resilience, and the complex negotiation of power dynamics. Janki Bai's selective engagement with emerging technologies like the gramophone, her resistance to patriarchal marriage expectations, and her self-curated artistic legacy illustrate a situated feminist agency that defies simplified binaries of victimhood or empowerment. By foregrounding these nuanced dynamics, Gour's narrative redefines the courtesan's historical and cultural legitimacy, situating her firmly within India's broader cultural memory.

This study thus contributes to ongoing conversations within postcolonial feminist literary criticism, emphasizing how fiction can function as a radical historiographical practice—actively resisting dominant cultural narratives that marginalize subaltern experiences. However, as with any scholarly work, certain areas invite further exploration. Future research might comparatively analyse Gour's narrative strategies with other feminist historical novels, explore reader responses to feminist recovery in contemporary India, or

examine more broadly how fictional historiography influences contemporary understandings of gender, memory, and cultural identity.

Ultimately, *Requiem in Raga Janki* exemplifies literature's capacity to interrogate history, reclaim suppressed voices, and challenge entrenched ideologies. Gour's feminist historiographic approach not only gives voice to silenced historical figures but powerfully critiques the very mechanisms through which historical silence is produced and maintained.

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IJES, Volume LXI, 2025

The Notion of Author in Contemporary Literary Theory

***Sunny Anand**

Abstract

The study explores the evolving concept of authorship in literary theory , tracing its transition from traditional perspectives to more subversive demonstration in modern and postmodern discourse. Early 20th Century way like Russian formalism and New criticism looked up to separate the author from the process of literary analysis, featuring the examination of texts purely through their essential, Structural elements. This move focused to establish a more scientific and objective framework for studying literature free of authorial biography or Psychological context, and to challenge the idea that texts must cling to mimetic or representational aesthetics. Later, theorists such as Barthes, Foucault and Derrida blown up this anti-authorial approach by transforming it into a fundamental ontological perspective. They posited that the author's role is an delusion and that meaning is produced through the interaction of the text with the reader rather than through authorial intention. This concept, Known as the "Death of the Author" decentralizes the authority of the author and situates texts within a broader intertextual structure, where meaning is influenced

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by a network of references and interpretations. While this shift has expanded critical approaches to literature, it has also faced criticism for oversimplifying literary complexity and neglecting the importance of historical and social contexts. Therefore, the study proponent for a more integrated approach that acknowledges both the limitations of traditional authorship and the need to consider external influences, aiming for a richer and more comprehensive understanding of literary works.

Keywords : Authorship, Anti-Authorialism, Death of the Author, Textual Meaning, God is Dead.

The concept of authorship has long been foundational to literary studies, traditionally regarded as the locus of meaning and authority within a text. In classical literary criticism, the author was understood as the singular, intentional originator of meaning, whose biography, psychology, and historical context were integral to interpretation. However, throughout the 20th century, this notion came under sustained critique. Early formalist movements such as Russian Formalism and Criticism advocated for a depersonalized reading of literature that foregrounded the formal and structural properties of the text itself. By excluding authorial intention, these schools aimed to establish a more scientific and objective approach to literary analysis, disentangled from biographical and mimetic concerns. Despite the critical productivity of these theoretical interventions, the complete erasure of the author raises complex questions. Does the exclusion of the author result in a fuller, more democratic reading of the text, or does it risk overlooking vital contextual and historical dimensions that shape literary production? Is the author merely a critical construct, or does the continued invocation of authorial agency point to a deeper, unresolved tension in literary theory?

The works of Nietzsche, Freud and Barthes reveal a new understanding of the subject and author that is not fixed or universal but instead dynamic and historically grounded. It is not a transcendent unchanging essence but something that emerges

within specific contexts, intertwined with its own era and surrounding. Ironically, these anti humanist perspectives seem to pave the way for a reimagined form of humanism, where rejecting traditional views of the subject becomes a means to explore new understandings of human identity and experience.(Burke: 2008)

When Nietzsche proclaimed in 1882 that "God is dead" he wasn't simply dismissing the Deity of traditional Christianity. He was challenging the validity of anything that fills the role that this God once occupied in human existence. In this broader sense a religion is any system of thought that promises access to a deeper ultimate reality. As such, ideologies like European Buddhism, Hegelianism, and Marxism are also seen as forms of religion. Nietzsche argues that these, too are no longer credible or viable as sources of belief. (Young: 2003)

Nietzsche argues that to find meaning in life, we must become the 'Heroes' of our own stories. This doesn't imply performing heroic feats but rather taking on the role of the central character, as in a novel. To achieve this, we must first recognize the potential for greatness within our self, even in the most mundane aspects of our lives. This requires as to draw inspiration from artists, yet transcend their limitations. While artists' creativity often ends where real life begins. Nietzsche encourages us to fuse artistry with existence, crafting our lives as a work of art. (Young: 2003)

Barthes regards Nietzsche as his primary intellectual influence, particularly drawing parallels between his own autobiography and Nietzsche's Ecce Homo. This work not only redefines the autobiographical genre but also underscores Nietzsche's view that the drive for knowledge is deeply rooted in biological and physiological statement, as he uses it to critique Christian idealism, which he sees as a moral system that suppresses the strong by promoting spiritual ideals imposed by the weak. Central to his revaluation of values is the rejection of the mind-body dualism asserting instead that all thought, values, and judgments originate from the body. Barthes's development of a materialist theory of

the subject in the pleasure of the text aligns with Nietzsche's ideas as he too situates the body as the foundation of meaning and human experience. (Burke: 2008)

The notion of the death of the author today parallels the impact that the Death of God had on late nineteenth century philosophy. Both concepts reflect a shift away from faith in traditional pillars of authority, intention, and creativity. In a Society that perceives itself as having outgrown belief in divine beings or their negation, the Figures of the Author and the human subject are thought to fill the vacuum left by metaphysical truths, acting as new sources of meaning in a world where such certainties no longer hold sway.

The concept of the death of the author tries to address the divide between the methodological issue of authorial absence and the ontological question of what it means for the author to disappear. However, those advocating for this view often end up obscuring this distinction rather than clarifying it. Critics might suggest that removing the author opens up new avenues for interpretation but this argument often drifts into the notion that texts should inherently be read without considering the author. In a reversal of the usual error, this shift takes what is originally a theoretical stance and treats it as if it were an established fact. (Burke: 2008)

Barthes radically redefined the role of the author by rejecting the idea that a text embodies an authoritative message from its creator. Instead, he depicted a text as a complex network of various interwoven writings none of which are truly original, forming what he called a "tissue of quotations." In this view, the author is no longer a creator but a "Scriptor , but merely a vessel for organizing these pre-existing fragments. The generation of meaning, according to Barthes, does not stem from the scriptor but begins with the reader. He argued that for writing to evolve, the myth of the author must be dismantled, asserting that the emergence of the reader requires the symbolic "death" of the Author. (Smith-Laing: 2018)

The concept of authorship has always been fluid and evolving. Historical evidence shows varying views on what it means to be an author, from the scholarship of 2nd century B.C. Alexandria to the interpretations of the early church fathers and into the medieval era. Likewise, the author's role changes across different artistic contexts. In times when representational forms dominate, the author is tasked with specific responsibilities. When a text is seen as achieving a particular representational goal, it becomes inherently linked to its author's identity is essential to connecting the text to its intended subjects. This dynamic sets up a framework where the text serves as an extension of the author's intent and becomes the basis upon which critical analysis and interpretation are judged. (Burke: 2008)

The new critics and Russian formalists aimed to exclude the author's influence to prioritize purely literary analysis. However Structuralists and Post-Structuralists, who rejects strict distinctions between different types of writing, expand this perspective. Their view of intertextuality, where literature, philosophy, and science interact equally, means that the exclusion of the author is no longer just an internal methodological choice. For thinkers like Barthes, Foucault and Derrida, the dismissal of the author is not just a tool but a foundational principle. In contrast, the new critics and Russian formalists' anti-authorial stance emerged as a reaction against biographical criticism. To define a distinct critical field, they needed to separate the literary work from the biographical and psychological interpretations prevalent in 19th century criticism. As a result, the Author's role along with any external context like history or society was marginalized to develop a formal, intrinsic analysis of the text. Here, excluding the author was a methodological tool that did not address the origins or influences behind the text. The death of the author, in this traditional sense was not the focus; instead, it was about the incompatibility of author-centered analysis with text-centered criticism. (Burke: 2008)

However, in Post-Structuralist thought, the goal is not just to set the author aside but to assert that the author has always been a nonexistent concept that authorship is an illusion. Barthes, Foucault and Derrida push this idea to its limits, transforming the author's exclusion from a methodological choice into an ontological assertion about the nature of discourse. They argue that the act of writing itself inherently negates the existence of the author.

Decades before Barthes's theories emerged, Mikhail Bakhtin identified the need to reject simplistic and singular interpretations of texts. He argued that traditional notions of authorship were ill-Suited for understanding Proto-modernist writers like Rabelais Swift, and Dostoevsky, whose works he described as polyphonic, meaning they incorporate a diverse range of voices without privileging the author's own perspective. Unlike the unified voice of traditional and epic literature, Bakhtin viewed this polyphonic or carnivalesque mode- which he referred to as menippean-as emblematic of a breakdown in hierarchical structures and the development of an anti-authoritarian form of expression. Yet, rather than declaring the author irrelevant, Bakhtin reimagined the author's role to fit the dynamic and dialogic nature of these multi-voiced novels. (Burke: 2008)

The Russian formalists similarly dismissed the author's role to establish a scientific approach to literature that rejected language as mere imitation. By doing so, they aimed to free both the text and its criticism from being accountable to external "contents" or bound by the conventions of representational aesthetics.

Eliminating the author creates a temporary space for developing a critical methodology. However once that methodology is in place, it must either revisit and reconsider what was excluded – making adjustments and revisions or continue ignoring the question of the author, risking a narrow, selective approach that falls short of fully engaging with the literary work. The concept of Death of God as proposed by Nietzsche can be equated with the idea of Death of

the author proposed by Barthes. The "Death of the author" functions as an overlooked paradox within the works of Barthes, Foucaults, and Derrida. Although they attempt to dismantle and interrogate the concept of authorship, the very notion they aim to eliminate lingers within their discourse. The absence they construct is never entirely void but instead subtly inhabited by the traces of the author they sought to erase. Their exploration of authorial disappearance becomes entangled with the presence of the author, revealing that even in its denial, the idea of authorship remains embedded within their theoretical frameworks, resisting complete removal. Anti-authorialism begins as a strategy to methodically exclude the author from literary interpretation but ultimately transforms into its own objective. The assertion of the "death of the author" operates within a circular logic – by setting subjectivity aside, it presumes that subjectivity no longer exists. This reasoning exposes the absence of any inherent necessity within writing itself to eliminate the author. Whether one reads a text with or without considering the author is a matter of interpretive preference, shaped by particular critical frameworks rather than any intrinsic truth about literature. As such, the idea of authorial absence reflects not a universal claim about texts or discourse but a self-contained critical stance. This position reveals more about the critic's methodologies and assumptions than it does about the actual role of authors. In essence, the erasure of the author does not express an objective fact about writing but serves as a conceptual tool that reflects the critic's interpretive choices, underscoring how critical frameworks, rather than the text itself, determine whether authorship is acknowledged or dismissed.

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IJES, Volume LXI, 2025

Gender (Im)balances in Human Trafficking: A Study through Novel *Sold*

***Runoo Ravi**

Abstract

Human Trafficking is the most abominable act committed by one human being upon the other. It encompasses men, women and children, particularly from the marginalized sections. Apart from absorption as drug peddlers, organ donators, arms carriers, domestic help, and miscellaneous uses, the concentration is mostly on sexual exploitation and around 65% of the trafficked victims get exposed to Commercial Sexual Exploitation (CSE) since childhood. However, the demand for female sex, irrespective of her age is always greater than that of the male sex, particularly in the commercial sex market. This demand is dominated not only by easy availability of vulnerable and gullible females but also due to the prevalent social hierarchies which promote gender discrimination. This availability results in trafficking not being limited to traditional areas but at tourist destinations, clubs, resorts, as well as guarded dark web. Girls from underdeveloped countries, grappling with poverty, unemployment and geo-political strife become the most potential victims. Patricial McCormick's novel *Sold* published in 2006 traces the journey of Laxmi, a young girl from Nepal who is sold into slavery in India. The novel,

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also adopted as a film with the same name throws light on the pitiable conditions and horrors of life of such girls.

Keywords: Human Trafficking, Gender, Condition, Literal Representation.

Human trafficking is the most profitable trade, second only to arms and ammunitions in the contemporary world. It is the epitome of cruelty and heartlessness of one human being towards the other. Men, women, and children of all ages and from all backgrounds can become victims of this crime, which occurs in every region of the world. According to a nation-wide study conducted by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) in the year 2005, 65% trafficked victims reported that they had been exposed to commercial sexual exploitation (CSE) when they were children.

The major factors largely affecting human trafficking are poverty, unemployment, violence, domestic abuse, lack of family (orphaned children), lack of dignity, lack of access to basic amenities and discrimination. Sadly, women are affected more by these factors, in comparison to men. The low status of women and girls makes them vulnerable to traffickers, recruiters and pimps who take full advantage of the social, economic, and personal subordinate status of the females. Since a large majority of women and girls still remain uneducated and jobless, despite the continuous endeavours of the government, the traffickers use this vulnerability of the women to trick them and trap them. Naturally, their risk of being a victim of human trafficking increases in the same proportion. Apart from this, the demand for the female sex, be it a young girl, an adolescent, a small girl-child, a woman, or even an infant is far greater than those of the equivalent male in commercial sex market. Because gender rules interact with all social hierarchies of class, caste, and ethnicity, the systematic exclusion and subordination of women and girls in India and their consequent social roles and inferior status makes them more targeted as trafficked victims.

The sex industry mints money because it obtains raw materials in the form of innocent and gullible victims (obtained chiefly

through human trafficking). Then it decorates and presents these 'items' in the market and procures immense profit. Women, girls, very young girls, virgins, and even kids and infants are heavily trafficked to be pushed into pornography and sex tourism. The demand is very heavy and so trafficking destinations no longer remain confined to traditional 'red-light areas but have been relocated at tourist destinations, holiday resorts, fancy clubs, business centres as well as heavily guarded dark web as well. In all these 'socially respectable' places, men are allowed both socially and morally to abuse women and children: flesh trade is harmless fun for them, and the ignoble activities are merely a means to enhance their masculinity.

Human trafficking has been greatly impacted by the incessantly growing globalization and liberalisation. The traditional norms have weakened, anomalies in cultural conventions are being witnessed and human relationships are being weighed on the basis of profit and loss and not through feelings and emotions. As a result, men, women, and children, especially of the weaker and the marginalized section have been reduced to mere commodities in the market. They fetch a good price and are valued not as individuals but as delivery agents for sexual pleasure, organ trade and cheap exploitative labour.

Sold, a novel by Patricia McCormick, published in 2006 tells the story of a girl from Nepal named Lakshmi, who is sold into sexual slavery in India. The novel is written in a series of short, vignette-style chapters, from the point of view of the main character. The 2014 movie *Sold* by Oscar-winning director Jeffrey D. Brown is based on the same novel. This novel is a very vivid representation of the nexus between patriarchy and social hierarchies which take its toll on the female in all aspects, including the heinous crime of trafficking. The narrative style of the novel is purposeful and intentional. It not only provides the image of fragmentation; reflecting Lakshmi's distorted life but also offers an insight into the author's frame of mind. McCormick frankly admits that she chose these vignettes as scenes presenting

Lakshmi's story because initially it was too daunting for her to even imagine telling Lakshmi's entire story. She expresses her thoughts very frankly on this point. "…Vignettes seemed to be the right way to tell a story that is inherently so fractured- if not shattering. I also think the "white space" between vignettes calls on the reader to engage his or her imagination in the story-telling process to fill the blanks." (www.bookbrowsw.com/author_interviews/full/index.cfm/author_number/1375/patricia-mccormick. access 30.07.2025)

Lakshmi, the protagonist of *Sold* is a thirteen-year-old girl living with her family in a small hut in the mountains of Nepal. Her family is desperately poor, but her life is full of simple pleasures, like raising her black-and-white speckled goat, and having her mother brush her hair by the light of an oil lamp. But now the harsh Himalayan monsoons wash away all that remains of the family's crops, Lakshmi's stepfather says she must leave home and take a job to support her family. "According to the reports by The World Bank 40% of the Nepalese population is living under abject poverty and do not enough income to procure even the minimum level of calories in their meals". (Brown, 49)

He introduces her to a charming stranger who tells her she will find her a job as a maid working for a wealthy woman in the city. Glad to be able to help, Lakshmi undertakes the long journey to India and arrives at "Happiness House" full of hope. But she soon learns the horrible truth: she has been sold into prostitution. An estimated 100,000-200,000 Nepali trafficked persons are in India. Nepali girls are especially desirable as prostitutes in India because they are considered more attractive due to their lighter skin colour, and because Nepali virgins are believed to be able to cure AIDS. The trafficking of girls from Nepal into India for forced prostitution is perhaps one of the busiest slave trafficking routes anywhere in the world, with estimated 5,000-10,000 Nepali women and girls trafficked to India each year. The situation became more alarming after the devastating earthquake of 2015

and according to a report published by Freedom United on 11th March 2020, "an estimated 54 women and girls are trafficked across the border into India every single day." (URL:https://www.freedomunited.org>ne. More than 50 Nepali women and girls trafficked into India every day. Published on March 11, 2020. access 08.07.2025)

An old woman named Mumtaz rules the brothel with cruelty and cunning. She tells Lakshmi that she is trapped there until she can pay off her family's debt – then cheats Lakshmi of her meagre earnings so that she can never leave. Lakshmi's life becomes a nightmare from which she cannot escape. Still, she lives by her mother's words – "Simply to endure is to triumph" – and gradually, she forms friendships with the other girls that enable her to survive in this terrifying new life. She also teaches herself to read and speak in English through listening to the conversations of people around her and books she manages to take. Eventually, Lakshmi meets an American man, who arrives and disguises himself as a client to gather the evidence he needs to prosecute Mumtaz and her associates. Mumtaz is ultimately arrested, thus freeing Lakshmi and the other girls.

Sold received positive reviews for exposing readers to an unfamiliar world. It showed how the trafficking of girls from Nepal into India for forced prostitution is perhaps one of the busiest slave trafficking routes anywhere in the world, with estimated 5,000-10,000 Nepali women and girls trafficked to India each year. According to a report by Times of India, "A study conducted by border guarding force, *Sahastra Seema Bal* (SSB) on Human Trafficking on Indo-Nepal claims the number of victims brought illegally in the country has gone up by 500% since 2013 with girls trafficked from villages and Terai region of Nepal sold to brothel owners in Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and other cities for up to Rs. 50,000." (timesofindia.indiatimes.com. Neeraj Chauhan. March 31, 2018. The Times of India. Nepal Girls Trafficked Into India Up By 500% In Last 5 Years: SSB Report. access 30.07.2025.)

Lakshmi is one of such girls who had dreams of a happy life in her eyes, the desire to study and so hard work, the right to lead a life of dignity: all this was snatched away from her. Lakshmi wanted to go to school, to get educated so that she could at least work as a waiter in the city to help her family. But her stepfather did not allow her to do so. Laxmi says, "I can work for rich family like Gita does, and send my wages home to you…" Her mother knows all the limitations and tells her, "Lakshmi, my child…You must stay in school, no matter what your stepfather says." The mother knows that denying education to women is the same as keeping them in eternal chain of poverty and dependency. Education helps women escape poverty and functions as a tool to help women from falling behind men. And Laksmi's stepfather very well knows the value of education. He also understands the patriarchal structure in which the subordination of women is exemplified to maintain the status quo. The society has the perception of women being weak, unable to lead, and always being in the secondary position. Furthermore, the attitude towards subordination of women is compounded by the notion that the main duty of a woman is to serve her husband and his family: and thus, her education does not matter. Women can never be considered more important than a man. So much so that Lakshmi's mother says to her, "[W]e are lucky to have a man at all." And what does this man do? "He oils his hair, puts on his vest and a wristwatch that stopped telling time long ago, and goes up the hill eachday to play cards, talk politics and drink tea with the old men."

Yet Lakshmi accedes that she has to praise him (her stepfather), respect and thank him for taking them under his custody after her (Lakshmi's) father died. But Lakshmi has to also accept the violence that comes by default with such kind of patronage. Gender based violence is best defined as the violence that occurs due to an imbalance in the bargaining position of power between women and men. Violence occurs also as a result of role construction widely influenced by the patriarchal culture. The women face discrimination at all levels, even in the heinous crime

of trafficking. Examples of such violence are sexual exploitation, neglect of reproductive rights, trafficking, rape, and pornography. Beatings, sexual and mental abuse, and harassment are also acts of violence against the women. One of the acts of violence, normalised by the social norms, and accepted by Lakshmi is human trafficking, inflicted on her by her father. He tells her, "'One thousand rupees,' he says. 'You belong to me', she (the buyer) says. 'And I paid a pretty sum for you too'. Lakshmi longs to go home. She says this to Mumtaz. Mumtaz laughs at her and asks her,

> ""Home? And how would you get home?"
>
> "I don't know."
>
> "Do you know the way home?" she says.
>
> "Do you have money for the train?"
>
> "Do you speak the language here?"
>
> "Do you even have any idea where you are?"" (McCormick 110)

Lakshmi was sold by her stepfather. He did this without any remorse. This was the best way for him to earn quick money. He used this money to fulfil his lavish desires. He spends the money in gambling. He has no concern towards his stepdaughter who does not realize that she has been sold. It is very common for women to be sold without their knowledge or consent and they land up in brothels, leading their lives in abject misery, considered a mere sex object or sex toy for men. The point is whether the same would have been done by the stepfather had Lakshmi been a boy? Would he sell 'him' in the same remorseless manner or would he have looked up at him as the 'honour' of the family, a proud progeny.

The pitiable and despicable condition of the trafficked women all around her, is witnessed by Lakshmi as realization begins to dawn on her. She not only understands her predicament but also begins to accept her destiny. As she walks towards the train, she

witnesses several men shouting and shaking their fists in the air. As Lakshmi went closer, she saw "…a girl of my age crouche[d] in the dirt. Her scalp has been freshly shaved- pale and fragile as a bird's egg…and hanks of her long hair lie in coils at her feet…one of the men in the crowd throws his cigarette butt at her feet. Another one spits in her direction. Then another- a fat old man with a boil on his neck- picks up a handful of gravel and flings it at her. She winces, then begins to cry". (McCormick, 78) The cutting of the hair, a part of the woman's feminine beauty symbolizes her exile and disgrace as a woman. It projects her uselessness as a human being, a female and thus negates her identity. The society now accepts her only as a commodity, as a sex toy. Lakshmi realizes that women who are victims of sexual abuse and trafficking are hurt both physically and spiritually. They become victims of community crime. They are considered fit for only satisfying male passions. And through the eyes of Lakshmi, the reader realizes this as well. Lakshmi could watch the truth unravelling in front of her own eyes. She begins to hate herself as she understands the truth unravelling in front of her eyes. She begins to hate the truth about her own life that she will never have an education or an honourable life. She understands her fate as a woman, but she still continues to cherish the hope of a new, better life, some day.

Lakshmi's rape at the brothel, in sharp contrast to her hope for a better life, was a gruesome, unforgettable experience for her. "…no matter how often I wash and scrub and wash and scrub, I cannot rinse the men from my body." (McCormick 129) Her agony is understandable. She has the obsession to clean herself. The repetition of words like 'wash' and 'scrub' shows her desire to cleanse herself; the desire to forget everything. The physical act is symbolic of the emotional despair and the degradation which she feels. This degradation is compounded by the apparent lack of social concern and responsibility that she observes in the policemen. There is neither respect nor concern towards such

'creatures'. "Policemen are supposed to stop people like Mumtaz from selling girls, but she gives money each week, and he looks the other way". (Mc Cormick 159) The social nexus is another tool that exploits these hapless women. The protectors become the penetrators and people like Lakshmi are victimized.

Countless children—typically girls about 13 years old—are taken from their villages, often by someone they trust. They are promised better lives and the chance to work in the city, and instead, are sold into brothels. Lakshmi's story is one of despair and hope, as it follows her from her village in Nepal, to being sold into a brothel in India, and her fight for freedom. Twelve-year-old Lakshmi, whose story is told in Patricia McCormick's award-winning novel "SOLD" represents just one of 3 million children lost to human trafficking each year. "That there's hope; there's a way out, and people can see that the human spirit isn't broken in this situation. It's such a horrible place to be, but when these girls do get out, when they're back in their own community or they're back in a shelter and with kids their own age, you see them coming back and you see that they really are just kids." (URL:https://thestateofwomen.com/sold-sheds-light-on-global-issue-of-human-trafficking/ access 30.05.2023) The novel helps generate more awareness. It brings the plight of the innocent trafficked girls to the pages she writes. Her novel becomes a literary tool to raise awareness. It makes the reader play a participatory role. Because eventually we do have to remember that what hurts the victim most is not the cruelty of the oppressor but the silence of the bystander.

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IJES, Volume LXI, 2025

The 'Absurd' Affect in the Theatre of Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter

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Abstract

How does the lack of action and devaluation of language in the plays of the Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter lead to the affect of the 'Absurd'? Affect, according to Gregory J. Seigworth & Melissa Gregg, "at its most anthropomorphic, is the name given to those forces... that can... suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations, or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world's apparent intractability." (1) By mapping the intersection of affect theory with literature and art through the revision of the question of representation, this paper argues that affect theory reinvigorate the problematic of representation by turning it into a debate about mediation, producing two main critical gestures when in contact with literary and artworks. On the one hand, scholarship has stayed "between representation" by taking affect as excessive of cognitive processes in order to analyze and expand how affect influences our representations of these processes, both when doing literary

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and art criticism, and when elaborating epistemological paradigms. On the other, theory has also stepped "beyond representation" by looking at affect as an autonomous entity in mediation whose capacities affect and surpass human cognition. In treating affect as a new capacious entity, critical concerns revolve around ontological questions, and they prioritize what affect is and does to bodies more than what it means. The plays of the 'Absurd Theatre' is characterised by an absence of action and a devaluation of language. This paper will focus on these aspects in the select plays of Beckett and Pinter to demonstrate how the lack of action and the fragmented/ devalued language deployed by the playwrights affect the audience in the creation of the affect of the 'Absurd'.

Keywords: Absurd, Action, Affect, Language, Samuel Beckett, Harold Pinter

The plays of Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter have been categorized as 'Absurd' by the theatre critic Martin Esslin primarily due to their deviation from the conventional dramaturgy. The deviation includes lack of the Aristotelian action – without a proper beginning or an end and fragmented language. This paper argues that these strategies are adopted by the playwrights in an endeavour to create the affect of absurdity – defined as a stratagem to uncover the inability of language to define the 'in-between-ness' (Seigworth 2) of the bodily action and the cognitive emotional response. Leonard Powlick (1986) shares an instance of such an in-betweenness:

> When the curtain rose, he settled in for what he apparently had expected to be a usual evening's entertainment in the theatre, but as the first act progressed, he grew restless. *This*, obviously, was not what theatre was supposed to be like. He gradually calmed down, however, and by the time act 1 was half gone, he was caught. I could feel the tension coming from him as he strained forward in his seat so that he could hear every word, see every gesture. A couple of times I even overheard him humming some of the tunes

> that Deeley and Anna sang to each other. Throughout the rest of the play, he continued to respond physically to what was happening on the stage. At the end, after the final curtain call (he had applauded enthusiastically), and as the houselights were coming up, he sank back in his seat, let out a breath, and said to his wife: "What the hell was that all about?" (Powlick 30)

This inability to define the emotion aroused by the action of the play in precise linguistic terms refers to a pre-linguistic state that "could ... be seen to resist interpretation" (Einnarson 126) in terms of language. This corresponds to the Spinozian idea of affect "which refers to the particular state of one body's reaction to another body's having affected it" (Seigworth, p. 184 as qtd in Otto 2). Thus, the audience referred to by Powlick can be considered to have been affected by the physical movement of the bodies of Deeley and Anna on stage that cannot be defined using the language.

Powlick defines this affect of the audience as a consequence of Pinter's dramaturgy of being 'difficult'. This 'difficulty' is attributed to the inability to verbally define what the play was 'about' by the audience, despite being affected by the action of the play. It is this dilemma and the subsequent outburst that forms the title of Powlick's essay that constitutes the 'Absurd', a term coined by the critic Martin Esslin to describe the impact of a new mode of theatrical practice adopted by such playwrights as Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter which 'bewildered the sophisticated audiences of Paris, London and New York' (Esslin 1). This theatre, which Esslin famously termed the 'Theatre of the Absurd', was characterised by a devaluation of language as well as a marked absence of the Aristotelian action, something which has traditionally been regarded as the hallmark of theatre.

Dramatizing a spontaneous flow of action, Pinter's *Old Times* evoke a multiple levels of pre-linguistic emotional response comprising simultaneously of a supposed lesbian relationship between Anna and Kate; a love-hate relationship between the two

ladies; the romantic yet distant relationship between Deeley and Kate; and, finally, interplay of memories of the three characters that are often contradictory. Taken together, the intensely dramatic action leaves the audience in an absurd state of being that defies linguistic paradigms being devoid of any background information either of the characters or the causes of the action.

This indeterminacy can be traced in other plays of Pinter as well. Why is Stanley in *The Birthday Par*ty being pursued by two sinister figures? Why does Ruth in *The Homecoming* accept the offer to become a prostitute so calmly? These questions are not raised by Pinter to be answered; nor are they as his critics sometimes suggest, raised gratuitously merely to create spurious curiosity and suspense. Following Massumi (2015), the perspectives that lead to such a state of indeterminacy "must be reframed from start to finish. The conceptual strands that were bound together into the notion of ideology must be untied, and their connection to each other reproblematized." (84)

The Western theatrical paradigm is constituted on the basis of the Aristotelian ideology of catharsis of the emotions of pity and fear. In the Aristotelian framework, theatre "is an organized whole composed of parts that have specifiable functions and occupy determinate positions within the whole." (Massumi 84). However, the 20th century avant-garde theatrical practices have challenged the traditional theatrical ideology. The turn from the author-centric approaches to the "death of the author" and the subsequent rise of the reader further problematized the actor-audience relationship with the power dynamics shifting from the actor and director (auteur) to the audience – the interpreter of the action on stage. This shift seeks to inculcate a counter-ideology by exposing the "emergently self-structuring" (Massumi 88) nature of those very ideologies that are being critiqued. This critique from within created an affect that Esslin defined as "absurd" – a sense of bewilderment at witnessing an eerie reality that de-constructed the dominant ideology.

Thus, the 'absurd' refers to an affect that inculcates from a crisis of shifting of power dynamics. In Samuel Beckett's *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958), this crisis is emanated by means of the unsaid that creates the affect of absurdity. The play presents Krapp listening to the recordings of his former selves only to label them as foolish without being offered any justification for the same: -

> Just been listening to that stupid bastard I took myself for thirty years ago, hard to believe I was ever as bad as that. Thank God that's all done with anyway.... Nothing to say, not a squeak. What's a year now? The sour cud and the iron stool. (Pause.) Revelled in the word spool" (24-5).

The play critiques the power of language as the unsaid creates a more powerful affect than the spoken utterance. The realization of this power is further manifest in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1954). The action of the play derives from circus-clownery as the two characters – Vladimir and Estragon, also called Didi and Gogo – use various linguistic means to survive as they wait for the arrival of the titular character Godot whose antecedents are not known. Language in the play evolves as a self-contradictory theatrical device. On the one hand, language appears as powerful as it evolves as a means of survival in a moment of crisis. On the other hand, in the use of childish gibberish language, the significance of the same in such an existential crisis is refuted. Taken together, this realization of the contradiction creates an affect of the absurd.

In the plays of Harold Pinter, the affect of the absurd is created through an impending menace. Indeed, Pinter's early plays such as *The Room* (1957), *The Birthday Party* (1958) and *The Dumb Waiter* (1960) have been considered as 'Comedies of Menace'. The common denominator of these plays is the steady progress of an apparent comic situation into a menace that comes forth from an unknown source creating an atmosphere of uncertainty that destabilize the ideologies of the audience by creating the affect of the absurd.

The Birthday Party (1958) begins with a couple, Petey and Meg with a paying guest, Stanley, living a happy, peaceful life while maintaining certain distance from the outer world. However, as Gale (1971) remarks, "... Stanley's refuge in *The Birthday Party* is invaded by Goldberg and McCann and reconfigures the relationship between Meg and Petey..." (81) In a scene of intense interrogation that comprise primarily of nonsensical language, the two invaders are able to take Stanley away from his refuge 'to make a man' of him.

GOLDBERG (*crossing to him*). Webber. (*Quietly.*) SIT DOWN.

(*Silence.* STANLEY *begins to whistle "The Mountains of Morne". He strolls casually to the chair at the table. They watch him. He stops whistling. Silence. He sits.*)

STANLEY. You'd better be careful.

GOLDBERG. Webber, what were you doing yesterday?

STANLEY. Yesterday?

GOLDBERG. And the day before. What did you do the day before that?

STANLEY. What do you mean?

GOLDBERG. Why are you wasting everybody's time, Webber? Why are you getting in everybody's way?

STANLEY. Me? What are you—

GOLDBERG. I'm telling you, Webber. You're a washout. Why are you getting on everybody's wick? Why are you driving that old lady off her conk?

MCCANN. He likes to do it!

GOLDBERG. Why do you behave so badly, Webber? Why do you force that old man out to play chess?

STANLEY. Me?

GOLDBERG. Why do you treat that young lady like a leper? She's not the leper, Webber!

STANLEY. What the—

GOLDBERG. What did you wear last week, Webber? Where do you keep your suits?

MCCANN. Why did you leave the organization?

GOLDBERG. What would your old mum say, Webber?

MCCANN. Why did you betray us?

GOLDBERG. You hurt me, Webber. You're playing a dirty game.

MCCANN. That's a Black and Tan fact.

GOLDBERG. Who does he think he is?

MCCANN. Who do you think you are?

STANLEY. You're on the wrong horse.

GOLDBERG. When did you come to this place?

STANLEY. Last year.

GOLDBERG. Where did you come from?

STANLEY. Somewhere else.

GOLDBERG. Why did you come here?

STANLEY. My feet hurt!

GOLDBERG. Why did you stay?

STANLEY. I had a headache!

GOLDBERG. Did you take anything for it?

STANLEY. Yes.

GOLDBERG. What?

STANLEY. Fruit salts!

GOLDBERG. Enos or Andrews?

STANLEY. En— An—

GOLDBERG. Did you stir properly? Did they fizz?

STANLEY. Now, now, wait, you—

GOLDBERG. Did they fizz? Did they fizz or didn't they fizz?

MCCANN. He doesn't know!

GOLDBERG. You don't know. When did you last have a bath?

STANLEY. I have one every—

GOLDBERG. Don't lie.

MCCANN. You betrayed the organization. I know him!

STANLEY. You don't!

GOLDBERG. What can you see without your glasses?

STANLEY. Anything.

GOLDBERG. Take off his glasses. (Act Two)

This classic scene of interrogation creating the affect of menace highlights the dual potential of language as a theatrical device to decipher the absurd. The nonsensical language of interrogation possesses the power to subdue the resistance of Stanley and eventually taking him away with them to an unknown place. The affect of menace is further heightened as the motif of the two characters remains unknown as are the antecedents of Stanley.

The Dumb Waiter (1960) continues to refer to the power of silence over spoken utterance as the titular waiter is dumb despite which it dominates the two contract killers – Ben and Gus who have been placed in a room to kill an unknown person. The two killers are found to be forced by the titular 'dumb waiter' to fulfil various orders that are being placed by unknown person. As the play ends, the two characters are found to face each other as intended target of murder. The play ends with the stage direction– "*A long silence. They stare at each other.*"

It has been argued by Maurice Blanchot that "the truth of language [is] absence", and also that "the continuing insistence of that which is always absent *from* the truth. The *event* of death is neither the motor of truth in language, nor the repressed truth of language, but rather that which language must first foreclose in order for there to be such a thing as truth at all" (pp. 18-9). The production of this inaccessible space in representation as the

limiting condition of being in post-structuralism and deconstruction becomes the site of contention in affect theory. Affect complicates and expands the possibilities of the debate on representation not by resolving the space in between but by bringing it back to life. Most importantly, affect theory turns the crisis of representation into a debate about mediation, thus problematizing the understanding of the in-between as a mere reflection, on the one hand, as well as the nature of mediation itself, on the other. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari draw emphasis on this twofold structure of mediation when elaborating on their notion of affect in *What is Philosophy*? (1991/1996):

> Affects are no longer feelings or affections; they go beyond the strength of those who undergo them. Sensations, percepts, and affects are beings whose validity lies in themselves and exceeds any lived. They could be said to exist in the absence of man because man, as he is caught in stone, on the canvas, or by words, is himself a compound of percepts and affects. The work of art is a being of sensation and nothing else: it exists in itself. (p. 164)

While the affect of absurd is rendered through language, the plot and action of the plays of Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter complement to the affect. The uncertainty looms large in the plot of the plays of both the playwrights. The motif of remembering the past selves of himself by Krapp, who according to him are foolish, is not revealed. As the play does not dramatize any progress in the character of Krapp, it is never understood whether the 60 year old Krapp learns something from the mistakes committed by his former selves. We, as readers or viewers, are spared the emotional component of Krapp; he stops the tape whenever it seems he ponders the truth of his life or attempts to answer any existential question: "What I suddenly saw then was this, that the belief I had been going on all my life, namely — (*Krapp switches off impatiently, winds tape forward, switches on again*). . . unshatterable association until my dissolution of storm and night with the light of the understanding and the fire—

(*Krapp curses louder, switches off, winds tape forward, switches on again)*". However, it is exactly what is left unsaid that is unsettling to us. We do not hear any proposed answers on the meaning of Krapp's life as he reflects. Krapp does not want to hear about his old conclusions about his beliefs or the eventual questioning of formerly relied upon beliefs. He considers his former selves to be foolish for presuming that he once claimed to have any answers:

> Just been listening to that stupid bastard I took myself for thirty years ago, hard to believe I was ever as bad as that. Thank God that's all done with anyway.... Nothing to say, not a squeak. What's a year now? The sour cud and the iron stool. (Pause) Revelled in the word spool. (24-25)

Beckett's play reveals a dual nature of language – one that empowers it and the other that demeans it. The action of the play complements the affect of absurd created by the use of language in its gap between the desire and the physical action. Thus, although Krapp does not want to hear about his former selves, the entire play is based on his listening to the tapes recorded at various points of his life. This complement of the action is further supported by the endings of each Act in *Waiting for Godot*, wherein the characters decide to leave but they continue to stay.

Pinter's *The Birthday Party* (1958) and *The Dumb Waiter* (1960) both dramatize the gap between the language and the physical action. In *The Birthday Party*, despite his unwillingness, Stanley is rendered helpless as he succumbs to the interrogation by the two characters, Goldberg and McCann and leaves with them 'to be a new man'. Similarly, in *The Dumb Waiter*, the two characters are shown to be the mere puppet in the hands of a superior power, the dumb waiter, whose orders they cannot refute despite willing to do so.

An analysis of the play, read in connection with Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, reveal certain structural as well as thematic similarity. In both the plays, the characters as well as the place

are given a vague description. In both the plays, the characters engage in various mundane activities to pass their time. However, Pinter's play has a more immediate effect as the audience can relate themselves with the more 'real' situation of the play.

The plays of Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter create an affect that undermine and reconstitute an ideology by critiquing it from within. In opposition to Massumi's opinion of creating a counter-ideology by transmitting the dominant ideologies in distorted forms, the plays of Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter create an alternative world-view – a new perspective to think about a given situation. The plays provoke its audience to experience the affect by making it live the very structures of the ideologies of the alternate world view and decipher the differences between the dominant and dominated ideologies. As Massumi points it out, "This requires revisiting the whole notion of rationality – and self-interest. In a process-oriented frame, the thinking-feeling of affect is always directly implicated in an operativity – it pertains more fundamentally to events than to persons. It is directly enactive." (91)

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IJES, Volume LXI, 2025

Documentation in Narratives Decode Contemporary Human Tragedy in Githa Hariharan's *Fugitive Histories* and *I Have Become the Tide*

***K.K. Singh**

Abstract

The contemporary fictional writing is not completely fictional because both fact and fancy find place at the same time. Especially the writers like Arundhati Roy and Githa Hariharan have chosen the mode of documentation to decode contemporary events in relation to history and myth. One can easily trace the documentary style in their fictional world in which the contemporary events provide an appropriate milieu to their imagination which seems more authentic. In this paper, my utmost aim is to highlight how the mode of documentation becomes too much appropriate for fictional writing as it happens in the case of Githa Hariharan's two novels: *Fugitive Histories* and *I Have Become the Tide.* Here, documentation has become an influencing tool to decode contemporary happenings with all its effects. The novelist dives deep into human emotions and passions in analysing contemporary tragedies like communal riots and caste-prejudice which still haunt India even seventy-five years after independence. In these two novels—communal riots and cast-prejudice are not metaphors but the reality based on the documents presented by the novelist for the sake of creativity. In the documentization of contemporary events, Githa Hariharan and Arundhati Roy

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seem quite vibrant to present all these with symmetrical flow of emotions and sentiments of the characters portrayed for the purpose of the delineation of contemporary tragedy which seem to dismantle modern India in the wake of the 21st century. So, the two novels of Githa Hariharan as mentioned above are documents of modern India presenting the issues related to contemporary life with utmost reality.

Keywords: Documentation, Decode, tragedy, contemporary, creativity, symmetrical flow

Githa Hariharan's two novels *Fugitive Histories* and *I Have Become the Tide* are certainly the analysis of contemporary events which have shaped the modern India in multiple ways. *Fugitive Histories* (2007) documentizes communal riots took place in Gujarat after Godhra train incident. That incident, in many ways, seems to be the turning point in Indian politics. The writer is quite critical in her approach because she believes "Indian might have reached the climax in terms of scientific and technological development, but really are in the stone age of human psychology." The blood which sheds during communal riots does not able to remove the stains from humanity.

Three different chapters—"Missing Persona", "Crossing Borders" and "Funeral Rites" documentizes three different cities—Delhi, Bombay and Ahmedabad with flow of memory and desire associated with that imposed violence. The communal violence of 2002 in Gujarat has been documentized in live manner and we come across a real picture of the same with rare objectivity. The frightening memories of fear and darkness have created the sense of horror and terror on the one hand and fear and compassion on the other hand. The portrayal of the characters like: Reshma, Zainab Khala, Zakia, Zaulekha Yashim, etc. are so live and true of authenticity that their experiences tell the tale of contemporary tragedies.

The memory of Mala, Asad and their two children—Sara and Samar have been documentized in proper manner without any

touch of imagination and fancy. There is not fictional probability in their utterances rather there is a unique sense of harsh reality in them. How such a tragedy has been documentized properly, is the real essence of the fictional world of Githa Hariharan in this novel. Mala and Asad's life after their marriage was not full of charm and fascination but became hellish because of their belongingness. They found themselves nowhere. The dilemma has been narrated her with an effect in these words of the novelist discussing about the naming of their children:

> There was different kind of pain involved in naming of the new body. Asad had overruled his mother's suggestion that the boy be called Ahmed, or any other 'good' name that began with an 'A'. Mala and Ashad had decided months earlier on Samar if the baby was a boy. But now Mala's mother wanted him to be named Rama or Krishna, preferably Ramakrishna, a double dose to help or compensate for his half and half parentage. (45)

We can see the conflict over such questions related to human relationships which is free from caste and religion. But in India, it is not easy to cross the limit imposed by religion, especially the union of couples belonging to Hindu and Muslim community treated like two extreme poles having no choice to unite at all.

Mala, Asad, Samar and Sara have no choice but to live in the world with certain compromising limitations. Sara's discovery of a completely new life during her documentation of communal violence after Godhra incident in Gujarat may be shocking to her but it is a kind of reality witnessed in our country since our independence.

Hariharan would like to observe life of thousands of the victims who seem quite innocent and they have nothing to do with the politics of communal violence. The portrayal of experiences of various victims, especially women is full of pathos and compassion and anyone's eyes would be full of tears by visualizing those moments. Hariharan's narration depends on the real

documentation in which anyone could notice such happenings which are the core of Indian life. At one place she rightly says: "They call this a border and some call this area mini-Pakistan". (67)

Yasmin is not a single victim but like her, we come across several others in the novel. The novelist intentionally or unintentionally has documented the experiences of women in large number. It gives her an opportunity to provide a compassionate look because women are less political. The experiences of Reshma, Zainab, Najma, Razia, Nusreen, Zahida Khala, etc. are full of compassion and also compel us to rethink our existence, we can realise the inhuman attitude of human beings from the words of Zakia. She tells Sara: "I saw it with my eyes. The little boy next door. They poured petrol in his mouth. They put a lit match stick into his mouth as if it was a lollipop. He just burst." (89)

The words of Noorjehan are not fictitious but full of reality and also put many questions on the philosophical consideration of the existence of human beings. She tells Sara with eyes full of tears:

> My name is Noorjehan. They burnt my husband, they burnt my father, they burnt my son. His name was Safique. He was just fifteen years old. If only I could have buried them properly, with some dignity, if only I could have given them the respect everyone should have in death. (90)

Farida's words are also same showing her compassion as well as unnoticed anger in her eyes when she demands: "The dead are gone. Now give us our men back, give us our children back. All those they took away with made-up charges. Give us our missing ones, our lost ones." (91)

Even in the era of post-colonial set-up, human beings are not looking beyond community, caste and religion. Religious orthodoxy comprehends irreligious mindset in really uneducated society. But in our country, even the so-called educated minds show more

orthodoxy and that is the real threat to humanity. Githa Hariharan's minute observation has resulted in proper documentation combined only with truth and not fancy and imagination. If someone is bound to live in his or her own land in the state of fear and insecurity, how the concept of Tagore's freedom could be achieved (Where the mind is without fear). Hariharan's mode of documentation compels us to think in this direction also. She declares:

> No privileged person in terms of caste and class can, despite choices made as an adult, really 'know' the lived experience of those who have been historically oppressed. *I Have Become the Tide* has been written with this awareness ut it was also born out of the conviction that no writer can engage with life in India today without taking a stand, in some modest way, on the terrible inequalities that continue to ravage the lives of so many of our fellow citizens. (89)

Hariharan's brilliant way narrating the traditional way of narrating the most recent incidents related to the case of caste politics or caste-prejudice gives her a chance to documentize the suicide of Rohit Bemula with only altered name and location. The contemporary tragedy has been linked with age-old hostility of caste prejudice evident in our cultural or social set-up from the time immemorial, and still in a position to create havoc and commotion. We are aware with the suicide of Rohit Bemula, a research scholar belonging to scheduled caste which is the battle field for Indian politicians who never want to miss the opportunity to show their sympathy or grab the occasion to materialize their dreams in state or national politics.

The comparison between Rohit Bemula and Satya is quite visible without much stress or labour. But Satya's linkage with the great saint Chikka as the novelist tries to establish, is quite dramatic and not natural. But the motto of her thematic perception is so strong and graphic, it gives a proper symmetry to the plot of the novel, although two-fold narratives which are separate in nature may be traced. These lines of Chikka establish a proper link

between past and present. It also reminds us the imaginary homelands of Tagore at the same time when Chikka sings:

Where is that land
Where water flows free?
Tell me, tell me.
Where is my land
Where water flows free? (134)

The sonority of above lines reminds us some stanzas from Coleridge's great ballad *The Rime of Ancient Mariner* but here the context is quite different. Here, there is no manifestation of psychological fear, rather there is a plea for creating conducive atmosphere for 'living'. This 'where' seems to be the real metaphor used in this novel to locate oneself with human fervour and dignity. This where seems to be the real search of Chikka, professor Krishna, Kanappa, Sata, Ravi, Asha and Dr. Senthil who are not in favour of creating 'Utopian' society, but certainly, they like and love to live in a 'good and healthy society'. Because professor Krishna's research has been intentionally presented to show how even in that struggle for bringing 'good' life for 'that community' which is still deprived even after much transformations in modern age. Professor Krishna's research is well documental but appeal seems to be of no result.

The land 'where' is not far away. It is everywhere but no one would like to make it. The land searched by Kannadeva or Tagore or Satya is visible but people search this elsewhere. We can realise the compassion of such singing by Chikka's family:

The land is here, and there,
It's everywhere in me.
In me the land
Where water flows free. (234)

Professor Krishna, Satya and Senthil present the continuity of same repression and suppression suffered by Chikka's family in those days. Satya's ambition is not passionate or he is not the

victim of passionate ambition. Satya does not want to transform the society; he only wants to live with human dignity. He himself documented his ambitions in these lines:

I don't want pearl,
I don't want rubies.
Just a piece of land
O mother,
And the songs we sing on that land.
Father searched for a groom
And sent me away from home
Mother wept. (256)

The life of Chikka in the past and life of Satya in the present gives a unique connectivity of past and present to the novel. Here, plot and sub-plot merge into one whole only due to centralized thematic perceptions. Kannapa's sacrifice and Satya's suicide are well connected with a hint of possible unsympathetic consideration of the respective societies. If condition is conducive for living in modern scenario in the wake of constitutional security, Satya might not have documented his own experience of suffering in these compassionate but questioning words:

This is a cobler's child
Don't sit next to him.
This is a washerman's child.
Don't speak to him.
This child's mother lifts buckets of shit.
Run away from him.
My tears for these children have dried up.
Must my voice too grow silent. (278)

Githa Hariharan's tackling of events took place both in the past and the present is supposed to be the linking point and at the same time it also evokes the tragedy evident in every age. Professor Krishna's research on Kannadeva is not unintentional but forms

the major scope in the novel for many reasons altogether. Mulk Raj Anand in his novel *Untouchable* has raised this issue something 90 years back when he deals with the miserable life of Bakha. More and less, the condition is same although some resolutions from the side of the government have been imposed. Even though professor Krishna is not *dalit* but his zeal and curiosity must be appreciated. His anger is quite obvious and affirms his strong will and power:

> In a past life I was untouchable.
> In a past life they smelt my shadow and fled.
> In a past life the meat I ate was rotten.
> In a past life I bathed in stagnant pond.
> That was the past.
> Tie me, tether me so I do not stray there again.
> Keep me here, in current and whirlpool,
> O river of thousand faces. (302)

In the way in which the lives of both—Kannadeva and Satya have been documented—brings clear idea of the alarming situation which gives the affirmation that 'change is not possible without sacrifice'. For bringing such transformation, Kannadeva dived deep into the river near Anandagrama.

The same thing has been realised by Satya in the second decade suicide clearly affirms the point that we are still in the stone-age of our human psychology although we have researched the climax of science and technology. Only technological perfection or tools cannot help much to improve the situation. Satya is not Bakha of Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable.* Bakha easily surrendered as his father Lakha suggested him to do so. On the other hand, Satya is a typical modern fellow having surrounded by multiple modern problems. Chikkaiah's dream of "where is my land, where water flows free?" and Satya's dream or search of "where is my story, my own story?" are not realised. Satya's suicide is not a sort of "poetic justice" done to his character of

'poetic justice' cannot be appreciated at all. Satya's introspection in his diary redirects his dilemma to understand the situation:

Me, a doctor? Me, write poems and songs?

I can hear laughter.

Their laughter.

Medicine, they call it.

If this is healing.

I do not know it.

Poetry, they call it. (276)

Githa Hariharan smartly documented the current political scenario which provides, as she thinks, a little space for free discourse on any issue, especially issues related to 'nationalism' and 'anti-nationalism'. The character like Shankar is visible everywhere now-a-days who is the typical product of current evolution in Indian politics. In the novel, we find a glorious battle of discourse between Asha and Shankar after the suicide of Satya, Asha posts these words: "From the washerman poet Chikka to medical student Satya, born an outcaste, dying an outcaste, has anything changed in all the years in between." (254)

Shankar, on the other hand, has some other mission to realise and he does not find himself in any dilemma to post this message for Satya: "You're born where you are because of the sins you committed in your past life. Stop blaming everyone else now. Bharat Mata ki Jai. That is from Shankar @ hindupartriot." (287)

Hariharan's documentation of suicide of Rohit Bemula certainly shapes the plot of the novel in many ways, especially for highlighting such inconducive circumstances which creates such a devastating environment in which the scholars found themself insecure. She artistically handles such a controversial matter which had created much sound and fury without any political fear.

Githa Hariharan, without any fear, documentizes the much-discussed problem with unique details with during deep into human emotions and passions in her novels—*Fugitive Histories* and

I Have Become the Tide. Her art of characterization rightly provides her an opportunity to narrate the contemporary tragedy although with taking some side without any fear. She might be criticized for mixing creativity and politics into the whole but she is not alone at all. She belongs to the class of Mulk Raj Anand, Arundhati Roy, etc. who are also the representative same class with more articulative energy.

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CREATIVE SECTION

POEMS

Poems

***R.K. Singh**

1. Life Unlived

I'm an after thought
in my own city
excluded forever

left to strangers' pleasure
along broken roads
disappearing footpaths

dust and accidents
from construction sites
to stuckness of home

I fracture the spine
of my diaries and lament
life unlived in years

2. Dream Ripples

Who left the rabbit's foot
at my door to uncover
the hidden secret
whispered in hazy dawn?

missed chances add up
to the lost path through corners
overlooked for fear
of diminished abundance

in the race for living
by hesitating

and not exploring what's new—
intentional ripples:

broken myth models
incomplete processes
the soul griming in
slimy degeneration

the mirror of truth
the gap within and without
the trust deficit
the tumbling ground I stick to

3. Images

TV screen
programmed to preview
ahead of time
what's coming next
if you are ready

choose before
it's too late or change
the course even if
things work out for you
future isn't set in stone

flickering images
no different from shadows
in the March heat wave
dragon fire swallows each
wild orchids blooming spring

4. Abandoned

With divided heart, mind and colours
deluded and dumb millions still blind
to politicians peeling their flesh
layer by layer like onion

take pride in the knife that cuts them to core
get cooked in debris of myths and history

for kites and vultures of caste and sect

now more vulgar breeds of tyrant flourish
under the same sky they are gashed peels
the abandoned bodies, the rotten souls

5. Feminist Notes

Intentionally layered
internally fragmented
queer antics:

she builds up her own
sexual toolkit to prove
how coward man is

she sees a rapist
in each man detests
the male smell but trusts
one night stand
with deep thrust
long erections
and climax control
for blood to soak smoothly

she sits shrouded
in her see-through pink gown
on the terrace
inviting autumn winds

for longer stopover
just to accuse the artist
of invading her body

she curses a young bull
for obstructing her way
in the street shouts at hawkers

and, yet another
at eighty reimagines
fading memories
with snaky radiance
to break a new dawn

my friend says
the dynamics change:
there's a before
and an after
to feel life

I say yes, but I'm tired
of walking and writing
what I watch

I'm no tout to comfort
or restore the faith
of a dwindling flock in heat
culling is convenient

6. TEN TANKA

Baffling my brain
mosquitoes find my vein
in night's darkness
they land without humming
suck blood with swollen itch
***
The sky's map
distorts in no time
my funny face
no physics could force
the cloud's short-hand
***
A sleeping soul
under medication
mumbles love tanka
he can't recall
on awakening
***
Swirling spiral
of her skirt spills tides of dream
and memory:
I breathe fire in the dance
forgetting bends and twists
***
When I inhale in
her mouth and exhale stroking
hair or caressing

I ride her into joy and
make her hail morning like earth
***
Short nights and long days
sleep loss rustles a friction
echoing in bed
the cycle of cravings
over and over again
***
Undissolved in light
chasing rainbow desire
no grand affair
no experiment to live
the essence, no end to dust
***
The tree is me
leafy, green, bent, straight, full, rich
rooted in nature
loving sun, moon and stars
sheltering one and all
***
Lightning
roaring colours in the sky
red, white, dark
merge into one
fire, water, earth
***
What poem can brew
on faces hidden behind

veils misty eyes say
all I can't image in
haiku with season word
***

—**R.K. Singh**

***Ram Krishna Singh** is an Indian English poet, known for his haiku-inspired brevity, existential introspections, and erotic minimalism. A retired Professor of English at IIT-ISM, Dhanbad, he has published extensively on ELT, ESP (English for Specific Purposes), and technical communication, while his poems have appeared internationally in several journals. His latest poetry collections include *Against the Waves*: *Selected Poems* (2021), *Covid-19 and Surge of Silence/Kovid-19 Hem Sessízlík Tolkn* (English/Tatar, 2021), *Silence: A White Distrust* (English/Japanese, 2022), *Poems and Micropoems* (2023), and *Knocking Vistas and Other Poems* (2024).

Power of Women

***Kuntala Kumari Sabat**
****Trans. Mary Mohanty**

Sixteen crore hearts have received inspiration
From the far- off infinite space today,
Sixteen crore women will arise in India
Incarnated as the blossom of happiness and affluence.
How long, tell me, how long
The sacred land of Aryas will remain down?
Today the long night will end.
Like the new sun rising in the east,
Hundreds of sacred feet of beautiful women
Are tinkling with ornaments.
Mighty power of India will arise in unison.
In India will awake Indira, the goddess of affluence
And Bharati, the goddess of learning.
Look look opening your eyes oh stupid!
Breaking your deep slumber oh fool!
Indian women are treasure of India,
Worship their lotus feet like goddess.
Let the faces of sisters, mothers, wives and daughters
Shine in heavenly joy radiating light.

That light will remove the gloom of your heart,
The pain of your misfortune
And burden of your sin.
Your hands will be charged with fiery power.
Heavenly devotion will manifest
In your joyous minds
Filled with the fragrance of lotus.
Indian woman is not low or poor on this earth.
Her eternal fame will never disappear
In crores of years from this world.
As long as the river Ganga flows
As long as the Himalayas is covered with snow
The gentle breeze will spread
The fame of Aryan women.
The fame of Aryan women shines bright
In sacred Rajasthan, forests of Rajwada,
In Kalinga, Karnataka, Badri, Brindavan
In Mithila, Bidarva, Banga and Bindhya areas.
Even to-day Sati, Sabitri, Padmini,
Sanyukta, Subhadra, Janaki, Rukmini
Are alive in the decayed skeleton of India.
Aryan mother is not lifeless in her heart,
Her life stirs in secret in her faint veins.
Her loud lamentation will go
By the power of Mountain Menaka's daughter,
Goddess Uma, the consort of Lord Shiva.
No longer her head will hang low in shame,
Her daughters will remove her mother's pain.

Sixteen crore women will arise in joy
Singing 'Hail to Mother'.
The sisters and the brothers will be initiated
To the great charms of saving India.
The sons of India are never oblivious,
Woman is his main goddess forever.
She is the Word, the goddess of learning,
The goddess of plenty, the goddess of power, Durga,
Rama, the goddess of wealth,
Narayani, the goddess saving us from the three sins,
She is ever the partner in all deeds
And religious activities.
Do not spread in the world in vain
India is rife with repression of women.
Outsiders should not sing in pride
The tales of Indian women suffering.
Arise with new vigour, arise Aryan sons.
Disgrace has made you blind,
Reproach has made you torpid.
Today stand beside the heavenly brilliance,
Swaha, the consort of Fire,
May like mighty goddess Sachi,
The consort of King of gods,
She appear in pride and joy
Holding bajra, the weapon of King of gods.
May mighty woman appear in every house,
like goddess Uma holding trident.
May she wipe out vice, poverty and suffering

With the huge sword of goddess Uma.
May India arise with her ancient pride.
The women will make India a sacred place,
The Naimishya forest, the great and glorious
Dwelling of ancient sages,
The jewel in the heart of India.
May the desolate sadness and
Miserable lamentation go far away
By heavenly joy today.
Years after years in pretence,
No longer the Rishis' sons would worship
Clay idols with all rituals.
The lotus-feet of living mother
Would receive pure devotion and adoration.
No longer mothers would die in disgrace,
Mother would be enshrined in every house
Diligent worship of Shakti, the power
of mother-woman would increase.
Hypocrisy will go away,
Far away from the land of India.
Women will create sacred place
For the worship of mother
In the inner chambers of India.
Valiant daughters would give birth
To brave sons like hundreds of
Arundhati, wife of sage Bashistha.
Again the Aryan soil will resound
With the glorious song of Yashoda,
The mother of Lord Sri Krishna

And Kunti, the mother of Pandavas.
Again hundreds of god-like sons will adorn
The laps of mothers like Aditi,
The mother of gods.
The sons born of mothers like
Kausalya, the mother of Sri Rama,
Sumitra, the mother of Sri Lakshman,
Sachi, the consort of King of gods, Indra,
Are the pride of our country.
Again sons like Sivaji and Pratap will be born,
Do not shed, do not shed futile tears.
We had risen in the past,
We have fallen on the ground at present,
Do not despair brother,
This time we will rise like mighty lions,
Inspired by our mothers.
Mother is the centre of our attention, our worship,
Mother is the core of all our perseverance.
Reciting the incantation of the name
Of mother in our hearts,
We the young men and women will arise again.
This time we thirty-three crore will awake,
We will not remain silent,
Lowering our heads.
The days of our indolence is gone,
Darkness is disappearing at a distance.
Today the men and women of India
Are united with one great goal.
Together we brothers and sisters will remove

The shame of our mother with all efforts.
Again goddess Durga will save Bharat (India),
The land of King Bharata,
Wielding ten weapons.
The images of the Divine couple,
Lakshmi and Narayan will be
Worshipped in temples.
The image of Shiva and Parvati
Merged with one another will look attractive
With the rivers Jahnabi (Ganga) and Brahmaputra.
Again the land of Aryans will be worshipped
All over the world and look lovely
Like the blossoms of
The heavenly Nandan forest.

***Kuntala Kumari Sabat** (1901-1938)- She was the first woman novelist in Odia. She was a physician, poet, essayist, novelist, freedom fighter and activist of Odisha during the colonial period.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Vikas Sharma: *Honey Trap,* Ukiyoto Publishing (2025). p. 144 ₹ 250/- (P.B.) ISBN: 9789367954461

Beauty is truth, Keats said. Beauty is also power. But beauty can also be a trap and a weapon to capture and defeat. This is what Vikas Sharma tries to suggest in his new novel *Honey Trap*.

Prof. Vikas Sharma is no longer a stranger to the creative world. He has produced nearly a dozen of novels including *Love's not Time's Fool, I.A.S. Today, 498 A, Fear and Dreams, Medicine: Light in Twilight, Ashes and Fire, Hope Against Hope, Ideas and Events, Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow, Sana, Never Together, Never apart, Media Revolution 2030, and Love and Ego.* Besides writing fiction he has also written some critical books.

Like any other sensitive writer Vikas Sharma keeps his eyes on the current socio-cultural developments in the society. He has written on various contemporary issues in his novels. In this novel also he tries to focus on a very pertinent issue of the status of people of the feudal class after the end of feudalism. He tries to track how these people try to rehabilitate themselves in the socio economic order. In their quest of new identity they try to take up various professions and go through struggles in their own ways. But amidst this struggle for finding a new identity they find love and beauty as a uniting and alluring force.

Honey Trap is an account of the family of the feudal lord K.R.Raju, the Raibahadur of Aurangabad across generations.

Through these generations there are so many ups and downs and yet there is an unseen thread of love and bonding. Through the relationship between Dr. Mangesh and Dr. Kuntal, Arnav and Roshni and Fanny and Prabhu, and Cabbot and Madonna the writers tries to show the power of love and beauty and goes on to show body as an instrument through various episodes of body relationship. However, the writer carefully keeps there descriptions within limit and prevents from being obscene.

The locus of the plot shifts from India to US, to Canada and to Russia. The plot is linear incorporating characters and events across three generations from K.R. Raju to Dr. Mangesh to Prabhu. As the structure of feudalism is on the wane, people try to find out alternative sources of survival as they take recourse to medical profession, legal practice and also crusher business. The story tries to incorporate the political developments also by referring to the Russian war against Ukraine. The characters of the new generation move to the US for medical studies.

In the crisscross of characters and events there is one element that connects, and that is love. There are episodes of extra-marital love and passionate bodily love at regular intervals as the story goes on making progression from one generation to the other. Life seems to have become free from any fixed schedule; it goes on flowing so much so that it becomes most unpredictable. We are unable to know where the story is leading to. Except Dr Mangesh and Dr Kuntal all characters are sketchy. The novel seems to be a family history of K.R. Raju.

The language of the novel is simple and there is no deliberate effort of embellishment, thus making the novel easy to read. The novel has been divided into 25 chapters. At various places, some typological experimentation has been made. The book has a beautifully designed cover page that catches our eyes. The novel is handy and can be read in a short time.

Throughout the novel, with the help of different episodes, the writer tries to depict the possible effects of honey trapping. In most

of the cases the love that has been portrayed seems to be only skin deep; it is at best the attraction of the flesh rather than the charm of the soul. The novel seems to be a portrayal of the rehabilitation of the characters from feudal set up in the newly emerging socio-economic scenario. *Honey Trap* , overall is a new feather in the cap of popular Indian English fiction.

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Rajnath: *Criticism and Society.* Jaipur: Rawat Publications. 2025. pp 172. ₹ 1095/-

This book represents the recent work of the veteran scholar of English, Professor Rajnath. His insights and wide reading coupled with a simple and clear style make this book the younger generation should learn from and emulate. They would learn from the Professor, balance, fairness , objectivity, civility and wisdom. Prof Rajnath has spent a lifetime devoted to English Literature in general and Criticism in particular. He even ran single handed the *Journal of Literary Criticism* for nearly twenty five years. He has not allowed Theory to overwhelm Criticism and his two excellent essays in this book on T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* and *Four Quartets*, are examples of true literary criticism. It is not as though he is unaware of developments in Literary Theory but he knows how to learn from it and use it to concentrate on the literary work. This is increasingly not the case in our Departments of English because everyone is talking Theory with not a glance at the literary work. In fact our Departments run on the notion that the Author is dead and so must the literary work be.

The Western philosophical tradition has collapsed the distinction between philosophy and literature and we are told that there is only ecriture or Writing. Along with this, as Rajnath points out in

his opening essay, Reason has been rejected and the aesthetic foregrounded. This viewpoint believes that when one is looking at literature there is no need to take stock of a moral intelligence, which Rajnath says, is undoubtedly at work in a poem, and this leaves literature open to notions of untrammelled play of impulses, a wild undisciplined thing which has no connection with Reality, or social expectations. The same can be said of Religion which depends on Faith and mystery and is similar to literature in its use of myth, symbolism and imagination, but is not lacking in logic and reason. Western philosophy has converted Religion into play and a secular discourse.

What is the limit of the aesthetic dimension in Religion and literature? Rajnath mentions approvingly Coleridge who loved literature as much as he loved Religion and Philosophy without collapsing them into one inchoate thing. He recognized the underlying logic in literature and in Religion providing T.S. Eliot, F.R. Leavis, the New Critics and Yvor Winters an escape from the damage caused by Sir Philip Sidney who said that "the poet nothing affirmeth and therefore never lieth". They emphatically point to logic and reason in literature and in Eliot's case Religion also. Rajnath follows these forebears and is able to root for reason in the midst of Imagination, and logic and truth in the midst of Religion, which has been reduced to aesthetics and desacralized. Donne and Herbert, men of spiritual longing were able to combine logic with faith in their poems. If religion is divorced from thought it becomes a tool in the hands of fanatics and unreason. Our Vedas and Upanishads have logic and, therefore, have attracted sterling men like

Radhakrishnan, Rammohun Roy and Dayanand Saraswati. Rajnath considers Indic religions for their dependence on reason, and touches on various religious figures who have contributed to society. The true practice of religion will not allow intolerance. Thus the dominance of Aestheticism and unreason in literature and religion can be engaged with and faith and reason can go together.

Rajnath has an essay on the idea of the Intellectual. Edward Said thinks that an intellectual must speak truth to power and he must be secular. Rajnath thinks this is a kind of intolerance though he quotes Said approvingly when he argues for pluralism of identities and culture. Rajnath is against the habit of taking a rigid view on any matter and he comes down hard on Intellectuals who generalize and take a monistic view, and refuse to listen to alternate viewpoints. Though he does not specifically say so he must be against Wokeism and what we now call cancel culture. An Intellectual must be on the side of humanism and pluralism. He cannot, as they say, take the attitude that it is my way or the high way. I may add that Left thinkers in India practice this kind of intolerance. Rajnath is hard on Romilla Thapar and Irfan Habib in this respect and they are not intellectuals for him though he concedes that Rajeev Bhargava is one. Rajnath's touchstone to determine whether one is an intellectual is whether s/he speaks the Truth. A person who speaks the truth is an intellectual for Rajnath and since a literary critic correlates society and literature he must be an Intellectual. Derrida converted literature into a meaningless act because you can't arrive at Truth in any matter because of the undecidability factor. Habermas on the other hand believed that literature is world disclosive. When 9\11 happened Derrida and Habermas came together to speak of the stark Reality out there. Their courage makes them intellectuals and their Philosophy in the Time of Terror is a modern classic.

Criticism, not Theory, is the Professor's concern, and criticism is of no use if it does not address societal concerns. So the criticism of a poem must modulate into a lesson for society. Therefore, it is remarkable that there were only six critics of English literature between Sir Philip Sidney and Matthew Arnold. There used to be a belief that criticism is secondary and a parasite on the creative writer. But in our times we have not only individual critics but a critical collective like the Russian Formalist School, the New Critics, the Chicago Critics and then the advent of Derrida and

Said. Criticism is now seen as undoubtedly important and a shaping force in the intellectual life of our times. Time and again Professor Rajnath raises the question of morality, not in any abstract way but in relation to literature and criticism. The other notable aspect of this book is that it draws on Formalistic criticism of an earlier era and inter disciplinary criticism of the contemporary period. But the Professor does not allow either to blind him to their limitations, though he profits from their strengths. Independence of thought is the hall mark of Rajnath the critic and intellectual. He opines that Indian Criticism of English has been mostly imitative and should learn to be assimilative of various strands of criticism, including Sanskrit Poetics. It will only then come of age.

The latest American Import is Critical Race Theory (CRT). It comes from Law and is concerned with racial discrimination of the Black people of America. Rajnath does not go so far as to see developments from it, particularly with respect to the Indian Diaspora in America where CRT has been used by American scholars, Dalit activists in the USA associated with organizations like the Equality Lab and their Wokeist counterparts in India to invoke caste and racism in Hindu Culture and to do damage to Indian institutions like the family. This aspect of CRT promotes hate, something which Rajnath disapproves of and finds not present in his version of CRT. That is a matter for another essay I presume.

But here Rajnath is drawing parallels with Post Colonial Theory (PCT) and CRT. If Said was the forebear of PCT, Richard Delgado and Jean Stefanic, Professors of Law introduce CRT. If Said focuses on the Arabian Orient to call out discrimination in the West and its diminishing of non white peoples, CRT fills the gap by including Blacks in the scheme of things which PCT did not do. Gayatri Spivak in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" did not include Blacks and other ethnic minorities. It was an elite subalternism provoking one scholar to quip "Can the Subaltern Spivak?"!! Rajnath points out that PCT and CRT focus on the

collision of cultures. Both draw from structuralist and post structuralist thought in their efforts to speak up for the Orient and the Blacks respectively. Niether is purely literary, one taking its origins in history, the other in law and then moving to other disciplines. Both are interested in rapprochement and eventual peace, equality and harmony. CRT as Rajnath conceives of it preaches against hate speech for which American racism is famous. Terms like nigger for the Blacks , chink for the Chinese, kike for Jews, spic for Italians are intended to damage others' reputation and hurt their feelings. Rajnath points out that Churchill called Gandhi a fakir and Indians themselves are not free from this despicable habit, witness the treatment given to poor North Indians in Mumbai. Rajnath makes an impassioned plea for avoidance of hate speech and the treatment of all with love and respect. He quotes appropriate passages from Said and the Delgado-Stefanic duo in support of this purpose.

The Two essays on Eliot's *The Wasteland* and *Four Quartets* have similar concerns about structure and meaning. Rajnath comes up with the judgement that ultimately The Wasteland is unique in being representative of the Modern Age in its theme and technique and is by far the finest product of Modernism. He does not mean to say that *Four Quartets* and the later poems are inferior, only that they are not unique. There is also critical prejudice that Eliot converted to Anglo Catholicism and this affects the criticism of the later poems. In the structure of *The Wasteland*, in its mythical method lies the meaning of the poem. There is a coalescence of the past and the present where each comments on the other. Though it is a period poem and a London poem its meaning has larger dimensions. Eliot has a cosmic vision which covers all times and all places from the remote past to the urgent present. The Mythical method enables parallels and contrasts and a number of images and there is a single significant, consistent personality like Tiresias to provide the necessary order and unity. The poem works at two levels, one dramatizing the enormous

futility of life but there is the other strand, an underlying one, which speaks of hope. *Four Quartets* which has been attacked for its thought and philosophy is the result of changes to Eliot's personality and if we look closely we can detect the interplay of personality and Impersonality. Space does not permit more detailed discussion of these two essays on Eliot's poems. Suffice it to say that they are replete with brilliant insights and *Four Quartets* has a maturity of style and handling of syntax. Rajnath the excellent teacher and interpreter is at his literary best in dealing with them.

Two essays follow, one on Raja Rammohun Roy, the other on the influence of British colonialism on Indian Literary culture. Rajnath is all praise for Roy as a pioneer of the Indian Renaissance. Contrary to judgements that he was a lackey of the British (Gandhi called him a pygmy) Rajnath argues for a balanced picture of Roy who not only wanted Western education to come to India but also had a deep understanding of the philosophical portion of the Hindu scriptures which is grand in its vision and Universal in its dimensions. He was opposed to blind faith and superstition which characterized Hinduism in his times. He wanted a fusion of Western thought and Indian philosophy. That was his prescription for India becoming a modern nation. In the prevalent atmosphere in Indian universities where Roy is seen as a crypto Christian, Rajnath is courageous to defend Roy. As far as Colonialism's influence on Indian Literary forms, is concerned, Rajnath sees a parallel between the English Renaissance which saw English prose coming into its own and the Indian Renaissance which did the same for our Bhashas. Indian English prose was already a mature genre while it took our Bhashas a while to profit from that influence. Rajnath in his interventions focuses on the positive influences that ushered in the Indian Renaissance, singles out Roy for praise and remarks that English Education has done good for India. He does not believe that English education produced deracinated individuals and a whole generation which was taught to pour scorn on native traditions and beliefs.

There are two appendices, one on Rajnath encountering Leavis and the other on his meeting with Valerie Eliot who allowed him to access material so far not shown to anybody. He must be applauded for this victory. Throughout this book we find Rajnath politely disagreeing with the finest minds in the West like F.R. Leavis , I.A. Richards, Derrida, Said and Indians like Gandhi and Radhakrishnan but he is always balanced in his criticism. He speaks the truth and even if one disagrees with him one can't fault his logic , argument and clarity. In these respects he is an academic par excellence and an intellectual. He belongs to a generation which is fading away slowly, much to the detriment of English Departments.

Reviewer: Dr. Mohan Ramanan retired as Professor of English from the Central University of Hyderabad after four decades in the profession. He is widely published with books on Modern British Poetry, American Poetry, R.K. Narayan and Rt. Hon Srinivasa Sastri, and over hundred articles published in forums both in India and abroad. He was for a time Dy Director of the American Studies Research Centre, and served as HOD, English and Dean, Humanities at the HCU. He has been awarded the British Council Fellowship, Fulbright twice and the Monteserrat Fellowship which enabled him to do research, teach and lecture in UK, USA, Europe. He lives in Hyderabad.