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1

Overcoming the Trauma of Homelessness: A Study of the Diasporic Poems of Mona Dash, Kavita A. Jindal, Usha Kishore and Yogesh Patel

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Abstract

In my paper, I propose to underscore the process of acculturation in the land of settlement and the formation of home in the poems of four diasporic poets. The poetry of Kavita A. Jindal, Mona Dash, Yogesh Patel and Usha Kishore is preoccupied with the question of "belongingness" in the age of globalization. The poets overcome the trauma of "homelessness" or "unhomeliness" by negotiating with the new world. Their past and the present constantly interact with each other in their process of "homemaking". I intend to show how all of them despite possessing a homing desire try to cope up with a foreign world. The appeal of their poems is truly transcultural. They resolve the agonies of deterritorialization by accepting the challenges of transplanting their roots in the adopted country. The ambiguities, differences, between here/there, homeland/ host land are beautifully resolved in their poetry. Instead of having cultural myopia, their poems speak of acculturation and participation. The trauma of dislocation is turned into a celebration of the transcultural identity.

[Keywords: Home, Diaspora, Acculturation, Identity]

The postcolonial age is one of the constant dispersals of people from one place to another. People scatter from their place of origin, move beyond the borders and settle in foreign countries in search of better opportunities. Globalization has erased the boundaries between home and abroad. In the earlier ages of the diasporic journey, people suffered from an acute identity crisis. The syndrome of identity crisis in the past has undergone a sea-change. Now, people try to negotiate, accommodate and adapt to the variegated cultures, languages, and socio-economic as well as geopolitical structures. Today, people adopt multiple identities instead of suffering from the trauma of grappling with plural identities. Their inclination towards transcultural tolerance for all has resulted in widening the concept of homeland and host country. Instead of being trapped in the symbolic no-man's land between the land of origin and the land of stay, the diasporic sojourners address the issues of a mobile habitat. In this article, I have selected some diasporic poems of four expatriates. All these border crossers belong to the British India diaspora. I endeavour to demarcate the resolution of the conflict between the homeland and the host country in the poetry of Mona Dash, Kavita A. Jindal, Usha Kishore and Yogesh Patel.

Homi K. Bhabha's observation regarding diaspora studies is relevant in this context. "Diaspora studies in general, have shown how various "Third World" immigrants construct their cultural identities as citizens of "First World" countries (e.g. USA or Europe) while simultaneously retaining strong affiliations, identifications and loyalties to the culture of their country" (qtd. in Safran, 23). I have tried to focus on the resolution of the conflict between the home here and home there in the diasporic poems of these four expatriates. In the "Introduction" to *Transnational Migrations,* Safran, Sahoo and Brij V. Lal say, "...the transnational migration "triggers a range of feelings, including fear, nostalgia, anguish, exile, trauma, and sense of longing for the homeland, on the one hand, and the need to adjust, assimilate or integrate and to connect globally, on the other" (xxvi).

Mona Dash was born in Orissa. She migrated to London in 2001. In her expatriate writing the Indian culture, rituals have a significant space. The poet is not concerned about the problem of being rootless; rather she makes London her second home. In London, she sticks to the Indian way of observing and celebrating the rituals and

ceremonies. In the poem titled "The Skin of Tradition", she describes an Indian wedding ceremony in London where some foreigners with multicultural identities observe the strangeness of the ritual:

> The Americans, Germans, English
> French, Italians flock here, hearts one
> with conch shells; cross-legged,
> slurp white rice and dal from banana leaves. (8-11)

Though the Indian rituals, customs are recalled in this poem, the query of belongingness and homemaking makes her restless.

> Later, in London, that city I call home,
> Forgetting, at home *tulsi* plants sit in country yards
> White *chita* is drawn on Thursday
> To welcome Lakshmi.
> 'A city without temples scratching its skyline
> Cannot be home ever,' they pronounce.
> I question for years. (21-27)

The age-old question of making a home in the foreign land is answered in her keenest desire to "shed centuries of old skin". The line speaks volumes of her negotiation with other cultures. The diasporic poet re-constructs her identity that is pluricultural and hybridized. For her, the home is where her feet are. Residing in London, clinging to the memories, she is eager to emerge with her multiple selves. In her poem titled "Migration", she articulates the diasporic formation of identity. Identity in diaspora is ever-changing. She speaks, "living in another world/ always trying, deciding/ smoothly blend or nurture identity" (22-24). Her search for a home is a ceaseless process. Though she misses her land of origin, she does not indulge in pining for her memories. Rather, she speaks of finding multiple dwellings in multiple countries. Migration is all about her effort of finding ease at multiple homes: "they go, they come/ unknowing large suitcases/ migratory birds, looking for homes" (29-31). The assertion of being an inhabitant in a no-man's land is uttered beautifully:

> The inhabitants
> straddle worlds, legs in one
> minds in the other
> souls here.
> ...
> In this drifting space

sometimes we tilt
we shift towards
where we came from
sometimes we sink
into new lands.
Floating, disjointed, disparate
mass
no names, no roots
only a scattering seed swept by a tuft of hair
a dispersion
Diaspora.[1] (7-22)

The lines transport the readers to the fragmented, disjointed world of the diaspora in the present age of globalization. The images of "roots", a scattering seed swept by a tuft of hair", and "dispersion" compress the idea of diaspora. According to Robin Cohen, "The word "diaspora" is derived from the Greek verb *speiro* (to sow) and the preposition *dia*(over)" (ix). Homi K Bhabha says about the consequences of the diasporic, dispersion "in *The Location of Culture.* He says, "In that displacement, the borders between home and world become confused; and uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting" (13)

Kavita A. Jindal was born in India and for several years she lived in Hong Kong and finally settled in the UK. For her, home crosses borders along with the writers and poets. She does not feel like an 'alien' in a foreign land. In an interview with Farhana Shaikh in *The Asian Writer* she says, "... and the poems are set in London and North and South India. Wherever I roam is a sort of home and that's what I write about."[2] In the poem titled "The Path Between", the poet speaks of her home in a new location:

Where the river bends I've made my home
Sauntering quotidian on the towpath
From Hammersmith Bridge, clad in green and gold
To Barnes Bridge, steel grey painted;
The colour of the water beneath. (1-5)

The amenities, architecture of London draw her attention to a great extent. She has minutely studied the fat rivets on the bridges, the tools and adroit hands of the men fastening them. Even the otters living below do not escape her notice. In her tireless sojourning

across the land, the foreignness of a new country has lost its rough edges of "differences", "unfamiliarity". Rather, it provides an opportunity for the expatriate to rediscover himself amidst the splendour of London. She is overjoyed to recapitulate her experiences there:

> I've waved to rowers, Sunday sailboats,
> Patted the police horses that clop
> Always two nodding together
> On the vital track of spirit and energy
> Cyclists, runners, dogs, children.
>
> A trail of cherished natural history
> Ancient trees in silent observance
> Hidden blackcurrants, flowering hawthorn,
> Mud puddles, nestling kestrel.
>
> The Thames once curved deeper
> Looped even closer
> To my home;
> Marshes lay at the door. (14-22)

The poet succeeds in navigating into a new "home" in a new land. The euphoria of settling there and acculturating into its newness is beautifully articulated in this poem. Even the very depiction of her "house" in London speaks of her fondness for Britain:

> Aged one hundred and nine
> The house keeps itself as it was built.
> I live with the taste of family 'Hepburn';
> Their fondness for embellishment,
> For hearts carved in woodwork,
> For green and red stained glass. (23-28)

The poet transplants her Indian roots in London. The reminiscences of India help her forget the pain of detachment from the motherland and immigration to London. She reconnects to her land of origin by the objects and artefacts found in the land of stay. The interior design of her home in the adopted country reminds her of India with which she shares an inseparable emotional bonding. "The fireplace tiles were patterned / With peacocks and paisley. Inspired by faraway India" (30-32), she is meticulous about preserving her homeland heritage in the host society. Her emotional attachment with the artefacts of India is palpable in these lines:

...I arrived by place
Here, I am now,
Shielding local heritage.
Ignoring new interior fashions. (36-38)

The mere crossing of borders could not prevent her from preserving the Indian heritage in the faraway land. Her comfort lies in her attempt at restoring the artefacts of the native land. "These are my excuses" is another poem unique in its superb blend of several images like "*kurinji* flower of the Nilgiri hills" (1), " Kumbhakaran, the brother of Ravan" (3), "... trains to London " (5). The diasporic sensibility is well expressed in her poetry. In the poem titled "Kabariwala", she records the moment of her departure from the homeland. She says:

I'm going away.
Going where we ask; Going foreign he says.
I'm going where there is free love
Where you can be with whomever you want whenever
you want; probably England, that's where I'm going. (10-14).

In the poem titled "Where Home Was", she locates her homes. Past and present join hands to form her diasporic self,

We are rooted to the busy road where
My broken strings lie
Here is where they meet at last.
The past and the present" (17-20).

The poet celebrates her life of freedom in the "in-between" space. Being diasporic and possessing a space of liminality, she belongs both to her natal land and the present land of stay. The expression "*nomads have freedom, if no home*" (27) encapsulates the agonies of being "homeless" at one hand. On the other, it opens up the vistas of the unexplored world to which the unbounded nomads have free access. Instead of suffering from xenophobia, today's immigrants unveil their tale of exploring the world. In the poem titled "In Favour of Movement", the expatriate poet speaks of her "unbarricated", "unbridled" soul.

Usha Kishor is another poet belonging to the British Indian diaspora. In the poem titled "Immigrant", Usha Kishore muses on the pros and cons of living in the diaspora. She takes up the image of a

"bird" to symbolize the life of an immigrant. The memories of the lost land haunt her. But she overcomes the trauma of deterritorialization by unearthing the blessings of a nomad's life. Myriad memories, reminiscences of the long left land find voices in her expatriate writing. The poet says:

> A country stretches across my wings,
> at times a burden, at others a blessing.
> I have learnt to live with it, its silhouettes,
> of waving palm fronds seizing my dreams,
> its myths spread eagled on my verse, the cry
> of its peacocks, haunting my silent nights.
> I feel its goddesses in the feminine flow
> of my form, I whisper its twilight prayers
> in my sleep. My country grows with its roots
> penetrating my bones, it binds the culture
> of distance into my heart. Its paraphernalia
> of blue gods, red demons, sun festivals,
> its skies screaming with the wild colour
> of a thousand autumns and its aching moons
> scatter my forlorn thoughts in desert storms. (1-15)

Though the poet recalls her past, she is free from the anxiety of an identity crisis. She is very much capable of adding "...another story to the history/ of migrant birds" (18-19). In the poem "I am not One, but Two", she explores the transitional zone of possessing the space of hybridity. Taking up the image of a swallow and a chakora, she reflects:

> I am not one, but two
> I live on both the sides of the sky,
> I fly in and out of the blue
> I sing with my forked tongue
> of strange new worlds and
> stranger ways. I have no flock
> no music, no culture,
> for I am not one but two.
> I am half swallow, half chakora.
> But I am not lost, I am not alone,
> I am not afraid. My past seeps
> into my present. My future
> a strange mixture of magic
> and realism, I am not one but two.
> India bleeds in my veins, England
> paints my feathers with her mists. (11-26)

The poet makes home in the "in-between space" of two countries, cultures and ideologies. The no-man's land gives her a freedom from the limits of a particular geographical as well as cultural landscape. According to Bhabha, "The 'past-present' becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia of living" (10). Usha Kishore possesses a plural personality. Her hybridity gives birth to her creativity. In the poem titled "Where Do I Belong", she speaks of her migratory nature "I am as all prodigals / are a wanderer, an exile/ a migrant bird..."(17-19). She celebrates her diasporic subjectivity: “I know I am an exile, without/ this exile I am no one” (46-47). She gains home and identity in her exile.

Yogesh Patel, another expatriate poet sings of freedom in exile. Staying in the UK, he offers his solution to the eternal query of the migrants: "Whose sky is it anyway?/Freedom is your definition" (6-7). In the poem titled "A Strange City", he muses on his multiple identities: "Yes, I was tossed in Africa/ Had my genes toasted in India/ And I'm rubber-stamped of Britannia" (27-29). In the poem titled "At Home With Homelessness", he rises to the level of the metaphysical by taking up the imagery of a dead person transported from the world of the living to that of the dead. The poet wonders about the wandering spirit of the dead one:

> And yet you are only an expat whale
> Neither here, nor there, in the Thames
> No passport, no visa, only a misfit
>
> But in death, you’re between homes!
> Your homelessness tossed between seas.
> My homelessness tossed beyond the Thames. (16-18, 22-25)

In the poem titled "I'm-not-a-racist Tea", the poet speaks of his hybrid identity by using the metaphor of tea which may be either from Darjeeling or from Kenya. The origin of the tea matters little to him as he advises his readers to adhere to the emotions of love and compassion which can conquer the racist feelings. He says, "Don't be racist/ Just add sugar/ Of love and words" (5-7). In another anti-racist poem titled "Oi! Don't call me racist", he says:

> I’m milk, white
> And I will make a nice coco
> Tea, coffee, or chocolate

Brown, black, latte
Love to be tanned, sweet
No sugar, the way you like
Hell, I can be ice cream
Or a fresh cream
Tasty. Will you
Just shut up and drink me?
I'm good for you. (1-11)

In the poem titled "Galatea Effect", the immigrant thinks himself to be an intruder entering the woods of a foreign land. Despite being an outsider, he is accepted by the surroundings which trigger up his diasporic sensibilities:

I am glad to be accepted by the horse chestnuts, limes and planes
and the embracing vine climbing, light-headed
and rustling and reminding me
I am just a migrant
In this part of the world.[3] (9-13)

Stephen O'Brien says, "To come across Yogesh Patel's poetry is like a door opening to the fresh light at the end of a dark corridor. There are poets of the east and poets of the west,... Patel shows that he is a poet of both sensibilities. In this way, the subtleties of Indian poetic form and tone are gently entwined with those of the English tradition to form a new, delicate and original utterance."[4] (qtd. in Brian D'Arcy)

In my paper, I have examined how these diasporic poets try to overcome their discomfiture of leaving the homeland and settling in the host country, and how they transform themselves to accept the newness, the strangeness of a foreign culture. To cope up with the differences and ambivalences of the new world, they have resolved the problem of split identity between the country of origin and the land of stay. The four poets have transformed the trauma of dislocation into a celebration of a new transnational, transcultural identity. The four transcultural poets have shifted their mobile habitats to the transitional, "in-between", no man's land of the British Indian diaspora.

Notes

1. See *Home Thoughts* edited by Usha Kishore and Jaydeep Sarangi. P. 49. See Introducing Kavita Jindal – The Asian Writer

2. See The Rapids: An innovative jazz of poetry (iglobalnews.com)
3. See The Rapids: An innovative jazz of poetry (iglobalnews.com)

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2

Constructing the *Femme Fatale* in Kerala Culture; Reading Subversive Monstrous femininity in *Love* (2021) and *Krishnankutty Pani Thudangi* (2021)

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Abstract

Malayalam cinema has traditionally and historically read the *femme fatale* in the horror genre as an 'Other' that should be tamed, contained, exorcised or made passive by the climactic end. The monstrous femininity of the *femme fatale* was always de-activated and made vile by patriarchal appropriating discourses that construed a fractured idea of female gender based on sexual repression. This paper reads Khalid Rahman's *Love* (2021) and Sooraj Tom's *Krishnankutty Pani Thudangi* (2021) through Juliva Kristeva's theory of Abjection and Barbara Creed's Monstrous Feminine to argue that the *femme fatales* in these visual narratives subvert patriarchal discourses of heterosexual home, family and female gender roles by acquiring agency and problematizing the self-same values that construe these monstrous femininities.

Keywords: *femme fatale, femme castratrice, S*ubversive monstrous femininity, Female sexuality, Heterosexual home, Abjection, Castration.

The cinematic space is rife with cultural enactments and performances fostering sexual and gender differences, especially in a patriarchal culture like India. Ashish Rajadhyaksha writing on the political history of Indian cinema notes that much of cinematic history is comprised of "fallible memory" pointing at the pervasive nature of film as a "cultural entity" in the Indian context (5). Over the years, Indian cinema has produced, reproduced and reappropriated archetypes of femininity conforming to the binaries of virgin/whore, mother/witch, complacent/outspoken, domestic/public,

monster/goddess and so on. These cultural myths and stereotypes clandestinely reinforce and reiterate the image of women as objects of desire, domestic and sub-human. The idea of a *femme fatale* or a woman that inflicts harm disrupts the narrative of traditional, heterosexual and patriarchal construction of femininity hinged on passive, voiceless bodies and minds. The Oxford English Dictionary defines *a femme fatale* as "an attractive and seductive woman, especially one who is likely to cause risk to or the downfall of anyone who becomes involved with her" (*femme fatale*, OED). The literal meaning of *femme fatale* writes into the patriarchal phobia of women with sexual excess, who pose a risk to narratives of female gender roles and performance in a normative society and undermine the power of the patriarch and the phallus. This research paper envisages reading subversive tropes in *femme fatale* constructions in contemporary Malayalam cinema. The research concerns itself with two visual texts: *Krishnankutty Pani Thudangi* (abbreviated as KPT) (2021) directed by Sooraj Tom, and *Love* (2021) directed by Khalid Rahman. I attempt to trace how the female gender is demonised in these narratives for their deviant acts and simultaneously constructed as deviant/ *femme fatale* to render them politically and socially weak/vulnerable. This notion would further be extrapolated and read from a feminist light to argue that the *femme fatales* so construed acquire agency in the narrative to subvert the idealogues of patriarchy that had given birth to them. This study would use Barbara Creed's monstrous feminine idealogues to ground *femme fatale* imagination.

Malayalee ideas of femininity hark back to misogyny and expectation of women as being docile and 'Angels in the house'. This presupposition was embedded in cultural practices and norms of the Kerala society and doubly exposes the grip of the patriarchal community in regulating female lives of the land. The social infrastructure was configured in a way that enabled the subjugation of economically and individually independent women and to brand them as social monsters or be a totem for sexual excess. Historically, women of Kerala were forced to conform to systems of hegemony that dictated accepted behaviour and are evident in inscribed roles of wife, mother, widow and grandmother. Jose notes that post-independent India had adopted "Victorian morality" and that the

neo-nationalist ideas were expounded on "willing female subjugation" towards a better nation. She further elucidates that the linguistic state of Kerala had absorbed these codices of femininity into its dominant culture and had given rise to the contemporary social image of female sexuality and femininity (Jose 62-63). Post-independence Kerala had witnessed a proliferation of films like *Bhargavi Nilayam* (1964), *Yakshi* (1968) *Ennu Swantham Janakikutty* (1998) and *Akam* (2011) delineating on the horrors of *Yakshi,* a mythical *femme fatale* from collective cultural imagination. These films represent the anxiety the normative society had regarding deviant female gender performance especially the blurring of the gulf between the private and the public sphere. Society was trying to re-shape discourse on expected female gender roles by demonising femininity, in an age when the 'women's question' was hotly contested in the socio-political context of Kerala. Jose attributes this sea change to Kerala's "encounter with modernity" in a historical backdrop that engineered a new form of "domesticity" (Jose 56). The 'modern heterosexual Malayalee' was resisting the Westernised ideals of emancipated, independent femininity and recycling ideologies of submissive 'good women' through the cinematic cosmos. Rajadhyaksha pinpoints an earlier Bollywood instance of the *femme fatale* recreated for the nationalist construct of family and home in *Pitru Prem.* He asserts "Such a story resonates through much of India's popular fiction and even its mythology: a good man done in by a woman's deadly charms. In this case, it is not the man himself who is done in, but his son, which effectively damages the family and the home" (Rajadhyaksha 5-6). The *femme fatale* is conjured in the film to underline the damaging influence of a woman's sexuality on a family and in a wider sense, the society at large – the nation. Sindhu Jose traces a parallel trend in Malayalam cinema where intertexts of popular myths, novels and short stories were recycled. She observes:

> My argument is that the Yakshi is a corresponding figure in the horror genre in Malayalam. Her monstrousness in the cultural imagination is a result of the modernizing project of gendering in Kerala. Her deviant performance in terms of unchecked passion and free movement is in contrast with the disciplined performance of the subjugated, domestic Malayalee women of the twentieth century. With her agency and sexuality, the Yakshi stands out as an 'other' of this 'ideal' Malayalee woman. (Jose 4)

This paper works from this intersection of the gendered construction of the *femme fatale* trope in Malayalam cinematic space and endeavours to examine how the representation of the aforesaid trope subverts the hegemonic gender ideology of femininity in the collective memory/ imagination of twenty-first-century Malayalee.

The construction of *femme fatale* in contemporary Malayalee imagination pre-supposes an outward, exterior world of the public. Culturally, the chaste, virgin female body inhabits domesticity while the uncouth, outspoken and hypersexualized femininities roam the public space, especially the metropolises of India. Jumana writing about Malayalam films and female images argues that "Women's bodily space is a restricted space in almost any culture. Women function from confined enclosed spaces while men have access to wider, more open public spaces" (P 61). Shahina observes that modernization had brought in a new archetype of a "glamour puss" for a "Westernized girl" in the collective imagination of male Malayalee psyche (K 33). This archetypal representation of female gender and femininity hinges on the divorce between the private and the public. Devika delineates that the ideal modern Malayalee woman was placed in the "modern home" as an "overseer of material goods, bodies and souls" who had "gentle, non-coercive power". She further uses the composite identities of "domestic" and "aesthetic" women to problematize the binary identity of women; as the provider/ life-giver in the former and also as the site of pleasure (Devika 2). Since the ideal woman was anchored at home and her sexual duties reconfigured as conjugal responsibility towards her husband, the image of a prostitute is therefore construed as an *Other*, an external public force in the Malayalee psyche. Women who challenged conventions of family and domesticity and occupied the public sphere became branded as dangerous women, temptresses and a whore (owing to the sexual transgression). This meant that the *femme fatale* was imagined as a corrupt, amoral and deviant performance of femininity outside patriarchal conjugality and film representations in Malayalam had read the *femme fatale* through the masculine gaze and had ostracized her for violating and threatening the 'home'. Simkin notes in Western culture, specifically in *noir* films that the *femme fatale* was constructed as an antithesis to the "domesticated woman" and has been identified as "sexually

transgressive" (Simkin 6-7). This study problematizes the 'safe-haven' of a heterosexual home in patriarchal discourse and undermines the dominant narrative of dangerous women originating and possessing the outside or that which is not domestic space.

KPT and *Love* subvert the patriarchal hegemonic ideal of *femme fatales* born outside domesticity and 'home' by harbouring the 'dangerous women' within the confines of a heterosexual family. The ideal abode of a husband, wife and children in the social fabric of Malayalee society, the home occupies the prime spot as a hegemonic order. *KPT* problematizes this hegemonic structuring of the 'home' by introducing a void, a lack/an absence of the husband, wife and children trope or a family unit (both physically and politically) in the domestic space of the visual text. The movie opens with a tour of an enigmatic, dark and empty/voided house, the camera captures long shots of dimly lit long corridors, vacant winding staircases, scenes of Last Supper and Crucifixion, a whimsical wall clock, dim and greasy candles and an empty hospital bed (KPT 1:47-2:40). The soundtrack in these initial scenes is laced with an ethnic instrument playing deep basses with four distinct lips 'shushing' or quelling someone or something. This gradually transitions into the sight of a young girl mopping the floor followed by smoking with incense and finally the girl is shown dragging a heavy garbage bin bag, the camera angle is from the bottom to the top. The viewer is cathartically imagined as the object; as the garbage in the bag; as the floor being cleansed and as the room being smoked. The traditional setting for a masculine gaze, on the girl as an object of desire, is subverted with the viewer being replaced as the object in the visual narrative. *KPT* challenges the normative conception of a happy family residing in a well-lit house. The house, *Luca's Palace* contrasts with the cheery ambience of a normative household, is dark and peopled only by photographs of a family and a young girl (KPT 5:49). The family is physically absent and only present as a memory in the narrative while the girl occupies and regulates the dark domestic space. The cinematic space is used to ground the authority of Beatrice (the young girl) in a house named after a man, Luca. The absence/ void of a heterosexual family reinforces the familiar *femme fatale* trope of patriarchy that constructs an atmosphere of social and political deviance engulfing the space occupied by a strong, independent woman. Yvonne Tasker notes "the

deceptions, disguises and confusion that surrounds her [*femme fatale*], producing her as an ambiguous figure for both the audience and the hero" (as qtd. in Simkin 6). The fear or in Freudian terms castration fear of the fatal woman has not infiltrated the domestic space as dictated by patriarchy but rather has taken nativity from the dark domestic realm in *KPT.*

Beatrice is introduced as dejected, silent and exotic; and the space she commands is transformed into non-normative domesticity. She is represented as a *femme fatale* in *KPT.* The initial scenes of the movie portray Beatrice as an ingenious yet enigmatic persona. The house Beatrice occupies is in an isolated/secluded location, thickly forested and divorced from civilisation. This signals a metaphoric break with patriarchal ideologues and the physical alienation from the outside world which enables Beatrice to carry out her revenge. Beatrice possesses twin identities; she is silent/vocal, invisible/visible, friendly/deadly, beautiful/disgusting and perfect/imperfect. As in the Western conception of the *Femme Fatale*, Beatrice lures in her prey through her extraordinary and elevated sexual energy from the phallic outside, from the exterior world into her interior, the world of the Kristevan semiotic. This is evidenced in her choice of a sex slave, the accomplice to her crimes in the film. Binto (Vijilesh Karyad) is seduced by Beatrice; first by utilizing his sexual desperation/voyeurism when he plants a mobile phone camera in her bath (KPT 1:07:08) and second by guaranteeing to yield herself to anything and for everything (KPT 1:15:36). Stevie Simkin would find Beatrice's the conflation of the identity of a seductress and a virgin as Freudian equivalents of the sex drive, *Eros* and the death drive, *Thanatos* (7). Unnikannan and Binto exclaim that Beatrice is exceptionally charming and their desire for her fatally beautiful body puts them in a death drive. Etymologically, Beatrice in Italian translates into "who makes happy" and this magnifies and exposes the connotation of the inherent sexual excess/desire that the character Beatrice symbolises in the movie (Online Etymology Dictionary).

Beatrice is extremely alluring and welcoming on the outside and while she harbours amorality and corruption deep within. Özdïnç observes the "charming" beauty to the "degree of enchantment", as an important aspect of the *femme fatale* archetype and emphasises that her "charming attitude" which includes everything about her, draws

men towards her (Özdïnç 178). This characteristic is evident in her seduction and subsequent enslavement of Binto (Vijilesh Karyad) through her sexual advances. Özdïnç quotes Farrimond to further argue and cement the idea that *femme fatale* espouses her "seductive sexuality" to "achieve her goals or [her] ambition to improve her circumstances" (as qtd. in Özdïnç 179). His unquenchable desire for Beatrice's body finally culminates in the encounter with the monstrous aspects of Beatrice, as he witnesses the murder of Benedict (KPT 1:13-1:15). Beatrice's violent act of a cold-blooded murder instils abject fear in the heart of Binto, a heterosexual male. The following scene depicts Beatrice forcibly locking her lips with Binto, subverting the male hegemonic control over her body, and using her fatal sexual allure/beauty to de-activate and terrorise the heterosexual male. Beatrice can use this momentary sexual encounter to duplicitous ends by terrorising Binto with her sexual appetite and simultaneously enrapturing him with it, to the extent that he becomes a sex slave – an accomplice to her later murders. Simkin writes that "surface beauty" and "inner corruption" are key concepts of the *femme fatale* narrative where the fatal woman's capacity in deceit and her "facility to take on different personae in order to mask her true intentions, feelings or identity" are of paramount significance (Simkin 29). Binto is found in a trance-like walk behind Beatrice after their first three victims – Leo, his wife and their son Benedict have been brutally murdered (KTP 1:16:55). The state of hypnosis or trance is a tell-tale sign of the *femme fatale* trope as Simkin observes a similar reference being made to Ruth Synder – Judd Gray case, where a real-life *femme fatale* Ruth Synder as "a sexually magnetic woman" was alleged of "hypnotising him [Judd Gray] into the conspiracy to murder her husband"(93).

A similar tale of deception and manipulation entails the terrific experiences that Unnikannan has at the hands of Beatrice. In the opening scenes, Unnikannan is instantly smitten by Beatrice – he comments on her tattoo-covered body and boasts about her exceptional sexual allure to his friend (KPT 17:13-28). She uses her sexual appeal to lure Unnikannan into his apparent death. The idea of desire and death are juxtaposed at this instance. Even the urban myth of Girija, a sensuous local beauty who had lived in an isolated house just like *Luca's Palace* and her paramour Krishnankutty, conjured by Unnikannan to torment Beatrice fails. The myth

emphasizes the restoration of normative social order and family hegemony while punishing the sexual transgressions of Girija and Krishnankutty with fatal death. This provides an antithesis to *KPT's* narrative where Beatrice punishes her foster family for violating her (sexually and mentally), through death. Beatrice dismantles the normative ideal of a heterosexual family through her soliloquy that she uses as a retort (KPT 29:12-30:30). The ersatz conversation she has with her physically absent mother and father suggest the absence of the symbolic order or social infrastructures of a heterosexual family as the parents are absent and the female child has taken charge of the home. It also hints at the phallic void where the father or the patriarch is absent in the family narrative. The terror or fear in this soliloquy scene is extracted from the phallic void, where Unnikannan is confronted with the reality of being in the presence of a *femme fatale.*

Beatrice disrupts the traditional patriarchal feminine conceptions/ imaginations. She is enigmatic, claims to be a *Yakshi* (an allusion to a female mythical revenant), invisible and invincible at times, is superficially sweet and friendly but filled with revenge, vocalises explicit sexual desire and finally murders or brings death to men. In reading Beatrice's character, this research uses Barbara Creed's idea of the monstrous feminine which has theoretical underpinnings in Kristevan theories of abjection. Beatrice as a *Yakshi* or a female revenant signals her departure from the world of the living and her entry into the world of the dead; her presence in the film world of *KPT* is however contested and confused. She is in a liminal existence as there are instances in the initial scenes of the movie where Beatrice is or appears to be a docile, normal teenager looking after her bed-ridden grandfather and the scene where she is unsettled at Unnikrishnan, the home nurse's unauthorized tactful entry into her house. These scenes contrast with her ghost-like pace when she appears in the woods and also when Unnikrishnan, trapped outside the house, observes Beatrice's swift, impassioned, mechanical locomotion/movement inside the house. Meenu B identifies and categorises the *Yakshi* as a vegetal deity with "jurisdiction over the wild" and embodying the metaphoric signification of the "savage/uncultivated" (B 331). Beatrice is wild and uncontrolled, which agrees with the *Yakshi* archetype of a

monstrous feminine. She is shown to 'glide' from one room to another and makes sudden, impromptu/spontaneous appearances before the camera. Beatrice's identity oscillates between the living and the dead: Unnikrishnan suspects Beatrice to be a *Yakshi* and is only reassured post a haptic encounter with her hand, her skin (KPT 46:00-47:48). Her appearance is also reminiscent of an *Yakshi* with unkempt hair let loose around her shoulders, a lean and supple body in seductive attire, a bewitching smile and loud, vigorous screams when she tortures her former sex offender, the paedophile Luca (KPT 57:00-37). Meenu B quotes Sutherland to delineate the confusion medieval travellers had on encountering the Yakshi or a lone woman at night.

The confusion about her identity stems in part from the strangeness of seeing an "undomesticated" woman, that is, as a woman apparently detached from a man for it is the formal attendance upon husband and family that is the unmistakable sign of the "good" woman. Her solitary wanderings divorce her from a safe image of the bound and the maternal and immediately evoke for a chance male beholder the embodiment of sexual license. (as qtd. in B 332)

Beatrice's representation and identity follow in the *Yakshi* traditions but reworks the trope of the "undomesticated/ wild woman" by problematizing the daughter/parents' kinship, especially the daughter-father relationship that is central to a heterosexual Malayalee family. The tell-tale signs of a domesticated daughter are absent in Beatrice as she is resident in a domestic space evacuated of the phallic hegemony and phallic energy with the absence of a father/patriarch and his social companion – the mother. The men who meet her: both Unnikannan and Binto find Beatrice's "undomesticated" state as vulnerable and as a sign of a moral/sexual deviance. The revenge narrative of the film reveals Beatrice's Monstrous persona (The *Yakshi* disclosed) whereas the beginning sequence of seductive beauty and docile womanhood portrays the *Yakshi* in disguise. This provides the viewer/spectator with fear and a perversive pleasure that simultaneously "fascinates" or excites "desire" but which must be "repelled for fear of self-annihilation" (Creed 10). The idea of radical exclusion for signification outside the symbolic order points to Kristevan abjection and the femininity so construed as "Monstrous" in Barbara Creed's perspective as Beatrice

occupies the crossroads or liminal space between "human and inhuman" in film representation (Creed 11). Beatrice uses her *Yakshi/ femme fatale* identity to violate and avenge her violators – the patriarchal control over her body and mind are subverted when she deploys the tropes of fatal seduction and terrorising fear.

Luca's palace continually dismantles and rebuilds the border between the exterior and the interior, between the masculine home and the abject feminine space. The house is set on an estate covering 20 acres of land in a sylvan setting. The monstrosity of the house is underlined several times in the narrative with Beatrice and the house appearing as one single unit – undifferentiated and mysterious. Creed asserts that it is the "mythical *vagina dentata"* that "castrates via incorporation" or that which devours – this is an ever-present trope with respect to *Luca's Palace* (Creed 157). Its cavernous space symbolically and consumes, and reincorporates the heterosexual, patriarchal male and female spectator through the meme of *femme fatale* and *femme castratrice.* Beatrice uses the house as a space for her revenge as it draws many parallel lines with her own identity. The house possesses endless long corridors and doorways that either open to another interior space or are dead-end. Thus, making it a mysterious place that is similar to Beatrice's mind revealed to the spectator as an enigma as it is difficult to judge her thought process by her countenance. This manifests itself as a symbolic representation of the female genitals – the vulva and the vagina, which by their very nature are inconspicuous and simultaneously a dangerous site of desire and death. The labyrinthine, often serpentine features of the corridors and stairs, the darkness and an air of uncertainty further illuminate and reinforce this notion as female genitals are abject – owing to their maternal as well as excremental function. The long central passage of the house is repeatedly shown, first when the maid enters when Unnikannan enters and is also shown as the space where Beatrice was tortured and sexually violated – defloration. The dungeon-like space where Unnikannan was imprisoned and the womb-like room were Beatrice tortures and castrates Luca, figure as embodiments of the female womb. This latter room is walled on all four sides and could only be accessed via a flight of steps that descend from the ground level, similar to the vaginal canal. Beatrice utilizes the monstrosity and mystery of the house to carry out her

revenge, like how she used her sexuality for the same purpose. The house thus prefigures itself as a quintessential abject feminine space as it evokes conflicting emotions: the desire to enter and the fear of the interior. *Luca's Palace* blurs the binary of wilderness/home wherein the house harbours a hostile, inhospitable space that closely resembles an uncharted abyss, a terrible wilderness. In the Kristevan universe, nature and the female body owing to its maternal facet, are interrelated as the latter violates the order of "the clean and proper body" whereby foregrounding its "debt to nature" (as qtd. in Creed 11). Nature in patriarchal discourses is imagined as an abject space that should be excluded from the safe, hospitable space and thus construed as an 'Other' for the safe space – a heterosexual home. This makes both the feminine body and nature abject – a composite identity embedded in *Luca's Palace* as it is both a wilderness and a totem for the female sexual prowess Unnikannan and Binto are initially drawn to the monstrous house and its interior enigmatic space but once inside the labyrinthine mazes, they are confused and in constant fear. Barbara Creed would term this fear as the fear of the female castrator or *femme castratrice* as she is a "female figure who exists in the discourses of myth, legend, religion and art but whose image has been repressed in Freudian psychoanalytic theory largely because it challenges Freud's view that man fears woman because she is castrated" (Creed 127). The *femme castratrice* is a deviant performance of femininity, an abject female as she is stranger to the maternal and conjugal functions that illuminate the 'domestic/domesticated/tamed woman' and instead poses a threat (castrates) to the phallic order or the patriarch – the locus of a heterosexual family. The house harbours many circular voids and one scene, in particular, stands out. When Unnikannan is touring the house, he comes across a short, narrow passage with a special wall of a row of circular, disc-shaped cut-outs that stream circular spot beams of light onto the opposite wall (KPT 15:21-16:06). The house becomes a representative of the *vagina dentata* or the toothed vagina owing to castration and genital qualities that it incorporates in its representation. The house and its interior spaces represent the female genitals in many ways; through the serpentine stairs; the long, often vaginal passages; the mysterious darkness and walls made of rock;

the womb-like rooms are cut-off from exterior light and in perfect isolation. Creeds writes:

> The myth about woman as castrator points to male fears and phantasies about the female genitals as a trap, a black hole which threatens to swallow them up and cut them into pieces. The vagina dentata is the mouth of hell – a terrifying symbol of woman as the 'devil's gateway. (106)

The female genital fear is displaced to the house in *KPT* and the house terrorises as it acts as the backdrop for the *femme castratrice*'s subversive revenge plot in the narrative. Further, the house castrates the men who penetrate its threshold, who try to differentiate/appropriate it as is the case with Unnikannan. His tour of the house with its maze-like innards terrorises and confuses him. He was clear and composed regarding his disposition and convictions before entering the house but once inside, his composure collapses into utter confusion and fear as he traverses the mysterious inside. Unnikannan is psychically castrated which ultimately puts him in a hostile/fatal imprisonment underneath the house. Binto experiences a similar castration of his mental faculties post his encounter with the house and the female castratrice-Beatrice as he is made a sex-slave. Luca is physically castrated in the denouement of the narrative by Beatrice and this cements the abject terror inflicted by the female castrator. Moreover, the fathomless well in the final scene with its mouth/opening resembling a wide-open vagina in orgasm, that Beatrice is thrown/pushed into by Binto symbolises the abject *vagina dentata* as it consumes/castrates the male/phallus both physically and psychologically and only Beatrice-the castrator, survives. Binto is presumed dead, or his identity is erased as in the closing scene Unnikannan narrates his gruelling episodes to his circle of friends who dismiss it as a myth – a falsity. This makes the psychological castration through death complete. Thus, the house occasions the encounter of the masculine and abject feminine space with the latter subverting the masculine hegemonic idealogues of femininity and reworking the castration fear through the *femme castratrice* trope.

Khalid Rahman's *Love* is a subversive black comedy where the *femme fatale* terrorises, first by her absence and finally by her abject presence as the 'Other'. Anoop, whose name in Sanskrit translates to

"incomparable" or "unique", is a stereotypical, normative performance of heterosexual masculinity in the post-modern Malayalee social context. Anoop and Deepthi are externally normal, happy couples but are in internal strife of hatred. The film subverts the popular conception of a 'happy heterosexual family' and exposes the different layers of love that turn into hatred. The film opens with twin pregnancy confirmations; Anoop's paramour Haritha's home-based test and his wife Deepthi's through an ultrasound scan at a hospital. Back home, the camera pans in on Anoop playing a violent videogame, the walls of the house studded with happy faces/moments of the couple as a mask for their internal hatred, the abundance of horse imagery/portraits and finally a space evacuated of the husband's companion – the wife (Love 04:32-05:36). Anoop in a trance like a revelation or a lucid dream visualises the damaging effects (psychological, physical and ontological) that his wife Deepthi would inflict on him once she's back and broaches the subject of Anoop's extra-marital relationship.

Deepthi's persona is built through the trope of a *femme fatale in* Anoop's subconscious as he pictures her as the deviant wife who; breaks the home/dishes; interrogates/protests against the patriarch (husband) and is an embodiment of violence that tempts him to murder (Love 05:49-09:34). The characteristics associated with a *femme fatale* are in a dynamic flux where cultural and temporal forces constantly define and redefine the archetype. Özdïnç notes "a basic set of characteristics of the archetype which remain relatively unchanged through time; being beautiful, enchanting, manipulative, seductive, and destructive, as well as being the embodiment of life and death, and an abject" (Özdïnç 177). The patriarchal project of demonising and denigrating sexually liberated, economically and socially independent women is vested in the 'vileness' attributed to *femme fatales*, both historically and in terms of moral/cultural epistemologies. Deepthi is similarly construed in the male/masculine mind – a centre of patriarchal epistemic production, as a volatile; insatiable; enigmatic; duplicitous and destructive female or a fatal woman. Anoop corrupts the male hegemonic status-quo by imagining Deepthi as a *femme fatale* who terrorises in her absence. Rahman has re-worked the film *noir*'s seduction scene, dominated by sexual overtones, by the *femme fatale* into seduction by the abject

display and poetic exposition of violence by the *femme fatale.* Deepthi seduces owing to her overt violent nature that subverts the attributed/conferred violence that inscribes the male gender. Her violence and monstrous performance of the female gender are underlined in the destruction of the horse (a black stallion) memorabilia, which bears its debt to patriarchal iconography (Love 9:03-10).

Edwards and Graham tracing the historical and cultural connotations of the horse opine that "horsemanship" and "masculinity" were interchangeably used in the early modern period in western society. They cite an example each from Shakespeare and Robert J. Flaherty to cement their respective literary use of horses as totems "defining the nature of gender relations at the time, the riding trope epitomising the link between sex and power, with men 'on top'[?]" (Edwards and Graham 26-27). Deepthi's act of breaking the phallic symbol of a horse, especially that of a stallion, evokes the metaphorical rite of castration. Rahman uses this scene as a springboard for the *femme fatale* trope and foreshadows the climactic, symbolic castration of the male through murder, and as a trigger for the man to re-assert his hegemonic place in the masculine gender role. The act of revenge that Anoop undertakes ultimately entails his fall as the murder poses a threat to his existence and peaceful life – a terrorising moment. The man in *Love* is drawn to the fatal woman as his power of violence has been trivialised by her monstrously violent acts like bringing destruction to the heterosexual family and home by terrorising the husband, subverting his authority over her and finally by exhibiting deviant femininity. Deepthi poses a risk to the male hegemonic power and thus Anoop is tempted to murder/bring destruction upon him. Özdïnç quotes Paul Huvenne and Kess Van Twist to "differentiate between the femme fatale and the ordinary seductress by stating that the seductress aims solely for sexual pleasure and prurient actions whereas a femme fatale uses seduction as a mean[s] of achieving her goals and/or bringing destruction upon men (as qtd. in Özdïnç 181). Deepthi in patriarchal imagination is using her fatal attraction/seductive prowess to ensnare the male protagonist and finally bring destruction and fall to his life by a murder he commits. This notion exposes the gravity of fear and terror evoked by the *femme fatale* even in a patriarchal, masculinized

narrative of the female gender, especially the monstrous and subversive performance of femininity. The physical absence of the *femme fatale* fails to reassure the man of his agency and to mitigate his fear of this monstrous femininity. Thus, Deepthi as a *femme fatale* through the patriarchal narrative evokes terror and fear, which subverts the idealised placidity and passivity of the female gender, especially the domesticated wife.

The charge of possessing an enigmatic and trivial mind/conscious has been displaced in the narrative universe of *Love* from the shoulders of the female gender to the realm of the masculine gender. *Love* showcases Anoop's deliberations on women's minds as an enigma – a collective male fantasy that establishes a spectrum of feminine gender performance from the 'monstrous' to the 'weakling'. Hanson and O'Rawe argue that the *femme fatale* is a "perennial site of uncertainty", is critically "unknowable" and has a "mysterious or concealed identity" (1-2). Anoop in *Love* projects two alternative selves; the cheating husband played by Sudhi Koppa and the distrustful husband by Gokulan. These alternative selves or alter egos of Anoop draw a parallel with Freudian terms of Id, Ego and Superego. Anoop becomes the middleman (Ego) whereas Gokulan (Id) represents the animal/primaeval human nature and Sudhi (Superego) figures as the repressive society/morality. Gokulan and Anoop discuss the former's wife and Anoop assert that women by nature possess a "different/distinct thought process" compared to men yet, they should take pains to comprehend them (Love 34:06-15). Rahman's plot, however, subverts this essentialist view of the female mind by portraying the *femme fatale* (Deepthi) as a reasonable and succinct negotiator as she attempts to make sense of her husband's duplicitous claims about his marital commitments and loyalty (Love 01:14:09-01:20:21).

Anoop's diverse egos juxtaposed onto the narrative space of *Love* illuminates the male mind as layered and incomprehensible as opposed to the cultural and historical conception of the female mind as mysterious. The illusion of the enigmatic female mind is further subordinated and broken when Anoop has conflicting thoughts of fantasy and terror regarding the murder of his wife; the fantasy of making the female silent and the horror/terror of the abject female body (especially of a *femme fatale*). The *femme fatale* never ceases in its

project of terrorising the patriarch as even after death, Deepthi's gaze is fixed on Anoop and his constant efforts to 'contain' her/make her 'passive' is ineffective and futile. Deepthi's life-less body is shown to resist Anoop's conforming acts. Her legs blockade the door/entrance and refuse entry to Anoop, underlining the clear motive of resistance and subversion of patriarchal authority (Love 24:02-08). The male mind in contrast is problematized from its ersatz perch of transparency and made ideologically opaque, impregnable. Anoop is unable to resolve his mental confusion regarding whom to choose; his wife or his paramour. The same dilemma is reflected and reinforced by his alternative selves Gokulan and Sudhi, as both of them confess that they still 'love their wives' yet are unable to comprehend their true desire. Sudhi oscillates between retaining his wife and his paramour in a parallel fashion while Gokulan wishes to simultaneously separate from his wife but is unable to part ways with her. Rahman elucidates through these subversive performances that the male mind is enigmatic but in a lesser sense, as in absconding from an encounter with reality while repressing their drives; death and life. The *femme fatale* on the other hand is explicit regarding her dichotomous identity of being both dead and alive. Anoop is in a constant mental struggle to escape from his relationship with Deepthi but is unable to vocalise his desire. He is effectively silenced/made passive and he finally admits that Deepthi would not "understand" even though he had evaded all of her questions (Love 01:15:55). Deepthi is clear-minded regarding her wish to terminate her toxic marriage with Anoop but he fails to owe responsibility for his extra-marital affair and also remains undecided on what his desire is a clear sign of a mysterious mind.

The climactic scene of *Love* is similar to *KPT* in that the spectators are horrified at the sight of the 'man's Other' castrating. In *Love*, the castration is metaphorical as an unsuspecting audience expects the establishment of the normalcy of heterosexual hegemony in the final minutes of the visual narrative through Anoop's murder of Deepthi but become horrified to learn that Deepthi has killed Anoop (Love 01:22:45-48). The *femme fatale* trait of "never yield[ing] to failure" and the fact that the *femme fatale*/abject "rebels against normative impositions" or "opposes any submission" is key to comprehending this metaphorical castration (Özdïnç 184). Deepthi is unabashed,

vocal and resists Anoop's advances for a settlement concerning their marriage. She pertinently questions and demands answer from her husband and when Anoop's efforts have proven futile, he follows his primaeval instincts to silence or to rob the woman of her agencies, by killing her. The male fantasy/desire of killing Deepthi has sexual connotations in *Love*; Anoop is the active agent in his masculine reverie (a misogynistic mirror) while Deepthi is penetrated/murdered/violated. The binary of active male and passive female in sexual intercourse is problematized by the abject *femme fatale* who is not a subject and nor is she passive. Kristeva calls to attention the fear of the subject's identity "sinking irretrievably into" the *femme fatale*/ bad woman (Kristeva 64). Anoop has a similar fear of incorporation/devoration by Deepthi as she questions/ overpowers his patriarchal authority. Deepthi's murder of Anoop plays on the reversal of the conferred gender roles for men and women. The fatal woman has acquired agency to resist the categorisation as an object and instead functions as an abject to re-incorporate the man, to terrorise him for his violation and ultimately murder him. Deepthi is the active agent here and she is confident and "Okay", post the murder and owns up her responsibility as opposed Anoop's inability to do so (Love 01:22:40). Deepthi's murder brings terror to heterosexual spectators as it subverts and problematizes the patriarchal conception of femininity and hegemonic power. Anoop is metaphorically castrated as Deepthi robs him of his sexual authority as the superior gender owing to historically conferred 'sexual capacity', which becomes passive in death. The woman as the active agent in a murder and the subsequent shattering of a heterosexual family brings/conjures twin responses in the audiences; the horror of familial deviance and the voyeuristic desire to peep into the non-normative/ the grey area of amorality and fetishism.

The *femme fatale* trope has been traditionally portrayed in Malayalam cinematic universe through the horror genre, with most of the narratives seeking to contain/exorcise the powerful femininity and make it passive through a patriarchal agency or machismo actions. *KPT* and *Love* open up a different genre of horror and *femme fatales* as these subversive and monstrous performances of femininity acquire agency in the narratives and subverts entrenched ideals of heterosexual family and familial relationships. In both *KPT* and *Love*,

the femme fatale originates within the heterosexual home as opposed to the popular conception of bad women violating the normative/domestic space. The domestic space, *Luca's Palace* in *KPT* is depicted as an embodiment of female genitals and acts as a political and psychological backdrop for the *femme castratrice.* Beatrice uses her overt sexuality to seduce and to avenge her sexual violators – the feminine sexuality/beauty is used by the fatal woman for her project/means or to her advantage. Similarly, Deepthi seduces/tempts Anoop into believing that he could murder her through her extraordinary display of violence. Anoop is terrorised by the thought of being tempted to murder his wife but eventually, Deepthi uses this fear to her advantage, as she murders Anoop to break free from a toxic marriage. Binto and Unnikannan are under the spell of the sexually powerful *femme fatale* Beatrice, who castrates them psychologically and physically through death and injury. The paedophile Luca is physically castrated in *Love.* The trope of mental castration by the *femme fatale* is evident in *Love* as Anoop also feels terrorised by his wife's tempting violence that ultimately persuades him to murder her. He is forced into an internal, mental conflict with his Id, Ego and Superego and this eventually robs him of his mental faculties and he finds reality crumbling before him – a kind of delusion convened by the fatal woman. Furthermore, in *Love*, the characteristic of enigmatic mind/mysterious conscious commonly attributed to the female gender is displaced onto the male conscious, thus undermining the authority and mental autonomy of the patriarchal ideologies. Deepthi and Beatrice have committed murders – a deviant act that terrorises and ostracizes them, making them abject. Their murders subvert the patriarchal conception of the female gender as gentle and compliant, submissive. The gravity of their crimes is amplified as their victims were heterosexual men, symbols of masculinity who were silenced by death or metaphorical castration that robs them of their sexual powers. On all these occasions, the *femme fatales* – Deepthi and Beatrice have used their sexual, political and social deviance to subvert and acquire agency to reverse patriarchal ideologues either through mental castration or physical castration (death), thus cementing their composite identity of being both life and death. Representation of monstrous femininity in films and popular culture of Kerala had hitherto relied on patriarchal

discourses appropriating femininity and female sexuality. *Love* and *KPT,* when read through Julia Kristeva's Abjection and Barbara Creed's theory of Monstrous feminine provide a counter-narrative of resistance that is embedded in the *femme fatale* trope, thus subverting patriarchal control on femininity while simultaneously problematizing the normative heterosexual home and family unit. These movies foreground how the socially, politically and sexually independent woman is made the abject (the *femme fatale)* to suit patriarchal project but use these self-same systems to level the ground.

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3

Gaze in Question: The Visual Politics of Suppression in Action

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Abstract

In the study of the cross-sectionality of narratives of the marginalized, in terms of class, caste and gender, the role of the body has been widely explored. But what remain relatively unexplored are the domains that are body-related, but not etched in the body. One such aspect is the concept of the gaze, an aspect that has received preliminary attention in John Berger's *Ways of Seeing* followed by Laura Mulvey's seminal essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema". Mulvey's female gaze as opposed to the male gaze when taken out of the territory of gender has far-reaching implications, especially when studied in terms of surveillance mechanisms operative at various levels in the society.

The look, cast by the subject at the position of power towards the object residing at a diminished station in terms of class/caste/ gender structures is a non-verbal manifestation of the operative hierarchization that can hardly be substantiated to fetch justice. The politics of gaze manifest at various locales is an urgent requirement of greater understanding to realize the existence of power structures not just in theory but in function. The same has been theorized by Katherine Hakim in *Erotic Capital: The Power of Attraction in the Boardroom and the Bedroom*. While Hakim's work is a testimony to the significance, not just of appearance but of the gaze that ascribes meaning to appearance, my paper intends to study the politics of gaze in society and the implications thereof, particularly in its noted presence among the domains of class/caste and gender. The paper intends to provide a contemporary perspective to the present-day significance of gaze in practice, when other forms of discriminatory tactics have the possibility of being faced with a threat, particularly in urban spaces.

Keywords: surveillance, gaze, hierarchization, male gaze, erotic capital, gender, scopophilia

The domain of the body has always been considered an important parameter in the cause of the cast-based subaltern in the Indian context. The phenomenon of untouchability in this sense provides ample scope to understand the germ from which emanated the tree of the casteist differentiation. The segmented reality of the Indian population is varied and multifaceted. Within the division caused by race, religion, region, class, complexion, caste and gender to name a few of the basic separations, one of the most significant in terms of the impact it had had on the history of nation-building, and the future of the Indian socio-political scenario, is that of caste. The term that has come to be the most intrinsically related to the phenomenon of caste in the country is the word "untouchable", it is quite superfluous to include the associated terms that emanated from this idea of 'he who must not be touched'. The terms "pariah", "achhuyut" etc. used today with or without the knowledge of their etymological roots are invariably entangled in an interplay of tactile sensibilities that points towards the maintaining of actual physical distance.

Untouchability refers to certain practices of the "upper" castes such as refusing to touch or share water with people who have been called the "Untouchables" and who are today collectively called dalits. These sets of practices involve not only proscriptions on both groups of people but are often justified through notions of purity and related concepts. (Sarukkai 39)

Thus, the involvement of the physical has been in the truest sense operative in the activity of effective alienation and marginalization. Of all the marginalized entities that the world has ever known, this practice of physical distancing practised based on caste consistently provides the most inhuman act of subalternization:

> Touch is one of the five senses of the human body. While it is often believed that sight is the dominant sense, ancient traditions in different cultures emphasised touch as the most important sense. In particular, and of special importance in the context of untouchability, the Indian traditions considered touch as an important sense; in some schools, touch was the most important sense. This is also echoed in other philosophical and scientific traditions. Many biologists consider touch as the "greatest sense" in the body and skin as the most important organ. (Sarukkai 39)

Various means have been adopted to substantiate the effective differentiation caused by such forced geographical distancing, some of which pertains to the occupational hazards which arise out of the vicious cycle, the beginning and end of which end in the generational repetition of life of ignominy and humiliation – touch with the adulterated causes desecration while the desecrated have no way of survival but to join the same service that is seemingly associated with their defilement. In this particular scheme of things, the aspect of the visual is often neglected, the politics of vision, seems like a fertile ground which was discovered late, yet something that has atypical power vested on itself for the unveiling of the motives hidden in plain sight. The power vested on sight is manifold. The work of Jeremy Bentham later commented on by Michel Focault may be considered the primary work that exposes at once the power that is exercised by the mere glance as against age-old muscular capacity and its visible demonstrations. The subtlety of the gaze has surprisingly evaded attention and continues to do so even today. In a world of proofs where the substantiation of damage is essential for the punishment to be meted out, the field of vision is provided as the forever elusive, commissioned villain always managing to escape in the garb of invisibility that is promised by its purported insignificance. It is indeed curious to understand that the presence or the mere pretence of the position of power evokes reactions in men who are conditioned to fear the entitled as the canine in Pavlov's famed experiment. Based on this play of power the modern captivators have enslaved their prisoners without the use of hefty chains. The power thus rests in the mind and it is the mind that it in turn enslaves.

Hence the major effect of the panopticon is to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary; that this architectural apparatus should be caught up in a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a situation of which they are themselves the bearers. (Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment* 201)

Eyesight has a very crucial role to play in this battle of wits and wily. While the absent prisoner creates the impression of presence in the watchtower, keeping the captives in check, the social panopticon forever in place keeps its members in check in a variety of ways. While in society one may come across this gaze functioning at various levels the issues related to surveillance and supervision may occupy centre stage. The errant child is in fear of being chided as the governess seems to have an eye for his errors, the absconding teenager is always in fear of being spotted by an over-enthusiastic neighbour, the cheating husband is wary of the wife or other relatives catching him unawares while at the same time the culprits of the state also show similar traits, a similarity that has given rise to numerous anecdotes and jokes over the years. However, under the mirth of jests, we tend to forget the other domains in which this gaze is operative and much to our relief as it might be in the cases already mentioned. There are other areas in which this social manner of surveillance is operative go significantly unnoticed.

As says Mark Andrejevic in the 'Forward' to *Feminist Surveillance Studies*:

> We are at a moment in time when we can start to see the surveillant imaginary expand vertiginously, thanks in part to the new avenues for monitoring opened up by technologies that "interact" with us in a growing variety of ways and involve a wide range of senses and sensors, and also to the increasingly sophisticated techniques for putting to use the huge amounts of data these devices, applications, and platforms capture and store. Intimations of a metadata world are starting to multiply: Edward Snowden's revelations about blanket U.S. National Security Agency (NSA) surveillance, media coverage of the huge databases being amassed by companies like Facebook and Google, and the proliferation of data centres across the landscape, including the NSA's giant complex in Utah. It is a moment that requires reflection on what is at stake in the seemingly inevitable slide into a monitored, digitally redoubled life. (Dubrofsky and Shoshana ix-x)

One such area is that of the caste. The impression of the viewer on the viewed and vice-versa in terms of caste may be considered an offshoot of the initially discussed angle of untouchability with the exception that it stretches too far beyond this particular angle and traverses dimensions unthought of before. The first such example

that we may consider is that of appearance, the stereotyping of the appearances of the people belonging to a particular caste might serve as the primary evil. Thus a person belonging to any marginalized section of the society is aware of these bodily markers that he/she has been culturally indoctrinated with, as a result of which, in the presence of people who might exhibit certain features that are traditionally ascribed to the higher caste and automatic doubt and self-consciousness pervade his/ her entire sensibility to the point that the fair, sharp-featured population might notice a visible shy, obscure being conscious of his non-entity cornered to one side. The simple glance cast by any of the other people in the crowd creates a sense of alienation in the marginalized, who is at once reminded of his non-belonging. The acculturation in this case is when the marginalized get accustomed to the sidelong glances and hushed tones, in association with the occasional verbal manifestations of discrimination. A similar issue may be pointed out in the contemporary media coverages:

> Many times, it has been found that even though stories on caste and media coverage of atrocities etc. are done by journalists, their biases almost always come in their work. For example, while journalists fly down to villages to report the details of the caste atrocities, all their narratives remain one-sided – highlighting the oppression and oppressed while completely omitting the other part of the story – the oppressor. Dalit people, whose faces are often not even blurred, are treated as if they are just objects of what is called the 'victim porn.' S. Anand (2005) names this biased reporting 'Visible Dalit, invisible Brahmin' where covering caste is equated with writing only about Dalits, mostly located in the rural areas – their experiences, their social condition, atrocities such as murders, rapes, etc. These irresponsible biased narratives have kept the oppressors – the Brahmin-Dwija1 communities away from the eye of scrutiny due to which their caste conditioning and pride rarely comes to be questioned. (Kureel 100)

The prisoners and the cast based marginalized thus get positioned on the same arena where the only stance they are allowed to play on is defense. This however does not stay restricted to this issue of glance; in public, the field of glances stretched itself to that of visual media. Laura Mulvey in her seminal work has provided ample exposition to the representational politics in which the victims are women. However, before the work of Laura Mulvey may be considered and one must conjecture the position of the

unemancipated castes in this scheme of representation, an example of the earliest critiques of this politics of representation may be John Berger his work exposes the representation politics in the case of paintings and focuses primarily on the pictographic representation of women.

In the average European oil painting of the nude, the principal protagonist is never painted. He is the spectator in front of the picture and be is presumed to be a man. Everything is addressed to him. Everything must appear to be the result of his being there, it is for him that the figures have assumed their nudity. But he, by definition, is a stranger – with his clothes still on. (Berger 54)

To add to this a pinch of contemporaneity we have the works of Mulvey where she dwells in detail on the subjectivity of the male gaze which utilizes the female body as an object for the pleasurable fulfilment of desire.

This paper intends to use psychoanalysis to discover where and how the fascination of the film is reinforced by pre-existing patterns of fascination already at work within the individual subject and the social formations that have moulded him. It takes as a starting point the way film reflects, reveals and even plays on the straight, socially established interpretation of sexual difference which controls images, erotic ways of looking and spectacle. It is helpful to understand what the cinema has been, how its magic has worked in the past. Psychoanalytic theory is thus appropriate here as a political weapon, demonstrating the way the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form. (Mulvey 803)

This forced objectivity of the female could be traced back to the concept of Irigaray's understanding of Plato's Khora, the similarity between the undifferentiated belonging of both the male and female embryos in the mother's womb and the man's realization of the absence of the phallic in the other instils in him a perpetual fear of losing that which is specific to him and therefrom arises a subconscious desire to be always position in power to e able to protect his symbolic status of one who has as compared to one who hasn't.

She argues that the formless and amorphous *khora* or cave, a metaphor for the matrix or womb, is perceived by Plato as a place of error and non-differentiation and that this fear initiates a desire for the order which entails the repression of the origin. This 'wisdom', she writes, is then transmitted by man-the-Father, as the 'so-called virginity and muteness' of the *khora* are re-constructed as a reflective space that will henceforth mark only his law's system of divisions. Irigaray believes it is Plato's refusal to see anything other beyond what is reflected in his speculum that has given rise to the practice of woman's appropriation and exclusion that continues to the present day. Confronted by the male gaze, a woman's sex presents 'nothing to see', and Irigaray suggests that women have been forced to accept this exclusively masculine 'dream of sameness' without reference to our dreams or desires. Anything which cannot be defined by man's law, she stresses, has been branded as alien, and subjected to prohibition and denial. (Sellers, *Language and Sexual Difference* 8-9)

This theory however cannot be considered to be the primary determinant of female objectivity as opposed to male subjectivity. The issue of erotic capital should also be given its due recognition if we are to consider the socio-cultural setting of the male-female dyad. Catherine Hakim's inclusion of the fourth capital in addition to the existing three namely, economic, cultural and social, seems an attempt once again to bring to the fore that which could be considered a pre-existent sociological reality albeit in the domain of the liminal. In the debate about which sex has greater sexual drive hence greater requirement of sex if we are to take into account what Hakim mentions in her essay, the men seem to be in the position of lesser power compared to the women. I purposefully mention the phrase "lesser power" as opposed to "powerlessness" because it has been explicitly stated by Hakim that the erotic capital is a truth as much for the women as for the men. The difference lies in the degree to which it is advantageous to each of the sexes.

We argue that erotic capital is just as important as economic, cultural, and social capital for understanding social and economic processes, social interaction, and social mobility. It is essential for analysing sexuality and sexual relationships. There are difficulties of measurement but these are no greater than for social capital. In sexualized individualized modern societies, erotic capital becomes

more important and more valorized, for both men and women. However, women have a long tradition of developing and exploiting it, and studies regularly find women to have greater erotic appeal than men. We ask why erotic capital has been overlooked as an asset in sociological theory. The oblivion of the social sciences to this factor suggests that a patriarchal bias remains in these disciplines. As women generally have more erotic capital than men, so men deny it exists or has value, and have taken steps to ensure that women cannot legitimately exploit their relative advantage. Feminists have reinforced 'moral' objections to the deployment of erotic capital. (Hakim 499)

In considering this premise it becomes at once clear that if men may be considered beings with greater sexual drive the women may be considered to be sharing a position of power as opposed to the men and this would surely make erotic capital a domain in which they wield greater power than the menfolk. As an offshoot of this argument, one can only conjecture whether the restrictions of a women's expression of sexuality imposed by the largely parochial principles using the vehicle of socio-cultural mythology and other such culturally attested variables is simply a manner of repression. In considering this, the role of the marginalized women of the lower castes becomes particularly interesting in terms of the power politics witnessed therein. At this juncture, the issue of the prevalent breast tax may be cited to provide an exemplary instance. The fact that women belonging to the lower castes of a certain part of the Indian subcontinent had to ensure payment of taxes to provide to themselves adequate clothing particularly for a body part that qualifies as a secondary sexual organ is intriguing:

> The breast cloth disturbances in 1856 occurred over the demand from Pulaya women to be allowed to cover their breasts. According to caste customs rigorously enforced by the upper caste Nairs, women from lower castes were not permitted to wear the customary breast cloth allowed to their upper-caste peers. (Desai 479)

It is needless to mention that in case the tax was levied on any other piece of clothing that might seem less necessary as a garment than the one mentioned, one might have tried to allocate a separate range of significations to it. However, on account of the choice of the garment on which was levied the tax and as certain credible sources

claim, the bigger breasts would warrant greater taxes; it can be safely inferred that this inhuman practice was nothing but a diabolical plan to satiate ones 'scopophilic' tendencies. The erstwhile sensual representation is eliminated and in place of representational objectification of women, the women of the lower castes suffer objectification arising from a case of dual marginalization.

The finality of this tactic of oppression does not limit itself here; one must understand the complete significance of this practice. While it has been established that this practice formed another innovative way of feasting on the marginalized, this at the same time made the distinction between the upper-class women and the women of the lower castes even more distinct. This facet can be understood better if we are to consider it as a re-enactment of the parochial principles meant to weaken the prospect of the erotic capital that women in particular have an advantage over. The idea is that the above-discussed practice propagated successfully caused a division between the women themselves, on the lines of caste; establishing at once the promiscuous nature of the women of the lower castes as against the chaste women of the Savarna communities. Thus, the dual oppression faced by the marginalized women takes place, the first based on the division of gender, the second based on caste. The reflection of the same can be found in literature.

While the brahmin male self in Samskara becomes relegitimized through the appropriation of the bodies of the lower caste women, the self-construction of the dominant caste male protagonists in "Akkayya" and "Ghatashraddha" is connected with the articulation of the identities of the upper caste women. The position of the male protagonist (he is located firmly within the upper caste structures) in these short stories becomes identifiable with the narratorial gaze. This gaze articulates the female figure and appropriates her body by constructing it in emblematic terms, "spiritualizing" it as in "Akkayya," or by sexualizing it in the attempt to alienate the female subject. The power relations in which the gender equations become configured in these works invest the upper caste male with power and agency. He is configured as the subject who constructs the Other in order to redefine itself. (Manavalli 27)

Furthermore, the following excerpt substantiates the claim of the second kind of oppression lower caste women in the field of vision:

> By positioning the upper caste male as the subject of desire, this textual discourse constructs sexual differences within structures that are involved in the maintenance of caste asymmetry. This leads to the naturalization of sexuality in the female body, especially the identification of the lower caste female as passionate, impure, and "sexual." What Margrit Shildrick and Janet Price discuss in their introduction to Feminist Theory and the Body as coding of "the feminine as sexual itself' in patriarchal discourse can be perceived in Ananthamurthy's works (Shildrick and Price 79). In such constructions of her identity, a woman gets defined in terms of her sexuality. (Manavalli 35)

While the relation between upper frontal nudity and promiscuity might be difficult to discern, it can be safely inferred that the culturally concocted notions of virtue and vice in our society have traditionally been associated with the show of skin, a fact which I would like to believe has received some reasoning now, owing to the discussion on the purposeful neglect of the erotic capital exercised by women. In this doing, not only was a division established among the women but at the same time, the concepts of chastity and virtue in the normative sense were reinforced with sufficient importance attributed to them. The cinematographic representation of this facet of caste-based division has been witnessed in numerous works. However, what remains to be understood is that in the contemporary times where the spread of awareness of caste-based discrimination has occurred to quite some extent, resulting in the absence of the practice of untouchability in many urban spaces, the discriminatory tactic pervading the field of sight can hardly be claimed to have subsided. While economic capital might have shown an increase to a certain extent, the percentage of increase seen among the lower castes is still debatable, owing to the exercise of subtler practices that remain embedded in the cultural lattice of the society.

The case of our mythological tales might serve as examples, while it would perhaps be inappropriate to mention a fleeting comment on any particular mythological narrative without treating all facets of it adequately, one may still conjecture, why certain characters were portrayed with prominent sensual attributes as compared to the others. If myths might be considered important in

contributing to the collective consciousness of the society, such distinct associationism which hardly receives alternative interpretations in the mainstream society might be considered detrimental in the process of extricating the marginal castes from the stigma that they carry. Without the debasement of these concepts from the level of their origin, elimination of discriminatory tendencies, as subtle as that in the field of gaze might be an impossibility, invariably resulting in simple pruning of the poison ivy, at the same time expecting its unceasing growth with time.

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4

Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*: An Ecocritical Review

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Abstract

This paper highlights the urgency of eco protection, the much-discussed issue of the day, by exploring the ecological concerns of Kiran Desai, projected in her novel *The Inheritance of Loss*. The novel is set in Kalimpong, which is well-known for its natural resources. But the heavenly ambience of this hilly region is heavily disturbed by the varieties of insensible acts of the human world. Political unrest is one of the unwanted events, demolishing the beauty of nature. Along with it, the anthropocentric mentality has also accelerated further devastation. Nature is badly affected by this combined evil force. No precaution is undertaken to maintain the ecological balance. Desai wants to activate mass consciousness by portraying nature as our friend, philosopher and guide. She has repeatedly shown how selfishness and self – centeredness of the human beings is initiating the catastrophic disaster step by step. The future is not safe. Both nature and human civilization are on the brink of gradual extinction. Restoration is earnestly required. Desai has also presented how the "biotic "and the "abiotic "world share a miraculous understanding of each other. One cannot survive without the other. She opines that only occupation and ownership of nature cannot lead to any favourable solution. Instead, the environment demands eco-centric sensibility and sensitivity. Only then, the world would experience a hurdle-free comfortable journey. It is the only option left for us by which environmental hazards can be avoided.

Keywords: Ecocriticism, Anthropocentric acts, Eco-centric development, Biotic and the abiotic world, Nature, Culture.

Cheryll Glotfelty, one of the pioneers in this field, has defined ecocriticism as the study of the relationship between literature and

the physical environment. Another notable work is "The Environmental Imagination" (1995) by Lawrence Buell, where he says that "this study must be conducted in a spirit of commitment to environmental praxis". A significant landmark in the history of ecocriticism is the establishment of the "Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment" (ASLE) in the United States in 1992. Here ecocritical ideas are enormously encouraged. In his "The Green Studies Reader" (2000), Lawrence Coupe has emphasized the importance of nature in today's world. Eco-philosopher Kate Soper feels nature is not given its due respect. Raymond Williams has uttered the same apprehension when he said that human beings do not pay sensitive attention to nature. Journalist Bill Mckibben in his book "The End of Nature" (1989), has explained how ecology is badly affected by varieties modifications of the earth by human civilization. He says, "We have changed the atmosphere, and thus we are changing the weather. By changing the weather, we make every spot-on earth man-made and artificial. We have deprived nature of its independence" (50). William Howarth attempts an etymological explanation of the term ecocriticism. Jean Francois Lyotard has tried to define ecology with a purpose to give voice to nature that has been silenced.

In this field, the names of the critics are never-ending as in the present civilization, ecocriticism is highly relevant. Its need and requirement cannot be ignored at all. By its virtue, it can gain a huge number of followers who think that the protection of nature should be the primary duty of the entire world. It is the only way to save this earth from destruction and devastation.

Today's world has experienced numerous developments and progresses initiated by the industrial revolution and modern science. But along with benefits and comforts, human civilisation is simultaneously disturbed because of serious environmental disharmony. The situation becomes so deteriorated that the existing world is on the brink of an eco-biological crisis. To prevent this cataclysmic outcome, an immediate and instant mass – awareness is becoming the need of the time. Therefore, concern for the environment is gradually gaining worldwide attention. Even literature cannot avoid this much-discussed issue of the day. It becomes one of the major platforms for raising human consciousness

throughout the world. Being a sensitive soul, Kiran Desai, the youngest ever Booker Prize winner, seems to acknowledge the present trend of showing tender care to nature in her novel *The Inheritance of Loss* (2006).

The novel, *The Inheritance of Loss*, has taken the subject of Gorkha insurgency in the Himalayan region in the decade of 1980s as its thematic background. Not only that. It also illustrates multiple issues like migration, displacement, cultural dislocation, existential dilemma, gender problem, the quest for self-identity, East-West encounter, diasporic voices, cross-cultural narratives etc. While dealing with all these serious topics, the author does not forget to highlight the ecological consciousness, an essential requirement to save the present-day civilization. So, in this novel, nature seems to play a very crucial role. It is given the status of a character that is equally vibrant and lifeful like the other protagonists of the novel. Very often, the psychological ups and downs of the characters are voiced by nature, whereas nature is also seen interacting with the author and characters quite frequently.

For instance, in this novel, the location is Kalimpong, a vibrant place of natural resources like the foggy atmosphere of dense forest, lavish green valley and snow-covered mountains of Kanchenjunga. Therefore, different seasons, animals, birds, insects and pastoral life of this region make the novel ecologically enriched. But the environmental diversity of this land does not stand alone. All the characters of the story are found inseparably attached to it. An unspoken commitment is very much visible between them. One cannot exist without the help of the other.

The story reveals that all the characters of this novel have faced some loss. Sai, an orphan girl, the Judge, Sai's tutor Gyan, the cook and his son Biju, all are traumatized by a severe psychosomatic crisis. In this journey of "loss", not only the protagonists are the sole sufferers. Nature also cannot avoid the curse of loss. Kalimpong has lost its pristine beauty by the political violence of separatists of Gorkhaland. In this way, both nature and human life have shared a common platform. They are destined to lose something precious and priceless. They are on the verge of acute insecurity. As if something is snatched away from their treasure house. The loss is irreparable.

Throughout the novel, Desai remains determined to explore the immense impact of nature on the human mind. It is evident from the very beginning of the novel as it has been started with a beautiful description of Kanchenjunga:

> All day, the colours had been those of dusk, mist moving like a water creature, across the great flanks of mountains possessed of ocean shadows and depths. Briefly visible above the vapour, Kanchenjunga was a far peak whittled out of ice, gathering the last of the light, a plume of snow blown high by the storms as its summit.(1)

The awe-inspiring ambience of this mountain and its scenic beauty, according to Desai "raise the human heart to spiritual height". (12) Here, the author reminds a very common belief that the glory of nature is next to God. One can feel almighty through the splendour of nature. On many occasions, the human psyche is given a voice through nature. When unwillingly Sai arrives at Kalimpong, her depression is skilfully suggested by the bleak landscape. "Kanchenjunga glowed macabre, trees stretched away on either side, trunks pale, leaves black, and between the pillars of the tree, a path led to a house" (19). It is candidly exploring the picture of an unhappy soul. The human mind speaks through nature. When Biju returns home after experiencing a disheartening atmosphere in the USA, he feels he had not seen such a vast, open and green landscape for a long time. "The sheer, overwhelming enormity of mountainside and scree coming down the flank of it. In places, the entire mountain had simply fallen out of itself, spread like a glacier with boulders, uprooted trees"(315). Biju' struggle in America makes his life sick and troubled. This unavoidable trauma of the mind gets a healing touch by "the immensity of wilderness "and "the abundance of greenery" of his motherland. It is almost like a physician's prescription accelerating an immediate relief.

During the journey, the hazards of the road remind him of a beautiful philosophical insight of his father. "So, feeling patient in the way one feels before the greatness of nature, impatient in the way one feels with human details" (315). Here, Desai has portrayed nature as a quick solution to all problems. According to her, it can be an alternative way to sort out the hurdles of human life. Very often, many comparisons are made where nature is treated as a human being.

Trees are like giants, the caress of the mist like a human being (2), Banana trees threat like a man by "flapping their great ears" (105), Teesta River came leaping (31), swollen presence of forest, the knockings of bamboo, the sound of jhora, mist charging down like a dragon (9). So, again and again, nature is personified. It seems to share a close relationship with anthropological diversity. Desai has deliberately done this to show the relevance of the healthy alliance between nature and human civilization.

When Father Booty is humiliated for being an illegal immigrant, the river Teesta is described as colourless and dark as if implying the uncertain destiny of Father Booty. On the day when the riot broke up, the buses were set on fire. This fire spread to bamboo jungles. When the cook is trying to escape from the forest flames, nature reveals its power and violence. Even amidst this political unrest, the reference of Kanchenjunga is not forgotten. Desai says "Above was Kanchenjunga, solid, extraordinary, a sight that for the centuries had delivered men their freedom and thinned clogged human hearts to joy. But of course, the cook could not feel this now and he didn't know if the sight of the mountain could ever be the same to him" (277).

Indeed, it isn't easy to restore the peace of Kanchenjunga. Political violence makes the situation worst and abnormal. But it is equally valid that amidst the chaos and confusion of the human world, nature does not appear a very easy thing to be polluted. It is powerful enough to fight against all odds and disturbing influences. The grace and grandeur remain intact and unchanged. Nothing can divert its steady and stable existence. The durability is beyond imagination. So, Desai does not miss the opportunity to establish her claim that ultimately the mutual understanding of both the "biotic" and the "abiotic" world can fight the still unknown dangers hovering around the eco biological environment of this universe. That's why Kanchenjunga is remembered in such a situation when the beauty of Kalimpong is facing a severe man created – problem. Just like a human being, mountains also appear affectionate and caring.

When the cook and his son come in touch after a long time, the landscape seems to celebrate this union. Desai again magnifies the beauty of Kanchenjunga. As if it is also enjoying this sweet moment

and participating in their happiness. "The five peaks of Kanchenjunga turned golden with the kind of luminous light that made you feel, if briefly, that truth was apparent" (324). Desai strongly believes nature has its own life, which can speak and communicate very surprisingly. It is only a matter of realisation and recognition. The voicelessness does not mean nature is emotionally void. Instead, it is very much alive, outspoken and phonologically strong.

Desai has also highlighted how nature is exploited by human civilization. In Manhattan, Biju sees the polluted water of Hudson due to oil leakage. It is alarming and an anti-environmental act. Another dreadful reality is seen when at Cho Oyu, the plum flowers are being watered in rotten blood of path lab. It is a horrible sight. The beauty of nature is severely damaged. Frequent land sliding in the hilly region is another problem reflecting the greed of human civilisation. Desai shows her concern about this calamity. She comments, "In order to accommodate the population boom, the government had recently passed legislation that allowed an extra story to be built on each home in Darjeeling; the weight of more concrete pressing downward had spurred the town's lopsided descent and caused more landslides than ever…it looked like a garbage heap rearing above and sliding below" (196-197).

It has polluted the mystical ambience of nature. The precious possessions are forcefully robbed. Nothing is protected for the future generation. The magic is lost. Readers are also informed that the inhabitants of Kalimpong are disappointed by the dreadful situation of their area. Due to various reasons, the beauty of nature is demolished. One Lady repents that the earlier glory of Darjeeling is completely shattered. Everybody is astonished by the gradual degradation of the heavenly ambience of nature.

Desai has also tried to protest the habit of open defecation in India. It is referred by her when Sai is returning from Darjeeling by train and exposed to a filthy sight. Her concern for ecology is once more conveyed. Another ecological issue of plundering natural resources is very skilfully mentioned by Desai. The topic is raised when Sai visits the museum where the socks of Sherpa Tenzing, who climbed Everest, are on display. During that time, Sai asks, "Should humans conquer the mount or should they wish for the mountain to

possess them? Sherpa went up and down, ten times, fifteen times in some cases, without gory, without claim of ownership, and there were those who said it was sacred and should not be sullied at all" (155).

Desai is trying to say possession cannot be the ultimate thing. Protection is also required. Care and concern are equally important, devoid of which, the loss is inevitable. Hence, continuous support can only strengthen the beauty of nature. Moreover, for many people, nature is something holy and pious. But this mindset is not enough to save wildlife. It needs healthy habits, constructive thoughts and a far-reaching sight. But human society lacks this spirit. They only know how to occupy. They are least bothered about the near future. Consumption is their sole purpose. It is evident in the fact that the serenity of this holy region is severely damaged by the recent outcome of political violence. It is not shown any care or mercy at all. It becomes a victim of human negligence. A mindless butchery has wholly destroyed harmony.

Along with the Indian landscape, Desai takes us to the land of New York too. Here, Biju's struggle for identity explores a horrible truth. He could not forget the degradation and dehumanisation faced by him as a cook. He is forced to sleep amidst dirt in narrow cabins and basements. Ill-treatment and mockery is his daily companion. This pain makes him nostalgic for his childhood which was full of freedom and liberty in the lap of nature. Desai says "He remembered bathing in the river, feeling his body against the cool muscle, and sitting on a rock with his feet in the water, gnawing on sugarcane … completely absorbed" (270). Once Biju retells another incident, shared by his father. “How peaceful our village is. How good the roti tastes there! It is because the atta is ground by hand, not by machine…and because it is made on a choolah, better than anything cooked on a gas or a kerosene stove…fresh roti, fresh butter, fresh milk still warm from the buffalo….” (103). Biju could not find this tender touch of nature in his working place. Only class-hatred and cultural clash make his life toxic and painful. So, the peace of the pastoral life still haunts his mind. He is badly missing the warmth and magnanimity of nature. All the time, he is trying to remember the happiness of his childhood in touch with nature to appease the psychological irritation occupying his mind.

In this novel, animals, birds and tiny creatures are described very minutely. Mutt, the pet dog of Judge, Mustafa, a male cat of Lola and Noni, snakes worshipped by the cook, Uncle Potty's rooster, the dairy cows of Father Booty – all, occupy someplace in the narrative as they are inseparably attached to the ecology of this region. Therefore, they are given a great emphasis on exploring the importance of their role in the entire eco biological arrangement.

Apart from fauna, the flora is also illustrated with careful observation. Desai comments, "Everyone in the Kanchenjunga loved flowers" (256). In another incident, SDO says, "Beautiful blossom, Justice Sahib. If you see such a sight, you will know there is a god'' (226). Desai also narrates the story of Mughal Emperor Jahangir, who wept when the flowers of his garden became dry due to heat. The writer again informs how the kitchen garden becomes a source of food for many families when the separatists disturb the land by political violence.

Desai has consciously described all these things just to remind that along with human beings, these trees and flowers are equally vital in the life cycle. So, ignoring them would prove fatal and disastrous. The more we care about nature, the more beautiful our world will be. The curative power of nature is also highlighted in the novel. Once readers come to know that a Memsahib, known to Gyan, gets comfort and peace from the beautiful nature of Kalimpong. In this episode, nature is projected as the healer of psychological disorders. One day Sai feels nauseated due to motion sickness. She is advised to look at nature for some relief and refreshment. So, to many people, nature acts as a mender. Various unwanted maladies can be prevented by it.

Considering the aforementioned reasons, we can see that Desai does not miss any opportunity to glorify the ecological resources of Kalimpong. She insists that amidst absolute chaos and complication, nature does never forget her duty and responsibility. She remains all-powerful and omnipresent, just like God. Thus, in this novel, nature becomes a symbol of care and comfort. Nothing could obstruct her from extending sympathy and solace even amid crisis and disturbances. She has been suffered all kinds of inhuman behaviour by the so-called civilized segment of society. Despite it, she is

limitlessly offering us the beauty and the bounty of nature. So, Desai highlights the urgency to protect the eco-diversity of the world. She has also raised the topic of eco-consciousness. She firmly emphasizes "if one is not safe, none of us are". (116) Therefore, eco-equilibrium remains her main focus throughout the novel. Along with other issues, it is given special attention by ample evidence of natural influences on human civilisation. She repeatedly utters the need to reconsider the anthropocentric narrow mindedness of the human being and become a little bit more sensitive and sensible.

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5

Parent-Child Relationship: A Comparative Study of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and Bapasi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride*

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Abstract

Human relationships are most important in any society. The very basis of any relationship is the Parent-Child relationship; it is the most innocent relation of unconditional love. But when deceit and betrayal of trust enter into any relationship, the very essence exhumes from it. This article proposes to make a comparative study of the parent-child relation/s in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982) and Bapasi Sidhwa's *The Pakistani Bride* (1983). The point for comparison is the parent-child relationship as depicted in the two novels set in two different milieus – one in Georgia and the other set in Kohistan on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border but the despotic patriarchal societies in both the locales oppress the female members of the society; either physically or by imposing their decisions and leaving no scope for the daughters like Celie and Zaitoon to make their own decisions.

Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple* documents the trauma and ultimate freedom of Celie, when she resists the paralyzing concept forced on her by others. Celie maintains her sanity by opening her heart to God through her letters addressed to God, who remains silent. Celie's father exploits his step-daughter, sexually and like a hawk, eyes her younger sister Nettie. Celie protects Netti from their father's carnal desires. The Epistolary novel depicts Scriptotherapy to save Celie overcome her sufferings. Bapsi Sidwa's *The Pakistani Bride* depicts a scenario where the adopted daughter Zaitoon is taken care of and given unconditional love. But when it comes to her marriage, she is married to a boy from the hills without her consent. Qasim thrusts his opinion of marriage on Zaitoon, which she cannot but meekly accept. Thus, both the fathers

oppressed their daughters in different ways. This paper focuses on how the daughters are subjugated and how they liberate themselves from their respective difficult situations.

Keywords: Male domination, Parent-child relation, Scriptotherapy, Struggle, Womanism, Victimization

Introduction

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982) emphasizes the theme of oppression of black women, focusing on the story of Celie. In the novel, the protagonist Celie shares a brutal Parent-Child relation with her stepfather where she is abused sexually and psychologically. The lovely father-daughter relation takes an ugly turn and it leaves a scar on her psyche. She disrespects her body, as it gives her a lot of trauma and oppression. After being humiliated in her childhood and oppressed by Mister she finally finds peace in her work and victory in her life. *The Color Purple* is a journey of a naive Celie of joy and triumph. It is the triumph of a woman's struggle. The shocking state of Celie's sexual abuse is revealed in the very opening letter of the novel, written to God. It is a sad commentary on the androcentric culture which treats women subordinate creatures and objectification of a woman's body. The other novel taken for comparison is *The Pakistani Bride* Parent-child relationship is the main part of family relations. The adoptive parent-child relationship is the relationship of Qasim and Munni, is heart touching and Qasim loves and takes care of Munni from the day he took her home, later he started calling her Zaitoon.

Sidhwa in her novel portrays different dimensions of this relationship with the great hurdles and incomprehensible moments. The relationships are in different forms such as mother-daughter relationship, father-daughter relationship, mother-son relationship, and father-son relationship.

Parent-Child relationship

The ideal parent-child relationship is the most significant in our life. It is full of pure and unprejudiced love. Parents are always effortful for the all-round development of their children. The depth of parents' love cannot be measured in words. The relationship between parents and child is indeed different from all other relationships.

Traumatic Childhood

The Colour Purple is the story of Celie, a fourteen-year-old African-American girl who lives with her sick mother and her sister, Nettie. Her stepfather, Fonso is shown as the defector of the story, who robs women's strength, both sexually and psychologically. As a child, Celie was repeatedly raped by her stepfather and was treated as an object of brutal sexual pleasure. Since her mother was pregnant and unable to satisfy her husband, the innocent Celie had forcefully become a substitute to her mother's body, in her father's bed for him. The innocent baby who should be playing with play items and being in her imaginary world was abused by Fonso and was his play object. As a result of his carnal desires, incestuous relationship, repeated traumatic repercussions of the Father-daughter incest, she delivers twice, but on birth, the father snatches the babies on the pretext of killing them. However, he sells them off. Celie is a very caring girl – she takes care of her ailing mother, shields her sister Nettie from being abused sexually and offers her body in return.[1]

Scriptotherapy: Psychoanalytical Therapy – Modern-day Counseling tool

At the outset of the novel, Celie suffers mutely and writes her story in the form of letters addressed to God as she is strictly warned by her stepfather not to share with anyone. Celie reflects her silent sufferings; the impact of oppression and it also reflects her budding internal strength by scriptotherapy and opening her heart out to the sufferings meted out to her at a tender age. The main reason why Celie begins writing her letters to God, which allows us into her world and gives a way to do vent out violence on the pages, the way she is attacked brutally sexually by her step-father, who only took pleasure in satisfying himself did not give an iota of thought what he is doing on her psyche. She maintained her sanity through her writing. Writing of her excruciating pain to God, in the innocent hope, that she will get some relief from heaven.

Her step-father also scares Celie not to speak to anyone except God: "*you better not tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy*" (Walker

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[1] Women Empowerment: Searching Within In Alice Walker's The Colour Purple Women's Life Without Color in Alice Walker's The Color Purple)

3). The letters of Celie visualize her hopelessness and helpless state. Celie is responsible for her predicament and she is crushed mentally and physically by the males who should have supported her. One of the most unusual characteristics of Celie is to suffer without getting angry, she accepts her destiny silently.

The writing process characteristically yields itself to unearthing new ways of looking at conditions. If it were not for Celie's letters, her progress would not be so notable. The novel's structure begins with Celie writing letters to God out of fear while unknowingly beginning the process of self-discovery. Then Nettie's letters function to aid in Celie's journey and Celie stops writing to God and writes to the more touchable Nettie.

She stops writing to God, as he is also a man and he will not be solving her problems and that is the reason he is not replying to her. Nettie and Shug gave her solace and with the help of feminine power, she got empowered. Celie finally realizes that she deserves contentment regardless of the promise of an afterlife.

"The God I been praying and writing to is a man. And act just like all the other men I know. Trifling, forgetful and lowdown" (Walker 173). This is an important change in Celie's beliefs since earlier she believed that:

> I can't even remember the last time I felt mad… Couldn't be mad at my daddy cause he my daddy…Bible say, Honor father and mother no matter what… Sometime Mister____ git on me pretty hard. I have to talk to Old Maker. But he my husband. I shrug my shoulders. This life be over, I say. Heaven last all ways. (Walker 40)

The Various Parent-Child relations in *The Color Purple*

Traumatic Pa-Celie relationship:

The spine chilling relation which Celie shares with her stepfather, where she is at the receiving end of all brutalities and a tender age she is a child –mother of a son and daughter as a result of successive rapes by her stepfather. Celie was unaware of their existence as she was made to believe by her step-father that he killed and sold them and at the end of the novel, after bearing so many hardships she is united with her children.

Hatred in Celie – Harpo relationship:

When she tells Mister's son – Harpo to beat Sofia, Sofia hits her husband back. She teaches Harpo to manhandle Sofia as her whole life she was at the receiving end and it was deeply ingrained in her psyche that women are to be beaten. But as times are changing Sofia stands up and reverts. Harpo blows and brutally thrashes him. This depicts the change in the mindset of the women; Sofia symbolizes the newly emancipated woman not the woman like Celie who was bound in chains. There is no need for her to negotiate identities.

Rise of Celie:

Initially, the young Celie remains isolated and alienated women. But she regains her strength with the help of other women's support through the bond of sisterhood. *The Color Purple* ends with an optimistic note that everyone unites together. Celie unites with her sister and children. Mr Albert's character changes and he starts to help Celie. The moment of transformation appears in the life of Celie which makes Celie an empowered woman. The character of Celie is like a phoenix that rises from ash to fight for her freedom. The three women who help her discover herself are – Nettie, Shug Avery and Sofia.

The Pakistani Bride:

The novel Bapasi Sidhwa depicts an emotional adoptive parent-child relationship. The adoptive parent-child relationship is the relationship of Qasim and Munni who is later called Zaitoon by him in the memory of his late daughter. The first chapter of the novel deals with the family background of Qasim. There is a tragic occurrence of Qasim's family that is depicted by Sidhwa. In the very first chapter of the novel, we come to know that all the children of Qasim are wiped out except Zaitoon who also after some time suffers from 'Mata', which is known as smallpox. Zaitoon is treated in various ways but there is no recovery. The worries and efforts of parents are depicted at the time when they suffer from smallpox. "They did everything within their power. The dank, dung-plastered cubicle was darkened further, for the 'Mata' could not stand light. Herbs and leaves, procured with great difficulty and reputed to have

a cooling effect, were strewn near the girl's burning body" (Sidhwa 13).

Despite their parents trying hard, Zaitoon does not recover and finally, she too succumbs to smallpox. After losing his entire family, he decides to leave his mountain village to Jallundar where his cousin works as a messenger in a British firm. While going to Jallundar, he runs to Sikandar's family on the train in a very terrible situation of communal riot. Sikandar and his wife are victims of communal riots except for his daughter, Munni. Qasim runs to Munni in a very miserable condition. He sees Zaitoon's replica in the face of Munni. As a result, he adopts her, treats and brings her up as his daughter. The first conversation between Qasim and Munni is pleasantly described with the attraction of Qasim towards Munni.

> "Qasim drew her to him. What is your name? Munni. Just Munni? Aren't all little girls called Munni? You must have another name..... Do you know your father's name? My father's name was Sikandar." (Sidhwa 27) The use of the past tense startled him. It shows courage and forbearance that meets the exacting standard of his proud tribe. "I had a little girl once. Her name was Zaitoon. You are so like her.... "(Sidhwa 30)

The tender bond between Qasim and Zaitoon

The warmth between the two can be seen that Munni leaned against him, and Qasim too feels deep and emotional after getting her tender touch. He embraces her as well as he feels a great tenderness in his heart. He recognizes the pitiable condition of Munni and he names her with the name of his late daughter Zaitoon. He says, "Munni, you are like the smooth, dark olive, the Zaitoon that grows near our hills. The name suits you... I shall call you Zaitoon" (Sidhwa 30). The fatherly feelings develop in the heart of Qasim and he adopts her as his child and endures her like a daughter. He takes her with him and carries her to Jallundur where he brings her up as his real daughter. Qasim loves Zaitoon so much that on her slight pretext he becomes anxious. For example, when Zaitoon's first menstrual cycle comes and she has stomach cramps, knowing that Qasirn carefully picks her up and asks her if she had eaten raw mango. Qasim knows very well that mangoes and red-pepper are being sold outside the school and Zaitoon is very fond of them. But Zaitoon denies all this. Since he was not able to understand her predicament, he buttons up her cardigan

saying that it would be better to consult Miriam. Zaitoon is a central character of the novel as the whole story of the novel rotates around her. It is she who succeeds in getting away from "suppressed male-dominated society" (Singh 12). She is also the symbol of the triumph of mind over matter and represents Khudi a spiritual strength of man.

Adoptive Parent-Child Relation

The relation of Miriam who is the wife of Nikka Pehelwan, a friend of Qasim, the relationship between Miriam and Zaitoon is a relationship of adoptive parent-child relation because Miriam is a caretaker of Zaitoon who also treats Zaitoon like a real mother because she has no child. Although she is not her mother yet she is fond of children.

Miriam takes good care of Zaitoon being the daughter of her husband's friend. She trains Zaitoon how to keep a house and visit neighbouring families for interaction with other women. In the company of Miriam, Zaitoon comes across several women in the neighbourhood where she understands the household duties and responsibilities. The relationship between Zaitoon and Miriam is like a relationship of a real parent-child relationship. Miriam's motherly feeling surfaces up and fights with Qasim, regarding his wrong decision of marrying Zaitoon to an uncultured boy. When Miriam tried to dissuade Qasim from taking the extreme step as there is a vast cultural difference between educated Zaitoon and the uncivilized Sakhi, she was told that a word and promise matters more than anything else in his life.

Sister, I gave him my word," Qasim spoke gently. "Your word! Your word! Your word! What has your word to do with the child's life? What? Tell me!" Qasim did not reply. Miriam glanced up and noticed Zaitoon's intent face at the balustrade. "Brother Qasim," she coaxed, "how can a girl, brought up in Lahore, educated—how can she be happy in the mountains? Tribal ways are different; you don't know how changed you are... (Sidhwa 91)

The important turning point in Zaitoon's life comes when Qasim decides to marry her to Misri Khan son, his cousin. **"**Marriages were the high points in the life of the women" (Sidhwa 86). It is her love for her father that she, in the situation where the decision of her life is

made without her consent, does not go against her father. Her respect towards her adoptive father can also be seen when Qasim brings her to his native village and they stay at an army camp where Ashiq, a jawan and Major Mushtaq seem to be worried about the success of her marriage with Sakhi, a tribal man. She is forbidden by Ashiq that the tribal family will not be suitable for her. But Zaitoon's loyalty does not permit her to go against her father's will and she says that she would like to go with her father's consent. It sounds that there is a strong bond between Zaitoon and her father that stops her to annoy her father. *As* soon as Zaitoon reaches her in-law's village, her conscious makes to change her mind that she behaves like a child and denies the decision of marriage under the teeth. She becomes impatient all at once and requests Qasim to take her with him. Her dislike can be seen in these words: "Abba, take me back... if I must ·marry me to someone from the plains... I will die rather than live here" (Sidhwa 157). Qasim becomes annoyed at the response of Zaitoon and he says, "I have given words.... it is dearer to me than life. If you besmirch it, I will kill you with my bare band" (Sidhwa 158).

In comparison to Zaitoon, Sakhi is an arrogant and incredulous man while her nature is simple and sober. She is fully unaware of the outer world. They both are misfits to each other. We can feel suspicion of Sakhi when he sees her on the highway towards the army camp where army Jawan holds the hand of Zaitoon. Seeing this, Sakhi becomes instantly aggressive; he abuses and beats her with a stick. He even kicks her and tries to kill her. In addition to it, his brother Yunus Khan taunts him for un-controlling his wife. He says: "How is your wife from the plains? You know, she requires a man to control her" (Sidhwa 170). “You’ll see how different it is from the plains. We are not bound hand and foot by government clerks and police. We live by our own rules—calling our own destiny! We are free as the air you breathe!” The spirit of his forebears stirred in Qasim. (Sidhwa 98)

The great flee of Zaitoon

Society becomes so miserable for Zaitoon that she cannot live and stay in it. Fleeing from in-law's home is considered a sin that hurts their prestige and honour and taking care of life is not important in

their society, honour, words and promises matter more. The bird (Zaitoon) broke open the cage and flew away to freedom. The bond of human relationship can be observed between Zaitoon and the army officer when Zaitoon is spotted near the granite bridge under the nose of the army camp. She is found by the army sentries first. Seeing her in a pitiable condition, Major Mushtaque feels sympathy for her. His sympathy makes to lead him to carry her on his back in her blanket. The blanket symbolizes Sakhi that is dead. Mushtaque saves Zaitoon not only from lethal surroundings but also from Sakhi who wants to hunt her. Applying his tactics, Mushtaque tells Sakhi that the girl is dead and he has buried her. This way, Zaitoon is survived in the end. Hamida is Zaitoon's mother-in-law. She has also sympathy for Zaitoon. She guides and comforts, Zaitoon motivating her to escape from the hills. Sidhwa in the guise of Hamida resented the love and affection of womanliness that a woman has for another woman. When she comes to know that Zaitoon is not found by the hunters; she thanks God and prays for Zaitoon's survival and her normal life again. Even her sympathy for Zaitoon becomes her enemy for her own life that her husband and son stop talking with her. She is also beaten by her son bitterly.

Comparison of Celie and Zaitoon

The stepfather in colour purple abuses Celie sexually. Celie was impregnated twice because of her father's continuous raping. She never sees her children and believes that her father killed them. Celie is psychologically destroyed and was made to believe,' God gives and God takes away', book of Job Chapter 1 Verse 21. Celie was never fairly treated by men in her life, she was only their object of lust and caretaker who does the daily chores, so she had become insensitive, she did everything mechanically. On the contrary, in *The Pakistani Bride*, Qasim loves, adores and takes care of his adopted daughter, she was his world, but when she reached the marriageable age, he like a typical father of a rigidly patriarchal society, for him the feelings of Zaitoon did not matter, but the word which he gave to Sakhi's father and he said he will live up to his promise.

He does not pay any attention to her daughter's pleads to change the decision of her marriage. After wiping out his all children, Qasim develops fatherly feelings for Zaitoon while Miriam has no child so

she develops a motherly feeling for Zaitoon. The relationship between the two is friendly enough even Miryam quarrels with Zaitoon's father on the decision of her marriage with a mismatched groom. On the other hand, Zaitoon doesn't go against her father's decision and without uttering a single word she accepts the decision. She proves herself loyal enough towards her father. On the other hand, the mother-child relationship between Sakhi and his mother is depicted in a very poignant manner. Sakhi is too harsh to bear the slight mistake of her mother.

When she was not able to get adjusted to Sakhi's lifestyle, she uses her womanly intrinsic power and gives a slip with her courage to the brute Sakhi. Like Celie, Zaitoon drew strength from Hamida and Miriam. So Womanism is prevalent not only in African countries but even in other places, a woman cannot see the pain of another woman and extends her helping hand.

Conclusion

Alice Walker shows Celie as a normal black woman who rises from the condition of nothingness to the position of self-empowerment. The protagonist Celie's self-discovery and self-definition make her recognize and trust her inner voice and she rejects the formulations that others try to impose upon her. She was always silenced, after fulfilling her roles; it was Shug, Nettie and Sofia who made her realize her worth and empowered her. The parent-child relation in *Colour Purple* depicts incest and oppression.

Sidhwa is a writer who rebels against the domination of male superiority. She believes that hurdles of life are necessary for a pleasant life. The novel depicts the Pakistani society with religious orthodoxy at its highest peak. There are no rights for women. She cannot go against her plight. She cannot live with her consent. Bapsi Sidhwa depicts Zaitoon as the girl brought up in the typical patriarchal culture. Through the character of Zaitoon, Sidhwa symbolizes the fighting and struggle against all physical odds to survive with dignity. Zaitoon loves Qasim very dearly, so when such an important decision is taken, she timidly agrees to it without opposing it. There is a strong bond between Zaitoon and her father that stops her to upset her father. Here Sidhwa describes coercion of patriarchal society where the words of man are more important than

his daughter's happiness whom he loves very much. In *The Pakistani Bride*, Zaitoon is sexually exploited by Sakhi. In *The Pakistani Bride*, we see that *Zaitoon's* agony starts on the next day of marriage. Her husband, a tyrant figure, beats her even at the smallest issue. She is endangered not to go beyond the river otherwise she *will* be killed. There is a major difference between Zaitoon and Sakhi's culture. Zaitoon belongs to Lahore based culture with a mixture of education and civilization while Sakhi belongs to hills, and is beyond any civilization and education. He tells her that everything will be alright and no need to worry. He consoles her that he can't break his promise to Misri Khan. Zaitoon disagrees and pleads with her father once again that she doesn't want to marry but all in vain. And finally, after the marriage, when the circumstances become unbearable for her, she flees from her husband's house.

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6

An Intersectional Perspective on Feminism and Translation Studies

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Abstract

The 1990s saw tremendous growth in the field of 'Translation Studies' with many interdisciplinary types of research and theories influencing it to widen its canvas, scope as well as reach. This growth is usually designated as the cultural turn in translation studies which in Susan Bassnett's words was a massive intellectual phenomenon' as the cultural questions started gaining significance across the Humanities. On par with several other intersections, the upsurge of feminist thinking and feminist activism has also strongly affected translation and translation studies. As Flotow points out that Barbara Godard highlighted the idea of feminist translation as a production of meaning and uses the term 'womanhandling' to describe feminist approaches to translation and considers that feminist translators should 'flaunt' their presence and agency in the text, making themselves and their work visible. Flotow's *Translation and Gender: Translating in the 'Era of Feminism'* makes a further clear connection between feminist politics and translation. It shows how cultural politics deriving from the women's movement and feminism have affected writing and translation, how translations examined from a feminist perspective may be seen to require revision and re-translation, and how feminist theories and translation theory come together to counteract what one critic has called the 'androcentric slide into gender as a trope in the postmodern translation theory'(p. 95).

It is known that the relation between 'Gender' and 'Translation' is fraught with a lot of complexities and it is the intersection of Gender and Translation exploring the resultant dynamics that the present paper attempts to study. The varied dimensions of theory and practice due to the encounter between Translation Studies and feminisms are the focus of the study.

Keywords: Gender, Intersection, Translation, feminisms, androcentric

Introduction

Like in all areas of society and academia, the emergence of feminism has contributed to the development and expansion of the field of Translation Studies. The 1980s marks the beginning of the Feminist Translation School in Canada, which foregrounded the paradigm of interaction between feminisms and translation. The encounter between the two disciplines has yielded many dimensions owing to the transition that feminism has undergone, which are recognized as the waves of feminism. Some of the areas of mutual interest shared by feminisms and translation have already been studied randomly and in isolation, but a systematic approach of the same would lead to a more holistic overview and aid in the renewal of its many research vistas. So, this paper brings into focus the varied theoretical and practical stances that emanate.

The advent of feminism and the feminist criticisms have led to a critical review of all knowledge casting doubt on the supposedly neutral and objective nature of the disciplines of knowledge, disclosing the fact that patriarchal ideology is operative in most of them, be it Sciences, Social sciences or Humanities. The incorporation of the cultural dimension to Translation Studies made it more amenable to yield to the sceptical approach of feminist studies. The hitherto neutral, objective and invisible role of the translator was now ruled out with the recognition of the far more active role played by the translator. As Lefevere and Bassnett have pointed out that the translator is first a reader of the source text with the awareness that there are various ways of reading and interpreting the text. So it is with an interpretation of his own that the translator tries to cast the source text into the target language which invariably rules out the possibility of producing a text that is faithful to the original and stands in equivalence to the author's intention. So, a translation is the result of negotiations within the social system in which the text is produced and consumed and the ideology it propagates. That's why the schools of thought like the Manipulation School or Polysystem Theory now defend the idea that "ideology rather than linguistics or aesthetics crucially determines the operational choices of translators" (Cronin 2000: 695), ultimately revealing that objectivity and neutrality are but fallacies.

It is at this time that feminisms were concentrating on analysing reality from the perspective of culture and ideology for some time which made the relationship of feminisms with translation complementary and mutually enriching. If the debate that was taking place in Translation Studies provided feminisms with new perspectives, Translation Studies, in turn, was benefited by applying a gender approach to statements such as "all translation implies a degree of manipulation of the source text for a certain purpose" (Hermans 1985: 11). Feminisms could see how unconscious adherence to the dominant patriarchal ideology takes place if conscious subscription to one particular ideology in translation fails. So, the naive translators become carriers for conveying and legitimising the dominant discourse. At the interstices of this development, the Canadian feminist translation school of thought came into being working to incorporate the feminist ideology into translation to establish new ways of expression freeing language and society from their patriarchal burden. The Canadian feminist translators, Barbara Godard, Marlene Wildeman, Susanne de Lotbinière-Harwood and Luise von Flotow produced English translations of avant-garde literary texts written by French-speaking women authors from Quebec which were characterised by their conscious attacks on the misogynistic conventions of patriarchal language in them. Being influenced by the post-modern theories of language, these feminist translators tried to develop a feminist literary culture and defend the visibility of women translators: "womanhandling the text in translation means replacing the modest, self-effacing translator" (Godard 1990: 93). They understood translation as a "rewriting in the feminine" converted into "political activity aimed at making language speak for women" (Lotbinière-Harwood 1991: 125). But, their objective of "making language speak for women" under all circumstances resulted in tuning feminist translation with essentialism based on a distinctive feminine culture that erases the differences between women themselves and establishes the universal definition of women as an oppressed group.

As Martín Ruano (2006: 28) claims that establishing parallelisms between the evolution of the definition of 'woman' and 'translation', as the objects of study in the two movements, is very beneficial for Translation Studies the observation, reflection and application of

certain core concepts of feminisms can be quite advantageous to the theoretical discourses of translation. Therefore, just as current feminisms de-essentialise and question the biological concept of 'woman' as the stable starting point for any feminist theory and policy, doubts can also be raised about whether translation arises from a material source text that has a stable signification thereby de-essentialising the ideal and traditional definition of translation as pointed out by Olga Castro. Further, it can be argued that as a woman is expected to be what the society prescribes her to be, with little power to be as she desires, translation too, is usually considered to be whatever the target culture requires it to be which precludes the experimental approaches that differ from the preconceived approaches. Again, as Venutihas presented, translation can be seen as "a cultural means of resistance against multinational capitalism and the political institutions to which the current global economy is allied" (2008: 18), which can be paralleled with Feminisms as a discourse of resistance against patriarchal and neoliberal values that discriminate against genders. This commonality of the purpose of resistance between Translation Studies and Feminisms can be worked out taking cues from the attempts at resolution in each of the disciplines.

Although Translation as an activity can be traced back to the most ancient times, Translation Studies as an independent discipline, without being seen as a part of Philology, Philosophy or Linguistics has had a recent history. However, a historiographical study of translation and its antecedents taking women translators into account reveals that writing was invariably considered to be a productive/masculine activity thereby censuring most women from becoming authors. In comparison, translation has been perceived as a reproductive activity and hence translation is feminine which enabled many women to enter into the literary world as translators. And as Chamberlain rightly puts it, the job of reproduction, whether it is of human beings or texts is generally undervalued and even despised in the hierarchical structures that define our culture, despite their being of dire need. Castro Olga makes explicit the gender metaphors in western discourses on translation. He quotes Chamberlain's disclosure of sexist metaphors articulated in translation treatises by well-known authors' right from the

seventeenth to the twenty-first century like Thomas Durant, John Florio or George Steiner. Olga presents how these authors when discussing issues of fidelity in translation and the originality or paternity of the text, they talk of betrayal of the women/translators and the binaries of production/active work/male and that of reproduction/ passive translation/female which is some of the prevalent sexist tropes. Thereby marking the hierarchical relation between the source text and the translation, this is a matter of politics. Thus, women and translation are conceived as peripheral elements concerning a core element: translation is secondary to writing and the translator is in the same position with respect to the author, in the same way, that feminisms are peripheral concerning patriarchy and women with respect to men.

However, many of the women who took up the readily available option of translation because of their literary interests, translation was a liberating instrument that helped them overcome the silence imposed on them as authors and allowed them to enter the literary world at least as translators. But translation can also be seen as an instrument of oppression because it relegated them to the outer edges of discourse. Also, the approach and strategies of translation adopted by these women translators have not been given their due recognition and the theories of translation have developed in a phallocentric way ignoring what the other half of humanity had to offer as practitioners of translation. Studies in this field have been done by Hannay, Krontiris, Robinson, Delisle, Agorni and others who complete the historiography of translation with the theoretical reflections of Aphra Behn, Suzanne du Vegerre, the English women translators of the Tudor period, Susannah Dobson, Elizabeth Carter, Jane Wilde, Clémence Royer, Albertine, and so forth.

Further, a few female writers who could manage to publish their writings also have been relegated to the background, lost and forgotten because of the patriarchal bias regarding women's writing and treating them as unworthy or inferior. Hence their works have never gained any furtherance by way of getting translated into different cultures and times. On the other hand, the works of male authorship with half the merit of some female writings have survived over the times through translations and gained their afterlives. Hence, seen in this light, Translation Studies needs to work out the

dynamics of translation by asking what is to be translated, who decides what is to be translated, the criteria behind such choices, thereby equalizing the field of translation for both the genders. Translation can also help transform the contemporary literary canon by openly choosing to recover the works of these silenced authors, which in turn would be extremely enriching for the field of translation and feminism as well.

Considering Spivak's warning of the ethical responsibility involved in speaking for others, translations of feminist works of women from post-colonial, minority and subaltern cultures goes a long way in gathering together the varied experiences of linguistically and culturally different women. This would establish connections between women; evolve methodologies that could expand and strengthen feminist movements making them inclusive of all women despite their individual, national, ethnic, racial and other identities. But other than these positive reinforcements gained by feminisms through translations, there are instances where translations of feminist texts lose their veracity due to 'phallotranslations' and 'paratranslations'. The phallotranslators consciously or unconsciously distort the original by incorporating into it the dominant ideology through a patriarchal translation. The reactionary aspects of the feminist writings get subsumed into the dominant ideology which weakens the very strength and substance of those works. The translation of Simone de Beauvoir's French work *Le deuxième sexe*, a key text for Second Wave feminism translated into English as *The Second Sex* by the zoologist Howard Parshley stands as an instance of phallotranslation where he is said to have "left out almost fifteen per cent of the original French text in the first volume and removed around sixty pages in the second in order to omit 'uncomfortable' facts (long sections about women's achievements in history, the feats of women who challenged gender stereotypes, taboos concerning lesbian relationships, descriptions of the hard work done by housewives, and so on)."(cf. Simons 2001; Moi 2004; Castro 2008)Also, Von Flotow (2016) has pointed out that "there have been many international studies of the translations of Beauvoir's *Le deuxième sexe* which have launched re-readings and revisions of Beauvoir reception, not only in English but also in languages such as Chinese, which had used the bowdlerized English version of 1953 as

a source text. In deciding to sell Beauvoir's book as a sex manual, Knopf, the commissioner and publisher of the first English translation, insisted on extensive cuts and changes in the text, which led to significant misrepresentations of Beauvoir's thinking."(3) The critical work on the English translations of Beauvoir, which began in the 1980s, has greatly added to scholarly understanding of what translation processes mean, what effects they can have, and how they can be manipulated by money, power, and ideology. Of course, these controversies have also revealed the importance of studying translations and understanding their outcome and their functions, especially but not only in an area as sensitive as gender studies.

There are also cases of paratranslations, which talks about the appropriate translation of not the text alone, but also the elements that surround and present the text, such as titles, prologues, notes, announcements, the cover or graphic aspects all of which add to the meaning of the texts. Such components of the book which are called by Genette (1987) 'paratexts,' also need to be carried over to the target culture. Though Paratranslation is not exclusively the job of translators as even the proofreaders, language reviewers, editors and others connected with the printing, publication and marketing of the texts also play a decisive role in presenting the work to the target society, yet it can be seen that many times the translation of the paratexts are completely out of sync with the purpose of those of the original and are rather naively done for only financial gains. As paratranslation exerts a strong influence, the translators must be sufficiently sensitized to pay attention to the transmission of ideology at the paratextual level also, so that the reader does not misinterpret the text. However, whatever choices are made by the paratranslators based on their requirements, it is the translators who are publically responsible for the choices made. So, this relationship between the one who translates and one who paratranslates and the analysis of the choices they make during the process of translation can be studied.

In conclusion, the intersection between translation Studies and Feminisms has been so versatile that analysis of what ensues is quite expansive and disparate. A few key areas which have been worked upon and the general formulations attained have been touched upon in the present paper. Claims of having covered all the debates that

have emanated at the intersection of the two disciplines would be overstatements. As the questions of the differences, if any, between men and women translators based on their reading and writing practices are being debated which have not been conclusive leaving potential sites open for further research work.

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7

Recreating The Historical Past: Looking at the Family Album in Anita Brookner's *Family and Friends*

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Abstract

In this essay I look at one of Anita Brookner's early novels, *Family and Friends (1985),* in which she is primarily concerned with depicting a network of sustaining family ties. Five main characters in the drama of the Dorn family are basically seen in social and interactive situations within the family and their community. In the narrative, Brookner uses the intricate structural device of using the family album to help us visualize and understand the psychology and motivation of each character. This ploy, in essence, gives to the narrative structure a historical and documentary element, thereby providing a quasi-epic dimension to the reader's perspective.

Keywords: Family album, Wedding picture, Pre-World War days, Matriarch, Aristocratic.

In her early novels, Anita Brookner displayed a remarkable gift for writing intense stories about women. One year after the critical success of *Hotel du Lac* (1984), which went on to win the Booker Prize, Brookner published *Family and Friends* (1985) in which she chose to extend the boundaries of her fictional world by depicting the dynamics of interpersonal relationship within a family and across succeeding generations of the family group. Significantly, the structure and culture of the Dorn family in *Family and Friends* resemble the organization and atmosphere of Brookner's own family life in a house full of expatriate Polish Jews: "... we lived with my grandmother, with uncles and aunts and cousins all around, and I thought everybody lived like that. They were transplanted and

fragile people, an unhappy brood, and I felt that I had to protect them." [Guppy, 149]

Indeed, in *Family and Friends*, Brookner is preoccupied with the ethos of family life, an ethos which validates the enduring bonds between parents and children and between sisters and brothers even while acknowledging the inevitability of intergenerational conflict and sibling rivalry. Unlike the earlier novels, *Family and Friends* involves a much wider cast of characters, and in place of the single protagonist, there are several protagonists of both sexes. In contrast to the action of the earlier novels where events quickly unfold over a period of a few months or a few weeks, the action in *Family and Friends* covers a period of many decades. Moreover, in the way the past and the older traditional pattern of life are recreated in the narrative present, the omniscient narrator becomes the family historian.

Brookner uses a dramatically effective ploy to plunge us into the lives of the Dorn family. With the first sentences of the novel, she swiftly carries us over the fictional threshold: her nameless narrator holds up an old black-and-white photograph of a wedding in the family and exuberantly points to Sofka, mother of four children and matriarch of one branch of the Dorn family. This is followed by a lengthy description, minute and exact in detail, of other people and their modes of dress. We are thus introduced to Sofka's sons and daughters and sundry other relatives who are grouped around her in the same photograph. Faces in the photograph are looked at as if with a magnifying glass, and facial expressions are read and interpreted to convey to us the mood of buoyant optimism regarding the as yet unknown future in the life of each of Sofka's four children. Noticeably, through constant juxtaposition of description and subjective commentary, the narrator attempts to recreate the atmosphere of harmony and carefree gaiety of pre-World War II days: "In the photograph the men wore tails or dinner jackets and the women long dresses with little hats, for this is a wedding in the old style, with something of a feeling for the old country. These weddings are important affairs, with the roster of the family's achievements on show. Quiet and retiring as their social lives may be, spent largely in each other's houses, playing cards or discussing the children, with a sharp eye for both perfections and imperfections of housekeeping,

the women will prepare for a wedding as if they themselves were getting married." (FF. 15-16)

Other group photographs of other weddings in the family are subsequently examined at scattered points in the narrative to note the passage of time and mark the poignant changes that time inevitably brings in its wake. As one reviewer has noted, the effect of this device of using photographs to tell the story of a family is like "studying the faded pages of an old photo album. We see sepia images of [the Dorns), decade by decade, caught in ritualized poses; the pretty children slowly maturing into their hectic flush of adolescence, and from there, into the more blunted space of young adulthood and middle age". [Kakutani, 18] In the hands of Brookner's narrator, the family album thus becomes a reliable source of information which is frequently consulted to recall specific moments.

Brookner is of course not alone in employing this device of looking at family photographs to recollect incidents from the past, but this device has been utilized more often by writers of more straightforward autobiographies who have felt the need to fill in gaps and discrepancies in the stories of the lives of family members who have either passed away or, if alive, are unwilling to talk about personal experiences. For example, in her second autobiographical novel *China Men* (1980), the Chinese-American writer Maxine Hong Kingston wants to tell us the story of the men in her family to complement the stories of the women told in the first memoir *The Woman Warrior* (1976). A reliable source for many of the stories in this book is Kingston's own mother, who is naturally talkative and whose sharp recollection and oral recitation of personal and family history trigger Kingston's subsequent ruminations.

However, in contrast to the mother sharing her past with the daughter and constantly "talking-story", Kingston's father is a grim and silent man who seldom talks about the past. In such circumstances, and wanting desperately to know more about areas of human experiences hidden from the women in the family, and more about the arduous and often illegal voyages made by adventurous ancestors (from mainland China to America) in search of work and a better life, Kingston is forced to hunt out old photographs from her

father's bachelor days and slowly piece together the story of his life. As Carol Neubauer has pointed out,

> Kingston uses the family album as one of her most valuable sources of information. Much of her narrative about her father and grandfather is based on photographs that her family has collected for generations. Her technique is to study them until the black and white pictures seem to acquire three dimensional depth. Then she uses the photographs as a starting point in a story that places the posed subjects in scenes full of action and dialogue. (Neubauer, 30-31)

Anita Brookner's technique in *Family and Friends* is very similar to Hong Kingston's technique in *China Men*. With the opening gambit of "Here is Sofka, in a wedding photograph.... [She]stands straight and stern, her shoulder's braced, her head erect in the manner of two generations earlier" (FF.7), Brookner is able to place the posed figures within the realms of a world made real by the perceiving mind which is itself outside the spatial and temporal limits of that world. Like Kingston's autobiographical narrator, Brookner's fictional narrator often combines reminiscence and evaluative commentary as a means of foregrounding his/her own individual perspective of events. Since the mind which verbally orders and shapes experience by placing it in time is the same one making obtrusive value judgments about the members of the Dorn family, we are always conscious of the fact that it is one probable point-of-view out of many. In other words, as in the case of Kingston and her retelling of her family history, we are aware of the issue of personal bias, of emotional involvement influencing the ethical position of the narrator.[2]

Let us look closely at the first photograph in *Family and Friends* and the specific adjectival phrases used to characterize each posed figure in the group, for it is through these sharp, revealing epithets that we are made to latch on to the distinctive traits of each of the Dorns. All our subsequent impressions of Sofka and her two sons and two daughters are dependent on how the narrator manipulates this initial encounter between the narrative audience and the posed

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[2] Incidentally, in her 1987 autobiography *Unveiling India: A Woman's Journey* (Penguin: New Delhi), Anees Jung has also utilized the device of using family portraits to tell her story.

subject.[3] Sofka is the focal center of the group and the narrator gushes over her appearance. However, the narrator's admiration of Sofka's aristocratic looks and dignified demeanour is punctuated with an implicit criticism of her rigorous maintenance of an air of "inflexible" (FF. 8) dignity which is seen have been instrumental in creating an inseparable gulf between her and her late husband. However, the blunt and dismissive acknowledgement of the absence of the figure of Mr. Dorn from the family portrait serves both to redeem Sofka in our eyes and enforce her privileged status. We are clearly meant to understand that, in a relatively unliberated age when women had almost no political power and very little scope for economic independence, Sofka occupies a singularly dominant position within the Dorn hierarchy not only because she has inherited wealth from her late husband but also because she herself has a strong and positive personality which is expressed in protective and proprietary attitudes towards her children and her household.

Sofka's proud bearing in the photograph becomes emblematic of her "determination to fulfill her role as duenna, as figurehead, as matriarch," which in her everyday conduct is translated to mean "presentation, panache, purpose and, in their train, dignity and responsibility; awesome concepts, borne permanently in mind." (FF. 17) However, to guard against the related dangers of closing our eyes to Sofka's human failings and elevating her to the status of an epic heroine, the narrator constantly juggles the tone of the narrative and shifts the perspective. For instance, the straight-faced listing of the necessary and praiseworthy categories of public conduct as understood by Sofka in the above passage is immediately followed by the narrator's ironic, deliberately mock-heroic use of a pair of flamboyant similes in the characterization of Sofka's dramatic enactment of her social role. The discordant note introduced by this linguistic strategy serves to diminish Sofka's somewhat pompous self-importance: "Like a general on the evening of a great campaign,

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[3] I am using the term "narrative audience" to signify the "imitation audience" addressed by the narrator of a fictional work. The narrative audience is to be distinguished from the "authorial audience" – the hypothetical audience for whom the writer has designed the book. See Peter J. Rabinowitz''s "Assertion and Assumption: Fictional Patterns and the External World." *PMLA* (96: 1981), 804-19

like an admiral setting a course for his fleet, Sofka looks to the family fortunes and plans her performances accordingly. She surveys her children, is proud of them, trembles for them. The tremor conveys itself to her hand, and a tiny drop of Madeira gleams on the polished wood of the little table. “Mama," says little Alfred. “The car has come round.” (FF. 17)

However, notwithstanding the narrator's exploitation of the range of our emotional response to Sofka, there is no perceptible diminution of our awareness of Sofka's stature and centrality within her own miniscule domain. Such an awareness is reinforced primarily by the way all the children are defined in relation to the mother-figure. Standing behind their mother in the first wedding photograph, looking frail and "curiously tubercular” (FF. 7) in comparison with the vibrant image of Sofka, the wistful and delicate faces of her two daughters (Mimi and Betty) make the narrator contemplate their destinies as envisioned by Sofka. We are told that Sofka favours the sons more than the daughters, and we also find out that in contrast to her ambitions and somewhat grandiose plans for her sons Frederick and Albert – she hopes they will become “tycoons, captains of industry” (FF. 10) – she has a narrower, more stereotypical and orthodox vision of seeing Mimi and Betty ultimately established as respectable matrons ruling over flourishing households similar to her own. Instead of condemning Sofka's unenlightened attitude towards her daughters, the narrator tries to justify this perpetuation of existing and socially sanctioned gender roles. In a lengthy and sympathetic passage, we are imaginatively projected into Sofka's consciousness and are made to identify with a mother's understandable fears regarding the security and happiness of single, unprotected daughters. Significantly, however, since Sofka herself has known little marital joy and (as we find out progressively from the narrative) has stoically endured the humiliation of widespread and public gossip about the philandering habits of her late husband, she is not as desperate and as callously aggressive as, say, Mrs. Bennet is in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* in pursuing her daughters' matrimonial opportunities. Although both Sofka and Mrs. Bennet have in common a primal maternal concern for daughters trying to survive in a male-dominated world, Sofka – who has fewer daughters than Mrs. Bennet to worry about and also has the wherewithal to

maintain her daughters in style indefinitely if need be – wants her girls to spend a few more years in flirtatious games before committing themselves to the heavy responsibility incumbent upon the roles of wife and mother.

We find out that Sofka rarely dwells on her own past role as a wife; damaged by the bonds of married life and rejected sexually, she has finished with the past, the past that has gone from her life as her husband has gone. The suffocating bonds have loosened and she now lives in the present; for the present she wishes to protect Mimi and Betty from the knowledge of pain and lets them prolong the days of their youth. In the following passage, the narrator's voice is subsumed in the passion and depth of Sofka's projected feelings for the welfare of her daughters: “What happens to young women, brought up to obedience, and bred to docility and virtue? What happens to such unprotected lives? How will they deal with the world, or the world with them? Sofka sees that her vigilance will be needed to spare the girls the hurt and the shame that even the unsuspecting can endure, even when they are harmless as well as beautiful...What happens to such daughters? Sofka looks at them sometimes and feels that there is something like a sentence of death on them. Then she determines that they must laugh and flirt and learn all the teasing catchwords, and learn to disguise the haunting innocence in their large eyes. But all in due course, let them harden naturally. And let them stay with their mother until then. (FF. 14)

Something about the psychological effect of her own abused condition as wife and mate can be ascertained from the way Sofka characteristically sees the female of the species as victim. The reason she now characterizes the human courtship ritual in Darwinian terms, with the strongest and fittest – like her – enduring and surviving beyond the struggle, is that she has had to suffer years of shame quietly and in isolation. Sofka dreams of a more secure world for her daughters, and in her mind, she is sustained by the image of her two daughters as innocent sisters devoted to each other and sheltering each other from the malice and ugliness of the real world where men are not the only predators. As Sofka knows only too well from her own experience with "heartless women... women of her own age, who view the world through narrowed eyes” (FF. 14), other

virtuous women can be vicious and ruthless and indiscriminate in expressing their moral outrage.

The image of sibling bonding that Sofka believes in is found to be an essentially false image. It takes her some time before she comes to realize that her daughters have something in their natures which defeats her best intentions to provide them with a stable environment. Although the narrator remembers the younger daughter Betty as having the verve and brilliance of a young rebel flouting the conventional norms of public conduct held sacred by the family, our final impression of Betty is of a jealous, selfish woman who blatantly uses her sexuality to further her own dream of becoming a film star. For instance, she first cuts her hair in modish style in defiance of the then traditional custom of all the Dorn women wearing their hair long and modestly tied up in a knot; next, she seduces and elopes with the same young, attractive Italian dancing instructor Frank Cariani with whom the shy and retiring Mimi had hopes of developing a lasting relationship; then she discards Frank in favour of Max, the talented nephew of a talented cinema maker. Family ties and obligations are regarded by Betty as only so many hindrances in the road to stardom. As the narrator points out while contemplating the image of the young Betty, in course of time, Betty will "withdraw her love, her admiration, her loyalty, and will be seen quite clearly to calculate her own against her family's chances of success." (FF. 36) The natural consequence of Betty's betrayal of the family trust and her renunciation of family values for more elusive mercenary gain is to alienate her from her mother and her siblings. She settles in the United States with her film director husband, fails a crucial screen test which was to determine her future in the cinema, and is last seen growing into an undignified, frustrated middle age in which "her brothers and her sisters have no reality for her." (FF. 156)

The narrator's trump card in the manipulation of our feeling is the way we are made to see Betty from Sofka's point of view; there is little room for error in the mother's instinctive knowledge of her daughter's true nature. We are told that as soon as Sofka understands that "of all her children Betty appears to be almost viciously in touch with her lower instincts" (FF. 37), she consciously renounces her own ties to this wayward daughter while at the same time acknowledging a lasting, deepening bond with the older, more honest and more

disciplined daughter. In contrast to Betty, Mimi shows every sign of conforming to Sofka's "unwritten and indeed unspoken rule" of maintaining decorum and "good form" (FF. 38). In a vivid scene replete with maudlin, sentimental feelings usually associated with tableaux of family partings, the narrator paints for us a symbolic picture of Sofka's dual act: renunciation of any further emotional investment in the life of her younger daughter and affirmation of a greater spiritual union with the older one. This occurs after Sofka has said goodbye to Betty for what she thinks is the short duration of Betty's purported stay at a finishing school in Switzerland but which turns out to be the last time she sees her younger daughter. Instead of going to Lausanne, Betty chooses to lose herself in Paris with Frank and abscond from the family fold forever:

> On the day of Betty's departure for her school in Clarins, Sofka weeps as if she is saying goodbye to her forever. Betty weeps too. There is a kind of random sorrow in Betty that guides her roughly to the inner meaning of these occasions. While the chauffeur loads the suitcases into the car, Betty embraces her mother and her sister.... Then the car moves off, very slowly, with a handkerchief fluttering at the window. On the street, Sofka, her own handkerchief quite soaked, suddenly grips Mimi by the hand, draws her to her side, and drops her head for a moment on to Mimi's shoulder. Mimi, surprised, smooth's her mother's cheek. Sofka alone knows that she has sacrificed one daughter in order to keep the other. (FF. 4-5)

In the first wedding photograph, Mimi and Betty are wearing matching dresses and look very appealing and innocent to the narrator. The aura of innocence is of course shattered by Betty's appropriation of Frank Cariani's affections, and it is many years before Mimi is able to recover from the psychological trauma of having been at the receiving end of treachery and rejection perpetrated by trusted companions. The narrator's slow unfolding of events within the shrinking Dorn household makes it readily apparent that Mimi has no ally besides her own mother. We see that it is Sofka's growing concern for this forlorn daughter of hers which makes her engineer an alliance between Mimi and Lautner, an old and devoted friend of the Dorns who helps with the management of the family business and has been both Sofka's valuable employee and reliable advisor for many decades. Although Mimi silently yearns for love and romance and is initially revolted by the idea of marriage to

the elderly Lautner, she is later persuaded by the cold and realistic image of a stark and lonely existence in store for her after her mother's death. In a dramatic confrontation between mother and daughter, Sofka is no less convincing in her argument in favour of a marriage of convenience than Charlotte Lucas had been whilst begging Elizabeth Bennet's forgiveness and understanding for agreeing to marry Mr. Collins, in Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*:

> 'Daughter!' cries Sofka, in a loud voice which startles them both, as does the archaic use of the word. 'I do not want to die and leave you alone. I do not want you to remain my little child, without your mother to run to. Do you know what they say of such women? Do you know what it is like for a woman to grow old without a man? To be a godmother to other women's children. Useful for presents and otherwise disregarded? Do you know what it is like never to set a family table? Never to celebrate? To sit alone, because it is inconvenient for your friends to invite you? Do you know what it is to be left out of other peoples plans? To be left out of their conversations, even? Do you want to grow old like this, playing the piano, dreaming like a girl? Do you know the names that other women apply to women like you?' (FF. 133-4).

Charlotte and Mimi's situations are not of course, exactly similar. The moral pattern of *Pride and Prejudice* makes us identify with and feel pity for Charlotte's predicament: that such a bright and intelligent woman should be forced into an unequal and loveless match with a man clearly unworthy of her because she is desperate for security reflects Jane Austen's outrage at the existing inequality between the sexes regarding inheritance laws and other political and social benefits. On the other hand, it is difficult to feel very sorry for Mimi: she has an independent income, and lives in an age when women have some political rights as well as ample opportunities for employment in various fields. Mimi fails to move out of Sofka's shadow because she lacks both the will and the courage to do anything concrete to change her situation. It is exactly this passivity in her daughter which frightens Sofka into taking matters into her own hands. Where Charlotte makes a wise and calculated decision to change her life for the better, Mimi is paralysed by lack of will and indecision.

Sofka's brutal truth-telling session with her daughter has the desired effect, and soon we are made to look upon a photograph

taken on the special occasion of Mimi's wedding day.[4] The narrator comments on Mimi's transformation from a frightened, neurotic girl to a woman of quality of whom Sofka can be rightfully proud: "she looks extremely gracious, rather grand. After all, she is not her mother's daughter for nothing." (FF. 137) After Sofka's death, Mimi returns to the family house to live there with her husband, and she carries on with the traditional way of life, dispensing warmth and graciousness and hospitality in the manner of Sofka:

> [Mimi] reflects on the pluses and minuses of life to a quite considerable extent these days, and thinking has hollowed her cheeks, made her stately, rather handsome, yet not too communicative. Mimi has acquired depth, a depth not of her own choosing. She is mildly matriarchal, given to sober pursuits, and an excellent housewife. She is at ease with Lautner and his elderly ways, no longer seeking diversion.... They are to be found in the drawing-room, with a silver tray of coffee-cups in front of them, entertaining visitors, family and friends. (FF. 185-6)

The values cherished and practiced by Sofka are now upheld by her daughter. Mimi's wedding photograph is the third in the series of photographs which the narrator carefully selects to mark the passage of time and record the changing fortunes in the lives of the Dorns. Frederick, the older Dorn son, is not in this group photograph (just as Betty is not there) because he has married and left England to live in the sunnier climate of southern France. The second wedding photograph the narrator inspects is that of Frederick's wedding with Evie. During the close inspection of the first photograph, Frederick had been characterized as "a lazy conqueror" (FF. 7) of numerous female hearts, and subsequent events bear out the truth of the narrator's initial epithet. However, in the way the doting mother is seen to indulge the foppish habits of her handsome son and collude with him in keeping his many brief affairs of the heart at the level of uncomplicated games, there is a covert suggestion of the existence of a deeper unconscious desire in Sofka which is manifested in her disinclination to share Frederick with another woman. The muted oedipal overtones in the bond between mother and son are indirectly acknowledged by the narrator through symbolic language and a

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[4] The technological advancement in the field of colour photography is duly noted in the reference to Sofka's violet dress and hat with violet flowers.

detailed account of Frederick's fond (mis) application of courtship gestures to the parent-child relationship:

> Sometimes Frederick will present his mother with one red rose. There are roses. There are roses in the garden, of course, but they are the province of the gardeners. Frederick's rose will be placed in a vase and taken up to Sofka's bed-table. As she lies back on the square pillows that her mother had given her when she married, Sofka will look at the rose and smile. (FF. 25)

Even though there is obviously nothing consciously sexual in their relationship, the narrator's allusion to the pillows which were part of Sofka's trousseau reinforces the suggestion that she has unconsciously placed Frederick in the position of surrogate husband. Frederick too is confused about adult relationships and is unable to find any woman more captivating than his mother. He is rescued from this unhealthy situation by the arrival of strong, healthy, earthy Evie who, as her name implies, is every bit the natural woman just as Sophie is the sophisticated one. Sophie feels an instinctive dislike for this younger woman whom she sees as a threatening invader and predator. Although Sofka's hostile reaction upon meeting Evie for the first time is cleverly camouflaged in the outwardly friendly atmosphere of a coffee party, the narrator's free use of animal imagery reinforces the idea of hidden antagonistic primal forces unleashed in an instinctual war between females trying to claim and protect a weaker male. Throughout the evening's light-hearted small-talk, Sofka is like an alert she-cat, studying her “adversary” and searching for a way to "outwit” this “menacing” creature who has “huge primeval hands and thighs, the teeth of shark, the braced back of a giant-killer” (FF. 73) The narrator however makes us see Evie as she really is: of middle height and average weight, and not "bad-looking”. In fact, she is seen as Frederick's saviour:

> Evie is not bad-looking as a member of the species. And it is as a member of the species, is those days before the lava cooled, that she is most viable. That is Evie's trump card: viability. With her strong neck, ready smile, woodcutter's teeth, and unvarnished good heath, Evie seems to promise, on her own, the propagation of the race. Next to her, Frederick appears effete, decorative, luxurious;.... (FF. 73)

Marriage and then exile to France prove to be liberating experiences for Frederick. He has no real interest in the family business. Nor does he have any sense of a deep fraternal or filial

bond to give him occasion for any feelings of guilt about immigrating to another country. His repudiation of family is more gradual and more understanding than Betty's repudiation, but there is no doubt of his spiritual casting-off of the Dorn name. He is seen at peace with himself and his new family in his small world as a successful manager of his father-in-law's hotel in Bordighera, near Nice. In the final analysis Frederick is seen as a harmless and simple man – much like Austen's Mr. Bingley – who only needs the trappings of a good life and the affections of a good woman to keep him on the straight and narrow path.

Sofka's equally gradual turning away from the older son is underlined by her pronounced lack of feeling for Frederick's children, whom she has never known personally and does not particularly care to know either. This of course is sign of Sofka's limitation: she connot find it in her heart to grow to love these strange offspring who are so much Evie's children and seem to have no Dorn blood in them. She is satisfied to receive the obligatory cards and photographs Fredrick sends her occasionally, and there is no attempt on Sofka's part or on Frederick's to reunite the entire family so that she can meet her grandchildren. As time goes by, the familial bonds between Sofka and her older son slowly sunder.

Sofka's disillusionment with her son actually begins with her perception of his failure to take an active interest in the family affairs, either at home or at the factory. From Sofka's point of view, this is a moral failing on Frederick's part which is tantamount to disloyalty to the entire family unit and endangers the welfare of the family's future. In these circumstances, it is Alfred, the sober, more intellectual, and more responsible younger son who is seen as the true inheritor of the Dorn legacy. Alfred has the requisite attributes of a strong sense of duty and devotion to his mother and the family business, and his social manners reveal the same kind of fastidious concern for decorum and good form as is manifested in Sofka's dealings with the world. Our first view of Alfred (in the first wedding photograph) was of a sickly child whom the narrator cannot identify at first, but in the second wedding photograph he stands out prominently as Frederick's best man, and the narrator's tone is one of surprise at the visible change in Alfred's appearance:

> Alfred, in tails, is as striking now as Frederick was at that earlier wedding. He is, of course, more handsome. Not only is he slimmer, straighter; he has a look of austerity about him, one might say nobility, that almost compensates for his brother's imminent departure. Strange how dispensable Frederick has suddenly become. Strange how the younger son has grown to resemble his mother. Those clear open eyes, that unflinching gravity of expression. (FF.83)

Unlike Frederick, Alfred has a complex personality, and his aristocratic demeanour is a defensive shield which harbours deep tensions and insecurities. The narrator has consistently maintained that Sofka and her family have always been outsiders in England; that their traditional way of life has never been allowed to merge with the traditions of native English culture; that all the Dorn children have been educated by tutors at home and have never gone to English schools. On the other hand, Alfred's voracious reading of the works of Dickens and other great English novelists has made him imbibe – at one remove – the values of a strong English tradition. He is the only one of the Dorn children who cannot reconcile himself to the status of an outsider. He does not fail in fulfilling his duty towards his family, but his spirit searches for a sense of continuity that will tie him to the land more firmly than his ties to his own family have ever done:

> He has visions, largely nourished by reading, of the sort of home he has never known: this sort of home is bound up with a certain concept of the land, of rootedness, which is proving strangely elusive. In such a home, thinks Alfred, he will find his true center;... Sometimes Alfred has a dream in which he is running through a dark wood; at his heels are two beautiful golden dogs, his familiars, and with them he is running though the dark wood of his pilgrimage towards the golden dawn of his reward. It is this strange dream that has determined Alfred to look for his real home. (FF. 103)

As the narrator's tone and imagery clearly indicate, there is a noticeable elusive quality in the very nature of Alfred's quasi-Romantic quest: he is doomed to search forever for his real home because he himself has no faithful vision of the future and cannot find in his soul any tangible evidence of his own salvation. Significantly, on the night of Sofka's death, Alfred's quest is abandoned and his inner conflicts are partially resolved when the consciousness of his undying allegiance to Sofka and her memory is

forced upon him in a moment of intense grief; he "stands all night in his mother's room, at the foot of her bed. I never meant to leave you, he says, and now he knows it to be true." (FF. 178) The visible manifestations of Alfred's return are his reaffirmation of an affair with his beautiful married cousin Dolly, and the sale of his country house with its make-believe world of genteel English-style living. Alfred accepts his destiny and finds a kind of peace in graceful compromise.

The narrator ends his narrative with a description of a fourth wedding picture – the last in the family album – which shows the family or what is left of it, grouped around the bride (Sofka's maid, Ursie) and the groom. In this photograph we are particularly asked to focus on three people who seem to form a cohesive unit: Alfred, his cousin Nettie (Dolly's sister, and the girl Alfred had been in love with in his younger days, now married to the quiet and stolid Will) and Nettie's little daughter Victoria. The narrator's celebratory – and strangely conspirational tone – invites us to speculate on the physical resemblance between Victoria and Alfred. His concluding words leave little doubt as to the real meaning of the picture. We understand that Alfred has finally found his roots through a renewal of his relationship with Nettie, and Victoria is living proof of the survival and continuity of the Dorn family line:

> Here is Alfred, tall, stiff, still a handsome man. Here is Nettie, very close to Alfred, leaving Will almost unattached, unpaired. And in the front row, the three children: Laurie, Charlie, and Nettie's child Vicky (Victoria). See that look on Vicky's face, that imperious stare, so unlike a child, so like Sofka. See Alfred's hand proudly clasping her little shoulder. See the resemblance. Wait for the dancing to begin. (FF.187)

In *Family and Friends* Brookner is primarily concerned with depicting a network of sustaining familial ties, and as such the five main actors in the drama of the Dorn family are basically seen in social and interactive situations within the family and their community. Each photograph of a wedding in the family becomes symbolic of the periodic assertion and reaffirmation of family solidarity in the face of momentary dangers of disintegration and disloyalty. All in all, the Dorn family is portrayed as a viable insular community of well-to-do expatriates who rarely come into conflict with the culture of their adopted country. Even the temporary

yearnings of Alfred Dorn are made quiescent with his growing maturity and acceptance of his role as the heir of the Dorn legacy. There is thus a sense of completeness in *Family and Friends*: at the end of the narrative, we come back to the beginning of yet another cycle in the life of this particular family, and progression and continuity are envisioned in the emergence of a new representative of a new generation. There is an affirmation and celebration of life in the final image of continued communal harmony. While another story waits to be written and told, actual closure of the narrative is achieved by closing the present family album containing the pictorial history of one generation of the Dorn family.

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8

A Critical Study on Colonialism, Imperialism, and Racism in *Heart of Darkness*

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Abstract

This paper analyses the language use and underlying discursive practices concerning colonialism, imperialism, and racism in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. It explores how the task of ideological-discursive formation of these is associated with the relationship between language, subject, reality, social process, and meaning-making, and how the novella uncovers those implicit ways in which the dehumanizing legacy of colonialism and racism is constructed and manipulated by the unreliable narrator–Marlow. The imperial and racial motifs are manifested in Marlow's impressionistic depiction of Africa and its native people in his meditations on civilization, colonialization, human nature, and self-knowledge. Marlow exploits opportunities to shape the tale from his point of view while effectively silencing African natives and other European voices making the sense of the reality of his individual experiences. The novella is not only framed in a complex way to manipulate language but also to deceive the reader. The paper also exposes the Oriental perspective that presents the ideological differences between Europeans and Africans and the prevalent value systems in colonial discourse. Therefore, the novella is highly contextual in contemporary (Conrad's time) socio-cultural-historical relations and functional in its syntactic and semantic correlations revealing that imperialism and racism operate through the dominant hegemonic ideologies.

Keywords: Colonial evils, imperialism, Africans, otherness, frame narrative.

Introduction

With technological advances especially the industrial revolution in the late eighteenth century, colonial expansion became an ideological mechanism of conquest, domination, and imposition to exhibit the superiority of the Western countries. The ideological-discursive function of racism and imperialism was mainly associated with the political domination and economic exploitation by those racist groups who imposed their dominant cultural-value systems upon the colonized peoples of the Third world countries. The racial purity and cultural superiority of the Europeans is an act of "Manichean allegory" of binary power relations that divide the whole world into its oppositional forces–colonizer/colonized, light/dark, civilized/evil, self/other, male/female, and human/nature (Jan Mohamed 63). This oppositional system is never free from its racial bias and domination that are seen as the epitomes of all colonial rapacity and savagery. Europeans started to exercise all forms of colonial process under the guise of civilization, Christianity, education, and trade that supported their dominating goals of gaining market economy and exploiting those territories for wealth, natural resources, and human labour. This trend had evolved into a predominant stage of capitalistic growth that captured distant lands and turned those into colonies of European markets. In such transformation, this act also resulted in rivalry among the European nations to gain those richer territories and demonstrate their powers. In his book *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said defined imperialism as the practices of the hegemonic discourse of the West in foreign territories, and colonialism as a direct "consequence of imperialism" and "the implanting of settlements on distant territory" (9). The ideological-discursive practices of colonialism and imperialism are grounded in their specific social, cultural, political, and economic relations. According to Ania Loomba, colonialism is the way by which capitalism attains its aims through the cheap human labour of the colonized countries. Racism, an integral part of colonialism, assigns many dehumanized principles of class distinction and racial biases to the non-Westerners (107-9). Moreover, many European writers including Daniel Defoe, Rudyard Kipling, E.M. Forster, and Joyce Cary depicted the Oriental issues in their works from the prevalent Eurocentric perspective.

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* focuses on major projections including Eurocentrism, enlightenment, universalism, Orientalism, cultural hegemony, and meaning-making–all are constructed by Charlie Marlow, the main narrator, from the predominant Eurocentric point of view. Marlow, Conrad's counterpart, is never free from the charge of being a colonialist and racist because of his role as a colonial master to make money and collect ivory into the interior and his frequent and repeated use of derogatory words for the natives. His use of impressionistic language obscures many crucial events and his reticence to depict facts of what he witnessed in the Congo. The greed of the European ivory traders and their vicious exploitation of the African natives under the humanitarian disguise and his indifference to them are also essential elements to justify the negative effects of colonialism and racism. The inhuman acts of the Belgian Company represent both colonialism and imperialism with its pursuit of wealth and destruction of the indigenous cultural system. To his perception of the natives, Marlow seems to assume the role of a European conqueror as he demonstrates them as savages who lack European civilized ideals and are manifested with all darker aspects of life though they have their society, culture, and tradition. Marlow's journey up to the Congo is taken from Conrad's voyage to Africa in 1890. Although he had been an eyewitness to the rapacious incidents where the European adventurers were not only the conquerors of territories with their swords but darkness with their torches, he has the reluctance to portray them in detail. Despite Marlow's ability to depict the indigenous culture and to identify specific locations, he weaves a world of mystery with greater universality—-the sense of being enchanted and disconnected in a double sense of making the story ambiguous and confused. The novella is less a reflection on the tradition of the late-nineteenth-century romance and adventure but an exploration of racism, imperialism, and colonialism. The textual knowledge maintains and represents the unequal power relations and the stereotypical representations of the East beyond the mere depiction of travel fantasy. In the light of postcolonial criticism, the distinct presence of colonial discoursal value and power/knowledge relations in the textual representation of the East and the West is a matter of fact to the analysis of the novella.

The phrase 'heart of darkness' suggests that the noun 'heart' is the metaphoric vehicle and the noun 'darkness' the tenor, thus concealing the fact both the vehicle and tenor are themselves framed by Marlow while reminiscing in a state of 'epistemological confusion' from which he never escapes. Marlow acts as a prime agent of colonial and imperial practices who creates a Western space of racist and imperialist discourse in a dominant and privileged way of storytelling and making his interpretation of others and providing insights into the major textual events and thereby constructing particular versions of reality to blindly believe him.

Racist, Colonialist, and Imperialist Outlook in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*

In *Heart of Darkness*, Charlie Marlow, an Englishman, also the narrator of Conrad's *Youth*, *Lord Jim,* and *Chance*, appointed by the Belgian Company as an agent to run ivory business, travels to the Congo, the personal property of the Belgian King, Leopold II. Marlow's job is to bring back Mr Kurtz, the Company's remarkable agent at the Inner Station. Marlow's experiences of European colonial and imperial legacy in Africa are framed in three ways: first, in the opening of the story, the colonial and imperial adventure under the guise of the civilizing and enlightenment ideals; second, a parallel between the Roman and the British Empire (in Conrad's own time), and finally, Marlow's hesitancy to disclose the actual events to the reader. Nevertheless, he illustrates them through his self-conscious and impressionistic frame narration under which he undertakes the role of an unnamed and unreliable narrator.

At the beginning of the story, an anonymous narrator introduces Marlow to his audience and ironically details that Marlow teaches his audience like Lord Buddha in European manners without following the actual civilizing ideals. Marlow unfolds his tale to a group of unidentified people—the Lawyer, the Accountant, and the Director of Companies on the *Nellie*, a cargo boat, in the Thames. The onset of the novella serves to emphasize something colonialism and the differences between Europeans and Africans, to conceal the knowledge and actual events–all devised by Marlow's storytelling. Marlow refers to the Congo as a "blank space" and a "place of darkness" (Conrad 108). Certainly, it was not a blank space and

unknown world. Congo was inhabited, had local names, peoples, histories, languages, traditions, cultures, and literatures. It is the Belgian colonial and imperial strategy that dominated native people and their culture while making them subservient. Despite his experiences of brutal idealism of Belgian colonialism, Marlow does not describe it directly; instead he complicates the whole story by intensifying impressionistic narratives and managing his explicit negotiation. He fabricates his dense narrative technique which demonstrates ambiguity, metaphor, complexity, suggestiveness, indirectness, and allusiveness. His actions are paradoxical as his has sceptic inclination towards the exploration of what he vividly witnessed in the interior.

Colonialism became a chance to civilize the natives and assign the ruthless European piracy and killings, alienating both natives and the colonizers alike. Excessive power, does not simply corrupt, it is systematically open to abuse. Racism and imperialism are initially expounded as a variety of brutish idealism that the takeover of any country falls under this legacy when the people of the defeated country [Africa] "have different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves [Europeans]" (Conrad 107).

As an explorer and adventurer in Africa, Marlow becomes an eyewitness to all avaricious acts done to the native people. With this statement: "I [Marlow] had got a heavenly mission to civilize you," Marlow expresses his ironical job to aid the native Africans (Conrad 108). Moreover, when he announces that like other European pilgrims his travels were also associated with European colonization—"the germs of empires," he realizes the fact that he is also an intruder in the Congo (Conrad 105). Ironically by saying "going native," Marlow confirms his exercise of unbounded power and become one of the pilgrims who have only false ideals of civilization and enlightenment and have also no self-restraint. Herein lies Marlow's moral confusion and contradiction and displays how he himself becomes a part of that imperial projection. In his words, colonialists and imperialists as conquerors "were going to run an over-sea empire, and make no end of coin by trade" without moral values "at the back of it" (Conrad 110, 107). Marlow symbolizes the agent of racism and imperialism through his discoursal practices of complexity, contradiction, impossibility, indirectness, hesitancy,

"dislocation of meaning, or the disorientation of values in the story" (Brantlinger 287).

Like Rudyard Kipling's notion of imperialistic attitude well expressed in his poetry and novels, Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* deals with the discourse of European colonialism and racism. European colonizers are mostly disreputable, depraved, intolerant, brutal, and exploitative. Imperialism and colonialism are inseparable from each other as both are associated with domination and control of other subordinate countries and driven by hegemonic ideologies. Said remarked that both are ideological creations and offer many of those derogatory concepts that identify the colonized peoples as "inferior" or "subject races," and "subordinate peoples," (9). In the novella, the natives are represented as savages, darkness, exotic, and uncivilized.

Throughout the novella dramatic irony prevails as we find in Marlow's narration. The purpose of civilization not only provides the Europeans with an impression of culturally superior race, but also the primeval human nature. Moreover, Marlow ironically says that the colonizers are blind enough to their civilized and enlightened ideals as they are corrupted by their greed, "darkness" of their hearts although they have the "sacred fire" of Western education (Conrad 105). Despite the colonizers' task 'white men's burden' to civilize the natives in Western looks, they tend to expand colonial territories and economic exploitation "at the back of it [civilizing ideals]" (Conrad 107). In such a humorous way what can redeem the native people is the sacred light of the Western civilization and enlightenment. Marlow assumes the role of a moral adviser and mediator in his assertion of "distant kinship" of the same European blood, and if he yields by the influences of primitive Africa, he will have similar impression of savagery that his predecessors had. The only things that the colonizers can create to protect themselves from this averse and overturning position to hide darkness of their hearts are culture, civilization, elocution, and formality that Marlow, Kurtz, and other Europeans bear with them. The textual relation of Marlow to the field of colonialist and imperialist discourse is crucial as he unfolds cultural hegemony and unequal power relations devised by the constitutive and productive force of European colonialism and imperialism.

Like the terrible consequences of European conquest of Africa, Marlow justifies the presence of the Romans in ancient Britain as an indication of colonialism when he says that the Romans were "conquerors," and what they did in Britain was "robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale," using "brute force" and '"going at it blind"' (Conrad 107). With the novella's references to London and the Romans, Marlow leaves a space for the reader to realize that London was a colony of the Roman Empire and the same London had been a systematic function of the British Empire in Conrad's time.

Kurtz, an agent of the Belgian Company, has made himself the natives' god. His commercial success is matched by his reputation for his idealism. His depravity is signaled by the human heads which decorate the posts outside his hut. He has received a higher position among other devils of the territory and is comparable to Lucifer. He joins the natives in bestial rites, worshipping his own unrestrained power and lust. Kurtz's "universal genius" and "magnificent eloquence" without the restraints help him exercise his semi-divine power over the natives and embrace African wilderness. It is the African wilderness that takes him, deceives him, gets into his veins, and seals up his soul to its own by the celebration of his devilish acts. The frame-narrator exposes its immense impacts on Kurtz that he laments for his departure from the Congo in his illness. Similarly, Marlow's telling of a lie to Kurtz's Intended and fiancée and his indifference to the miserable conditions of the natives indicate his moral flaws that he despises most in his life: "There is a taint of death, a flavour of mortality in lies," (Conrad 129).

African society is viewed from the Eurocentric viewpoint where Kurtz and Marlow are "wanderers on a prehistoric earth [Congo]" (Conrad 138). Marlow's journey in the African territories is a symbolic journey–into the primordial space. It is in Marlow's conception that to civilize the natives the price of Western civilization has been in a loss of self-restraint. To remove the natives' savagery, Kurtz exercises his boundless power that hides his self-restraint under oppression and exploitation. About the dead African helmsman Marlow says that: "he had no restraint, no restraint—just like Kurtz" (Conrad 156). Marlow relies heavily on the language of the dominant culture which he expresses in the text. His presentation of European invaders in

terms of colonialism is paradoxical as the attribution of the greed and evil to the European colonial masters are ideological and to the African natives are imposed. The civilizing missions of the European colonizers leave them primitive and brutal and are no longer better than the natives whom they rule and dominate. For example, Fresleven, a Danish captain, was killed by the natives over some hens. The colonizers are induced by unbounded power, greed, and wealth. Marlow's realization about human nature is ironical where the epitomes of European light and education turn into darkness and savagery while this darkness and savagery for the Africans are culturally imposed and determined by their colonial masters.

When at the Central Station the indigenous peoples are beaten and left to die on starvation by their local colonial chiefs, Marlow ignores them and disappears. Many marked differences are seen between the Europeans and the Africans, as Marlow calls Africans their enemies: "there was a touch of insanity in the proceeding" (Conrad 115). Marlow's open-use of derogatory words for the Africans shows his involvement in European colonial practices: "bundles," "creatures," "phantoms," "black bones," "black shapes," "black shadows," and "moribund shapes." To Marlow, the natives are only cannibals or savages and he treats them as less human. Marlow's association of African society with wild, lust, insanity, savage, darkness, death, and Other and his journey into the African interior with the primordial unknown world—all are taken from the processes of imperialism and racism by which a colonizer Self distinguishes himself from the colonized Other. Herein lies the practices and effects of colonialism and racism.

Nineteenth century racist and imperialist discourse is verbalized in the somber reflections of Marlow's tale. It is illustrated in the silence and enslavement of the natives, omission of the African languages and society, and the stereotypical representation of them. The natives are viewed through the lens of Oriental perspective where they are "stamped with an otherness" whether they are neither "subject" nor "object" but of "constitutive otherness." It can be said that though Kurtz's Intended is familiar with many events in the Congo, she is given no voice to articulate her feelings. She is only entertained and portrayed in an exotic sense: "... a wild and gorgeous apparition of a woman... savage and superb, wild-eyed and

magnificent; there was something ominous and stately in her deliberate progress" (Conrad 167-8). Such description about her—an exotic Other, a conventional trope in colonial adventure writing conveys the self/other distinction upon which colonial and imperial motifs are grounded. Their historical subjectivity and individual identity are seen as primitive, passive, savage, nigger, negro, black, dark, creature, emotional, and exotic "through a characterized ethnist typology proceed with it towards racism" (Said 97).

In his article entitled "An Image of Africa," Chinua Achebe called Conrad a "bloody racist" for his distortion and misrepresentation of Africa. He argued that Conrad's representation of Africa and Africans was dehumanized and "devoid of all recognizable humanity" (788). Marlow's "remote kinship," his affinity with Kurtz, and his detached moral values justify his role as a colonialist. No occasion is given to the Africans to represent their society and culture as peaceful, productive, and organized. Amongst the silenced natives, the Manager's boy speaks: '"Mistah Kurtz—he dead"' (Conrad 178). Native Africans are represented in negative stereotypical manner. The sound of drums which the Europeans perceive as noise of riots among the tribesmen may be a suitable example. Unlike the Europeans, the natives feel no alienation and even they need not have any reliance and sanction. In contrast, Kurtz, an alienated in the African wilderness, who creates rather than accepts the world of Africa, takes advantage of this tendency and exploits and kill the natives mercilessly. Marlow praises Kurtz's gifted personality, his eloquent expression, and his skill to be a demi-god to the locals. To Marlow, Kurtz is a colonialist intellectual and "a universal genius" that "all Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz" (Conrad 154). Therefore, the alienated Europeans detach themselves from the sacred flame of civilizing ideals and create the same for the unalienated natives who receive them as divine or fetish.

In the novella, Conrad works with every binary opposition of racist fantasy between Europe and Africa, white and black, light and dark, and civilized and savage. Though apparently it seems to subvert the charge of racism, but the subversion is incomplete. The double, contradictory purpose—characteristic of all Conrad's novels of what Frederic Johnson calls 'schizophrenic'—in the sense that the layers of ironic moral contents are intertwined with metaphorical and

symbolic patterns that likely divert reader's attention from revealing actual identity of colonial administrators to "misty halos" of the Congo River [not named in the novella] (Conrad 105). In the Third Part of the novella, Marlow paradoxically comes to admire Kurtz when he judges him: "he was a remarkable man" (Conrad 178). Herein lies the ironic insights of Marlow in revealing human nature and morality. Marlow's moral duality is seen as his solidarity with European identity as also his distance from his surroundings. In his pamphlet—the Society for Suppression of Savage Customs, Kurtz assigns many civilizing ideals for the natives to reign over them and to allow them to perform human sacrifice in his honour. The legitimacy of the suppression of native customs represents ideological practices of colonialism and imperialism: "Exterminate all the brutes!" (Conrad 155). His dying words— "The horror! The horror!" refers to his experiences of brutal life and his betrayal of European civilizing mission in Africa (Conrad 178). Marlow ironically identifies himself with Kurtz's attempts to regain and control the territory—Kurtz's moral victory—to live through his repressed desires.

Marlow's narrative seems to hide rather than imply the dark sides of cultural and racial difference. During Marlow's up-and-down river journey at the Central Station, one of his listeners objects to his smoking: "Try to be civil, Marlow" (Conrad 137). This reveals the presence of Marlow's listeners who at least respond to his occasional interruptions that silence other voices and conceal the actual facts. In response, Marlow's reply is that: "... There was not a word from anybody" (Conrad 130). This unveils Marlow's insecure narrative with its dramatization and exaggeration while attempting to criticize European colonial and imperial enterprise. Marlow, the unreliable narrator, is blind enough to his own morality and identity. He recounts the tale to others while a frame-narrator talks about Marlow that his audience knows more the hidden truth than what he convinces them. Caryl Phillips insisted that "the novel proposes no programme for dismantling European racism or imperialistic exploitation" rather its function is "doubt about the supremacy of European humanity and the ability of this supposed humanity to maintain its imagined status beyond the high streets of Europe" (63).

The novella's style becomes a virtue of insecurity and hesitancy, deceivable decoding, and adjectival impression. There are many places in the text that Marlow indicates with his overwhelming words: "inscrutable," "inconceivable," "impossible," "incredible," "unspeakable," "inexpressible," and "incomprehensible." Such adjectival words are used in the whole text, for instance, the scene around Kurtz's hut where human skulls are mounted on sticks—performed with: "unspeakable rites," "unspeakable secrets," and "monstrous passions." When the Harlequin claims that the human heads belong to the "rebels," Marlow insists him to hear more definitions for the natives: "there had been enemies, criminals, workers—and these were rebels" (Conrad 165). Marlow's hesitancy and indirectness are characterized by his frequent use of "like," "seemed," "as if," "not," "nothing," "perhaps," "but," "know," "yes," "no," "dream," and "not yet." F. R. Leavis suggests that in the whole text "the same vocabulary, the same adjectival insistence upon inexpressible and incomprehensible mystery, is applied to the evocation of human profundities and spiritual horrors" (176). Marlow's excessive use of ominous adjectives and adverbs forms a kind of "incantatory style" that reveal a sense of strange and dismal atmosphere in which the story takes place. Though the barbaric incidents are observed and experienced by Marlow and other agents in the Congo, the brutality, greed, stupidity, and rapacity of the colonial system are rendered in terms of frightening atmosphere that obscures in its adjectival repetition rather than provide actual happenings (175). Having addressed his audience on the cargo boat, Marlow mediates on his narrative techniques and vivid life experiences, and expresses the very impossibility of revealing truth of what happened in the Congo: "Do you see anything? It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream" (Conrad 129). With these words Marlow satirically warns his readers that the brutality and greed of European imperial powers are so expansive and that it is unbelievable to describe like a dream that no one can fully understand its meaning. Obviously, it shows Marlow's vagueness and self-mocking irony about his experiences and truth-claims.

The story's ambiguity mostly results from Marlow–an unreliable narrator. He interrupts the unnamed narrator's imperialistic view at the beginning of the novella. The power of suggestiveness,

indirectness, vagueness, and hesitancy that characterize Marlow's storytelling technique, is introduced by the frame-narrator when he describes Marlow's role that "I[frame narrator or Marlow] don't want to bother you [audience] much with what happened to me personally,"... No, not very clear. And yet it seemed to through a kind of light" (Conrad 107). Marlow's language, self-knowledge, and world views can be put into a question as his discoursal practices mould the world of Africa and its people and do not reflect upon them but create those practices for them to follow. His narrative does not always take place in a strictly orderly, logical fashion but is rather marked by fractured, elliptical syntax, and dashes in order to restrain himself from disclosing actual facts and reformulate his own utterances in ironic sense. Though he functions as the principal source of information, he himself seems to lack understanding of the events. His account of events in the Congo makes an impression of ambiguity on the reader.

Conclusion

Finally, it can be said that white European conquerors and their false humanitarian ideals in its implication of domination, exploitation, inequity, and expansion that Marlow brings in views are never free from the condemnation of colonialism, imperialism, and racism. Native Africans are stereotyped as the colonized *Other*, subaltern, inferior, and uncivilized under the dominant discourse of the West. The power of Marlow's indirect and suggestive language makes a sense of insecurity and strangeness to reveal the real events that he experiences in Africa. His impressionistic narration displays less about human existence but more about the atmosphere that is left to be perceived and interpreted by the spectator. Marlow constructs and reconstruct a make-belief world through his narration, ideology, and knowledge which are the functions of a dominant discourse. It marks a parallel of Marlow's dominant linguistic assumptions of what Ludwig Wittgenstein called 'language-game'—it is our language that determines our view of reality and actions, because we see things through it. Therefore, Conrad or Marlow's self-consciously frame-narration, language, self-knowledge, and personal experiences are preoccupied with ambiguity, mystery, irony, hesitancy, indirectness,

and obscurity that turn reader's attention away from European colonialist and imperialist attitudes to the primitive Africa.

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9

Stree: Horror of Ghost or Horrors of Patriarchy?

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Abstract

The Bollywood film *Stree* was a fresh breath of air when it was released in 2018 as it dealt with a very pertinent issue of society in a very innovative manner. It used the genre of horror as its framework to deliberate on the themes of patriarchy and gender discrimination. In the film, a female ghost with a supremely symbolical name 'Stree' (Hindi word for 'female') is presented as haunting the town of Chanderi during the four days of the annual religious festival. What is intriguing is that she takes only men as her victim as they simply vanish. In the course of the film, one gets to know that she used to be a courtesan who was oppressed by the men of the town who deprived her of a happy married life by killing her and her husband even before they could consummate their marriage. The menfolk used her as a commodity as long as she was beneficial to them but could not bear the thought as to how a courtesan could choose to stop her objectification. Centring this, other gender themes are also touched upon in the film in a dexterous manner. The film turns the table as men are presented to be scared of 'Stree.' The film ultimately brings to the fore the horrors of patriarchy in our day-to-day life.

Keywords: Patriarchy, gender, horror, Stree, ghost

Introduction

In 2018, Bollywood produced a film of a very unusual genre by the name *Stree*. While from the trailer, it appeared as a horror-comedy, it is after watching the whole movie that one understands that the actual genre it belongs to is 'Feminist Horror Film', seasoned with elements of comedy. The film is helmed by the debutant director Amar Kaushik while it is written by Raj & D.K and Sumit Arora and

produced by Dinesh Vijan and Raj & D.K. The execution of the storyline, screenplay and dialogues by the people at work are quite praiseworthy. The film showcases brilliant bit of acting by the very talented Bollywood actor Raj Kumar Rao while the other characters too play their part with élan. Keeping the overarching genre of the movie (that of 'horror') intact throughout, the film keeps the audience on the edge with the elements of horror, mystery, suspense strewn till the end, even after the main problem surrounding the ghost is resolved. The story is set in the Indian town of Chanderi in Madhya Pradesh based on a true phenomenon. It is commendable to see how this true phenomenon is used by the filmmakers to talk about a very burning issue of our society, that is, gender issues. People having the outside wall of their house painted "O Streekalaana" (O Woman, please come tomorrow), the petrified people of the town of Chanderi because it is that time of the year again when a female ghost called 'Stree' (Hindi word for 'female') arrives during the four-night annual puja celebration and the men start vanishing, three visual instances of the men getting vanished, the ghost Stree clad in a bridal dress with her face hidden like a typical bride of an Indian town, etc.—all these create the ambience of a horror movie perfectly and the audience too start feeling spooked that the lives of the men of the whole town are endangered. What is crucial in this context to note is that this ghost called Stree is only after men. Her hunt is quite gender-specific. At the very outset of the film, we are told that the mysterious Stree is on the rampage but the brunt of her rampage is to be felt only by the men of the town.

Stree appears to be a misandrist but it is only in the second half of the film that the background story of her hunting for the male members of the town is revealed. It so happened that in this town of Chanderi there used to be a courtesan. The people of the town had no problem with her as long as she fulfilled the desires of the menfolk of the town through her body. As long as she let the menfolk use her body as an object to gratify their lust, things went on normally but when she eventually found a person who loved not her body but her soul and decided to marry her, the people of Chanderi found it hard to accept. She and her lover married but before they could consummate their marriage, the people of the town exhibit the acme of their cruelty and patriarchy as they kill both of them. Actually, in

this patriarchal society of Chanderi, her body is not merely a body of flesh and blood but a site for patriarchy to exert its vicious control. Jeremy Hawthorn in *A Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory* defines 'body' in these words: "For many theorists, the body is no longer a purely physical system the study of which can safely be left to the medical profession. Instead, the body is also a concept or set of ideas which are seen to be implicated in, and already in part constructed by, the non-physical: IDEALOGY and history, for example" (30) and further, while talking about the concept of body in feminist terminology he writes, "Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott have suggested that the challenge – one to which feminists are now responding – 'is to develop a theory of the body as itself socially constructed while being experienced as a material, physical presence' (1996, 11)" (31). The town of Chanderi is a typical representation of patriarchal society. It is a phallocentric world where men are the masters and rule-makers of the society; where the commodification of the body of a woman is acceptable because it gratifies the male fraternity but when the woman strives to get rid of her commodification, people cannot bear it and the punishment meted out to her in this phallocentric world is death. Jeremey Hawthorn defines phallocentrism in these words: "In contemporary feminist usage, phallocentric patterns of thought consciously or unconsciously assume and advance a view of the masculine as a natural source of power and authority, and the feminine as naturally subject to this" (260). Stree's attempt to marry the man whom she loves is a challenge to patriarchy; it is a breach in the whole patriarchal system constructed in the society. She challenges the, to borrow the term from Kate Millett's famous feminist book, 'sexual politics' of this male-dominated society. About the title of Millett's this book, Raman Selden, Peter Widdowson and Peter Brooker in *A Reader's Guide o Contemporary Literary Theory* write:

> Millett's title, *Sexual Politics*, announces her view of 'patriarchy', which she sees as pervasive and which demands 'a systematic overview—as a political institution.' Patriarchy subordinates the female to the male or treats the female as an inferior male, and this power is exerted, directly or indirectly, in civil and domestic life to constrain women. (133)

This quotation is quite illustrative to understand the context of the plight of Stree when she was alive as the deeply entrenched

sexual politics of the society does not allow her a happy married life and wants her to continue to be in the inferior position of being an object to the male fraternity. That is the position assigned to her and when she wants to rise above that position, the patriarchy punishes her.

Therefore, ever since her death, she has been haunting the town of Chanderi every year during the annual puja celebrations and takes away men leaving behind their clothes in her attempt to fulfil her consummation. She has been looking for love and respect which the townsfolk never gave her while only making use of her. Here we have a very pathetic portrayal of a sexually frustrated woman whose sexual desires remained unfulfilled and to fulfil that, she takes away men. It might sound ironical to say that she is sexually frustrated when professionally she was a courtesan but that is what the film wants to emphasise that while as a courtesan, she was the victim of the lust of men, her genuine love and sexual desires were for the man who loved her genuinely. The film attempts to present her as a 'woman.' But patriarchy never considers her a woman (that is, a human being with desires and rights) because according to the patriarchal values, her very definition is something else, as the world-renowned feminist critic Simone de Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* says, "Woman? Very simple, say those who like simple answers: she is a womb, an ovary; she is a female: this word is enough to define her. From a man's mouth, the epithet female sounds like an insult; but he, not ashamed of his animality, is proud to hear: 'He's a male!" (21) By 'simple answers', Beauvoir means those who like patriarchal answers and who subscribe to patriarchal ideologies.

The film *Stree* does a commendable and innovative job of foregrounding gender issues in a very interesting way. Stree is oppressed at the hands of the people of Chanderi because of who she was—a woman and a courtesan. On the other hand, Raj Kumar Rao's character Vicky (pronounced 'Bicky'), who was in actuality born of a prostitute faces no harassment, prejudice, insult, oppression, social boycott ever. The whole town knows about this except him and he gets to know about this much later in his life. There is no name-calling for him, no gossiping, nor is he ever treated with a sense of inferiority. The sexual politics of this phallocentric society is strongly at play here. The privilege of being a male is that ever since

childhood no one ever taunts him or even mentions it in passing that he is the son of a prostitute. The people of this town maintain such decency and show such utmost respect to the privacy of this matter that it is in glaring contrast to the treatment meted out to Stree. The latter suffers only because of her sex. These two different treatments to a man and a woman, however, do not come as a surprise in a society encrusted with patriarchy.

However, the normalised gendered table is turned drastically through the ghost Stree, albeit for a short period. Since she is only after males, the males appear scared of Stree (we must remember it means 'Woman' in Hindi, so they are afraid of a woman) and step outside after dark. They remain behind closed doors after dark as there is a montage of many men shutting the doors of their houses one by one because outside there is danger. After all, outside there a ghost named Stree is roaming in the town. Centuries of normalised patriarchy is turned at its face when men are presented in such a situation which for females is a way of life in a patriarchal society. Females are raised and live all their lives taking precautions against 'Purush' (the Hindi word for man) not just after dark but even during the day. While in the real world, *Strees* (women) are scared of *Purushes* (men), here in this world of the film *Purushes* are scared of *Stree*. No doubt, there is an interesting wordplay on 'Stree', the name given to the ghost. The men also have to dress as women to save themselves from the wrath of Stree. They have to cross-dress for the sake of their safety. One is reminded of William Shakespeare's famous romantic comedy *As You Like It* where Shakespeare also presents the concept of cross-dressing in the context of female safety. In the play, Rosalind dresses as a man to keep herself and her cousin Celia safe from any kind of sexual harm by men when they travel towards the Forest of Arden (women are more afraid of rape than death!) as she says, "Beauty provoketh thieves sooner than gold" (1.3.100). When she decides to dress like a man, Rosalind says:

> A gallant curtal-axe upon my thigh,
> A boar-spear in my hand, and in my heart
> Lie there what hidden woman's fear there will.
> We'll have a swashing and a martial outside
> As many other mannish cowards have
> That do outface it with their semblances. (1.3. 107-12)

In the film, the men step outside dressing like women and the footage shows people in public places dressed only as females and it looks like there are only women and women. For once, it looks like a woman's world! In the movie *Stree* as the fear of the ghost is at its pinnacle, a man says to his wife, "Listen, please come home early. Alone I feel fear" (1:44:52-53) as the woman prepares to step outside after evening. The woman's body language is quite noteworthy as she very casually says, "Yes, yes, I'm coming. You keep the doors closed" (1:44:54-56). Pamphlets are being distributed on how to be safe from Stree. The announcement is being made that Stree is outside and the lives of males are threatened. Men do not like that they are being instructed to step outside wearing saree. On the other hand, in our world, instructions of precautions against males and how to dress when stepping outside is a normalised common thing to females.

Therefore, we see men behind the closed doors and women milling outside either roaming or even doing something important without any worry after dark. Thus we see women reclaiming the public space from which they are debarred generally. Here it is the ghost that gives women a sense of freedom in the public space. She ushers in a time when women, like their counterpart human beings, can also live their life easily and freely and their scale of safety does not depend on the different times of the day. Thus, the ghost Stree ushers in a feminist utopia for some time where the gendered table is turned strikingly, where, for once, the men have to cage themselves after dark. One is reminded of the feminist utopia Ladyland as presented in Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's renowned short story "Sultana's Dream" where men are kept inside the house while women walk outside totally at ease. Here also the gender binary of the patriarchal society is turned and women reclaim the public space. In the story, the woman from the Ladyland tells Sultana that the streets are quite safe because men are inside and the reason for women's no safety is men only: "Yes, it is not safe so long as there are men about the streets, nor is it so when a wild animal enters a marketplace" (Hossain). The society of Chanderi turns into a gynocratic society during the stay of Stree. Jeremy Hawthorn defines 'gynocratic' saying, "That which is ruled by women. Thus a gynocratic society would be one in which women held power, in contrast to an

ANDROCRATIC society, in which power would be – and has been – in the hands of men" (145).

To foreground the gender problems of the real world, the film presents this ghost named Stree as quite a well-behaved ghost. She is a consensual ghost as she does not force herself on any man rather she calls the men by their names and when they turn, that is taken to be the consent and then she takes them away. Of course, her taking away of men is presented as in a horror movie with horror-inducing lights and sounds. In the film there are some very hard-hitting dialogues like "She is a Stree, not a male. Stree does not use force like men. First she will ask your permission" (1:16:13-20) come from one of the brilliant performers Pankaj Tripathi who plays the role of the all-knowing man of the town Rudra Bhaiya when Aparshakti Khurana's character Bittu asks in a state of fright, "What if she takes me away forcibly?" (1:16:11-13) Even while being a ghost, she is presented to be better than men. Here the ghost appears better-behaved while the men who force themselves on women are implied to be ghostly, horrible and dangerous. While reviewing the film Sucharita Tyagi, the well-known film critic says, "Imagine this ghost is more aware of gender rights than most alive... people" (0:35-40). Here the binary between the ghost and human beings (specifically, men) are turned upside down as this ghost is far better than them. Sucharita Tyagi praises this film in these words: "And hearing Pankaj Tripathi tell people how Stree is different from your standard male ghost in that she does not use force rather asks for consent before taking anyone away—yes means yes—makes all of this a fresh breath of air" (1:33-44).

Conclusion

The famous and seasoned film critic Anupama Chopra in her review of the film says these eloquent words: "In a recent interview with the website filmstage.com actor Ethan Hawke spoke about Trojan horse movies. These are genre films that turn out to be something else like the Oscar-nominated *Get Out*, a terrifying horror film which is a blistering commentary on race relations in America. *Stree* is also a Trojan horse" (0:00-19). By giving the name 'Stree' to this ghost, the film delivers its feminist discourse superbly. The very title of the film is highly significant as well as suggestive that the film is on the

'woman' and the issues of women in general. 'Stree' means 'woman' in Hindi and the very title points towards the fact that what we are going to witness in the film are women-related or gender issues. The film is gynocentric as it attempts to start a discourse on the female experience. Even though the story centres on the issue of one woman, in particular, the issues here are dealt with in such an intelligent manner that the film turns out to have universal relevance. Ankur Pathak in his article "'Stree' Movie Review: Smashing Patriarchy, One Shriek At A Time" writes these pertinent words:

> The film isn't just a tale of a dead woman haunting men as she never found love, she's *also* haunting them for years of systematic oppression and mistreatment. By terrifying them so much that they can't come out alone in the night, she's reclaiming a space that's been toxified for women by the actual and perceived threat of male violence. She's making them feel what she, and by extension, all women, have been made to feel: caged and worried for their safety." (Pathak)

It is said about the ghost that she does not harm a man in whose eyes she sees love because she is love-deprived. All she craves for is love and respect because these were denied to her while she was alive. Ultimately, the townsfolk can placate her ghostly vengeance by building a statue in her honour and writing in a placard at the foot of the statue: "O Stree, protect us." When Stree comes next year, these words comfort her and she returns leaving the men unharmed. It is obvious that when the townsfolk treat her with love and respect, she relents. Hence, even as a ghost she is presented to be quite humane who reciprocates love and respect while it is the patriarchal men who act more like an evil ghost. Thus, from our above analysis, we can say that the horror of this apparently horror film is focused on showcasing the horrors of patriarchy in our society.

Note

The quotations in Hindi are translated into English by the author.

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BOOK REVIEWS

1

A place where each city is as good as the next: Review of *Found in Translation*, by Miriam Adelman

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[São Paulo: Nosotros, Editorial. 2020. 144 pgs., ISBN 978-65-00-10992-4]

"We are [always] driving towards some border" says the poet who writes this book – and I would not disagree. If we are not moving, physically, from one territory to another, we are always heading toward a greater border beyond, one that carries us unto another penumbra – equal, similar or unlike the larger one that brought us here.

The trek toward a border is much of what this book is about, the trek toward a cultural border, or a border demarcated by mountains or rivers or even the imaginary line that came to some general's mind as he invaded the land of the Other or took it over, or the trek toward the border between languages where the one on this side begins to recede and leave its place to the other until the other is simply *there*, keeping the first one "in its heart, on its lips, in its thoughts", as the Arabs used to say. The reader of this book should keep this journey through languages in mind.

There is no novelty in men and women switching languages – out of obligation, desire, or simple lack of alternative. That Marcus

Aurelius wrote in Greek may be because he found it a lovelier language or one that was more appropriate to philosophical thought. That Conrad abandoned a Slavic language to adopt an Anglo-Saxon one may have been due to interests, whether obscure or very clear. That Kafka wrote in German might have been a matter of obligation, sympathies or even a sort of bowing to the language of the dominator. And there are many others: Brodsky, Yourcenar, Ramon Llull or Hildegard… choosing one's language is a matter that precedes us, as myth, as reality. One way or another, to leave one's own language behind and plunge into another is nothing like changing one's attire or choosing the gem on the ring on one's finger. This has been on my mind since I read the first poem and discovered there the word "untar" – which, although rendered in English as "spread", in Portuguese acquires specificity, or strangeness, physicality, as in spreading butter or cream or tar…. It spread over my palate and urged me on to the following poems, certain that there I would find the lexical wealth of at least three languages.

To write poetry is to dive into one language inside another, yet within the same language. I have read the works of scholars who claim to have learned another language in their old age, one learned within their own. Yes: if we study philosophy or religion, sociology or law, we access other registers, learn other ways of saying things. In this regard, poetry differs little from the aforementioned disciplines. We learn other languages within our own over the course of our lives. In this particular case, we have before us a poet who makes her way through different languages (in the most banal sense of the term language, that is, if such a sense makes *any sense*). Thus, in translating a poem from English to Portuguese, she had to find something that would "translate into Portuguese", not an English word but a sensation, or even a discourse, in the most complex meaning that can be given to discourse – the relationship between beings who speak within historical and socio-cultural contexts. And each poem is a distinct "speaking": we find in this book two journeys "toward borders", one which unfolds within language(s) and another which takes us from one language to another. And I would add: without mitigation. Nothing is done here to soften the pain of the world. The beauty of images, subtlety of verses (in the three or four languages appearing in the book), nothing appeases what must be said on the

journey toward borderlands. If something is beautiful, so it is; if ugly it is, ugly it remains.

I am not suggesting that she resorts to the dream or the nightmare of Babel, yet the movement from one language to another, as the poet translates her own poems (from here to there, or there to here), raises hard choices regarding even the simplest of words, words such as "ice", let's say, because "ice" means one thing to us and another to astronomers. And so it would be in other instances: the word "stone" for Sisyphus, the word "water" for that which Tantalus expects to find in the crater he cannot reach, or even the word "image" for Narcissus, when he has not yet become a blossom. Reasons to allow yourself to peruse these pages, as one who peruses several paths at the same time, like an imaginary library.

Some readers who know her might wonder if they are to find, in this book, the questions that she, the poet, also scholar and researcher, brings to her academic work. Let me warn you right off: don't take that path! It will get you nowhere. Nonetheless, as I went along with my own reading, as if making my way through a gallery, a museum or even a garden, I was taken to thinking about the investigative mode of her poetic voice, which dives into the things of the world without disturbing them at the core, in the good sense: getting a scare, shaping inquiries, allowing for surprise, finding or trying to find answers. Years ago, Brazilian poet Carlos Drummond de Andrade wondered, "'what for, so many legs, dear God?', ask my eyes and my heart, but my eyes ask nothing." The modern subject, the subject who in but a few hours can cross borders, was never so alone nor so immersed in doubt. Which is why, perusing countries, people, the things of the world, with the searching gaze of this poet – this researcher, perhaps – is so worthwhile, even if only to arrive at the same conclusion as Drummond.

Let us be clear: this is not the book of an exile. An exile is one who has been banished. Ovid was banished and every line of Sorrows speaks to this. Brodsky was exiled, and you can feel his exile in his own translations from Russian to English. Even in Beckett can you perceive that feeling of "having left something behind", in his passage from English to French. But not here. Miriam is a curious soul. She probes. Just one conversation with her and you will see how

much she dives into what you recount to her. I surmise that she once rambled the streets of Mexico City with the same curiosity for "the things of the world" with which she roams the streets of Brazil, or that guided her wandering days in France. And she would do the same in Lesotho or Socotra.

Here is the moment for a digression: we may think of the world as taking N.Y. or Paris or London as its epicenter. But this is not her case. So if you begin your reading from that point of departure, you'd better start over.

Upon reading these poems, and letting the digression above take me further, a possible difference between "place" and "territory" came to my mind. We can of course think of the two words in different kinds of light: both can be thought of from the "physical" point of view, the ground under our feet, and in a "social" sense, that is, the social place we inhabit. Yet let us think here of an arbitrary, temporary difference: place as the space we occupy (social, historical, cultural) and territory as the earth that carries our footprints. Here you have it: this book is a place where these two ideas, these two discourses, these two concepts come together. If you stick "Found in Translation" in your back pocket and make your way through the streets of Milwaukee and then sit on a bench at the city's art museum and, after admiring the work of Calatrava, pull the book out and commence your reading, you will soon be transported to a street in Dhaka or Casablanca. The urgent thing about this book is that it tricks you, leading you to meander over geographical boundaries. Hence the relevance of the multiple languages it engages, and the variety of words from the same semantic field: nomads, travelers, streets, road (highway or path) as well as the names of cities and places.

And so, the poet writes, for her friends who are "stranded" in places and territories. I didn´t mention Wisconsin just for the sake of it. But I did choose a place at random. Throughout the text, I kept thinking back to poets who took the opposite route, like Michael Ondaadje, who is always expected to weave his native Sri Lanka into his stories. Exiled poets have no homeland. Their territory is cosmopolitanism. Yet these are the poets who carry the world on their backs. It is not the encounter between "East and West" that they

invoke, nor between "rich world and poor world", or between worlds of any sort, for that matter. Their writing is more complex: it is an amalgam in which we cannot tell where one begins and another ends.

Thus, the poet will talk about "time breathing its magical chant over some unfolding future" and she will do the opposite of what the sirens did, leading her "stranded friends" by the hand and away from the rocks. This image of a guiding hand, very common in Eastern mythology, came to my mind in several of the "territories" of this book, because this is how I felt: pulled gently, spying (but not spying on) the things of the world. At certain moments I felt – and perhaps she, wary of this type of approach, would not agree with me – as if I were inside these myths, wandering through them, understanding all the languages of Babel, so that "each city as *as good as the next."*

And readers will find harsher visions of the things of the world: in Michoacán, for example, a girl-child whose "breasts ripen" rather than her tresses, shoulders or eyes. The sky "gathers its rainclouds for the season to come". There is density hovering there. Although many readings are possible, there is a heaviness encountered there, the burdens of a young girl growing in a place where men reign. I may be completely wrong, having let myself get carried away by our conversations, but in this poem I saw the young girl and the ominous sky, the young body seeking to flourish and the unkind world hovering above her. Hence, wanderings do not lead only through places where the traveler discovers beauty. That would be merely banal.

This observant traveler sometimes had, in her journeys from one language to another, to sacrifice a subtlety or two. Thus, we go from the English original "cows gone to bone" to the Portuguese version, ""*vacas sustentando o mais puro esqueleto*" – a much more direct reference to the skeletal. But take note: this is the poet herself, making her way along the sometimes tortuous paths of translation. And readers will gain much with this, encountering an opportunity to savor verses in at least two versions: from the language of departure to the language of arrival.

If language and idiom are elements that invade this book, then only do we stand to gain. Understandings of the things of the world

unfold through language: they are at the same time interpretation and interpellation of the things of the world, around the world through which we wander. In "Found in translation" we find the echo of a melancholy film, yet not exactly an answer to it. Rather, there is the chance of finding ourselves lost or *found,* even while our doubts – or precisely this, our doubts– become the glimmer of possible understandings.

2

A Review on From Dulung to Beas: Jaydeep Sarangi's *Flow of the Soul*

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[Author: Sarangi, Jaydeep. *From Dulung to Beas.* Authorspress, 2020.
https://jaydeepsarangi.in/]

This collection foreshadows a rich tapestry of many lives and stories woven together by a single voice, whose ability to transpose himself into various existences across many divides and fault-lines create a multi-hued narrative, encompassing so much. There are tales of love, passion, pain, sadness, hope, bliss, in fact the full gamut of the human experience, distilled in these offerings.

We are taught to view the world anew, to rejoice in the splendour of nature at her best. The verdant mountains and babbling rivers is a constant backdrop to his many forays into meditations on the human condition. In the poem, "My sister wishes" I am enamoured with the words: *"the Ganges flows through the hearts"*.

The natural world is entwined in the poet's veins, in the sacred utterances that issue forth as poems dangling off his fingers. A simpler, more intuitive lifestyle foregrounds much of his musings about life. Within the normal daily tasks of life, he expertly traces lines to a larger reality, a more nuanced, yet profound truth.

A crescendo of vibrant and violent colours reverberates across the trenches of his soul, finding itself marooned on these pages. The poet becomes a smiling midwife after delivery of such issue. Water, rain, flood, monsoons, all wash the play of light and dark, happy and sad, bliss and despair that runs through this collection. Baring his

soul to an uncompromising world, he lures the reader in, with tantalizing titbits of life as it is.

The softness of a summery day, the cool touch of a sacred mother's care, the love of a devoted wife, introduce themselves into the reader's psyche, and suddenly we too are plunged into his universe, seeing anew the possibilities of a life beautifully lived. Traipsing through the realities of life, within the lush natural wonderland of his homeland, the poet deftly journeys through the material world, always cognisant of a larger truth, a spiritual thread that connects each to the other. In the poem, "Bengali Baul", these words stop the clocks, and encourage a pause, a moment to reflect.

> "The green fields overflowed with love and joy.
> Three passionate seekers of truth:
> Chaitanya,Nityananda and Advaitacharya
> Made the boat flow with the stream of time."

And flowing through are the many wild rivers and mountains, ever-present in the psyche of the people, offering succour and shade, hope and peace. Refusing to stifle a startling reality of a marginalised group, Sarangi compassionately and skilfully trumpets the cause of the Dalits. Their literary voices amalgamate with his and find newer audiences and understanding hearts everywhere. A triumph of compassion blazing a trail, his ode to the brave-hearts that rail against an unjust world trumpets a writer who weaves his heart and soul into all his forays into his art. In "Living alone"' the poet appeals to those who wish to speak for the voiceless, using the emotive language in the lines:

> How Kalyani, Meena and others
> Through hard labour and strength within
> Fight for their right.
> They write
> As they have no arrow to lift."

A powerful recognition of the call to arms using the power of the pen, to overpower the sword.

Gender nuances and immersing himself without fear in the shoes of the other also endears him to female readers when he unashamedly writes from the feminine perspective. Interspersing the act of creation from the female perspective in this offering, the poet

melds the natural world with the supernatural, while ensuring that gender is kept to the forefront of the process. In the poem, "My old flute"

> And in the tribal girl's vacant look.
> The ghost of my previous birth
> Makes me wild.
> I nourish my thoughts to grow up as a 'sal' full tree
> Or like river Dulung†
> Where you all shall be my pregnant foliage..."

Taking us on a whirlwind tour of different countries, Sarangi immerses us in different cultures and contexts, and for a moment the reader experiences life in these alien lands. The poet's agility with words and his interconnectedness with various types of people allows for a seamless immersion. It is wholly as a native of these lands, or a cultural immigrant to each that Sarangi exposes the accepted lie, that of any perceived differences that might exist.

In his poem "To Goddess Pallas Athena", he states:

> "We need to move into the open space
> Where all become one in
> The Murray Darling Basin
> With single musical note..."

In essence, all are one. And he ties it in with his constant seeking, of knowledge in sacred spaces, within and without his human vessel. These poems do not cloak themselves in obscure art, but rather stand proudly as themselves warts and all. A brave and bold body of work that teases the senses into long and languid sashays of forbidden glimpses into a warm, breathing and beating heart. Guile has no place in this universe. A soulful journey awaits the fortunate reader.