Literary Oracle

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"Entering into the Unknown": Subverting Mary Shelley in the Teleplay *Frankenstein: The True Story*

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Abstract

Since its publication in 1818, the narrative of *Frankenstein* has undergone diverse interpretations and adaptations. Despite the passage of two centuries, the enduring significance of this novel remains undiminished. The span between 1910 and 1975 saw the emergence of a total of thirty-two adaptations of the Frankenstein narrative. Notably, the 1973 adaptation of the novel, jointly written by Christopher Isherwood and Don Bachardy, has often eluded the thorough examination it warrants. Isherwood and Bachardy reimagined Shelley's novel, introducing a homoerotic perspective that offers an alternative lens to examine the relationship between Victor Frankenstein and his creation. This interpretation of *Frankenstein* differs from the conventional reading of a strictly filial bond between the two characters. This essay aims to closely examine the 1973 teleplay *Frankenstein: The True Story*, analysing Victor Frankenstein's relationship with his non-human/posthuman creation through the lens of a queer theory. Furthermore, the analysis will explore how the 1973 adaptation subverts the heteronormative ideology inherent in Mary Shelley's narrative. Drawing from Butler's theoretical stance, the essay contends that subversion serves as a political instrument to contest prevailing norms from within the framework of the narrative, thereby prompting a restructuring that highlights and questions heteronormative predispositions. This study will take a cue from the insights of

posthumanist, queer, and feminist thinkers such as Julia Kristeva, Judith Butler, and Lee Edelman for analysing the teleplay.

Keywords: Queer, Monster, Heteronormativity, Sexuality, Subversion.

Since the publication of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, in 1818, countless critics and scholars have worked, reworked, interpreted, and reinterpreted the text. In the words of Susan Stryker "I have asked the Miltonic questions Shelley poses in the epigraph of her novel: "Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay to mould me man? Did I solicit thee from darkness to promote me?" With one voice, her monster and I answer "no" without debasing ourselves, for we have done the hard work of constituting ourselves on our terms, against the natural order" (250-51). *Frankenstein* is arguably one of the most researched works of fiction in literary history. From those immersed in literary studies, the cultural critics and even those within the realm of scientific inquiry (for instance, the 2017 book *Frankenstein* especially "annotated for scientists, engineers, and creators of all kinds"), Shelley's magnum opus continues to offer an enduring source of insight and inspiration. The potential of the text to address racial issues, challenge fixities, cross boundaries, and shift the normative understanding of human/nonhuman that leads to various reinterpretations of the novel; some of those interpretations also appeared in the form of film and theatre adaptations. In the process of adaptation, the 'original' narrative invariably undergoes distortions. Drawing a parallel to Frankenstein's monster, the narrative fibres woven by Mary Shelley have been torn, mended, and re-stitched to fit the contours of adaptations. Each adaptation is a rereading of the source text, and reading is, as Stanley Fish says, "an activity, something you do" (70). The reader actively participates in giving meaning to the text rather than being a passive consumer of meaning. Echoing Fish's perspective, each adaptation is new in its own way, an interpretation, a reworking, which plays with the 'purity' of the original form. Shelley's *Frankenstein* has attracted the attention of various readers and academics due to its profound exploration of themes such as monstrosity and excess, its fascination with the potentials and boundaries of power, desire, and transgression, and its inclination to cast doubt upon what is conventionally considered the "normal world" (Rigby 4). Notably, a significant number of films on *Frankenstein*, approximately thirty-two,

were produced solely between 1910 and 1975. Of all these
adaptations, only a few received critical attention and wide
acknowledgement. Bouriana Zakharieva highlights that the 1931
rendition of *Frankenstein* by James Whale stands out as particularly
influential among these adaptations, imprinting upon popular
culture a stereotypical representation of the monster. However, this
article deals with the often ignored and overlooked 1973 adaptation
of *Frankenstein*. *Frankenstein: The True Story* (1973) is a reimagining of
Mary Shelley's narrative. Christopher Isherwood and Don Bachardy
reimagined the relationship between Frankenstein and his creation,
the conflict between nature and culture, the melancholic repression of
the self, and finally, the reconciliation between the self and the other.
This adaptation is of particular significance as it reveals much about
how sexual meanings were interpreted in the 1970s. Moreover, this is
one of the few adaptations that reverses the popular tradition of
imposing a filial bond between Victor Frankenstein and his creation.
This paper will apply the lens of queer theory to analyse how
Isherwood and Bachardy subvert Mary Shelley's novel in their
teleplay. According to Judith Butler's perspective, individuals who
don't conform to heterosexual norms often struggle to articulate
themselves using the prevailing heteronormative language, which
fails to accurately represent them. Butler contends that although it is
impossible to suddenly escape or change the system, it is possible to
alter the system from within through subversive, performative,
discursive repetitions. Therefore, the act of queering requires a
subversion of the system from within. Isherwood and Bachardy's
1973 teleplay thus deals with a familiar story and subverts the
normative narrative to provide an alternative space where queer,
nonhuman/monstrous individuals may find a voice again. The
application of 'queer theory' to any particular work of literature
requires an interrogation of normative concepts of sex and gender
identity and a critique of heteronormativity in all its manifestations.
In *Bodies that Matter* (1993), Butler, following the footsteps of
Foucault, argues, "Heterosexuality and homosexuality are mutually
exclusive phenomena, that…can only be made to coincide through
rendering the one culturally viable and the other a transient and
imaginary affair" (112). Following Butler's insights, it can be
suggested that a queer reading enquires about the process in which

'heterosexuality' has been set as the norm and 'homosexuality' has been rendered 'abject'. This paper will also take recourse to posthumanist thinkers like Elizabeth Effinger and Patricia MacCormac to investigate further how the subversion is at work in Isherwood and Bachardy's teleplay.

In his essay on *Frankenstein*, George E. Haggerty asserts that the 'masculine birth' in Shelley's novel, among other things, is a queer act itself. But this act of creating life, as compared to 'childbirth', was, nevertheless, imbued with a traditional tone of a filial bond. However, Isherwood and Bachardy appear to have deliberately taken a stance against this heteronormative perspective within their teleplay adaptation. Nowhere in the adaptation, do they make an indication of a father-son relationship between the two characters. A reference can be drawn from the Pygmalion myth to suggest that the relationship between the creator and the creation of the same sex as filial is influenced by the patriarchal culture that has a proclivity for what Adrienne Rich calls 'compulsory heterosexuality'. In the Pygmalion myth, the protagonist, disenchanted with the perceived flaws of the female anatomy, dedicates himself to sculpting an embodiment of his ideal woman. With the lifelike beauty and perfection of the statue, Pygmalion develops a passionate desire for his creation. Aphrodite, the goddess of love, touched by his love and devotion, brings the statue to life. Pygmalion and the statue, named Galatea, marry and live happily together. In contrast, Frankenstein's creation remains unnamed throughout the novel, emphasising its isolation and lack of personal identity. A similar undertone to create a human, assembling the "best parts of the human body", is noticed in the story of *Frankenstein* as well. However, unlike Pygmalion's romantic relationship with his "ideal woman", Frankenstein's relationship with his ideal male creation is never romanticised. The idea of a creator falling in love with the creation, particularly when it involves a male creator and a female creation, resonates well with conventional notions of romance and desire between two "opposite" genders. This narrative aligns more easily with the expectations and frameworks established by, as Butler terms it, the 'heterosexual cultural matrix'. Au contraire, Frankenstein's creation of the male body, and the subsequent interpretations of their bond as filial provide a perfect example to understand how the heterosexual

cultural matrix shapes the discourse by reinforcing and privileging certain relationships while suppressing or marginalising other non-heteronormative possibilities. Even though this paper discourages seeking a filial bond between Victor and his male creation, it is worth delving deeper to propose that even the imposition of such a bond between Victor and his creation does not destroy the possibility of a homoerotic relationship. Butler, in chapter two of *Gender Trouble*, critiquing Freud's essay "Mourning and Melancholia", argues that even before the desire for the opposite-sex parent is repressed by the child, another repression of the desire for the same-sex parent had already taken place which is not addressed by the Symbolic. That repression is, as Butler calls, "melancholic", the repression which cannot even be "mourned". Butler writes:

> In the case of a prohibited sexual union, it is the object which is denied, but not the modality of desire, so that the desire is deflected from that object onto other objects of the opposite sex. But in the case of a prohibited homosexual union, it is clear that both the desire and the object require renunciation and so become subject to the internalising strategies of melancholia… with the postulation of a bisexual set of libidinal dispositions, there is no reason to deny an original sexual love of the son for the father, and yet Freud implicitly does. (Butler 75)

According to Freud, the repression of the desire for the opposite-sex parent, or the Oedipus Complex, is responsible for the formation of an individual's ego and sexuality. Butler argues that since Freud overlooked the possibility of melancholic repression in the child, the return of the repressed might be formative of an individual's queerness. Butler further suggests that an individual's heterosexuality is consolidated only after successfully repressing homosexuality within. Butler's appropriation of Freud's essay and her postulation on the concept of melancholic repression deeply unsettles the traditional nature of the father-son-relationship just as Freud's concept of the Oedipus Complex had unsettled the traditional understanding of the mother-son-relationship. This essay, therefore, is an attempt to discover how Victor Frankenstein was not successful in repressing his homosexuality and find the gaps where his attempts at hiding his queerness slipped out.

The storyline of *Frankenstein: The True Story* does not stay 'true' to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Isherwood and Bachardy reimagined the

true story of Frankenstein, suggesting that the version that Mary Shelley had written was not what "really" happened between Frankenstein and his creation, and it was incumbent upon them to reimagine and rewrite what had happened. The subtitle "The True Story" thus works as a justification for another adaptation of *Frankenstein*. Isherwood's *Frankenstein* begins with the accidental death of William, Victor's brother, by drowning. The death of his brother sets Victor on an unusual journey to "raise life out of death" (*Frankenstein: The True Story* 9:10-9:13). On his journey, Victor comes across Dr. Clerval, who introduces him to the possibility of a scientific revolution that Victor has been dreaming of all along. However, before the completion of the project, Clerval dies of cardiac arrest. So, it can be argued that Isherwood works as an advocate to relieve Frankenstein's monster of at least two murder charges that he has been accused of in Mary Shelley's novel. In *Frankenstein: The True Story*, Victor does not abandon his creation, unlike Shelley's Frankenstein, who is frightened at the sight of his creation. Isherwood and Bachardy imagine Victor's creation, at least for the initial few days of his birth, as a "fresh" and "beautiful" young man. Victor makes public appearances with his creation. Victor's use of the adjective 'beautiful' to describe an apparently masculine subject somehow ascribes a queer undertone to it. The traditional heterosexual cultural matrix does not typically assign the adjective 'beautiful' to grown male individuals. That usage of the adjective may also be read as Victor's mind trying to make sense of his attraction for the male creation, and thus, using a 'feminine' adjective and feminising the beauty of the creation may allow him to make peace with the patriarchal symbolic order of his psyche. Victor collects the best body parts from fresh dead bodies and stitches them together to make his creation. A white European "ideal man" is what he aspired to create. Victor teaches him different languages, gives him lessons on table manners, and takes him to operas. However, Victor never introduces the creation as his creation to the world. On one occasion, when a lady asked Victor about his relationship with the 'handsome young man' (i.e., his creature), his reply, "a friend of mine from a distant country," suggests that a filial bond with his creation was never aspired by Victor (*Frankenstein* 1:05:54-1:05:59). Moreover, the use of 'friendship' to describe the relationship between

the two suggests Victor's dismissal of typical roles assigned to the creator and the creation, for example, master and slave, father and son. The homoerotic nature of their relationship is best appropriated in the bond of friendship. As patriarchy allows a non-erotic bond between friends of same-sex individuals, the description of the nature of their relationship as 'friendship' helps Victor justify his bond with the "handsome young man" to the patriarchal society.

Victor hides the stitching marks on the body of his creature with pieces of clothing. However, hiding the scars soon proves futile as the creature's body starts rotting; as Dr. Clerval phrases it, "the process is reversing itself" (*Frankenstein* 46:53-46:56). However, Victor's attitude towards his creation changes as the process reverses. Unlike Shelley's monster, whom his master abandoned, Isherwood's creature escapes from his master due to Victor's agitation to accept his physical changes, his transformation into a monstrous being. Isherwood's monster is not out on a murderous rampage in search of his master. In fact, the only characters the monster intentionally kills are Dr. Polidori and Agatha/Prima (another creature made by Polidori using Frankenstein's methods). Isherwood's monster does not want a female companion for himself; thus, any attempt at "heterosexualising" the creature has been abandoned by Isherwood and Bachardy. Unlike Shelley's monster, Isherwood reimagines the monster as an entity untethered by the Lacanian Symbolic order of state since the monster never learnt the language ruled by patriarchy, although he was victimised by patriarchy and its rejection of him as who he is.

The body of Frankenstein's creature requires special attention to understand how Isherwood and Bachardy attempted to subvert the traditional understanding of Shelley's monster. Victor Frankenstein created his creature collecting the "best body parts" of humans, by stitching them together. Some critics, such as George L. Mosse, have interpreted Victor's passion for assembling beautiful body parts as originating from a homoerotic sensibility. However, Victor's concept of the ideal man is quickly shattered as he becomes aware of imperfections in his creature's skin. As Jack Halberstam has suggested the monstrosity of figures like Frankenstein's creation is carried in the skin, indicating that monstrosity becomes manifest in the physical form. Jones and Harris contend that monstrosity

transcends mere physical appearance; it serves as a warning about the potential consequences of unbridled desires and the unpredictable nature of an undisciplined and unrestrained body. Victor rejects his creation not because of its hostility towards him but because his skin shows signs of imperfection. The mirror becomes an important metaphor here: the creature sees his reflection in a broken piece of a mirror and notices how different his skin is from Victor's. This can be read as the creature's mirror stage as he has been brutally forced to realise his separation from the world, from Victor. And this realisation made him stab himself, in an attempt to destroy himself. The mirror serves as a metaphorical explanation for the shift in Victor's attitude toward the creature. Jones and Harris write, "For many gender-creative and other queerly identified people, mirrors — like families — can be sites/sights of not only the painful work of seeing the self as a creation — an unfinished becoming…but also the sites/sights of betrayal and loss" (523). Victor's rejection of his creature as his body is changing and transforming is read by many transgender theorists as the world/society's rejection of a trans individual. Frankenstein's monster represents a dynamic, living embodiment of qualities that families and society have labelled as 'ugly,' 'dangerous,' and 'perverse' — qualities that continue to fuel the policing and vilification of queer individuals today. Elizabeth Effinger reads the creature's body as a posthuman body, "a body that situates itself along the liminal zone between species, and between human and nonhuman communities" (155). Isherwood and Bachardy's posthumanist critique of the story is quite evident: Victor, as the creator of the white European Vitruvian man, can be considered an upholder of Enlightenment liberal humanism. However, Victor's horror at the transformation of the creation is a reminder that the humanist ideals are crumbling down. Even though Victor is seen as a posthuman character who "refuses to live within the boundaries of the human", his humanist ideologies become apparent in the way he treats his posthuman/nonhuman creation when "the process starts reversing", and the flesh decays. Consequently, the fissures on the creature's skin can be interpreted as culture's inability to conceal nature, in line with Timothy Morton's proposal that "Frankenstein is an ecological novel precisely not because it compels us to care for a pre-existing notion of nature, but it

questions the very idea of nature" (qtd in Effinger 155). Morton goes on to suggest that "we identify with the monstrous thing; we ourselves are 'tackily' composed of assorted bits and pieces" (195). Victor's monster is made monstrous because of Victor's inability to accept him. Thus, Frankenstein's monster is a construction — a figure that signifies selves and ways of living the world cannot bear to see. The monstrous is misunderstood, deformed, destructive, and queer. As Effinger says, Frankenstein's monster "is our posthumanist kin, someone or something with whom we identify on the uncanny grounds of our shared messiness" (155).

Victor's relation to Dr. Clerval is also subject to many speculations. The relationship between the two can be read as queer, not adhering to the traditional understanding of relationships between two men. Since the very introduction of the character, Clerval has been described as a "strange man" (14:42). Victor succeeded in giving birth only because of Clerval's extensive research. Metaphorically, Clerval's creative fluid made the birth of "a living, breathing man" possible. It has to be noted that Clerval first takes Victor to a secluded place, a "haunted" place that tends to evade public attention. This space assumes a queer quality as Victor ventures into it alongside Clerval. Clerval's discomfort at the presence of Elizabeth could suggest his preference for male companionship and reluctance to share Victor with a woman. Victor's act of transferring the brain of Clerval to his creature may be read as Victor's attempt to bring Clerval back to life, as a lover's attempt to bring his beloved back. Ulla Kerren, in her thesis, argues that the space shared by Victor and Clerval was homosocial in nature. According to Eve Kofosky Sedgwick, homosociality and homosexuality exist in the same continuum, with social bonding at one end and homosexuality at the other. The fear of homosexuality is averted in male-dominated homosocial spaces mostly by increasing imposition of homophobia. Therefore, a queer reading would suggest that Victor's engagement with Elizabeth is an attempt to avert the attention of a homosocial, homophobic culture in which heterosexuality is "compulsory". So, Elizabeth seems to represent a closet in which Victor seeks safe refuge from the homophobic world. Sedgwick argues that "a woman often appears in scenes where two men are represented together in order divert the threat of

homosexual possibility" (qtd. in Rigby 103). The scene where Elizabeth suddenly shows up at Clerval and Victor's place and kills a butterfly that they had created seems to serve a special purpose. The killing of the butterfly can be read as the act of killing a queer possibility between the two men. Elizabeth's fear of the butterfly suggests the horror of heteronormative society at the sight of a queer act. Kerren argues that Sedgwick's continuum makes it "possible to think of men as having homoerotic desires while still being heterosexual" (39). Therefore, Victor's relationship with Clerval and later with his Creature (as the Creature is an extension of Clerval) can be considered homoerotic and thus queer. According to Halberstam, Victor's homoeroticism becomes evident through his "voluntary exclusion from friends and family in pursuit of the secret of creating life" (qtd. in Kerren 41). Building on Sedgwick's theory, which posits that homosexuality was the most significant secret in the nineteenth century, Kerren interprets Victor's rejection of his creature as a rejection of his homosexuality. In other words, Kerren contends that "Victor's homosexual desires turn into homophobia" (41).

Victor's visit to a church and his confession seems to be crucial to understand Victor's trouble in dealing with his guilt, the guilt of being a posthuman, the guilt of giving male birth, and more specifically, the guilt of being queer. Soon after Victor notices the signs of decay in the creature's organs, he visits the church to absolve himself of his sins. It should be noted that Christianity always considered homosexuality a sin. Victor's creature worked as his reflection for quite some time, so the imperfection in the creature's body might have also made Victor aware of his imperfections. Victor's forsaking of his creature can be interpreted as the forsaking of his queerness. The sense of guilt, the constricting result of the Superego, ultimately found a way to repress Victor's Ego and Id, particularly his homosexuality. However, as Freud has argued, the repressed does not always stay repressed—Victor's creature returns, and with him, the horror of Victor's homosexuality. In Victor's creature, Victor saw his failure, his imperfections, and his impurity. Critics like Eric Daffron and Mair Rigby suggest that the monster results from Victor's inability to accept the "ugly" side of his creation and, in effect, the "ugly" side of himself. The creature becomes an abject figure, a "terror-inspiring receptacle for social fears and deep

personal revulsions" (Jones and Harris 520). The monster is a part of Victor and also not a part of Victor. The monster is a threat to Victor's façade of heterosexuality. Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection is relevant here. She suggests that abjection occurs at the margins of a culture where established meanings become destabilized. These marginal spaces, according to Kristeva, can "disturb identity, system, order". The recurring presence of the creature in Victor's life serves to disrupt the meanings and norms constructed by a heteronormative society. Understanding the concept of abjection is crucial in grasping the horror associated with the creature and the broader horror linked to queerness in the narrative.

'Abjection' comes from the Latin 'Abicere', which means to 'throw away' or 'to cast off, away, or out'. Rina Arya notes in her book *Abjection and Representation*,

> The terms 'abject' and 'abjection' can be used in different but related senses to refer to an operation (to make abject) and a condition (abjection). In the first sense, abjection refers to an impulse or operation to reject that which disturbs or threatens the stability of the self and is unassimilable…secondly, it refers to the 'wretched condition' of being in this state, when one has experienced the abject or has been rendered abject. (Arya 3)

The monster threatens the stability of Victor's self. In the monster, Victor identifies his own self, which he renders abject. The abject does not fit neatly into the categories of subject or object but embodies qualities of both. It exists in an intermediate state, where it cannot be completely separated from the subject (as an object would be) and lingers in an object-like manner without becoming an object. Victor's neatly formed boundaries are under threat because of his creation, which he cannot get rid of as an object, as an 'other'. The sight of the monster at Victor's wedding thus horrifies Victor as his 'heterosexual' structure, as symbolised by his marriage with Elizabeth, is under threat. Isherwood and Bachardy twist Shelley's narrative and refuse to make another vengeful Frankenstein monster for the world. In the teleplay, Dr. Polidori takes the monster to Victor's wedding. However, the monster is not allowed entrance to the wedding venue. The guards' reaction, "get this monstrosity out of here" (1:52:22 — 23), captures the sentiment of heteronormative society at the sight of queer 'others'. The creature is dubbed

'monstrous' because of the deformity of his flesh and skin. However, after the wedding party, as Polidori shocks Victor, taking him to the carriage where the creature is waiting, the creature greets Victor by pulling the mask off his face. The mask seems to be quite a literal symbol here, which represents the mask Victor has put on to hide from the eyes of patriarchy. Isherwood and Bachardy imagine telling the 'true' story of Frankenstein by unmasking Victor's monster, Victor's "other self", the abject. Arya, drawing on Kristeva, notes:

> The abject hovers at the boundary of what is assimilable, thinkable but is itself unassimilable, which means that we have to contemplate its otherness in its proximity to us but without it being able to be incorporated. It is the 'other' that comes from within…that we have to reject and expel in order to protect our boundaries. We are unable to rid ourselves of it completely and it continues to haunt our being. (Arya 4)

Victor tries to reject and expel the monster to "protect" his boundary, but the monster has returned to haunt his being. The inability to get rid of the monster and the awareness that it is a part of him (his creation) horrifies Victor. Abject things are unable to be ingested or incorporated into the Symbolic; they always remain a threat. The monster, as abject, defines Victor's identity. The monster embodies elements that are at the heart of Victor's being. Following Arya's argument, "Fear of the other is central to abjection" it can be suggested that Victor's fear emerges from his "deep-rooted" fear of the monster-in-the-self, his queer self that he wants to expel. However, the last scene of *Frankenstein: The True Story*, the "reunion" of Victor and the monster, as they walk towards each other with wide arms as if to embrace each other, suggests that Victor finally accepts his Creature before his final moment of death. This ending implies that Victor can only be truly free in death; only before death could Victor look at the heart of his 'self', and by embracing his creation, Victor could "feel alive". Various moments in the teleplay indicate that even though Victor is repulsed by his creation, Victor is unwilling to take away his life. Victor runs after his Creature to prevent him from jumping off a cliff, and when Polidori hypnotises the creature, inducing a deep sleep, Victor wakes him up and saves him just before Polidori's servants attempt to kill him by throwing him into a large tub of deadly chemical potion. Victor's unwillingness to kill his creation and his saving the monster from death suggests his

unwillingness to destroy his queer self, the self that he does not want to acknowledge.

Queer and transgender theorists have appropriated Kristeva's theorisation of abjection to understand how queer and trans* individuals are rendered abject and thrown to the margins. Victor's cause of horror at the sight of the monster can be read as the horror of patriarchal society at the sight of queer and trans* individuals. Meredith L. Ruff notes, "The lack of a complete symbol causes horror. In order to combat fear, subjects invest in meaning-making" (Ruff 11). Patriarchy embodies the Symbolic order, the language, and the meaning-making process. Patriarchy, in order to render queerness abject, keeps it away from the Symbolic. The self's inability to understand the abject causes horror in the being. Another crucial aspect of Victor's creature is that it does not have a name, implying that it was denied entry into the Symbolic. Victor's creature is impure, and impurity upsets order (the Symbolic). "Impurity as something that upsets order, is a cause of abjection" (Ruff 12). The monster is a collection of different bodies and entities, an assimilation that is 'unassimilable'. Ruff writes,

> Impurity…is often accompanied by disgust which typically relates to the mixing of separate entities…undoing borders culminates in intermingling of different elements now impure. The resulting instability, the fact that the elements can no longer be separated out to make sense as singular pieces, is an aspect of abjection. (Ruff 12)

When Polidori asks the monster his name, the monster's reply, "My name is Legion, for we are many" bears the Christian undertone that dubs the queer body as 'evil' and 'impure' (*Frankenstein* 1:49:41-1:49:45). The monster thus becomes a symbol for many (trans individuals, queer, disabled, black, the marginalised others). The "monster" has to be otherwise, marginalised, and 'cast away' so that the boundary of the Law and Order can be marked. The monster, the abjection, cannot be found inside or outside that order; it belongs to a liminal space and destabilises the Law.

In his book *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Lee Edelman posits the social abject, the queer as an isolated figure, what he terms 'the sinthomosexual'. For Lacan, 'symptoms' or 'sinthomes' are those fissures in the Symbolic where its very structure is revealed. These fissures can be likened to dark holes within cultural coherence;

peering into them reveals the entire rationale behind that culture. Edelman's sinthomosexual serves as a vehicle for exposing everything that culture seeks to conceal. In this sense, the sinthomosexual acts as the very mask that unravels culture's foundations. The fissures on the creature's body thus may be considered Lacanian 'sinthomes', which revealed the true nature of his skin to Victor. For these fissures, the creature was dubbed 'monstrous', and consequently, a 'monster'. Like the queer, the monster can be regarded as Edelman's sinthomosexual, the entity the culture wants to expel. The monster resists any possibility of cultural articulation. The monster, the sinthomosexual, is driven by the death drive, which threatens the Symbolic order. Queer is thus a threat to patriarchal society. And the monster is, therefore, a manifestation of what society has created and thrown away. The monster is thus unapologetically a symbol for queer, trans* individuals who have been oppressed systemically by the society. This paper, therefore, is an attempt to show how essentialist concepts such as heterosexuality and humanism are full of inherent contradictions and ambiguities. Queering the teleplay, therefore, results in the unmasking of the very structure of society with its 'ugly', impure sites. The posthuman aspect of the teleplay is revealed in the deconstruction of the category of the human. Isherwood and Bachardy point out how the 'nonhuman' is dubbed 'monstrous' because of its physical differences from the ideal human. This teleplay is a comment on the dehumanisation aspects of humanist ideologies, which marginalises any individual who deviates from the norm. However, the teleplay ends on a hopeful note with Victor and the monster walking towards each other with arms wide open, which might be a symbolic representation of a life where humans finally accept their nonhuman and queer selves and lives in harmony with each other.

Notes

1. "Entering into the Unknown" is a quote from *Frankenstein: The True Story* (1973), directed by Jack Smight, Screenplay by Don Bachardy and Christopher Isherwood. 49:26-49:28.

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2

Using ChatGPT in Teaching/Learning Language Skills

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Abstract

ChatGPT, a conversational AI model developed by OpenAI, is a large language model like Gemini, Bing, BERT, and others. It utilizes deep learning techniques to generate human-like responses in natural language conversations (Alikaniotis & Prokopidis, 2021). This paper looks into various aspects of ChatGPT, such as its functionality, its applications in ELT, its advantages, and its limitations. While it excels at generating responses similar to humans across a wide spectrum of inputs, it finds it difficult to deal with the complexity of human language. Of course, when used with some caution, ChatGPT can significantly benefit learners and teachers in teaching and learning language skills.

Keywords: ChatGPT, language model, ELT, learning, teaching, generate, educators

Introduction

ChatGPT refers to a state-of-the-art language model that employs a generative neural network architecture to engage in interactive dialogues, providing realistic and contextually relevant responses (Banerjee, 2022). This is perhaps the main reason why ChatGPT is making waves everywhere including online spaces. People consider this to be the most advanced revolutionary language model that is capable of answering any question from any domain. And what's more: it is capable of carrying out an infinite number of tasks notwithstanding their complexities. In effect, it has been thought to be one of the most disruptive agents, especially in the field of language teaching/learning.

How ChatGPT Works

Built using an advanced language processing AI model with a staggering 175 billion parameters, it is the largest and most complex natural language system (Ashraf & Imam, 2023). It is an advanced natural language processing model, characterized by its ability to understand and generate human-like text in conversational contexts, making it suitable for interactive language learning experiences (Chen & Hsu, 2022). Generative AI is a sort of machine learning capable of generating outputs in several different forms, such as texts, images, or sounds based on the content the tools have been trained on. It works by using generative adversarial networks (GANs), which again is based on a technique called Reinforcement learning from human feedback. It combines machine learning with human input to provide a realistic outcome. Some of the commonly used generative AI are ChatGPT, and Gemini mostly for text; MidJourney and LeonardoAI for images; Murf and ResembleAI for audio; and Runway and InvideoAI for video.

Strengths of ChatGPT

ChatGPT is capable of generating human-like or nearly human-like responses to an incredible range of text inputs. It allows learners to practice using the language in a conversational setting and receive feedback from a pre-trained language model. By generating natural language responses, it exposes learners to authentic language use, helping them develop their understanding of idiomatic expressions and colloquial language (Liu & Wang, 2022). It can predict the emotions of the user such as happiness, sadness, excitement, and frustration based on the text fed into the system. However, it struggles to predict the mood of the user, especially when emotions are expressed using figurative language or in an implicit manner. One thing, of course, is true: the use and growth of AI and natural language processing in recent times have brought about huge disruptions to the methods we employ in teaching and learning languages.

ChatGPT is available round the clock to provide support and guidance to users on any subject. It serves as an intelligent tutoring system that leverages AI technology to provide personalized language instruction and support to learners, simulating

conversations with human-like fluency and responsiveness (Kim & Kim, 2021). Access to resources is infinite, and it is always there to help one out with anything: an intervention with a difficult assignment or project, a quick response to a question, or a suggestion to a query. This, in a way, keeps the learner motivated and engaged. Of course, the input has to be clear enough for the machine to give the correct and accurate output.

This tool is capable of analyzing the search history and offers personalized recommendations for the user's individual needs. In other words, one can get targeted and precise pieces of advice on how to improve one's performance in specific subjects. The interactive nature of ChatGPT can enhance learner engagement and motivation, fostering a positive learning experience (Creswell & King, 2023). The AI-based language model can help its user manage time well which, in turn, can develop better study skills including research and lesson planning. It can also provide the user with tips and strategies for managing workload thereby helping them to develop study habits. If, for example, a researcher needs some literature for review on a particular topic, this tool can offer a large corpus of data in a matter of moments.

Educators, in general, are always on the lookout for ways to improve teaching practice or professional development. In such a context, this new-age tool can be a great resource. One can ask it questions ranging from teaching strategies to classroom management techniques to time management and it always helps one to explore new ideas and best practices in education. Studies have shown that tools like ChatGPT can have a visible impact on learning outcomes. It does so by providing tailored feedback and content based on their proficiency level and learning goals (Chen & Hsu, 2022). It also offers personalized support and guidance to learners and helps improve their academic performance. Moreover, it helps in bridging the gap between learners and educators.

Limitations of ChatGPT

Since the beta release of ChatGPT in November 2022, there have been considerable debates about its impact on the field of education. While many commentators recognize its potential as a tool to support education and potential benefits as a disruptor of the status quo

(Kohnke, et al, 2023), others highlight its potential drawbacks and risks. ChatGPT may struggle with understanding context-specific nuances and may generate inappropriate or irrelevant responses (Liu & Hu, 2022). Since it is trained to generate text or words based on input, the responses it offers may seem shallow and sometimes may even lack true insight. It's after all a machine, and not a human (www.techtaget.com)! One of the biggest drawbacks of the language model is that it does not know data and events post-2021. It is, therefore, possible that the chatbot can provide an incorrect response to a specific query. As Bowman (2022) notes, "There are still many cases where you ask [ChatGPT] a question, and it'll give you a very impressive-sounding answer that's just dead wrong." Many a time, the output given by the AI-based model can lack human touch. ChatGPT may inadvertently reflect biases present in the training data, potentially perpetuating stereotypes or cultural biases (Wang & Yang, 2023). The primary reason for this could be because the tool predicts the next word, it may overuse some words, e.g. *the*, etc. which compel the ChatGPT users to revisit and make amends to the content so that it flows more naturally, similar to human writing.

This tool does a good summarizing but fails to cite sources. Similarly, it does not provide a good analysis or insight into any data or statistics. It may provide several statistics but may not provide real commentary on what these statistics mean or how they relate to the topic. ChatGPT responses may sometimes lack accuracy or produce erroneous information, which can potentially mislead learners (Kim & Kim, 2021). One more striking feature is that the AI bot cannot understand sarcasm and irony and also fails to comprehend figures of speech, idioms, proverbs, etc. It is, therefore, possible that the answer the chatbot gives in response to a particular question, may be illogical or erroneous or even irrelevant.

ChatGPT as a tool also fails to consider a question or text input in its entirety; sometimes it may even focus on the aspect of a question which may not be sought by the user. For instance, when prodded a question like, "Does a horse make a good pet based on its size?" followed by another, "What about a cat?", the language model may focus on the size of the animal rather than viewing it comprehensively and giving information about having the animal as a pet. The basic issue is that it is not divergent and so finds it difficult

to reposition its response to cover a series of questions in a single answer. ChatGPT has the potential to put learners' thinking abilities at risk if relied on too much. Since it can offer infinite text responses to prompts, learners don't feel the need to think independently or formulate ideas creatively which results in weakening the learners' creative and critical thinking skills. They may also lack the ability to critically evaluate the information which may pose threats in an educational setting. It is a fact that the internet has made plagiarism a serious problem in learning environments. Since the AI tool derives answers from several sources, it may sometimes contain text that is somebody else's thus getting into the risk of copyright infringement. In addition, it is also unethical. Ethical concerns related to data privacy, security, and responsible use of AI in language teaching and learning should be carefully addressed when implementing ChatGPT (Liu & Hu, 2022). ChatGPT is capable of generating enormous data. However, the impacts associated with misusing or mishandling this technology may warrant a series of serious consequences for society as a whole. Some of the cases where misuse is possible are the text used to create fake news, propaganda, or impersonate an institution or organization.

Using ChatGPT Optimally in ELT

Using the AI tool with discretion is the best solution. But then how do we do it? Well, the input text can be changed so that the model gets used to repeated attempts at the same query. For example, the model may turn down the request saying that it does not have the proper answer to the question asked, but it might suggest a better answer when the same question is rephrased. The good news is that language teachers have become adept at using technology. On the one hand, language teachers have gained digital competence owing mainly to the need to engage in virtual teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, on the other, they need more skills to utilize ChatGPT more effectively.

It can be used as a virtual assistant for an English language learner. One can use this tool to generate content such as summaries, reviews, essays, reports, assignments etc. A learner can get the desired content in a matter of seconds by typing a keyword or a string of words. The AI-based model can be used as a virtual tutor

which provides English language learners all the assistance including instruction on a one-on-one basis as well as responding to their queries in real time. Since the chatbot is truly responsive and is solely dedicated to a user as a personalized text-prompt experience, it responds to everything the learner asks in the form of text inputs on a real-time basis. One more way the machine can be employed is to help the learners pick up a new language. For example, the tool can give the specific meanings of new words, construct sentences, suggest exercises, or even engage in conversation with learners, especially in translations. Besides, it can also check their assignments for grammar, spelling, vocabulary, coherence etc.

Using ChatGPT to Teach Language Skills

ChatGPT can be a valuable aid in teaching language skills such as LSRW, Vocabulary and Grammar primarily because of its ability to simulate human-like conversation and generate natural language responses. We discuss below in great detail how ChatGPT helps teach language skills:

With respect to teaching listening comprehension, ChatGPT can engage learners in interactive dialogues, thereby providing them with opportunities to practice listening comprehension in a realistic conversational context. In effect, learners can listen to ChatGPT's responses and infer meaning from the spoken language, improving their ability to make out the nuances of spoken language such as accent, rhythm and intonation. ChatGPT serves as an assistant or a conversational partner, enabling the learner to practice speaking skills by responding to prompts and questions generated by the model. Learners can not only articulate their thoughts and ideas aloud, but also receive instant feedback from ChatGPT on their pronunciation, grammar, and fluency. This real-time interaction facilitates speaking practice in a supportive and non-judgmental environment.

Thirdly, writing skills, which are critical language skills, can also be aided by ChatGPT'. The text-generation capabilities allow learners to practice writing in various contexts, which can range from informal chats to formal compositions. Learners can engage in written exchanges with ChatGPT, composing sentences and paragraphs to express their ideas and thoughts. Moreover, ChatGPT

can provide feedback on writing mechanics, such as grammar, punctuation, and vocabulary usage, making learners work on their writing skills. Vocabulary acquisition is another language skill critical to language learning. ChatGPT's vast knowledge base enables it to provide rich and diverse language input, exposing learners to a wide range of vocabulary words and expressions. Learners can interact with ChatGPT to learn new words, receive definitions, and explore word usage in context. It is not surprising that ChatGPT can generate contextualized examples to illustrate word meanings and help learners understand how to use vocabulary words appropriately. ChatGPT can assist learners in understanding and practising rules pertaining to grammar and syntax through examples and explanations in context. Learners can ask ChatGPT specific grammar points or sentence structures, and the tool provides instant feedback and corrections on their grammar usage. ChatGPT can generate grammatically correct sentences to model proper language usage and help learners identify and correct errors in their writing or speech.

Studies on the Application of ChatGPT in Teaching/Learning Language Skills

It is a fact that not much extensive body of empirical research focusing particularly on the use of ChatGPT in teaching language skills is available, but some studies that explore the broader application of AI models including ChatGPT in language learning and education, in general, have been conducted. It is important to take a look at these limited studies for they provide insights into the potential benefits and challenges of incorporating ChatGPT into language instruction some of which are given below:

One such study by Zoo, B., Liviero, S., Hao, M., Wei, C. (2020) "Artificial Intelligence Technology for EAP Speaking Skills: Student Perceptions of Opportunities and Challenges", for example, explores university students' attitudes about the potential of AI-assisted mobile applications to help the development of speaking skills in English for Academic Purposes courses in higher education. The analysis of the data shows that students prefer AI tools to improve their speaking skills mainly because of the limited teacher feedback. It was also found that students were generally satisfied practising their English using the AI tools. Moreover, the findings point to

certain limitations of the current AI apps, such as a lack of applicable feedback and few model examples. The study also revealed that students suggested the need for more AI resources, especially apps that accommodate a variety of English accents.

Similarly, another study "Exploring-the-Promise-A-Comprehensive-Review-of-Artificial-Intelligence-Integration-in-Language-Education-in-the-Philippine-Context" by Dalan, John Den Saul (2024) offers a detailed analysis of the growing use of AI tools in language education, in the context of the Philippines. The study scrutinizes significant AI tools including ChatGPT and explains their functionalities and efficacy in enhancing language learning outcomes. It further assesses the potential advantages and challenges inherent in the integration of these AI tools, taking into account the linguistic diversity, socio-cultural nuances, and ethical considerations intrinsic to the Philippine educational system. It also contributes to a nuanced understanding of how AI-driven language education interventions can be customized to cater to the needs unique to a particular geography.

Yet another study by Heilman, M., Collins-Thompson, K., Callan, J., Eskenazi, M. (Classroom success of an intelligent tutoring system for lexical practice and reading comprehension) presents an intelligent tutoring system called Remote Education and Assessment Platform (REAP) that provides lexical practice specifically for readers to enhance their reading comprehension. While discussing how these challenges were met, the study presents evidence that REAP has gained acceptance into the classroom at the English Language Institute at the University of Pittsburgh. An interesting study by Z. Yanhua (The Application of Artificial Intelligence in Foreign Language Teaching) analyzes the deep integration of AI and foreign language teaching. It further examines the application of AI in foreign language teaching and predicts its development in the future.

The Way Forward with ChatGPT

The past few months have been a witness to some uproar on what ChatGPT is capable of doing, especially in ELT. It has been a nightmare for educators because it has made them imagine that the language model could take away their jobs. However, the following points dispel the misgivings by proving that the tool may contribute

to making the educator's work even more relevant by embracing it. First, since ChatGPT can only correct language and write fairly good texts, a humane approach is necessary to assess the learners' pieces of writing, e.g. essays, reports, e-mails etc. Secondly, language assessment needs to be revisited in light of what students need to do with language in the real world. Seeing things from students' perspectives can help them gain autonomy in their language. Thirdly and more importantly, it would do a world of good to learners if more constructive feedback were offered to learners. The language teachers, and not the machine should assess content which reflects their knowledge of the language besides helping them become independent critical thinkers.

As has been stated elsewhere, since the chatbot can help learners in their research by giving them the required content, they do not pay heed to the lecture in the class. We should, therefore, invite them to explore the world through content or language, to build their own identity through language, and to critically reflect on what the world brings us, so that they may be more active and participate as agents of their growth. We can, for example, ask them to explore what the tool can do for students or how they can use it to optimise their learning and their communication skills. Let's admit that the tool can also help us offer feedback on students' work, wherever required. It may grade language and respond to changes we demand in the text (complexity of language, content or specific lexis, structures, for instance), but it cannot form an opinion or make decisions. So, we as language teachers should be creative and use the tool to our advantage.

One of the serious concerns with ChatGPT is that at times, it makes the learners feel the redundancy of language teachers (for it can effectively translate what learners want to say and write). But remember that language is more than transposing a sentence, a phrase, or a text into a different language; it involves several other aspects such as communication, subtleties, feelings, customs, values, beliefs, and behaviours. Remember also that since language is beyond transactional, and the bot will not be able to use cognition, cultural knowledge and reason to make more complex decisions, human intervention is a necessity. So, a way forward with learners who consider learning a language irrelevant would be to emphasize what

they can access and do by learning a different language and to what extent it can impact their disposition. Moreover, it is the need of the hour to focus more on developing and strengthening digital competence among language learners. Academic institutions are traditionally known to be helping learners acquire some basic proficiency in technology use, for example, e-platforms such as Padlet, Google Docs etc. besides other utilities like e-portfolios and video production tools.

However, educators and researchers have, as an answer to fast digital progress, put a lot of stress on the necessity for advanced digital knowledge among learners. The release of this tool makes this even more urgent. A learner, to be able to apply this newly founded bot effectively, must appreciate the constraints, and understand the ways to use it with safety and integrity, besides recognizing their responsibilities as digital citizens. We know that technology is available to make our lives better and easier; we should thus focus on what it can bring to the classroom. By embracing the opportunities, we may become better equipped to help our students access the world through language. We all know changing education also means changing our society's mindset on what we 'should be doing'. However, as teachers, we can play the role of catalysts for advancement and at the same time make way for a better world where teaching and learning exercises take precedence over everything else.

Conclusion

We live in a world surrounded by enormous data and equally massive content in the form of digital resources but the availability of a versatile and now almost indispensable language model (ChatGPT) with infinite possibilities to promote engaging and adaptive language learning has made our job as language teachers easy. We can, in effect, generate infinite resources on any branch of knowledge. It is going to bring about a huge disruption in the learning/teaching domain, especially the English language. The ELT that we have been familiar with all these decades is never going to be the same because the ChatGPT can help learners learn language skills effectively. So we should leverage this newly minted tool and make our learning/teaching interesting. We should support language teachers

to delve deep into the pedagogical possibilities of this AI tool and use it to scaffold education in general thereby aiding best practices of language acquisition. This, however, should be taken with caution: ChatGPT as a tool should be used to aid the traditional language teaching methods; it cannot replace the traditional way of language teaching and learning.

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3

"God Bless the Grass": The Environmental Songs of Malvina Reynolds

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Abstract

The American folk singer and activist Malvina Reynolds (1900-1978) was truly instrumental in spreading awareness of environmental and ecological issues through her songs. Reynolds only began composing in her forties and performing in her fifties, but soon made a name for herself, starting in the early 1960s, with her topical protest songs touching on a range of issues, most notably the environment. Her compositions have been covered and popularized by folk and pop giants such as Pete Seeger, Joan Baez, Harry Belafonte and many others. This paper will focus on her most well-known ecological songs: God Bless the Grass, What Have They Done to the Rain, Little Boxes, etc. With her white hair and granny glasses, Reynolds did not at all fit the image of the beatnik folk singer of the 1950s or the hippie movement which followed. She did, however, pioneer the embracing of environmental protection as an important theme in folk music and popular culture in general.

Keywords: Folk music, environmental issues, ecology, protest singer, activism

Malvina Reynolds (1900-1978) was a victim of persecution and prejudice from a young age which, along her family's history of activism, undoubtedly formed her character as a crusader for social justice and environmental protection. She was banned from receiving her high school diploma because of her family's anti-war sentiments during World War One. Her family was attacked by the Klu Klux Klan because of their radical leftist politics and being Jewish. Unable to find teaching work, she was forced to take manual labour jobs for a number of years despite holding a doctorate from UC Berkeley. She lived most of her adult life in Northern California in the Bay Area near San Francisco, and many of her songs make reference to this

geographical locale. It was only in her forties that she began to write songs, influenced by Pete Seeger, among others. Although his musical disciple of sorts, Pete Seeger quickly recognized the genius of the generation-older Reynolds and frequently covered her songs and praised her gift for songwriting. He summarizes his admiration for her as follows in a documentary on her life and work Love It Like a Fool:

> Malvina was one of the first songwriters who really started pulling things together. She showed that whether your concern is for the ecology of the world or problems of high prices or problems of sexism or racism, that they're all of different size and one big problem and that we're either going to solve or it's going to solve us. (Wengraf)

Reynolds was the first to acknowledge the limitations of her own voice and guitar playing, but nevertheless persevered with her chosen vocation and mission. Many of her songs display affinities with what we would now refer to as spoken word. D. Kelsen writing, about her connection with Long Beach California, discusses, among other things, how she triumphed as an artist despite her lack of classic musical gifts and skills.

> By her own admission, Reynolds never had a great singing voice. ... But despite that limitation and her late start, Reynolds found a following after leaving Long Beach by expressing complex truths with poetic simplicity. In 1960, at age 59, she recorded her first album with Folkways Records, Another County Heard From, which included 'Sing Along'" (Kelsen).

The above-mentioned song "Sing Along" from her first record does not deal with ecological themes, but does provide insight into Reynolds' own journey as an artist and a singer. The first stanza describes her own nervous, tentative beginnings as a songwriter and performer.

> I get butterflies in my stomach whenever I start to sing,
> And when I'm at a microphone I shake like anything,
> But if you'll sing along with me I'll holler right out loud,
> 'Cause I'm awf'ly nervous lonesome, but I'm swell when I'm a crowd
>
> (Reynolds, 1964).

In line with the performance philosophy of her mentor and friend, Pete Seeger, she emphasizes the communal experience and

how singing as a group can provide not only support and courage, but also a feeling of community. The chorus reinforces this message.

> Sing along, Sing along,
> And just sing 'la la la la la' if you don't know the song,
> You'll quickly learn the music, you'll find yourself a word,
> 'Cause when we sing together we'll be heard (Reynolds, 1964).

The remainder of the song discusses political activism and the notion that there is strength in numbers. This community of like-minded performers and audience members provided Reynolds with a much needed support system and encouraged her to continue in her musical career.

Her second album, Malvina Reynolds Speaks the Truth, from 1967, contains a number of her most popular and prescient ecological songs. The following song, "God Bless the Grass" has rightfully become an unofficial anthem for the environmental/ecology movement. It was covered most famously by Pete Seeger.

> God bless the grass that grows thru the crack.
> They roll the concrete over it to try and keep it back.
> The concrete gets tired of what it has to do,
> It breaks and it buckles and the grass grows thru,
> And God bless the grass.
>
> God bless the truth that fights toward the sun,
> They roll the lies over it and think that it is done.
> It moves through the ground and reaches for the air,
> And after a while it is growing everywhere,
> And God bless the grass (Reynolds, 1967).

Reynolds' references to God are certainly not of the traditional Christian bent or of the Jewish persuasion. She was brought up an atheist and later in life occasionally attended and performed her songs at the local Unitarian church in her home town of Berkeley.

> God bless the grass that grows through cement.
> It's green and it's tender and it's easily bent.
> But after a while it lifts up its head,
> For the grass is living and the stone is dead,
> And God bless the grass.
>
> God bless the grass that's gentle and low,
> Its roots they are deep and its will is to grow.

And God bless the truth, the friend of the poor,
And the wild grass growing at the poor man's door,
And God bless the grass (Reynolds, 1967).

The divine being made reference to in the song has much more affinity with Mother Nature or pantheist beliefs than traditional, organized religion. I would assume, however, that Reynolds would have little time or patience with metaphysical musings and would prefer to focus on practical activism. This 'grounded' religious perspective is expressed clearly in her song "This World" included on her record Malvina from 1972, but written years earlier.

I'd rather go to the corner store
Than sing hosannah on that golden shore,
I'd rather live on Parker Street
Than fly around where the angels meet (Reynolds, 1964).

The Parker Street mentioned in the song was the street she lived on for most of her adult life in Berkeley.

Even before widespread discussion of acid rain in the 1970s and nuclear fallout, Reynolds drew attention, in the song "What Have They Done to the Rain", to the poisoning of that most essential of natural phenomenon.

Just a little rain falling all around,
The grass lifts its head to the heavenly sound,
Just a little rain, just a little rain,
What have they done to the rain?

Just a little boy standing in the rain,
The gentle rain that falls for years.
And the grass is gone,
The boy disappears,
And rain keeps falling like helpless tears,
And what have they done to the rain? (Reynolds, 1964).

Reynolds did not merely write this song to be recorded and occasionally performed, but made use of it as a marching song during protests against nuclear testing organized by Women for Peace and Women Strike for Peace (WSP). The song has been covered by a number of artists including Joan Baez, who referred to it eloquently as "the gentlest protest song I know. It doesn't protest gently, but it sounds gentle (quoted in Smolko, 58).

Just a little breeze out of the sky,
The leaves pat their hands as the breeze blows by,
Just a little breeze with some smoke in its eye,
What have they done to the rain?

Just a little boy standing in the rain,
The gentle rain that falls for years.
And the grass is gone,
The boy disappears,
And rain keeps falling like helpless tears,
And what have they done to the rain? (Reynolds, 1964).

Tim and Joanna Smolko point out the distinct approach of the song in their volume Atomic Tunes: "The song addresses the long-term effects of fallout from continuous bomb tests … rather than a world-ending nuclear war, the subject of practically all other antibomb songs" (Smolko, 59).

The last song deserving of mention from the 1967 album is Little Boxes, which was inspired by 'cookie cutter' housing development in Daly City, a suburb of San Francisco. Covered once again by Seeger, among others, the song became an anthem of the counter-culture movement in the 1960s with its critique of the rat race, consumerism and conformity. It reached the public ear once again when it was used as the theme song of the recent hit series Weeds about a single mother selling marijuana to provide for her family.

Little boxes on the hillside,
Little boxes made of ticky tacky,
Little boxes on the hillside,
Little boxes all the same.
There's a green one and a pink one
And a blue one and a yellow one,
And they're all made out of ticky tacky
And they all look just the same…. (Reynolds, 1964).

Reynolds apparently coined the term 'ticky tacky' to refer to cheap, faceless building material used both on the exterior and interior of mass-produced homes. The most worrisome commentary, however, is concerned with how the people living in these soulless homes are equally void of personality.

And they all play on the golf course
And drink their martinis dry,
And they all have pretty children

And the children go to school,
And the children go to summer camp
And then to the university,
Where they are put in boxes
And they come out all the same. (Reynolds, 1964).

Josh Rutner points out the achievement of the song as follows: "It's a great song with a punch in its message that architectural mundanity and social mundanity go hand in hand: It's not just the little houses that are made of ticky-tacky, but also the people who went to universities and came out all the same" (Rutner). It is very apparent why this song struck a chord with the hippy, counter-culture, generation of the 1960s.

The song, "From Way Up Here", from her fourth record entitled merely Malvina Reynolds, released in 1971, seems to be viewing the world from space, which is quite frequently an occasion for a celebration of scientific hubris and nationalism.

From way up here, the earth looks very small
It's just a little ball of rock and sea and sand
No bigger than my hand.
From way up here, the earth looks very small,
They shouldn't fight at all down there,
Upon that little sphere…. (Reynolds, 1964).

Here, in contrast, we have a gentle reprimand concerning the insanity and inanity of humanity, which the viewing from space provides a new perspective on. Distance allows humanity to gain objectivity.

From way up here, the earth looks very small,
It's just a little ball,
So small, so beautiful and clear.
Their time is short, a life is just a day,
Must be a better way
To use the time that runs
Among the distant suns. (Reynolds, 1964).

"The Little Mouse" from the record Mama Lion from 1980, based on a true story of an accident in Buenos Aires involving the short-circuiting of computers caused by a mouse, provides a witty commentary on the fragility of technology.

> Hooray for the little mouse
> That mucked up the clearing house,
> And threw the Stock Exchange in a spin
> And made the bankers cry.
>
> So much for the electronic brains,
> That run the world of banks and aeroplanes,
> And if one little mouse can set them all awry,
> Why not you and I? (Reynolds, 1984).

This seemingly innocuous song points out the fragility of our military-industrial complex and how it can be so easily destroyed or temporarily sabotaged; one need only think back to the Covid epidemic. It is also a call for activism and a reminder that even the smallest of us can make a difference.

Reynolds spent most of her adult life in the Bay area, near San Francisco, but in contrast to most cultural treatments of this landscape, Reynolds draws attention to the disastrous ecological situation involving garbage, sewage, pollution, etc. The song "Seventy Miles" was not included on her recordings, but was part of her songbook The Muse of Parker Street from 1967.

> Seventy miles of wind and spray,
> Seventy miles of water,
> Seventy miles of open bay,
> It's a garbage dump.
>
> What's that stinky creek out there,
> Down behind the slum's back stair,
> Sludgy puddle, sad and gray?
> Why man, that's San Francisco Bay! (Reynolds, 1967).

Her words of frustration and warning have, by and large, mostly been sadly ignored.

Many more of her songs touch on ecological and environmental issues, but these should provide a representative sample of her concerns and songwriting approaches to the theme. In contrast to her image as an innocuous, little old lady, Reynolds could stand up for herself and did so throughout her life. She put it as follows:

> I don't mind crossing swords with people when I disagree with them, and I'm not your nice old grandma. However, I always make it clear that the reason I have this sharp cutting edge is because I do care for

people. I care about children, and I think the world is ripping them off, taking away their natural environment and much more than that—the natural progression of their tradition—and leaving them stripped, uneasy, uncomfortable, and in deep trouble, and it's because of that that I'm so sharp. (Harvard Square Library)

Larry Polansky pays tribute to not only her musical peers, but also acknowledges the great influence she had on singer-songwriters, dealing with topic issues such as the environment, up until the present. There is one important quality, however, that places Malvina's work alongside that of Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, Holly Near, and many of the other giants of the genre. This is the willingness, and maybe even the need to take on any issue, no matter how large, and handle it with stride, wit, artistry, and natural grace. Like Guthrie, she reserved a special place for the most universal social problems, and treated them with an extraordinary poetic care (Polansky).

Despite her almost frumpy appearance and rather mundane voice and playing skills, Reynolds helped launch the environmental/ecological movement of the late twentieth century. One of the songs which struck a particular chord with the flower-power generation was "No Hole in my Head" which refers to "sex and revolution", among other things. Recorded in 1971, it was performed for enthusiastic live audiences of young people who could easily have been her grandchildren.

> I have lived since early childhood
> Figuring out what's going on, I,
> I know what hurts, I know what's easy,
> When to stand and when to run,
> And there's no hole in my head.
> Too bad. (Reynolds, 1967).

Malvina Reynolds songs are not, by any means, only limited to ecological themes, but those touching upon these environmental concerns undoubtedly rank among her finest accomplishments and continue to be covered and performed up until the present day.

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4

Best Kept Secret:
The Conspiracy of Silence in
Mahesh Dattani's *Thirty Days in September*

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Abstract

This article explores the nuanced dimensions of silence, examining its physical, psychological, and textual manifestations in Mahesh Dattani's play "Thirty Days in September," addressing the sensitive theme of child sexual abuse (CSA). It delves into the multifaceted roles of silence as a mechanism for psychological resistance, repression, suppression, and avoidance in the lives of CSA survivors, particularly portrayed through the characters of Shanta and Mala. The article also explores the symbolic presence of God as a silent refuge and the intentional use of authorial license to veil characters' voices, highlighting the complexities of familial dynamics, societal expectations, and the pervasive silence surrounding CSA, emphasizing the challenges faced by victims in articulating their experiences. Furthermore, it delves into the psychological impact of repression and suppression on CSA survivors, detailing the intricate interplay between memory recall, dissociation, and the difficulties survivors encounter in acknowledging and confronting their traumatic past. The narrative of the play is dissected to reveal instances of silence as a coping mechanism, as well as the role of shame, secrecy, and power dynamics within familial contexts. The portrayal of God as a silent presence becomes a symbolic sacred space for characters to express and confront suppressed aspects of their harrowing experiences.

Keywords: Child Sexual Abuse (CSA), Dilemma of Disclosure, Incest, Abuse

Introduction

The utilization of silence as a spatial construct serves numerous heuristic purposes within the context of human civilization. Traditionally defined as "a state of not speaking or writing or making a noise" ("Cambridge Dictionary") and associated with the

intentional suppression of thought by compelling individuals to remain quiet ("Merriam Webster"), silence is often perceived as culpable for fostering an absence of meaning. However, in practice, the absence of verbal expression frequently proves to be more efficacious. In Mahesh Dattani's play, *Thirty Days in September*, which addresses the sensitive topic of child sexual abuse (CSA), the rhetoric of silence plays a pivotal role in facilitating psychological resistance. It acts as a mechanism for repression and suppression in the lives of victims, illustrating its potential effectiveness. Moreover, the act of forcibly silencing an infant, child, or even their parent or caregiver parallels a form of dominance commonly employed by child sexual abusers. The concept of textual silence also emerges as a literary strategy employed by writers to represent the unrepresentable. By deliberately choosing to silence characters, authors make their unspoken words more vividly comprehensible and identifiable, thereby exploring the nuanced dimensions of trauma and the complexities of human experience. In essence, silence, both in reality and in literature, proves to be a multi-faceted phenomenon, influencing and reflecting the intricate aspects of human psychology and societal dynamics.

Psychological Silence as Repression, Suppression and Avoidance

The term "repression", with respect to CSA, can be defined as a total or partial removal of conscious traumatic memories from a child's awareness (Singer vii). Cases of CSA survivors repressing their memories are exceptionally common, particularly in the case of incest abuse. More than half of the women in a study (Loftus et. al 80) reported childhood sexual abuse memories, with varying recollections: 69% remembered the abuse throughout their lives, 12% recalled parts but not all, 19% forgot the abuse for a time but later regained the memory and those who forgot exhibited deteriorated memories with less clarity, fewer details, and diminished emotional intensity. Child sexual abuse survivors commonly repress memories, experiencing amnesia for parts of their childhood and enduring persistent poor memory and learning issues into adulthood, with the resurfaced memories often remaining unclear due to dissociation during the abuse (Ratican 33, 35). Past traumatic experiences often

remaining buried in the subconscious contributes to almost 50% of incest abuse victims completely forgetting the occurrences (Blume 81), and approximately 60% suppressing those distressing memories for several years (Bradshaw 43), highlighting the profound impact of repression on recollection and the challenges faced by survivors in acknowledging and confronting their traumatic past.

Silence as a vehicle runs deep, albeit implicitly, in Mahesh Dattani's *Thirty Days in September*, primarily as a mode of repression, suppression, and avoidance of sexual abuse memories. Numerous instances of Mala Khatri and Shanta Khatri using silence as a strategy to repress their incest abuse memories are seen throughout the text. A more alarming aspect of CSA unfolds here: the mother-daughter duo had experienced sexual abuse in the hands of the same man Vinay — identified as Shanta's brother and Mala's uncle. For traditional Indian family reasons or otherwise, Shanta tries her best throughout the play to make Mala forcibly silence these memories from ever resurfacing. Growing up, however, she begins to realise that the repressed memories of her past afflictions were negatively affecting her present life and relationships with others. Naturally, she then accuses Shanta of destroying her life by relentlessly silencing her: "Ma, I am talking about what I had told you five years ago, but you said it couldn't be true. But now I know that you want to believe it is not true" (Dattani 25). In this context, Susan Clancy distinguishes between suppression and repression, asserting that the former is a voluntary and conscious act on the victim's part, involving a deliberate effort to eradicate traumatic memories, constituting a coping strategy frequently adopted by individuals striving to manage the impact of incest abuse (155). Dattani portrays both the female protagonists, especially Shanta, as using psychological silence as one of the means to endure their common torment. She forcibly tries to forget her memories and fervently urges her daughter to do so. In the play's concluding sequence, Mala sternly excoriates Shanta for her arid silence even after divulging all the scarring details, to which the latter defeatedly replies, "Forget. Remember what I told you. Forget!" (Dattani 54). Intentional forgetting, employed as a suppression mechanism, contributes to the pervasive silence surrounding child sexual abuse (CSA), inadvertently enabling abusers and perpetuating a culture of

silence that hinders widespread awareness and societal activism against this reprehensible crime.

Repression and suppression intersperse in the text during what Clancy calls "inaccurate memory recall" (53) — when the present psychological status of the victim silences the true traumatic memories by misrepresenting them. As Vinay regularly molested Mala as a child, she used to cry, expressing her physical pain. Years later, these haunting memories were distorted within Shanta's psyche, who observed a few of those incidents firsthand. When Mala continuously reiterates that uncle Vinay and another cousin "made the advances" (Dattani 28), Shanta replies that she remembers something entirely different — that it was little Mala herself who wanted to become intimate, it was she who wanted her uncle's kisses and physical touches. Mala's vehement protests denying these false accusations get helplessly silenced as her mother continues:

> SHANTA. But Mala, I have seen it with my own eyes. You enjoyed it. You were an average child but you had my brother and your cousins dancing around you. That is what you wanted. Yes! How can I forget?
> ...
>
> Silence.[1]

This kind of cognitive "dissociation", encompassing the compartmentalization of experience, with sensory and emotional fragments stored as isolated elements in memory, is common to sex abuse victims as it acts as a defense channel to help victims silently escape the pain they experience (van der Kolk and Fisler 510). Observing her own daughter Mala undergo sexual assault, and having personally endured similar experiences during her childhood, Shanta's recollections of these molestations have been significantly fragmented, rendering them exceedingly challenging to be fully and accurately reconstructed.

Clancy asserts that articulating traumatic experiences could be imperative for psychological well-being as victims require the ability to verbalize and discuss what occurred, which may play a crucial role in overcoming the psychological distress they endure in the aftermath; paradoxically, victims often employ two prevalent coping mechanisms, namely attempting to avoid thinking about the abuse and endeavouring to forget about it, as alternatives to openly discussing their painful experiences (155). In the initial act of

Dattani's play, when the "Man" masquerading as a paper vendor enters the Khatri household and demands payment with his "pelvis thrust out in an imposing manner" (11), Shanta experiences visible discomfort, yet she refrains from voicing her unease and, instead, acquiesces by making the payment. This cognitive silence, manifested as a purposeful avoidance of discussions pertaining to traumatic memories, recurs in several instances within the play. When Mala discloses her experiences of abuse, Shanta intentionally sidesteps the topic, redirecting the conversation towards a fruitless discussion about Deepak Bhatia. Moreover, even in Mala's early childhood, when complaints were raised regarding her uncle, Shanta deliberately evaded these discussions by diverting attention through the act of feeding her daughter, utilizing this not only to silence Mala but also to suppress the resurfacing of her memories. It is seemingly perplexing that a mother would disregard her child's complaints, particularly those concerning a matter as significant as child sexual abuse. However, empirical evidence suggests that two factors contribute to the difficulty of forgetting memories: their negative emotional valence, causing distress to the individual recalling them, and the existence of environmental cues capable of triggering the memory (Clancy 153). Consequently, whenever Mala was subjected to sexual abuses by Vinay, Shanta's unconscious mind would invariably evoke her own past experiences with the same individual.

Silence involving Shame and Secrecy

In 2020, the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights documented 420 verified cases and received 3,941 calls related to CSA over a span of six and seven months[2] (PIB Delhi). Despite these reported cases, it is crucial to recognize that instances of CSA are likely significantly underreported, as many victims choose to endure their suffering silently rather than confront potential familial embarrassment and public shame. This reluctance to report contributes to the pervasive underestimation of the true extent of CSA prevalence. Moreover, distinguishing itself from adult sexual abuse, CSA represents a complex dilemma, constituting a double-edged sword involving both perpetrators and victims within the same familial context. This intricate dynamic further underscores the multifaceted nature of the challenges associated with addressing and

understanding the prevalence of CSA in contemporary society. Studies in India since 1996 reveal that a substantial proportion, ranging from 62.5% to 76%, of children experience sexual assault within the confines of their homes (Virani 21), with approximately 40% to 50% of these assaults being committed by male relatives (Nisha 68), thereby complicating the ability of victims to articulate their grievances. Women's mobility in the context of sexual abuse becomes restricted due to the pervasive feelings of shame and the need for secrecy, as the prospect of public disclosure of traumatic experiences carries the potential for adverse repercussions. Consequently, this situation engenders a state of deliberate silence among female victims, wherein they consciously refrain from speaking out about their experiences of abuse, highlighting the complex interplay between societal expectations, trauma, and the suppression of victim narratives.

Dattani intricately intertwines the themes of silence, shame, and secrecy in three discernible sequences within the narrative. Firstly, the monologues between Mala and the counselor illuminate a profound apprehension towards disclosure, underscoring the pivotal role of secrecy in her experience. This is evident as she hesitates to fully divulge her memories during the recorded conversation on the 30th of September, refrains from disclosing her identity, requests the cessation of the recording to enable a more candid conversation, and even extends an apology for a circumstance for which she was, in fact, a victim during her childhood. These instances collectively highlight the intricate nexus between silence, shame, and the imperative to conceal traumatic experiences, providing nuanced insights into the psychological complexities surrounding the disclosure of child sexual abuse: "It's not anybody's fault except my own" (Dattani 9). Hence, Mala employs silence as a means of controlling information, strategically veiling her experiences in a shroud of secrecy. Secondly, within the tripartite conversation involving Shanta, Mala, and Deepak, silence becomes a deliberate instrument to withhold historical narratives. Deepak expresses skepticism about Shanta withholding information, while Mala staunchly rejects her mother's proposal to conceal her traumatic past from Deepak: "How can I hide all this from him if I am to marry him Ma?" (Dattani 29). Finally, Vijay's sexual assault on Mala reaches a

culmination in the imposition of silence as a tool of oppression, employing the threat of exposing her "whore"-like actions to coerce her into compliance: "If they hear you they will say you are a bad girl. This is our secret" (Dattani 43-44). By explicitly shaming Mala's very body while raping, Vijay exacerbates her silencing, asserting, "I love you even though you are so ugly…Nobody will tell you how ugly you are. But you are good only for this" (Dattani 44). In this context, textual silence assumes the role of a metaphor, symbolizing the subordination of women through their forced muteness in the face of abuse, highlighting the complex interplay between power dynamics, gender-based violence, and the suppression of victims' voices in instances of intimate partner violence.

God as a Silent Presence

The portrayal of God as a silent body, introducing a profound thematic element in the play's exposition, is embodied by the grandiose presence of Shri Krishna on stage. The silent existence of God, positioned in the narrative's background, serves as a symbolic sacred space for the otherwise reserved Shanta, enabling a form of self-disclosure where the unspoken dimensions of her psyche find articulation. Within this sacred realm, Shanta unveils her innermost silenced thoughts, revealing the traumatic incestuous childhood experiences of the sexual assaults perpetrated by her brother Vinay and his subsequent molestations on her daughter. Seeking solace in Lord Krishna, Shanta utters that He "knows all [she has] gone through" (Dattani 36), emphasizing the symbolic significance of God as a sanctuary for victims to express and confront the deeply suppressed aspects of their harrowing experiences. In Act III, when Mala starts condemning her mother for being oblivious towards her physical and psychological destruction, Shanta finally de-silences herself, much to the reader's astonishment, that none except God ever felt her pain:

> (Pointing to the picture of God.)[3] I looked to Him. I didn't feel anything. I didn't feel pain, I didn't feel pleasure. I lost myself in Him. He helped me . . . By taking away all feeling. No pain no pleasure, only silence. Silence means Shanti[4] . . . I cannot shout for help, I cannot say words of comfort, I cannot even speak about it. (Dattani 55)

Within the play, Shanta's silent prayers can be interpreted not merely as a pursuit of spiritual transcendence but rather as an expression of a familial connection with God, seeking solace and guidance from the Divine. It becomes a means for her to cleanse herself from the haunting shame of past trauma, a process aimed at preserving both her interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships.

Human silence exists within a particular framework, situated between "divine silence" and "animal silence" (Gould 3), constituting a binary of speechlessness, characterized by the voluntary suspension or involuntary debility of human speech or language. "Silence is a definitive character of God" (Gould 3), and is understood as an empty spatial entity. He comments: thematically connected to the vast expanses of the cosmos is the incomprehensible silence attributed to God and the heavens, a transcendent silence that holds significance within theological and post-theological discussions, often categorized under the framework of "negative theology or apophasis" (8). Shanta's connection with Lord Krishna and Mala's relationship with her "imagined" counselor can be likened to spaces facilitating the communication of the unsaid. In moments of internal silence, the mother-daughter duo engages in occasional conversations with their respective personal God-figures, where Mala's temporal interactions with her counsellor transform into Shanta's spiritual connections with Lord Krishna. Despite Mala's reproach of her mother's constant prayers during her complaints about inner turmoil, she inadvertently overlooks Shanta's concealed pain. The resulting inadvertent silence, arising from Mala and Shanta's revelations before the silent presence of Krishna/counsellor[5], constructs an ideal pathway for both of them to seek peace and solace in their quest for emotional healing.

Bodily and Authorial Silence

The occurrence of sexual abuse immediately silences the biological body, but alongside this, there exists an additional dimension of the body's silence in terms of the ego. The inherent nature of the body remains an integral aspect of our identity that remains beyond the scope of ego consciousness. Unlike the body ego, shaped by mirrored reflections and perceived images, the "body in itself" encompasses sensations continuously circulating. Awareness of these sensations

arises when one ceases mental dialogue, self-reflection, and imaginative projections, instead focusing on the present sensory experiences in the body's silent realm (Hill 30). The rhetoric of silence necessitates reader attentiveness, as silence, devoid of explicit explanation or speech, inherently demands interpretation and an active act of reading to discern its meaning (Anderson 59). Absolute physical absence has the potential to function as a manifestation of bodily silence, particularly within closely-knit familial structures. It is akin to authorial license, granting authors the authority to deny a character's voice entirely which involves strategically omitting explicit details to safeguard the dignity and privacy of survivors.

The play portrays Shanta as a sexually silenced individual, as evidenced by her reluctance to share a room with her husband and her explicit prohibition of any physical contact. This behavior is interpreted as a consequence of witnessing Mala's experience of incestuous abuse. Mothers of sexually abused daughters, particularly those who themselves experienced sexual abuse, exhibit significantly higher levels of adverse childhood experiences, current psychological distress, and problematic parenting practices, including the lowest emotional support from family and the least supportive parenting, while mothers of abused daughters who were not themselves abused tend to employ more punitive discipline; collectively, mothers of sexually abused daughters report heightened distress and parenting challenges in the aftermath of their daughters' abuse disclosures (Trickett et al.). This insight suggests a correlation between Shanta's observed behavior and the documented impact of incestuous abuse on familial dynamics. The play, therefore, underscores the nuanced ways in which authorial silence can convey the complexities of trauma and its far-reaching effects within the family structure. Shanta's husband opts to abandon the family instead of delving into the genuine cause of her state as "a frozen woman" (Dattani 36). In the face of Mala's accusations, it becomes apparent that the unfolding scenario serves to underscore not Shanta's shortcomings, but rather, it magnifies her father's deficiencies as both a spouse and a parent. This culmination of physical silence takes on an auditory dimension as Shanta, grappling with her internal turmoil, emits unintelligible utterances in the form of "Aaaaa, oooeeeoooo" sounds (Dattani 55). This phonetic expression encapsulates the profound impact of

unspoken pain, adding a layer of complexity to the narrative and emphasizing the limitations of verbal communication in conveying the depth of Shanta's emotional distress. Ironically, Shanta's silenced virility seeks to mute Mala's voice physically by overfeeding her with alu parathas, as Mala reflects, "I couldn't speak because I was being fed all the time... I thought that was the cure for my pain" (Dattani 24).

Elaine Bander defines the concept of authorial silence as a rhetorical device where an author intentionally imposes silence either on the text itself or on their own expression, representing a deliberate absence or omission of certain narrative elements (52). This notion stands distinct from the silence exhibited by characters within the narrative, where the narrator describes them as refraining from speech. Authorial silence thus involves a deliberate choice by the writer to control the narrative by withholding information, creating a unique layer of meaning beyond the characters' interactions and dialogue within the story. In Act III, a pivotal moment unfolds as Mala undergoes complete silencing of her voice during the alternating speeches of Man/Vinay and Deepak. The scene, where Ravi inflicts harm on young Mala while Deepak simultaneously attempts to soothe her, can be viewed as a symbolic representation of the perpetual struggle between Freudian id and superego. Notably, Mala's verbal silence coincides with her metaphorical absence upon Vinay's entrance, only to be de-silenced once the desecration concludes. Though Dattani does not explicitly articulate the reason for this narrative choice, it can be interpreted as his deliberate effort to depict Mala as an unrepresentable, trauma-induced entity caught between the clutches of a perpetrator and a caring fiancée.

Conclusion

Child sexual abuse is a profoundly distressing and pervasive issue that has severe and lasting impacts on its victims. The consequences extend beyond physical harm to include profound emotional, psychological, and social repercussions. Victims often face challenges in disclosing the abuse due to fear, shame, or manipulation by the perpetrators, leading to delayed reporting. Clancy discusses how bused children frequently face challenges in disclosing their traumatic experiences, often due to factors such as their young age

(12), the potential for inaccurate recollections (34), the fear of threats from perpetrators, feelings of helplessness, and a limited understanding of the abusive acts during that period (52). Moreover, societal stigma and disbelief can further compound the trauma for survivors. This article explores the multifaceted nature of silence, encompassing both physical and psychological dimensions, as well as its manifestation within the textual framework to portray muteness and its varied roles in Mahesh Dattani's play "Thirty Days in September," which addresses the theme of child sexual abuse. The examination extends to the portrayal of a Godlike figure as a silent refuge and the intentional use of authorial license to shroud a character's voice. Acknowledging the limitations of this article, there exists a potential avenue for further research within the domain of silence as employed in theatrical works addressing child sexual abuse. Adequate support systems, including counseling and therapy, are crucial for victims to cope with the aftermath. The legal system plays a crucial role in seeking justice and holding perpetrators accountable, but it is imperative to address broader systemic issues to prevent and combat child sexual abuse effectively. Public awareness and education are essential tools in breaking the silence surrounding this sensitive issue and fostering a culture that prioritizes the protection and well-being of children.

Notes

1. *Italics in original*.
2. The 420 cases of CSA were received between 1st March and 31st August 2020. The 3941 calls were received between 1st March and 15th September 2020.
3. Italics in original.
4. 'Shanti', contextually, in Hindi, means silence or peace. It sounds similar to the name Shanta who also wished for peace from the traumatic memories of CSA.
5. The author uses "Krishna/Counsellor" merely because of their similar role in the text and not to offend any religious or professional spaces.

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5

Alienation, Assertion, Vegetarianism: Reading Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*

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Abstract

The Vegetarian, a Korean novella written by Han Kang and translated into English by Deborah Smith, revolves around Kim Yeong-hye, a young woman who is seen transgressing all boundaries in her defiance of patriarchy. This paper seeks to showcase her attempt at liberation from the shackles of male oppression eventually leading to self-assertion. It also explains how her tryst with vegetarianism acts as a turning point in her life and leads to her condition of social alienation and self-absorption. It examines the struggle of a non-conformist woman who is determined to carve a space for herself in a male-dominated world. Yeong-hye's vegetarian way of life is but a rejection of patriarchal values though it is considered as a consequence of her mental illness. Thus, through a close reading of the text, the paper will also try to deconstruct the Korean social system and its values to understand the psyche of the protagonist and interpret her life decisions.

Keywords: Alienation, Assertion, Liberation, Patriarchy, Vegetarianism

The Vegetarian (2007), a Korean novella penned by Han Kang and translated into English by Deborah Smith, epitomizes the colonial 'new woman' archetype, Yeong-hye, pitted against traditional values, which leads to destructive consequences. Journeying through the life of a non-conformist woman, this text opens up new vistas to the Korean patriarchal society and showcases the attempt of the protagonist at self-assertion and liberation from the shackles of male oppression. Kim Yeong-hye and her tryst with vegetarianism acts as a turning point in her life and lead to her condition of social alienation and self-absorption. Kang's attempt at reflecting this sense of

alienation is so scrupulous that she does not let her protagonist tell her own story.

> The novel epitomizes an experimental sense of disjointedness: its opening segment is narrated in the first person by Yeong-hye's husband, and the second section is a second-person narration focalized through her brother-in-law (an artist who indulges in sexual fantasies about her), and the third segment is third-person narrated by her sister In-hye as she tries to convince the protagonist to eat. (Stobie 1)

As the story unfolds, we witness Yeong-hye as a young woman who ceases to conform to the societal norms and taking upon herself to decide her preferences and challenges. The novella herein not only records the journey of a young woman in particular, rather has been instrumental in revealing the misogynistic underpinnings of Korean society. Yeong-hye's tribulations are not the consequences of her decisions; rather they can be attributed to her nature of being anti-establishmentarian and unconventional. Life was ordinary, and uneventful before Yeong-hye decided to become a vegetarian. This sudden decision is "perceived as an act of insurgence as against the norms of society" (Ravikesh 505). Her husband, Mr. Cheong, describes her as "completely unremarkable in every way" (10). Her insignificant nature and passivity were, however, an advantage for the husband as he considered her disinterested and aloof nature a camouflage to his drawbacks. Her demanding emotional refrainment drew him to marry her despite his disapproval of her nature at the very first sight of her:

> The paunch that started appearing in my mid-twenties, my skinny legs and forearms that steadfastly refused to bulk up in spite of my best efforts, the inferiority complex I used to have about the size of my penis—I could rest assured that I wouldn't have to fret about such things on her account. (10)

These lines confirm that the husband was, but a conformist as well as a carpetbagger. He married Yeong-hye because he was equally unremarkable and insignificant, a man who lived an ordinary middle-class life with no high hopes or soaring goals in life. He took the easiest road to live a life till death:

> I settled for a job where I would be provided with a decent monthly salary in return for diligently carrying out my allotted tasks, at a company whose small size meant they would value my unremarkable skills. And so it was only natural that I would marry the most run-of-

the-mill woman in the world. As for women who were pretty, intelligent, strikingly sensual, the daughters of rich families—they would only have served to disrupt my carefully ordered existence. (10)

The husband observed that Yeong-hye "was a woman of few words" (11). She did her daily chores and took interest in anything but books, did not bother about the husband coming late nor wished him to take her out. They were two individuals who lived under the same roof out of customary need without any kind of emotional involvement, distanced and disinterested. These observations point towards her passivity and conventionality. However, she showed sparks of defiance in more subtle ways. For instance, her dislike for a bra and this often-brought shame to her husband. She would leave it unhooked and the husband had a problem with it since it was visible through her thin tops. He tried to persuade her but "she'd have it unhooked barely a minute after leaving the house" (12). She justified herself appropriately saying that "it squeezed her breasts" and instead charged her husband that he "couldn't understand how constricting it felt" since he had never worn one (12). But he seemed to be more concerned with his wife conforming to the prevalent standards of beauty in Korean society: "It wasn't as though she had shapely breasts which might suit the no-bra look. I would have preferred her to go around wearing one that was thickly padded, so that I could save face in front of my acquaintances" (11-12). This was her way of setting herself free from the chains of patriarchy that bound her and hence her body voiced her rebellious attitude. Besides this unusual habit, all else was okay with Yeong-hye till she had a dream which left her disturbed and compelled her to make a life-changing decision. Following the dream, she threw out all the non-vegetarian and dairy items stored in the fridge. She had decided to turn vegan. But the husband could not comply with her choices and addressed her as "insane" to which she did not bother to react: unperturbed and unmoved. Having dreamt of a red barn in the woods, her face reflected in a pool of blood, blood-soaked clothes and hands smeared with blood and all of these disturbed her to the consequence of being intolerant to the sight or smell of meat. She repeatedly dreamt of these scenes of dark violence:

> They come to me now more times than I can count. Dreams overlaid with dreams, a palimpsest of horror. Violent acts perpetrated by night.

> A hazy feeling I can't pin down…but remembered as blood-chillingly definite. Intolerable loathing, so long suppressed. Loathing I've always tried to mask with affection. But now the mask is coming off. That shuddering, sordid, gruesome, brutal feeling. Nothing else remains. Murderer or murdered, experience too vivid to not be real. (30)

Furthermore, Yeong-hye stopped using leather and other animal-based products as well, indicating her outright rejection of violence against animals. Korean society predominantly follows a non-vegetarian diet and thus Yeong-hye's defiance was mocked and her gastronomic shift from being "perfectly competent when it came to hacking a chicken into pieces with a butcher's cleaver" to surviving on kimchi and salad was such a shock for everyone. The dinner party hosted by the boss wherein the boss's wife asserts that "it isn't possible to live without eating meat" for they consider meat eating as "a fundamental human instinct", which implies "vegetarianism goes against human nature. . . It just isn't natural" (26). Such a lopsided and prejudiced view of vegetarianism is what Carol J. Adams terms, "The Sexual Politics of Meat". Adams, an American writer, feminist and animal rights activist, in her magnum opus, *The Sexual Politics of Meat: A Feminist-Vegetarian Critical Theory* (1990) introduced this term and defined it thus:

> The Sexual Politics of Meat means that what, or more precisely who, we eat is determined by the patriarchal politics of our culture…What The Sexual Politics of Meat argues is that the way gender politics is structured into our world is related to how we view animals, especially animals who are consumed. Patriarchy is a gender system that is implicit in human/ animal relationships. Moreover, gender construction includes instruction about appropriate foods. (Preface 15-16)

After some serious discussion and contemplation regarding other reasons behind the vegetarian diet few of which were ideological differences, medical reasons, religious issues, following trends or making a lifestyle change, the final verdict is passed by the boss's wife: "The idea of a special diet always made me feel uncomfortable. It seems to me that one shouldn't be too narrow-minded when it comes to food" (26).

Yeong-hye's family, like almost all of the families in a Confucian society, expected absolute loyalty from their children. They speak of Yeong-hye as if she is a sulky and bad-tempered child, who must not

be taken seriously but needs to be corrected and this is emblematic of a Confucian society, where family has to take care of the child, no matter what the age of the child is. Therefore, the way the father patronizes her and forces Yeong-hye to consume meat reveals the patriarchal environment in which they operate. Being a patriarch, he not only teaches his daughter to conform to the social rules but also forcibly feeds her meat when she does not want to eat it thereby abusing her rights as a human being. Such physical torture is an extreme form of male chauvinism where a woman is forced to stay loyal to her family and later, her husband. Yeong-hye's discarding the stuffed meat out of her mouth reinforces her rejection of male dominance. She, even, attempted suicide by slitting her wrist which symbolizes her split from her misogynist family in particular and Confucian ideology or the larger society, in general. Patriarchy demands a prescription to the codes of conduct to ensure comfort although it implies being a prisoner's check of the tyranny. Yeong-hye's choice was unpalatable because it was not a part of the dominant group. As a matter of fact, choosing the non-dominant makes Yeong-hye the 'Other' by default; as Adams puts it, "Vegetarians face the problem of making their meanings understood within a dominant culture that accepts the legitimacy of meat eating" (107). The lack of interest to understand the marginalized discourses might lead to a kind of alienation of these minorities from the mainstream leading to a kind of silence. The 'Other' is always silenced and oppressed by the dominant but efforts are always made to force them to accept the tyranny of the dominant since a deviant poses a potential threat to the organic fabric of the oppressive forces and their self-proclaimed supremacy. Violence is thrust upon such peripheral discourses so that either they are wiped off their existence or more unfortunately, forced to accept the dominant order. Since Hang Kang aims to devein the dark aspects of patriarchal oppression vis-à-vis a portrayal of violence inflicted upon her protagonist, she particularly draws upon episodes of mental torture as well as physiosexual violence arising from Yeong-hye's choice of turning vegetarian.

The sight of meat is not only what Yeong-Hye abhorred, but she also withdrew from the mundane world of fleshly pleasures as well. On being confronted by her husband for sexual avoidance, she

rationalizes that the smell of meat from his body is what puts her off. The savage instinct in him overpowered his mask of civilization and he raped her though he visualized her as "a comfort woman dragged in against her will", while he "was the Japanese soldier demanding her services" (32). The husband justifies this heinous act by citing the excuse of a man's inability to control his animalistic instincts:

> But it was no easy thing for a man in the prime of his life…to have his physical needs go unsatisfied for such a long period of time. So yes, one night…I grabbed hold of my wife and pushed her to the floor. Pinning down her struggling arms and tugging off her trousers, I became unexpectedly aroused. She put up a surprisingly strong resistance and, spitting out vulgar curses all the while, it took me three attempts before I managed to insert myself successfully. (32)

Yeong-hye's defiance of traditional gender-expected behaviour and her struggle for physical autonomy cast her as an embodiment of the new woman trope. Through her, Han Kang highlights the savage nature of human beings. Owing to the physical and sexual abuse at the hands of her husband and her family, Yeong-hye begins to question the anthropocentric ideologies of her family and society at large. She becomes a misanthrope and becomes protective of nature. In a way, she starts to connect her experiences with that of nature. She feels for the animals who are killed for human consumption the way she dies a metaphorical death every day. Therefore, she distances herself from the humans who have lost humanity and strikes a more vegetative connection with the innocent nature and identifies with her thereby staying away from destructive forces and their ways.

If the husband satisfied his libidinal urges by forceful sex, Yeong-Hye's father asserted his male chauvinism by whipping her "over the calves until she was eighteen years old" (Kang 31). A product of military masculinity and strength, who was "never tired of boasting about having received the Order of Military Merit for serving in Vietnam" (31), the father leaves no stone unturned in forcing Yeong-Hye to have non-vegetarian food. From yelling at her to slapping her to asking his son and her husband to hold her as he forcibly pushes a chunk of meat into her mouth, he does it all but in vain. Such acts of violence and abuse highlight the depths of male chauvinism and misogyny ingrained in the family. The father could not withstand the fact that the daughter 'chose' for herself. The

husband could not tolerate the wife's entitlement to her freedom of denying him sexual pleasure. It is so because patriarchy *decides* for women since men believe women cannot and should not be privileged enough to make choices. They should always be the submissive and subservient *other*. A man with "strongly fixed ideas", he could not take the maverick nature of his daughter with ease (31). He yelled at her but she did not deter. It was expected of Yeong-Hye to say, "I'm sorry, Father, but I just can't eat it," but her assertive tone was not taken well by the men: "I do not eat meat"— clearly enunciated, and seemingly not the least bit apologetic" (38). The only man who, though silently, disapproved of the violent behaviour towards Yeong-hye was her brother-in-law. The brother-in-law's sexual attraction to Yeong-hye is what covers a major section of Part II of the novella. Being an artist, he might be drawn to her non-conformist attitude in addition to the Mongolian mark on her buttocks. However, it is revealed that he neither has any genuine feelings of appreciation for her rebellious nature nor does he respect her individuality. She is just a fetish for him. Her difference from other women in being insubordinate and defiant sexually attracts him towards her. He trivializes her journey of self-realisation into a fetish and considers her attitude as a deliberate attempt at sexual provocation.

In the scene when Yeong-hye attempts to commit suicide, the author tries to evoke a sense of parallelism between violence against women and those of animals. Animals are helpless beings dominated by humans and used according to their benefit. This anthropocentric view is underlined in the Biblical account of Genesis where "God gave man dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and all the earth, *Genesis* 1.26" (Abrams, 2013, p. 97). Therefore, a man presumes such authority over a woman's body as well. The image of thrusting pork into her mouth could signify the way a woman is silenced. She is not allowed to express her desires or speak for herself. Language of patriarchy which subjugates a woman to gratify the carnal desire of man is not acceptable to her. Yeong-hye's decision to abandon non-vegetarian food is congruous with her rejection of patriarchal values. It was her blatant refusal to abide by the stereotypical expectations of the male gaze which expected women to have fuller breasts and a wide waist

so that they look sexually attractive to the male sight. As she stopped eating meat, "She grew thinner by the day, so much so that her cheekbones had really become indecently prominent. Without makeup, her complexion resembled that of a hospital patient" (23). Yeong-hye had to pay a heavy price for refuting societal norms. It meant complete withdrawal from the world for her. She had to revert to a pre-human stage wherein she had to reject everything human as she could not identify with the species and their lifestyle any longer. However, it also meant that she had to lose herself completely and get rid of all her human attributes to liberate herself and accept her new identity. Her journey of self-discovery symbolizes the new woman's struggle for self-assertion in the male-dominated world. This archetype of 'the new woman' also seeks to expose the abusive side of the torchbearers of male agency as well as shed light on the challenges and impediments witnessed by contemporary Korean women in their journey of emancipation. Deprivation of humanness in the case of women is synonymous with animals, who are treated not as independent beings with distinct identities but as beings at the disposal of man. This can be seen in the way how meat is referred to as mere flesh instead of a dead animal. In the words of Carol Adams, "Through butchering, animals become absent referents. Animals in name and body are made absent as animals for meat to exist" (79). The same can be applied to women. Men regard them as 'possessions' or 'objects' devoid of any identity of their own: "Through the structure of the absent referent, patriarchal values become institutionalized. Just as dead bodies are absent from our language about meat, in descriptions of cultural violence women are also often the absent referent." (Adams, 2010, p. 68) The violence against Yeong-Hye has been quite chauvinistically justified in both cases. While the husband tries to play the victim by citing non-fulfilment of his physical needs, the father advocates for compliance with rules: "If she eats it once, she'll eat it again. It's preposterous, everyone eats meat!" (39)

Han Kang has emphasized the flesh trope through her preoccupation with one part of the body in each of the three parts. The first part portrays an obsession with breasts. It is so because Yeong-Hye hates wearing a bra as she finds it restricting and suffocating. Even when she goes out, she does not wear one

attracting the attention and contempt of people. Herein, another stereotype is broken since "many patriarchal cultures dictate that women, who are stereotypically cast as natural caregivers, must wear (often uncomfortable) undergarments to de/sexualize mammary glands which would nurture their children. Paradoxically, the supposedly caring woman is conditioned to enjoy eating meat, which (in most modern contexts) is the product of carnophallogocentric ideals[i]" (Stobie 9). The second part of the novella fixates upon a birthmark on the protagonist's buttocks referred to as "The Mongolian Mark". She stayed with her sister In-Hye and her brother-in-law post her suicide attempt. The unnamed brother-in-law, an artist, is drawn towards this birthmark for which he paints her body with flowers and attempts to fulfil his sexual fantasies. Though Yeong-Hye resists at first when he paints his own body, she finally consents as she is drawn to the flowers on his body, but more importantly with the hope that those horrid, wild dreams would stop troubling her, but in vain. Instead of bringing her relief, they incite in her a desire for "*flowers to bloom from* [her] *crotch*", causing her to "*spread* [her legs] *wide* and mimic the form of a tree" (Stobie 13).

The flesh vector is further reinforced when episodes of nudity surface throughout the novella. Yeong-Hye, post becoming vegetarian, ceased to be conscious of her nudity. She thought of herself as a plant in need of sunshine. Since a plant never clothes itself, she chose to do the same. Her complete identification with plants can be traced back to the sexist violence that was inflicted upon her and her body because she was like an animal to a man. Moreover, she did not want to identify herself with any kind of human-induced violence on nature as can be seen from her dismissal of leather products as well as lipsticks. So being a human would mean violence in every form - clothing, food and language. Perhaps, that is why she stopped eating plant-based food as well. Language is also known to hurt and violate, hence she stopped talking. Moreover, plants do not talk, and so does she considering herself as one. She further asserts how breasts are her only companions because they do not hurt: "Can only trust my breasts now. I like my breasts, nothing can be killed by them. Hand, foot, tongue, gaze, all weapons from which nothing is safe. But not my breasts. With my round breasts, I'm okay. Still okay. So why do they keep on shrinking? Not even round

anymore. Why? Why am I changing like this? Why are my edges all sharpening— what I am going to gouge?" (34-35) In fact, Yeong-hye's fasting could be seen as a rupture of the patriarchal system of values. Self-imposed alienation puts her in a situation wherein she is shifted to a mental asylum being considered insane. Even in the asylum, the theme of violence is reflected in the way the doctors try to feed her forcibly. Even her sister comes to visit her and acts in the same way but that is out of her concern for her sister. The husband, and her parents all were ashamed of Yeong-hye and they had given up on her but it was only In-hye, her sister, who cared. She came to meet her at the hospital; she persuaded her to eat though in vain. Yeong-hye considered herself a tree and when her sister brought her rice cakes, she refused to eat them saying that she had ceased to be an animal: "I don't need to eat, not now. I can live without it. All I need is sunlight and water" (129). She performed headstands since she dreamt that trees were standing on their heads, and being a tree, she should also do the same.

However, it is important to note that her so-called insanity might not be a medical issue, rather it is more of a social product. It springs up because she defies the dominant discourse. Joan Busfield, a renowned British sociologist and psychologist, points out that women's mental illness can either be a "social product" or a "social construct" (536). It is a social product when it is "a direct product of their oppression" or in other cases, "mental illness is a label which is used to control and confine the actions of women and involves the exercise of patriarchal power" (536). The last paragraph of the novel speaks out for Yeong-hye through In-hye's lenses: "Quietly, she breathes in. The trees by the side of the road are blazing, green fire undulating like the rippling flanks of a massive animal, wild and savage. In-hye stares fiercely at the trees. As if waiting for an answer. As if protesting against something. The look in her eyes is dark and insistent". (188) In-hye seems to be protesting against a male-dominated world which tortured her sister to such an extent that it destroyed her individuality completely just because she refused to conform to their rules and conventions. The Korean society is essentially a patriarchal one which places its beliefs in the Confucian mode of thought:

> Exemplary behavior and uncomplaining obedience were expected of them….Women were expected to demonstrate obedience before all other virtues, and at every stage of life. As children, girls were required to obey their fathers; as wives, women were required to obey their husbands; and as widows, women were required to obey their grown-up sons. At no point in her life was a woman, according to the traditional Confucian view, expected to function as an autonomous being free of male control (Richey).

Numerous rules were laid down to ensure the good conduct of the women. Trivial things like how to sit and manage household chores and the time of waking up and going to bed were also pronounced. So, it was ensured through these rules that male supremacy was maintained and anyone who went against the set notions was certainly punished.

Thus, Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* is a novella revolving around multiple issues such as sexual and physical violence, animal abuse, patriarchy, alienation, eroticism and body politics. Thus, vegetarianism is not only a lifestyle change but, in this text, it becomes a symbol of protest and defiance. As Adams says, "An integral part of autonomous female identity may be vegetarianism; it is a rebellion against dominant culture whether or not it is stated to be a rebellion against male structures. It resists the structure of the absent referent, which renders both women and animals as objects" (220). By writing about vegetarianism, Kang not only draws parallels between women and animal violence and abuse, but she is also successful in challenging sexist oppression because "interrupting a meal, [means] interrupting a man's control, interrupting the male tradition with female voices. When women writers raise the issue of vegetarianism, they touch upon their dilemma of being silenced in a patriarchal world. Vegetarianism becomes a complex female meditation on being dominated and dominator." (Adams 186)

Besides violence and gendered oppression, the novelist also draws our attention to a woman-woman bond in the form of the two sisters. In-hye, though sane as per societal standards, has had a troublesome life packed with hardships and struggles. She worked for her only livelihood and after she severed her connections with her husband, she had to run the shop and take care of her son, Ji-woo. Towards the end of the novella, Kang tries to juxtapose the lives of

both sisters. Through the character of In-hye, she tries to question the significance and validity of societal expectations and responsibilities. Contemplating her own life decisions, she is trying to assess herself and the value of her existence. None of them was the one who has lived a life according to the accepted norms as any normal and sane human being would nor the one who revolted against society and built her world of fantasy wherein, she thrived away from the stark realities of life. This is what Han Kang calls the "im(possibility) of innocence" and the omnipresence of violence (qtd. in Patrick), omnipresent to the extent that the novella ends on the same violent note: "In-hye stares fiercely at the trees. As if waiting for an answer. As if protesting against something. The look in her eyes is dark and insistent" (152). In-hye expresses her amazement and frustration "at this world of mingled violence and beauty" (qtd. in Patrick). But what is indeed intriguing is that perhaps, in the process of taking care of her sister and trying to understand her problems; In-hye has been able to understand the inherent violence and struggle that the male-dominated world forces upon women. While through her rejection of anthropocentric values and norms, Yeong-hye has established a non-human identity for herself to escape the violence innate in this male-centric universe, In-hye has faced all the troubles single-handedly through rejection of a male-dominated household and has been able to assert herself and fight for her rights as an independent and bold woman as well as a single mother. Her protesting gaze at the end of the novella reflects her anger and frustration as well as her defiant and patient nature since she had been dealing with the male-centeredness in a unique way of decentering the male and taking his position as the breadwinner and caretaker of her own family.

Notes

1. Carnophallagocentrism is a neologism termed by Jacques Derrida in his essay "Plato's Pharmacy". It refers to the masculine point of view.

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6

Evaluating Abuse of Young Adults' Bodies in Collins's *The Hunger Games*

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Abstract

The bodies of young adults are vibrant and seductive. They view their physical selves as "being in the world." Social structures and grownups detest the physical activities of the young adults. Thus, the present study looks at many circumstances and causes of young adult's bodily abuse in Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games*. In this article, it examines how and why the Capitol's authority mistreats the bodies of young adult characters like Peeta and Katniss. It also looks into the motivations behind the young people's plans to mistreat their bodies. In order to maintain their power and influence over adolescents, this study makes the case that adults and societal institutions mistreat young adults' bodies. In the process of exercising power, the adults view the young adults as competitors and formidable opponents. Additionally, it argues that rather than deterring young adults from acquiring their freedom, individuality, and maturity, physical violence encourages them. The study draws on theoretical ideas and readily available critical comments from scholars who specialize in young adult writing and conceptions of the body, including Roberta S. Trites, Tayaba Moeen et al., and Heather Y. Swanton et al., for its analytical purposes. Lastly, by focusing on abuse, the study hopes to introduce a fresh perspective to the study of the body, young people, and young adult texts.

Keywords: Abuse of body, authority, freedom, individuality, maturity and young adult

Introduction

Suzanne Collins' dystopian young adult novel *The Hunger Games* (2008) describes a live TV fight to death between twelve boys and twelve girls, known as tributes, who are between the ages of twelve and eighteen and represent twelve of Panem's outer districts in the annual 74th Hunger Games. Greek and Roman gladiatorial myths

about Theseus and the Minotaur are incorporated into the vicious fighting in *The Hunger Games*. The young adult protagonists of this classic book, notably sixteen-year-old Katniss Everdeen and Peeta Mellark, who stand in for District 12 as tributes, experience numerous physical atrocities at the hands of the dictatorial Capitol leader. It incorporates the various settings of physical abuse. Abuse of the body is a significant worry and theme throughout the work, among the many projections and abjections directed towards the young adult body. Abuse of the body is concentrated on the twenty-four young adults selected for the games from twelve different districts of Panem. In the name of yearly games, the Capitol mistreats the bodies of young adults. Thus, the causes and circumstances of abusing the young adult body are uncovered in this work. It claims that adults mistreat teenagers' bodies in order to establish their control. In contrast, young adults mistreat their bodies in an attempt to escape the suffering they endure, to refuel for rebellion, to reclaim their independence, individuality, and maturity, and to stand out from the adult and young adult crowd. Additionally, this novel discusses various fallouts from mistreating the body of a young adult.

In general, physical damage, misuse of the body with cruelty or violence are considered forms of abuse of the body. The prevalent factors in the vigorous young adult body are physical harm, overuse, cruelty, and violence. According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, abuse of the body means "to treat the body in a cruel or violent way" (6). Abuse of the body refers to the various things the body does and experiences. The term "body abuse" refer to a variety of behaviours, including hitting, kicking, pushing, shunting, juddering, spanking, and severe physical punishment. Sexual abuse of the body is included in the category of abuse of the body. "Tough love" or physical abuse may cause bruises or more serious damage. As such, the abuse of the body is a form of violence.

Young adults' bodies are frequently the targets of assault. While examining the term 'young adult', The American Library Service Association originally used the phrase 'young adult' in 1957 to refer to teenagers in the 12- to 18-year-old age range. Young adult's bodily abuse has been extensively discussed by several critics and theorists. However, to examine the themes of body abuse in *The Hunger Games*,

this research primarily draws on the theories of Roberta S. Trites, Tayaba Moeen, and Heather Y. Swanton.

Following its release, *The Hunger Games* garners a great deal of praise from esteemed reviewers and authors. According to some academics, *The Hunger Games* serves as a model for uprisings against despotic rule. George A. Dunn and Nicholas Michaud in "*The Hunger Games* and Philosophy: a Critique of Pure Treason" consider *The Hunger Games* to resemble weaponry. They assert, "*The Hunger Games* are the art of resisting the Capitol" (7). They think that the games that the tributes engage in make dealing with the oppressors worse. *The Hunger Games* plays a part in the general sentiment of unrest against despots. They further contend *The Hunger Games* employs "a theatrical performance as a weapon" (46). That act aids in eliminating the adversaries of performers. They reason that Katniss is a paradox and that games use intimidation to illustrate theatricality. She performs the roles of hunter and victim, as well as killer and healer. While Riley McGuire argues that the children of *The Hunger Games* are LGBT with unexpected futures, the aforementioned parallel can be used as a weapon. The future is uncertain for these kids. McGuire states, "*The Hunger Games* presents recurring cultural narrative, featuring a dystopian alternate reality in which children are selected to fight each other to the death in a televised event" (64). This game tells the story of a Panem cultural phenomenon. He argues that *The Hunger Games*, as a televised event, demonstrates a cultural narrative of North America in which the child is the symbol of a prenatal civilization that dictates the continual generation of new life and the maintenance of existing life.

Young adult reviewers like James Blasingame, in turn, support both the advantages and disadvantages of *The Hunger Games*. They emphasize that Panem, the future United States, will have a harsh life, a despotic central authority, and a gloomy future. Conversely, they disclose that the yearly national lottery, *The Hunger Games*, fosters a sense of regional pride. In this particular context, they acknowledge, "This book is appropriate for upper middle school readers, high school readers, and adults; it is devoid of sex or bad language, but brutal murders can make the story a bit disconnected at times" (725). According to Blasingame, adults and young adults are drawn to read *The Hunger Games*. Blasingame state that there is

less profanity and increased sexual activity in *The Hunger Games*. *The Hunger Games* uses violence, as per Blasingame, to revive the young adult milieu. Another critic, Jen Scott Curwood, thinks that *The Hunger Games* helped young adults develop a connection between literature and literacy. Curwood claims, "The link between literature, literacy, and technology is demonstrated by the way in which teenagers interact with Collins' *The Hunger Games*" (417). It participates in the activities that the culture and society direct. The social-cultural paradigm serves as a framework for the construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of young adults' views.

The Hunger Games, based on what Amber M. Simmons claims, a different young adult literary critic, strives to promote social action. Simmons contends that *The Hunger Games* "is a pop culture sensation" (22). Simmons is implying that the bulk of Panem's youth is represented in the tastes and fashions of *The Hunger Games*. He speculates that the adolescent tributes chosen to compete in *The Hunger Games* are meant to perpetuate the supposedly popular culture of the districts ruled by the Capitol. The series is dystopian and post-apocalyptic. This is a "rich meal for imagination" (ibid). She criticizes *The Hunger Games* for having a "connection to social injustices in our society" (23). Simmons concludes that *The Hunger Games* combines utopian and dystopian ideas to inspire a rebellion against injustice and absolute power. She declares that if people everywhere continue to experience exploitation and inequality, humanity will pay a heavy price. Negotiating with the conflicting opinions of different reviewers and critics and analyzing them helps to identify the research gap. To the best of my critical review abilities, none of the aforementioned reviewers have thoroughly examined The Hunger Games from the standpoint of bodily abuse. Thus, the book waits to be unearthed by utilizing the viewpoints of young adults who abuse their bodies and the ensuing fallout. Many academicians have written and published a variety of study articles and publications to look deeper into the concepts surrounding the understudied issues of young adults abusing their bodies. The Pakistan Journal of Clinical Psychology via University of Karachi published a paper by Tayaba Moeen et al. titled "Development and Validation of Body Image Scale (BIS) For Young Adult Females" in 2013. They examine diverse body representations within the

Pakistani setting and their connection to physical abuse. Furthermore, Tayaba Moeen examine how the body helps young individuals speed up certain tasks. According to Moeen, "Events affecting the body (accidents, illness, and sexual abuse), relationships with others, self-esteem, and socialization" (1) have an impact on the formation of body image. The maltreatment of the body escalates as one grows. In a similar vein, Siobhan McEvoy, a critic, examines in her review of "*The Hunger Games*: Theorizing Opportunities for Peace Education" how youngsters experience various forms of abuse as they develop. Moeen and Siobhan both highlight the maltreatment that occurs while children and young adults are developing. According to Siobhan, "*The Hunger Games* tells the story of children whose identities and existence are viciously entwined with cycles of armed conflict" (23). Children and young adults are disturbed by the armed conflict in their quest for identity and existence.

Likewise, young adult scholar Roberta S. Trites explores the connection between abuse of the body and authority in her book *Disturbing Universe*. She discloses that power is a fitting metaphor for the self-discovery that teenagers frequently pursue. They demonstrate power with their body. She employs "social power" to carefully consider the stories that young adults and youngsters tell. Young adults and children can use their bodies to acquire "social power." Young adults' bodies function as an agency to gain social power. Trites cogitates, "Adolescents' power is simultaneously acknowledged and denied, engaged and disengaged" (6). Teens' authority is both recognized and rejected, involved and not involved at the same time. The exploitation of the body and power go hand in hand. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of Prison*, Michel Foucault materializes the prisoner's body in tune with her. In the chapter "The Body of the Condemned," Foucault examines the boy of prisoners. Foucault contends, "Power remains as an agent for the materialization of body" (10). The abuse of the body is orchestrated by the power. In "Juvenile Crime: Aggression and Delinquency after Sexual Abuse: A Longitudinal Study," Swanton et al. examine child maltreatment, juvenile crime, sexual abuse, and domestic violence in great detail. Additionally, Steward explains the views of violence and sexual assault to children and young adults.

Consequently, a study of numerous perspectives surrounding the abuse of young adult bodies supports a critical and argumentative analysis of *The Hunger Games* and a stronger conclusion. The aforementioned ideologies provide a clear route to the desired endpoint. They lend their support to the work in order to make it useful for the study of young adult literature.

Abuse of Body in *The Hunger Games*

With the allure of a reality show, *The Hunger Games* mainly emphasizes physical appearance when choosing tributes to compete in the savage, live, televised games every year. Twenty-four young adults, one male and one female from each of the twelve districts, are chosen. In the same vein, Trites clarifies, "Social institutions are bigger and more powerful than individuals and it is common for them to mistreat teenage bodies" (3). She means that social structures frequently mistreat young bodies because they are larger and more powerful than individuals. The goal of these institutes is to exploit the bodies of the teenagers. One way to identify the presence of bodily abuse in young adults is by looking at their physical strength. In essence, the rules of *The Hunger Games* are announced by the organizer. Speaking about the organizer's guidelines, Katniss explains the main scenario of bodily abuse as:

> The Capitol uses the removal of children from our districts and their forced execution as a means of making us aware of how completely powerless they are over us. How unlikely it would be that we would survive another uprising. The true meaning is evident regardless of the words they choose. Observe how we kidnap your kids and sacrifice them while leaving you helpless. We will eliminate every single one of you if you move an inch. As we carried out in District Thirteen. (18-19)

The provided version clearly shows the Capitol's misuse of authority. The residents of other districts have no opportunity to object or provide clarification. The kids from the districts are brought to the Capitol, where they are made to kill each other in order to win. Their survival is still in the hands of the Capitol's mercy. People are afraid that the Capitol will abuse their bodies at any time. They contend that bodily functions, including thought patterns and interpersonal connections, are governed by our bodies. The Capitol wants to abuse the body of a young adult to demonstrate its presence. Its goal is to become more authoritarian and domineering. By

mistreating their bodies, the Capitol administration hopes to impose its will on the young adults.

First and foremost, Katniss is stunned by Prim's choice because "the name bounces around the inside of her skull" (21). Katniss is rendered mentally deficient by the choice. This is actually Katniss's worst nightmare. Unhappiness over Prim being only twelve years old is murmured by the crowd. When Prim approaches the stage, Katniss points out what Prim's body is doing. To put it another way, Katniss articulates:

> I see her, the blood drained from her face, hands clenched in fists at her sides, walking with stiff, small steps up toward the stage, passing me, and I see that the back of her blouse has become untucked and hangs out over her skirt." What reunites me with myself are these small things, like the untucked blouse creating a ducktail. (21-2)

Prim becomes meaningless with the announcement of Effie Trinket. Her expression and her clenched fists convey both her fear and obedience to the Capitol decision. Katniss's early years are recalled by Prim's unbuttoned blouse. Her blouse's state reveals the misuse of authority coming from the Capitol. Nonetheless, Katniss manages to gather the courage to regain consciousness because of her love for Prim.

Katniss is inspired to volunteer for *The Hunger Games* by her love for Prim. *The Hunger Games* selection process is akin to a "corpse" or the death penalty. The selection process is the struggle with mortality. But Katniss chooses to offer her help to save her sister from being slain. She gasps, "I volunteer as tribute" (22). Katniss agrees to take on the Capitol's challenge. Parallel to this, District 12 male tribute "Peeta Mellark" (25), is introduced by Effie Trinket. The idea of body torture is strengthened by *The Hunger Games*' choice of the Capitol. The young adult's selection for *The Hunger Games* is emphasized by Capitol authorities. Even the uninvited decision suggests the misuse of authority. The Capitol authorities mainly misuse their authority and the bodies of young adults by selecting teenage representatives from different districts under the pretext of preserving culture and entertainment traditions. Through *The Hunger Games*, to preserve and strengthen its hold over the districts, the Capitol establishment persists in violating human rights.

In his doctoral dissertation, H. Thapa asserts, "Collins elucidates the consequences of the abuse of body" (185). The Capitol government manipulates or mistreats the group of tributes, who range in age from eleven to nineteen, during the Games in a variety of ways. Because of the oppressive methods used by the Capitol, they were unable to dispute the trainer's and the authorities' actions. Katniss complies with Haymitch's and the preparation team's suggestions. They tidy her up and take her hair off of her body. Lykke Guanio- Uluru, a critic, concurs with these circumstances, pointing out that "the modifications to her body and identity through dress and medical surgery are forced upon her rather than freely chosen" (77). The Games' organizers' coerced actions involve abuse and violence. Even though Katniss must adhere to all of these petty and self-serving behaviors. The protagonist Katniss, a 16-year-old girl, describes these actions as follows:

> This has involved shaping my nails into uniform forms, removing all hair from my body, and scrubbing down my body with a gritty foam that has removed at least three layers of skin in addition to grime. I feel like a plucked bird, about to be roasted, with the things pulled from my legs, arms, torso, underarms, and sections of my eyebrows. (61)

Such actions by the Games' organizers do not sit well with Katniss. They aren't human in her opinion. It hurts and tingles on her skin, making her feel very exposed. She is unable to challenge, though. Individual freedom or volition is threatened by mistreatment of the body. Adults mistreat the young adults with force. The adult's coercive actions inspire Katniss to be fearless and explore her independence and individuality. Thapa further claims, "*The Hunger Games* projects the adults as agencies to abuse the bodies of young adults" (186). President Snow and the so-called peacekeeper soldiers are still abusing their bodies and authority. In the event of poaching, the Chief Peacekeeper severely beats Gale in the plaza. He reveals that Gale is fastened to a wooden post by his wrists. Above him hangs the wild bird he shot moments before, its neck punctured by a nail. His shorts were ripped off and his jacket was thrown to the ground. Only the ropes at his wrists keep him from collapsing onto his knees while he is unconscious. A slab of raw, red meat replaces what was once his back. Peacekeepers and Snow misuse their authority. Attached on a wooden post is Gale. He suffers a severe

beating. The bulk reveals his nude back. He's been abandoned. Still, Katniss does her best to shield Gale's "broken body" (106) with her arms. These actions make it clear that young adults are resisting and that the capital authorities are abusing their bodies. By empowering themselves, the young adults are able to oppose the violence that the adults incite.

Even in District 11, the Peacekeepers' ongoing misuse of authority and body continues. Katniss and Peeta are escorted to the Justice Building by the Peacekeepers upon the arrival of the Victory Tour train at District 11. Rue's role in helping Katniss and Peeta win the tournament is remembered by them at the Justice Building celebration. Katniss and Peeta are led out of the Justice Building following the ceremony. When Katniss exits the building, she witnesses the horrifying scene of the Peacekeepers' brutality toward an elderly man, which Katniss characterizes as: "The elderly whistler was being hauled up the stairs by two Peacekeepers. Bringing him before the throng to his knees. And shooting him through the head" (63). The whistling is seen by the Peacekeepers as an act of disobedience. These whistleblowers are killed. The elderly man's body is abused by the peacekeepers. Their goal is to dissuade the populace from opposing the Capitol. They act in an impolite and nasty manner toward anyone who speaks out against the Capitol. By mistreating the body, they discredit humanity. Thapa unfolds: "Collins presents the beautification as a part of body abuse if the corporate world ignores the will of the concerned one. The corporate world often exploits the young adults to promote their products and business" (187). Cinna, Katniss's beautician, is trying her hardest to make her look more beautiful, but Katniss does not like it. According to Katniss, Beautifying one's body is merely another form of maltreatment. She states that President Snow needs to see the abuse of the body carefully. Katniss then gives the specifics of the physical abuse. She draws comparisons between the many cases of physical abuse and the Capitol's officials as well as other individuals. She then questions:

> What to do. Shut my mouth like that of President Snow? My breasts are tattooed? Put diamonds in my skin and dye it magenta? Slice ornamental designs into my face? Please give me curved talons. Or the whiskers of a cat? I observed all of these things and more about the

Capitol's populace. Are they genuinely unaware of how strange they appear to the rest of us? (49)

Katniss expresses her dissatisfaction by posing many queries about her appearance. She believes that they are constantly trying to change her appearance. She feels that those from the Capitol place an excessive amount of emphasis on appearance, which she views as physical torture. These examples of physical abuse show how young people's wills are suppressed. The grownups try to undercut the teens' motivations.

Thapa believes, "The prettification as such does not indicate the abuse of body. The enhancement of body look betters the social horizon and image. However, how the body look matters for the corporate world and people refers whether it is abuse or use" (1191). Body abuse has no bearing on the corporate world's comprehension of an individual's desire for the prettification process. For example, it cannot be considered abuse if the organizer of the beauty pageant is aware of the participants' wishes. Enhancing one's image and social horizon can be achieved through the beautifying process, provided that the organizers encourage participants to further their careers. However, the Capitol coerces the teenagers into becoming beautifying to draw in more sponsors for *The Hunger Games* Series. Thus, it is bodily abuse. In *The Hunger Games*, the physical torment and the Games' procedures continue for a very long time. To escape the Capitol and save their own lives, Peeta and Katniss must take several drastic measures. To get out of the Games' way, they pose as a married couple with Katniss as an expectant mother. But they need to start the Games. Peacemakers storm into Katniss's waiting chamber and attack Cinna just as she is ready to be sent into the arena to start her Games. According to Katniss, the Peacekeepers' actions are as follows:

> Unexpectedly, the door behind him suddenly opens, letting three Peacekeepers rush into the space. Three strikes Cinna in the temple so hard he falls on his knees, while the other two pin his arms behind him and cuff him. However, they continue striking with gloves studded with metal, leaving gashes on his torso and face. Cinna's lifeless body is dragged out of the room. The remnants of the blood on the floor are all that remain. (262-63)

The Peacekeepers express their rage over the Games' postponement. The state of games is chaos. While Snow wants to keep the Games going, people are urging him to cancel them. In this instance, his Peacekeepers mistreat Cinna while disobeying Katniss's plea. Cinna is severely assaulted, leaving him bleeding on the ground. The Capitol authorities violently abuse their authority and the people's body.

Collins depicts the protagonists' desire to utilize drugs to speed up their abuse of their bodies. Adolescents who take drugs mistreat their bodies. A portion of the government workforce and game developers rebel against President Snow. While Peeta, Johana, and Enobaria are being held by the Capitol in an attempt to misuse their authority, these individuals are making an effort to resist it. Haymitch to the public announces, "Peta was picked up by the Capital along with Johana and Enobaria" (387). To show off its false and tyrannical rule, the Capitol arrests Peeta and other people. Hearing this misuse of authority, Katniss is incensed. She loses self-control and is thereafter put under a strong drug's severe sedation. Katniss states what ails her:

> My skull hurts so much after a needle pokes my arm that I give up fighting and just scream in a terrible, dying animal cry till my voice breaks. Because of the drug's sedative effects and poor sleep quality, I am stuck in a dull, painful state of suffering that appears to never end. They put their tubes back in and speak to me in quiet whispers that I can never hear. (388)

Katniss sedates herself with drugs after her buddy Peeta's incarceration. She wants the Capitol authorities to stop abusing people's bodies. These pictures highlight further incidents of the Capitol authorities abusing people's bodies. In *The Hunger Games*, the Capitol's goal to subjugate other districts through the mistreatment of young adult bodies is thus evidently successful.

In addition, Thapa argues, "The intention of the young adults does not confine only in abusing other's body. They distrust their friends as well" (198). Therefore, the young adults in the novels written by teenagers are shown to be sceptical of one another's actions and to engage in "physical, sexual, or psychological harm, including acts of physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse, and controlling behaviours" (Jonathan Herring, 38). Siobhan

Murphy, a Danish critic, agrees with Herring when he discusses internal partner violence (IPV). According to Murphy, the early years of adulthood are a high-risk time for IPV. Child abuse is known as IPV. In "Child Maltreatment Typologies and Intimate Partner Violence; Findings from a Danish National Study of Young Adult", Murphy goes on to acknowledge that IPV is defined as "physical, sexual, or psychological harm, initiated by a current or former partner or spouse" (755). Murphy emphasizes how abusing one's body can occur with a spouse, partner, or ex-relationship. Young adults continue to experience high rates of bodily abuse. There are numerous examples of domestic violence in *The Hunger Games*. Katniss has suspicions about Peeta's kindness toward her and their tutor, Haymitch. She thinks that *The Hunger Games* arena is inhospitable to compassion. Katniss asserts, "A kind Peeta Mellark is far more dangerous to me than an unkind one. Good people seem to find a way inside of me and take root. Moreover, I can't allow Peeta to do this" (49). Katniss recognizes the ability of good people to manipulate. She emphasizes that good people fight their enemies internally. Because of this, she is resolved to keep her distance from Peeta and cultivate an independent mindset in order to win *The Hunger Games* "kind Peeta Mellark, the boy who gave the bread, is fighting hard to kill her" (60). Despite Peeta's empathetic demeanour, Katniss plans to forge her path in life and identity.

Katniss continues to doubt Peeta. Katniss and Peeta continue to experience internal relationship violence. Reminding herself, Katniss says, "Don't be so dumb. Peeta is preparing a way to murder you. He's drawing you in so that you'll be easy pickings. He is more lethal the more likeable he is" (72). She has little faith in Peeta's actions. She wants to be emotionally and physically strong. She comes up with a new reason to hurt Peeta. In addition to Katniss, Peeta harbours misgivings about her, as Haymitch dismissively states, "Peeta has requested to be coached separately" (113). Peeta is not a believer in Katniss either. Peeta wants to establish his identity and place in the world by regenerating his ability to defeat his opponents. Further, Thapa explicates, "Young adult novelists project the adults and institutions abusing the body of young adults to establish their control over the young adults. Adolescents understand their strength when they combat with the institutions" (202). Agreeing with Thapa,

Trites posits, "Adolescent characters struggle with the various institutions in their lives to understand their power" (8). In *The Hunger Games*, Katniss and Peeta battle to accept themselves in the eyes of adults and institutions. Abuse by adults and institutions is something Katniss and Peeta experience from the start. The evil intentions of the institutions and adults push Katniss and Peeta to become independent. These betrayals help them grow into adulthood.

Katniss and Peeta's identities are dependent on their ability to resist the constraints and crimes committed by the Capitol. In an effort to discover who they are, Peeta and Katniss battle against the Capitol's rules. They act as though they are in a romantic relationship. Regulations are altered by Capitol authorities. According to their regulations, two tributes from the same district can win if they eliminate tributes from other districts. Trainers mistreat tributes right there in the training centre. Trainer Haymitch Abernathy mistreats Peeta and Katniss to acquire time and power. Haymitch repeatedly admits, "I am sullen and hostile" (121). They learn "combative exercise, fighting techniques, and survival skills" (93) from Haymitch in order to succeed. To win over their opponents and gain additional sponsors, Haymitch forces them to "delight him" (117). He overuses his influence to keep them under his thumb. In this scenario, Katniss attempts to respond to Haymitch's questions as he acts as the interviewer. She is "too angry with Haymitch for what he said," though, so she is unable to (ibid). Boldly, Katniss responds, "She practically starts spitting answers at him as her fury seems to rise to the surface" (117). Katniss tries to find out where she stands about Haymitch. She makes an effort to elude the adults' manipulation and maltreatment. As Linda Morgan exposes more about adolescents in "Insight through Suffering: Cruelty in Adolescent Fiction about Boys," young people not only tolerate physical abuse but, astonishingly, actively participate in it. Morgan explains, "Adolescents can be brutally cruel to other adolescents. Others are viewed by them as vile, foolish, or self-centered" (56). They are envious of and competitive with others. Collins examines the activities of the tributes in *The Hunger Games*. Their goals are to win and to murder others. They are physically abusing their bodies. In the lives of young adults, physical abuse and violence coexist side

by side. Katniss describes Peeta as having experienced violence and acknowledges, "His face is swollen with bruises, there is bloody bandage on one arm" (161). Teens have no qualms about severely mistreating their pals' bodies. Their feelings and need for vengeance are out of control.

Similarly, the friends of the Capitol mistreat young people's bodies on the pretext of maintaining peace. Peeta was struck in the head by a peacekeeper. The violence on the body is continuously shown on television to intimidate the opposition. The television reveals, "We are privy to the real life action being played out on the set. Peeta's endeavor to carry on talking. To capture the white tiled floor, the camera sounded. The boot scuffle, the blow's effect, which is inextricably linked to Peeta's agonized cry. Additionally, his blood spatters the tiles" (134). Here, Peeta's injuries are a result of the torture he endures at the hands of Capitol authorities. The Capitol guards physically torture him a great deal. He gets severely thrashed live on TV. He attempts to combat the mistreatment perpetrated by the authorities. He makes an effort to voice his opposition to the peacekeepers' violence. He battles the Capitol a great deal to carve out a place for himself in the adult showground. Young Adult stories typically encourage their heroes to commit acts of physical abuse as a form of retaliation. Adults and young adults do not coordinate their activities. Until they fulfil their objective, young adults will continue to abuse their bodies and engage in violence. Thapa claims, "Another important condition for maltreating the body is sexual abuse. Mostly young adults involve in the sexual abuse. Through the sexual activities, young adults abuse their and others' bodies immensely" (204). In this regard, the association between sexual abuse and body abuse is presented by Heather Y. Swanton et al. in "Juvenile Crime: Aggression and Delinquency after Sexual Abuse: a Longitudinal Study." However, Swanton et al. assert, "There might be additional criminogenic elements at play in cases of sexual abuse. Hard drug usage is linked to a higher likelihood of sexual abuse" (731–731). Here, the abuse of the body through sexual assault is initiated by the use of heavy drugs. The four forms of sexual abuse are indecent assault, attempted indecent assault, sexual assault, and sexual assault. The abuse of the body is the result of these assaults. When Peeta and Katniss pretend to be in love in *The Hunger Games*, she says,

"Peeta bends over to give her a kiss" (294). Peeta makes an effort to rape. Peeta tries to entice her. As Katniss disdainfully clarifies, "Peeta envelops me in his arms" (317). One can express one's sexuality through the body while variations in physical functions are brought about by gender, colour, class, and sexual orientation. Youth and popular culture's silhouettes are integrated when the body is used as the major site of sexuality. Trites claims, "Young adults also dare the universe to be disturbed" (2). Adolescents are not afraid to stand up to adults and society. They want to take over their area. The adults and the Games' organizers enforce rules that Katniss and Peeta refuse to follow. Both Peeta and Katniss experience confusion when they learn they are still in the running for the 74th Hunger Games. "Dropping her weapons, Katniss takes a step back" (343). Peeta laments, "I don't want to die like Cato (343)" in a similar. They disobey the Games' rules acting as if they are in love. Taking night lock berries, Katniss chooses not to kill Peeta. She plans to mistreat her physique. At last, the Games Organizer declares Peeta and Katniss the winners of the 74th Hunger Games. They fall into each other's arms as Katniss spits the berries out of her mouth. They succeed in being themselves while upsetting the Capitol's universe.

Conclusion

The Hunger Games incorporates numerous types of hunger. Primarily, physical hunger, hunger for power, hunger for freedom, hunger for recognition and hunger for justice engage intensively in the novel to unfold the abuse of young adults' bodies. Adults mistreat young adults physically to gain power over them. Young adults are typically mistreated by adults because they see them as competitors and potential sources of dominance in the future. To establish their identity, freedom, authority, and maturity, young adults also mistreat their bodies. Adolescents frequently mistreat their bodies during their growing phase. Adolescents are compelled by their development process to mistreat their bodies. In contrast, young adults exhibit a propensity to mistreat their bodies to establish their status in the adult and young adult ranks. The Young Adult storylines are dominated by motivations other than physical abuse. *The Hunger Games* depicts several incidents of physical abuse. By abusing the body, it blatantly projects the concepts of identity,

control, and freedom. The annual lottery program known as *The Hunger Games*, which selects young adults between the ages of 11 and 18, is a classic example of the Capitol's abuse of power over districts and individuals. The Capitol forces the two main young adult heroes, Peeta and Katniss, to mistreat their bodies for them to survive. In an attempt to break away from the current of identity and freedom, young adults plan to injure both their own and other people's bodies. The main characters of *The Hunger Games*, Katniss and Peeta, misuse their bodies and those of others to assert their dominance, define their identities, and reclaim their lost freedom. They initially feel anxious about competing in the Games as lottery conductor Effie Trinket announces their name to take part in the yearly Games. Afterwards, Haymitch gives them confidence and instruction, and they are prepared to mistreat their bodies. Haymitch, the trainer, mistreats their bodies to gain control over them and imparts various survival techniques. To win *The Hunger Games*, both slaughter a great deal of other tributes. Peeta and Katniss can express their true selves to others after winning the game. By abusing their bodies, they progressively try to regain identity, freedom, and control.

In conclusion this research contends that physical abuse is a significant problem and the politics of the body is significantly influenced by the misuse of the body in *The Hunger Games*. The politics of the body gives young adults a way to enter the realm of identity, freedom, and maturity. Even when their bodies are abused, they manage to gain entry to the territory of freedom, identity, and maturity. In the end, young adults can tear down the wall of control that adults built to enter the realm of freedom, despite the forceful attempts of adults to tighten their grip on control and abuse the young adult body. In the same vein, Katniss and Peeta use physical torture as a way to mature and come to terms with society's truths. They work very hard to overcome the incidents of physical abuse. They accept the occurrences of physical abuse as a given and use them as opportunities to grow in both their strengths and flaws. For the young adults, abusing their bodies serves as a means of transportation to their destinations. Collins urges her young adult characters to embrace and put up with physical mistreatment to hasten their attempts to reclaim their identity, their lost independence, and their adulthood.

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7

The Rohingya Crisis:
A Cross-Border Analysis of Habiburahman's
First, They Erased Our Name

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Abstract

Habiburahman's *First, They Erased Our Name* reflects the Rohingya crisis which has been one of the glaring crucial issues of the contemporary world. Historically, Rohingya are a native minority Muslims of Arakan State, West Myanmar. However, during the 1980s, due to the rise of autocratic rule under U Ne Win in Myanmar, Rohingya community was persecuted suspending their political rights. And they were cracked down into a state of non-citizens not listed in 135 recognized ethnic groups. The Rohingya crisis is characterized by sectarian violence between the Rohingya Muslim and Rakhine Buddhist communities. The tyrannical move of Myanmar authorities against Rohingya turns them into severe restrictions on their freedom of movement and extreme barriers to accessing basic humanitarian assistance. In addition, Rohingya people have been scattered into several parts of the world from 1982 onwards deserving stateless status living in between natural life Zoe and political life Bios. Theoretically, this paper will analyze the real plights of Rohingya immigrants through the theoretical lenses of Foucault's ideas on power dynamics and biopolitics Homi K. Bhabha's hybridity and resistance and Agamben in relation to Arendt's right to have right. It further offers a different solution in fostering understanding and empathy, offering a scholarly contribution to the ongoing discourse surrounding displacement, identity, and resistance.

Keywords: Refugee Immigrants, Humanitarian Crisis, Stateless Plights, Biopolitics, Hybridity

Introduction

The Rohingya crisis has been a serious and complex issue that has been the contested subject of contemporary research and analysis.

According to a policy 'Brief" by the American Institute of Bangladesh Studies (AIBS), the Rohingya crisis is a result of a long-standing history of discrimination and persecution against the Rohingya community in Myanmar. It has emerged as a pressing issue on the global stage, demanding a nuanced understanding of its complexities and implications. This cross-border analysis endeavours to delve into the heart of this humanitarian crisis through the lens of literature, specifically exploring the multifaceted dimensions embedded in Habiburahman's narrative, *First, They Erased Our Name*. This literary undertaking seeks to unravel the intricate layers of the Rohingya experience, offering a comprehensive examination that goes beyond the surface of geopolitical discussions.

The analysis employs the expression of thinkers such as Edward Said and Homi K. Bhabha, whose postcolonial theories contribute to the power dynamics, cultural hybridity, and resistance embedded in the Rohingya narrative. The study also examines how the medium of storytelling contributes to the articulation of the Rohingya people's cross-border identity.

The **findings** of this analysis reveal the profound impact of erasure, displacement, and marginalization on the Rohingya community. Intertwining theoretical frameworks and the lived experiences depicted in Habiburahman's work contributes to a deeper comprehension of the Rohingya Crisis. It also shows the specific poignant realities faced by the Rohingya people in their homeland (Habiburahman, 2019). In conclusion, this cross-border analysis serves as a valuable exploration of the Rohingya Crisis through the lens of literature. It emphasizes the significance of narratives in fostering understanding and empathy, offering a scholarly contribution to the ongoing discourse surrounding displacement, identity, and resistance. First, They Erased *Our Name* is described through the multifaceted narrative of the Rohingya crisis, unravelling the intricate layers of displacement, and identity. In the same way, the issue of Rohingya is represented in many books and articles differently. In "In Search of a Rohingya Digital Diaspora: Virtual Togetherness, Collective Identities and Political Mobilisation", Anas Ansar & Abu Faisal Md. Khaled provides a comprehensive analysis of the Rohingya crisis from a political and collective perspective. The article examines the historical and political context

of the crisis, the role of social media in shaping the narrative, and the challenges faced by the Rohingya community in terms of identity, citizenship, and human rights. It also highlights the importance of collective action and international cooperation to address the crisis. Ansar and Khaled point out:

> Frequently called the most persecuted minority in the world, the Rohingyas have suffered systematic violence and oppression in Myanmar since the 1970s. Today, the vast majority of the nearly three million Rohingyas are in exile, escaping state-sponsored human rights violations and persecution in the Rakhine state of Myanmar—a place they call home. (2023)

This shows the historical and political context of the crisis, the role of social media in shaping the narrative, and the challenges faced by the Rohingya community in terms of identity, citizenship, and human rights. It also highlights the importance of collective action and international cooperation to address the crisis. In another article "The Rohingya Refugees: A Conceptual Framework of their Psychosocial Adversities, Cultural Idioms of Distress and Social Suffering" byNivedita Sudheer and Debanjan Banerjeeexplores the psychosocial adversities, cultural idioms of distress, and social suffering experienced by the Rohingya refugees. The article provides a conceptual framework for understanding the complex and multifaceted nature of the crisis, including the impact of trauma, displacement, and loss on the mental health and well-being of the Rohingya community.It also highlights the importance of culturally sensitive and context-specific interventions to address the psychosocial needs of the Rohingya refugees.

Ken MacLeanin his article "The Rohingya Crisis and the Practices of Erasure" examines the practices of erasure that have been used to marginalize and exclude the Rohingya community from Myanmar's political and social landscape. The article provides a critical analysis of the historical and political context of the crisis, including the role of the military, the government, and the Buddhist nationalist movement in perpetuating violence and discrimination against the Rohingya. It also highlights the importance of recognizing the agency and resilience of the Rohingya community in the face of adversity. Likewise, Md Nurul Momem's book *The Rohingya Refugee Crisis: Implications for Regional Security* examines the security issues

and worries from three angles: local livelihood, political rivalry, and potential radicalization risks resulting from the Rohingya people's statelessness. It draws attention to the present circumstances, which call for specific steps from regional governments, and it underscores the need for "political will and measures to be initiated to successfully handle security implications" (615-629). *The Rohingya Crisis: Human Rights Issues, Policy Concerns and Burden Sharing*, a research study, also discusses the many facets of Rohingya life in Bangladesh, Myanmar, India, Nepal, and other Southeast Asian nations as well as in the West. Additionally, the piece offers a thorough examination of the issue, taking into account its historical contexts in resolving the crisis and highlights the role of legal avenues such as the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the International Criminal Court (ICC) in holding the Myanmar authorities accountable for human rights violations.

Another article on Rohingya crisis, "The Rohingya Crisis and Questions of Accountability" by Adam Simpson & Nicholas Farrelly explores the legal and political dimensions of the Rohingya crisis, including the role of international law and human rights norms in addressing the crisis. The article provides a critical analysis of the challenges and limitations of accountability mechanisms, including the International Criminal Court (ICC) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ), in holding the Myanmar authorities accountable for human rights violations. It also highlights the importance of addressing the root causes of the crisis, including the issue of citizenship and the need for political reform in Myanmar.

While all of these related reviews provide valuable insights into the Rohingya crisis, they differ in their focus and scope. For example, Anas Ansar & Abu Faisal Md. Khaled examines the crisis of political and collective identity perspective, while Nivedita Sudheer and Debanjan Banerjee focus on the psychosocial adversities experienced by the Rohingya refugees. Ken MacLean provides a critical analysis of the practices of erasure that have been used to marginalize the Rohingya community, while Adam Simpson and Nicholas Farrelly examine the legal and political dimensions of the crisis. None of the studies have an understanding of the Rohingya crisis from a cross-border perspective. Critics have long grappled with the challenge of encapsulating the depth and gravity of the Rohingya Crisis, and this

literary exploration will add a new perspective to the ongoing research on Rohingya crisis.

This paper will emphasize on the ontological, epistemological and axiological approach through the theoretical lenses of Agamben in relation to Arendt's theories on the right to have rights, and Foucault's Biopolitics as the major theories. Additionally, such a theoretical frame will focus on a close reading of the novel *First, They Erased Our* Name. Employing these major theoretical tools, representation of major characters and their dehumanized position will be analyzed to reveal the true picture of immigrants and refugees of contemporary society and how such social scenario causes a humanitarian crisis. The main objective of the study is to uncover the realistic suffering accounts of immigrants and refugees in their daily basis life through the narrative, *First, They Erased Our Name* and the fictional representation of the characters. This study is done to analyze the displaced position of Rohingya immigrants and their pain through the representation of the major characters of the novel and to explore the humanitarian crisis due to the stateless position of Rohingya immigrants and its devastating impact on real refugees' lives. "The Rohingya are refused even the most basic human dignity" (Habiburahman 47). More to it, this study also aims at offering a solution for Rohingya refugees and immigrants in the world through the right implication of the concept the equal liberty and ideas of absolute hospitality to all immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers.

Agamben in his book, *We Refugees*, explores the complex connection between citizenship, rights, and the elusive nature of humanity. He claims that "Rights, that is, are attributable to man only in the degree to which he is immediately vanishing presupposing (indeed, he must never appear simply as a man) of the citizen" (Agamben 117). For him, the rights are not assigned only based on a person's general human identity (or "simply as man"). Rather, it is connected to the citizen's status or legal and political frameworks. This claim of Agamben is supported by critic Arendt in her book, *The Origin of Totalitarianism*, with the concept of inalienable rights. Arendt reflects on the rights:

> The rights of man, after all, had been defined as "inalienable" because they were supposed to be independent of all government; but it turned out that the moment human beings lacked their government and had

to fall back upon their minimum rights, no authority left to protect them and no institution was willing to guarantee them. (Arendt 291-92).

Individuals are born with these inalienable rights, which means they cannot be taken away or given up. For her, these inalienable rights become problematic when in real-world scenarios, the individuals might not get any authority or institution willing to step in and guarantee or protect these fundamental rights. In this context, as any other Rohingya does, Habib also rhetorically feels the same in the narrative when he declares, "Why am I not treated the same as my friends? Why am I . . . confined within the perimeter of our village . . . sense of injustice gnaws at me." (21). It presents the Rohingya are the victims of the state's exclusion and mistreatment. Therefore, to enjoy inalienable rights a person must be within the political space of a government.

The Rohingya are not considered complete human beings rather they have to face life-threatening complexities to survive in Myanmar. The protagonist Habib narrates "Those who refused to leave their home were slaughtered or arrested and tortured. The extremists looted whatever they could. Hundreds of Rohingya were left dead. Thousands were imprisoned. Maybe more who knows? Who will ever care? Who will record the truth of such horrors?" (Habiburahman 9). Rohingya lose everything when they are out of political space. They are not safe and their death is normal and even not recorded because they are not sovereign citizen subjects of the state. In Myanmar the case of Rohingya the question of life and death becomes very crucial because they lose the right to have rights in a totalitarian state.

After the unfair moves of Win, Rohingya lost every citizen's right as they have not been included as citizens. As the narrator states:

> I never knew my grandfather, who used to live with my grandmother and father in nearby Arakan state, before our family were chased away by men from the dominant tribe, the Rakhines. Or maybe it was the Burmese soldiers. I can't remember anymore. Whichever it was my grandfather was arrested and tortured to death. Grandma often cries when she talks about him the rest of the family went into hiding while they waited for the manhunt to end. (27)

These sorrowful words of Habib reflect the traumatic history of his family concerning the murder of his grandfather. It was the initial plight that the authority strategically excluded them from their political rights

According to Foucault, biopolitics involves the study of how governments and states control the biological body of human beings or citizens—not just individuals, but also populations as a whole. As mentioned by researchers Gudmand-Hoyer and Lopdrup Hjorth, in their review article on *The Birth of Biopolitics*:

> In 1978, Foucault conceptualizes the governmental target of the population as a new collective focus of biopolitics, representing a political object insofar as the population is that on which and towards which the acts of government are directed, but also a, political subject insofar as it is the population that is called upon to conduct itself in a particular way. (Gudmand-Hoyer and Lopdrup Hjorth 106)

Moreover, in biopolitics, Foucault's idea of the population as a "political object" and a "political subject" illustrates the move away from the control and management of individual populations and toward the regulation and management of entire populations. The narrative claims, "the history of the genocide and massacre tells the suffering and the hardships that the Muslim refugees have to face" (Habiburahman 3). This includes not just how the government acts about the population, but also how the population actively participates in society and behaves within the limitations imposed by the governing power.

In the modern context, migrant cosmopolitanism has the power and right to battle for their rights to find justice in the political discourse. The refugees in the narrative claim, "But making something happen meant drawing attention. Being visible . . . He gathers a courage and steps outside with the confidence" (Habiburahman 136). This can be related to the concept of Balibar's Citizen Subject and Equality, Levinas's ethics of face, and Derrida's cosmopolitanism regarding the existing crisis of refugees.

In Myanmar, the educational institute doesn't easily welcome the students in the classrooms as they are deprived of fundamental rights. In the narrative, the Rohingya situation is intensified by the Buddhist Rakhine students who forcefully harass the Muslim students, "Goodbye, ten per cent . . . another derogatory term, . . . not worthy of respect, of no value" (Habiburahman 64). Similarly,

Derrida's idea of unconditional hospitality is thought-provoking and pushes us to reconsider hospitality from a deeper and wider angle. The unconditional law of hospitality encourages a more humane and inclusive approach to welcome those who arrive seeking shelter and asylum by provoking thought about the moral obligations of nations and cities toward those who are displaced. Derrida argues:

> The city itself could determine the laws of hospitality, the articles of predetermined law, both plural and restrictive with which they meant to condition the great law of Hospitality- an unconditional law, both singular and universal, which ordered that the borders be open to everyone, to every other, to all who might come, without question or without their even having to identify who they are or whence they came. (Derrida 18)

He challenges the conventional understanding of laws and regulations that govern the relationship between a host and a guest. This notion of cosmopolitanism invites us to think of a kind of hospitality that surpasses protocols and promotes a welcoming and accepting attitude toward people like Rohingya and from all other backgrounds and identities.

In addition to its effect on their legal status which forces them to relocate. "Due to the greater number of Muslim victims, the origin of the violence has been generally attributed to widely spread Rakhine xenophobia. Discussions on Rohingya identity and the historical background have been altogether eschewed" (Leider 3). For Leider, Rohingya identity is not a fixed category but rather fluid as a remaking process. So, they have multiple identities in different parts of the world.

Correspondingly, scholars focus on the suffering based on the everyday lifestyle of Rohingya caused by the limited resources and its adverse consequences "Although an extended humanitarian response in a variable scale has been initiated, Rohingyas are suffering from limitations of resources and coordination is required for proper implementation of emerging opportunities and planning" (Karin *at el* 15). For them, Rohingya suffer from the risk of the lack of basic needs. Another critic M.R.I. Rusal raises issues about how Rohingya are deprived of citizenship as scattered masses even in their home country as a basic right. Citizenship is a fundamental right that ensures people have legal protection and the ability to

participate in civic life, therefore its lack of legal acknowledgement has serious ramifications. The Rohingya people struggle to lead safe, stable lives in the absence of citizenship:

> In this regard, the nationalist monks, mob, and military have all been part of a larger campaign of eliminating the Rohingya people. Interestingly, the democratically elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991 for her non-violent strategy for democracy and human rights, failed to condemn the ongoing persecution (Rusal 3).

According to Rusal, Rohingya are practically eliminated from their historical homeland Arakan, a state in Myanmar. As a result, Rohingya have to suffer this terrible fate deserving severe plights in different places with an identity crisis. In addition, scholar Azeem Ibrahim shows the repressive move of the Myanmar military to crack down on the Rohingya Muslim ethnic group to drive them across the border into Bangladesh as a deserted mass. This entails looking into how the military crackdown and forced migration relate to human rights standards and international law.

As researched by critic Azeem Ibrahim, "If this legislation and discrimination was simply a historical legacy of the period of military rule and dictatorship .... the shift to democracy has worsened the legal position of the Rohingyas and has seen a dramatic escalation in the violence they face" (Ibrahim 52). In his view, Rohingya are dehumanized discriminated and thrown out of the legal space due to the rise of dictatorship in Myanmar.

In the same vein, critic Galache Sardina Carlos discusses anti-Rohingya sentiments connected to crime. Unfairly targeting a particular ethnic or religious group increases the possibility that they would be wrongly linked to criminal activity based more on biased opinions than on solid facts. "The refugee crisis has also contributed to a reduction in the price of drugs, as many desperate Rohingya in the camps have fallen prey to criminal networks trafficking methamphetamine (known as yaba in Burma), produced in Shan State and smuggled to" (Carlos 247). In this situation, the vulnerabilities brought about by the refugee crisis are taken advantage of by criminal networks.

The Rohingya are vulnerable to the influence of these networks because of the dire conditions they live in in the camps. Methamphetamine manufacture and trafficking simply serve to intensify the problems already faced by these communities, introducing an additional layer of complexity to an already challenging circumstance. So as the crisis worsened the situation in Arakan turned into an isolated hub of illegal networking. Muhammad views that the Rohingya are systematically excluded under the leadership of General Win in their native land. "What is needed is political will and diplomatic assertiveness from the UN leadership to bring the Security Council to a consensus to solve the humanitarian crisis and existential threat that the Rohingya are facing" (Muhammad 68). As for him, Rohingya are denied rights to public services the civil rights, including the right to vote. The persecution of Rohingya has multiplied and they have faced violence, arbitrary arrest and detention, extortion, restriction of movement, confiscation of property, forced labour, and other abuse in an organized way. Indeed, the Myanmar government refuses to accept the human sensibility of the Rohingya.

As displaced refugees, Rohingya face the humanitarian crisis due to unhospitable treatment in several places of the world. After Myanmar Rohingya come across many places encountering various people. The protagonist, Habib is forced to move from place to place disguising his true identity to continue his life. He travels to a new place with a new identity to avoid abusive treatment, and a hostile environment even from the local government. He often takes the help of his relatives but does not disclose his real identity because if authorities find him with his true Muslim identity he can immediately be persecuted as an illegal person. Habib exposes that "If they find out that we are Rohingya that's the end of us" (140). Such an expression indicates to state authorities who are ready to end the Rohingya. Authority acts to erase their physical existence wherever possible. This unsafe condition of Rohingya refugees reflects Foucault's idea of biopolitics because the authorities do not want to see the physical existence of Rohingya in Myanmar in new host countries. Physically Rohingya are likely to be convicted at any time anywhere even without any mistakes.

In addition, it's not easy for Rohingya to meet family members and sit together sharing pain and happiness in a new land. Habib's uncle utters:

> I can't keep you here. Stay tonight but tomorrow you will have to leave. The neighbours do not like us living here. If authorities find you here, we will be arrested and imprisoned. Since we left Arakan, we have told everyone that we are from a Muslim ethnic group in Shan state. If they found out that we are Rohingya, that's the end of us. (140)

This situation is extremely heart-reducing in the life of a refugee. They cannot meet even the family members freely. So, it's a convincing example of a humanitarian crisis.

Similarly, the narrative presents that no one is ready to have solidarity with displaced refugees in the world. The central character Habib reaches the rickety bridge that lies between Malaysia and Thailand authorities and he changes his cultural dress *longyi* and wears trousers just to be safe from the corrupted authorities. "Behave like the locals if you want to avoid being noticed. When you're working, watch the other workers and do what they do. Camouflage is your only protection. Stop wearing a *longyi* and wear trousers" (203). So, he has to imitate others whether that is desirable or not to survive in a new land. Changing his traditional attire which is attached to his ancestral legacy reflects the erasing of his true identity.

The Rohingya problem has been a serious humanitarian crisis for decades in the world but it can be solved by adopting some useful theories. Particularly taking the ideas of hospitality, open borders as well as dissensus, we can address the immediate crisis of Rohingya. Habib protagonist of the novel *First, They Erased Our Name* gets warm hospitality in several places during his perilous journey. As Derrida proposes unconditional hospitality "The question of cosmopolitanism or hospitality is also the "question of question" in that "hospitality [must] begin with the unquestioning welcome" (Derrida 29). Habib receives absolute hospitality at Christmas Island. On the Island, the Australian Navy patrol boat ACPB 88 assists refugees in rescuing life providing immediate basic needs. He shares the moment, "The rescue operation begins. The Australian haul us aboard, rape us in towels, give us something to eat and drink, a brief medical check and some warm clothes" (227). It is humanitarian assistance to save the lives of Rohingya. In Habib's life, it is the first

incident of getting support from the authorities treating them with dignity, and respect, and showing humanitarian values.

Conclusion

Thus, the Rohingya Refugee crisis has been a serious central issue in the present world for years. The novel *First, They Erased Our Name* uncovers the true narrative of the Rohingya as stateless from inherited land in Arakan State West Myanmar to several parts of the world due to dictator U Ne Win erasing them from the list of 135 recognized ethnic categories in 1982. The state political crisis caused the entire crisis in the lives of individuals of Rohingya. As a result of the suspension of the citizen rights of Rohingya, they are turned into stateless. In addition, exiled from political space Rohingya people would face a severe humanitarian crisis as illegitimate masses in Myanmar set up precarious journeys to several countries from one part of the globe to the next. Furthermore, Win's assertion against Rohingya excluded from the fundamental civil rights and throw them like Homo Sacer, a sacred figure who can be killed without culpability like a wolf but not sacrificed. The declarations of human rights seem to cease to secure an individual's right to asylum because Rohingya are transformed into neither entirely human nor beast who have been banned from the city and exploited, and tortured wherever they are unfortunate to take shelter as refugees. There would not be an alternative to solving the Rohingya immigrant problem in the 21st century. In order to address the Rohingya crisis the concept of Derrida's cosmopolitanism, Balibar's citizen subject and equality, and Levinas's ethics of face would be implacable. Adopting these solution theories Rohingya issues could be normalized by reestablishing their previous citizen rights in the world.

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8

Writing Draupadi: Politics and Poetics of Myth in Modern South Asian Literature

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Abstract

Modern South Asian literature celebrates Draupadi as one of the key icons that helps explore the embedded tenets of thoughts about self, history, and polity. Human beings make meaning of their endeavours in the political setup of historical context by placing self-therein. Bengali novelist Mahasweta Devi (1926-2016), Oriya novelist Pratibha Ray (1943-), and Nepali novelist Neelam Karki (1975-) rewrite Draupadi's myth from the Mahabharata in "Draupadi" (1978), *Yajnaseni* (1984), and *Cheerharan* [Disrobing] (2016) respectively. Each of the woman authors addresses the formation of a woman's self at a particular historical juncture in their society. Devi's rebel self emerges from prevailing discrimination in Bengali society where the Mundas were socially and politically pushed to the margin. Ray broadly reflects on the plight of women in her contemporary society where they have lost independence to the dictations of society upon their self as they have no freedom of choice. Narrated in an epistolary form addressing Krishna as her spiritual companion, Ray's Draupadi reveals the vibes of her inner heart and her intimate observations about the world and the people. In Karki's *Cheerharan*, Draupadi organises a programme to bring four generations of women together: Satyavati from the first generation; Ambika and Ambalika from the second generation; Gandhari and Kunti from the third generation; and Draupadi, Ulupi, and Bhanumati from the fourth generation. Though each generation narrates its story to the audience in the programme, this study will focus on Draupadi's narration only. Devi, Ray, and Karki employ Draupadi as one of the power narratives to explore a new meaning in the changing context of their society. The woman authors reframe Draupadi's myth in different ways to suit the ethos of Bengal in the 1970s, Odisha in the late 1970s, and Nepal after the second people's movement in 2006. Each author invents a unique way of framing the narrative to address the inequalities in power structures in their societies. This paper contextually reads the three texts to examine the goal of writing Draupadi in modern South Asian fiction.

Introduction

Modern South Asian literature has celebrated myths by reviving them from time to time in search of a new meaning in the changing social and political contexts. One of the most widely read, reread, and interpreted myths is the tale of Draupadi which has occupied its place in popular tales, folk hymns, poetry, and fiction. Bengali novelist Mahasweta Devi (1926-2016), Oriya novelist Pratibha Ray (1943-), and Nepali novelist Neelam Karki (1975-) have written from the Mahabharata the myth of Draupadi to address particular challenges of their respective societies in Bengali short fiction "Draupadi" (1978), Oriya novel *Yajnaseni* (1984), and Nepali novel *Cheerharan*[Disrobing] (2016) respectively. This paper analyses the ways of treatment of the myth in modern South Asian literature and the political goal behind it. To derive conclusions from the study, I have taken Gayatri Chakrabarty's Spivak's 1981 English translation of Devi's fiction, Pradip Bhattacharya's 1995 English translation of Ray's novel, and Karki's novel in Nepali for the analysis. The materials cited from Karki's novel are my translation.

Changing Contours of Interpretations: Rereading Draupadi

Modern South Asian literature illustrates multiple instances of writing the myth of Draupadi from the Mahabharata. As the most flexible cultural icon of contemporary times, Draupadi has emerged as a voice that adds meaning in times of trouble, suffering, and torture. In the most volatile transition of society, Draupadi allows people to view their reality from a different angle, preparing themselves to tolerate the tumultuous journey ahead in life. Mahasweta Devi's 1978 short fiction reveals the quest of an Adivasi girl fighting against discrimination in Bengal in the 1970s by recontextualizing the scene of Draupadi's humiliation in Hastinapur. Similarly, Pratibha Ray's novel *Yajnaseni* (1984) presents Draupadi's self-reflection on her journey. Neelam Karki's *Cheerharan* [The Disrobing] (2016) also addresses the prevailing challenges of Nepali society where people fight for a share in the state and power sharing.

All three texts have drawn the critical attention of scholars who have primarily read the texts from the perspective of gender and the

subaltern people. Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi" deals with the challenges of Bengal in the 1970s Subhranil Mahato analyses that the fiction "was written against the backdrop of the wild forests of Southern Bengal at the time of political insurgency in 1971. A messed-up time it was in the Indian political scenario. In Bengal, the growing disturbances among the peasants, labourers and tribal communities, got their direction to vent their anger with the Naxalite movement" (53). By recreating the context and placing Draupadi as a Munda girl fighting for her rights, Devi also expresses her solidarity with the downtrodden section of society. In addition to Mahato, Suresh Ranjan Basak approaches the short fiction contextually to explore the dynamics of the Santhal uprising. He reads Draupadi as an icon of public memory who reappears with renewed vigour. As he argues, "So Dopdi has to scrape the 'public memory' hard, not alone Vyasa's text, to make room for herself. As for Spivak's 'contradiction,' Dopdi fits comfortably into it, though it brings about a whole gamut of contradictions—ranging from societal to ideological" (332). As a cultural icon that sides with the oppressed in the story, Draupadi presents herself as a case, sufficient to challenge the traditional power matrix.

Sweta treats the garment as the major motif associated with the myth of Draupadi. In "Draupadi," she rejects clothes. Ved Vyas depicts Draupadi's quest to protect her honour by keeping herself in the clothes. On the contrary, Devi's Adivasi protagonist knows that a piece of cloth cannot give her any honour and protect her dignity. Piya Srinivasan contextually reads the story to see the modes of use of violence to silence the rebels. She writes:

> I highlight how *Draupadi* becomes an allegory for constitutional injustice by exploring contestations of power in the use of law, voice and deployment of the body. Written at the intersection of state power and sexual violence, the story inverts the narrative order of violence by rewriting the script of the violated female body. It presents a radical feminism that challenges patriarchal complicity in state power and scripts narratives of resistance that come together to form a feminist theatre of justice. (n. pag.)

As the seeker of justice, Draupadi has to undergo tremendous torture as she is repeatedly raped the whole night. Srinivasan's argument implies the use of force to silence women in a patriarchal

order. In the like manner, Masihur Rahman also interprets the story through Foucauldian frames of power and knowledge as he analyses, "The spectacle of tying Dopdi to four posts alludes to tethering animals. This shows how the detainees are dehumanised. Dopdi is sexually exploited repeatedly that night to extract information. Her private parts became the site of violence unleashed by state apparatus" (4). The imbalance in power structure results in the victimisation of rebels in "Draupadi."

Devi's text has been read to explore the inequalities in Indian societies. Postcolonial interpretations still find traces of imperial order at the bottom of local and national feudal power structures. Ramyabrata Chakraborty argues that Devi's fiction presents the drama between colonisers and the colonised. As he observes, Mahasweta Devi's fiction depicts "the experiences of a tribal woman who is the by-product of class struggle in postcolonial tribal India … Devi portrays in this story an ordinary wife struggling to make sense of her life as Indian tribal tradition clashed with modernity and a nascent nationalism eroded a colonial mentality" (195). He implies that the subtle roots of colonial power structure continue even after India's independence in 1947. The local/national structure reproduces imperial ego and asserts it upon the Adivasis, thereby dehumanising the local people. Neluka Silva explores the use of patriarchy as a tool of suppression. As she argues,

> To signpost the participation of women in the Naxalite movement as a recognition of their rights and a stride in "liberatory politics" is to ignore the male-centred underpinnings of the revolutionary ideology. By referring repeatedly to male voices, leadership and commands in Devi's story, the narrator deconstructs the revolutionary rhetoric by foregrounding its phallocentricity. (58)

The colonial power structure that was reproduced even after the Independence joins hands with patriarchy to further employ violence upon Draupadi in Devi's fiction. The imbalance of power is further illustrated through the issue of class. Bengal was going through a historical transformation in the 1970s when the tension between the high and low classes was at its apex. Mitali R. Pati gives pollical reading to the text as she argues, "Draupadi's gang rape is symbolic of centuries' old methods of brutal tortures being inflicted upon 'rebellious' low class/caste men and women in remote semi-feudal

agricultural communities in India" (89). As the social exclusion of certain peoples was continuously practised in Bengal for a long time, the Adivasi people rose to respond to the situation with arms in their hands.

Reading biopolitically, Pradip Sharma argues that the racist foundation of casteism has resulted in the most critical state of Indian society. He openly accepts that the Indian state has exercised biopolitical means to discipline the Adivasis. As he analyses, modern Indian polity has employed surveillance and killings to silence the people at the bottom of society (57). Sharma's reading focuses on the Senanayak's treatment of Draupadi. Sharif Atiquzzaman compares the situation in Tagore's *Chandalika* to Devi's "Draupadi" and observes the nature of atrocities emerging from casteism. As he narrates,

> *Draupadi* is a story about Dopdi Mehjen, a woman who belongs to the Santhal tribe of West Bengal. The landlords do not allow them to fetch water from their wells as they are untouchables. She along with her husband, Dhulna Majhi, murders wealthy landlord Surja Sahu and his sons, and usurps their wells, which are the primary source of water for the villagers. (177)

The excluded groups of people have certain types of responses that the government wants to control in society. In Devi's rendering of myth, Draupadi stands vibrant since she holds the ability to write back and reassert her agency in society.

Like Devi's "Draupadi," Pratibha Ray's Oriya novel *Yajnaseni* (1984) also recontextualizes the myth in search of a new perspective in contemporary culture through the classical narrative from the Mahabharata. Such reinterpretation adds a new meaning by drawing strong parallelism from the ancient context to the present. Shruti Das reads *Yajnaseni* to analyse the impact of patriarchy on the formation of Draupadi. She argues that Draupadi stands as a voice of protest who "writes back to patriarchy's cultural and sexual domination of the woman who is supposed to bear all silently and passively. The narrative becomes subversive; addresses *dharma* or morals as used for the convenience of the dominant oppressor and exposes the ills of Hindu patriarchal culture" (72). Draupadi paves the road to liberation by stoically preparing herself in the most tumultuous times of her life. Mohar Daschaudhari makes a comparative study of Ray's

Yajnaseni and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* to explore how each text recontextualizes the myth in the contemporary context. The study concludes that Ray and Bannerjee depict Draupadi as "a mover of destiny, a woman wronged by her husbands, her elders and yet she is not silent. Her voice is made audible, for the first time, through the re-writing of the epic" (178). Such readings assert that Ray's novel reexamines the inner contents of Draupadi's self in a new context in which Draupadi enriches the culture by revealing a new meaning.

Draupadi's struggle and tolerance teach us the relevance of such values in the modern world. She struggles to restore the honour that she has lost in the assembly of Hastinapur. Though insulted, she remains determined to regain the lost honour. Seema Dutta studies Draupadi to examine the upper limit of endurance of pain, torture, and humiliation in her. As Dutta sees,

> She faces numerous trials all through her life but none of them could break her. With every insult, she grows stronger and becomes the strength of her husbands and even the kingdom. She is representative of *Shakti* who knows that to preserve one's respect when there is no other way but to stand strong and fight the injustice that is meted out. (183)

Born out of Drupad's *yajna* fire, she swiftly journeys through the upheavals in her life. However, she displays an extraordinary ability to tolerate humiliation and injustice when the disrobing happens at the assembly of Hastinapur. Ray's novel reworks Draupadi's self to reinterpret the context and address the subtle complexities in modern values.

Some of the studies also see the novel as an assertion of traditional, typical Indian values in modern times. Such studies focus on the issue of dharma, justice, and morality. For instance, Amit Kumar's research indicates Draupadi's sacrifice to restore dharma and justice in society. As he argues, "Liberty of the self, free will of thinking and inner self of Draupadi in Yajnaseni is crushed and she has been completely devastated while saving dharma for the sake of others and avoiding the identity of her own" (4688). Kumar upholds Draupadi's sacrifice for the cause of the age in which she helps restore certain lost values for the welfare of people. Beside him, Sanchita Choudhury's conformist reading attempts to establish

Draupadi as the ideal woman in Hindu society. She claims that "Yajnaseni, an epitome of prejudice and untold suffering, has been known for her intrepid actions taken to fight against the evil" (251). Choudhari celebrates Draupadi as the embodiment of Hindu cultural values. Pallavi Gupta and Swati Vijay argue that Draupadi and Krishna complement each other. Reading *Yajnaseni,* they conclude that "Draupadi who is helplessly in love with Krishna becomes an important instrument in his re-establishment of Dharma" (14). Reading Ray's novel from the rightist position helps understand the reassertion of classical Hindu values in modern such readings assert the presence of traditional values in the novel, thereby claiming the reassertion of such values in the modern text.

Other studies have explored the inner content of Draupadi's self through the perspective of gender. Such readings examine power relations in a patriarchal order in which the actors challenge the authority of the other. Sunal Sharma's feminist reading of Ray's Draupadi asserts that the principal contradiction of the Mahabharata arises from the tension between men's attitude to using women's bodies in any way they choose to. Analysing the position of Draupadi in Ray's novel, Sharma writes: "The contradictory pulls of her seething emotions expressed in her lengthy inner monologues can be viewed as the emotive counterpart to the irreconcilable strands of a traditional mode of thinking and contemporary feminist ideology within the narrative of *Yajnaseni*" (143). Like Sharma, Silima Nanad also interprets the novel along the feminist lines. She concludes, "The picture of the woman that emerges from Ray's presentation of Draupadi reassures us that the plight of woman has not significantly changed despite several high-sounding slogans such as woman empowerment, equal rights to woman etc. in a globalised society. Yajnaseni has always been treated in an undignified manner" (88). Both Sharma and Nanda agree that Ray's novel reinterprets the myth of the Mahabharata through the contemporary critical lens of gender and feminism.

Neelam Karki's 2016 Nepali novel, *Chheerharan* [The Disrobing] has also been read from a feminist critical lens. Bimal Kishor Srivastwa finds the contemporary Nepali context in the novel. As Karki draws her resources from politically disturbed times in Nepal,

she addresses some of the fundamental questions concerning patriarchy through Draupadi's disrobing. The study states:

> Niharika depicts the central character, Draupadi, as a representative of the Nepali woman who experiences problems and sex discrimination living in a male-dominated society. She has to marry a person who meets the conditions set by her father. She also has to be a common wife for all five husbands under the order of her mother-in-law. She asks Arjun not to take her as water in a glass that anyone can drink, yet she has to negotiate. Draupadi objects to the rule made by her five husbands because the rule is made without consulting her. (15)

As a victim of patriarchy, Draupadi is forced to live by the expectations of the patriarchal order. Pratibha Paudel's stylistic study of the novel also reveals unique insights about gender in the text. Paudel states that Draupadi represents perennial suffering on the part of women under patriarchy. She illustrates:

> Through the use of Draupadi, the novel states that thousands of women have suffered the pains of disrobing to this date. Draupadi presents that the women did not have the right to choose their husbands. The treatment that Draupadi receives from Jarasandha, Duryodhana, Kichaka, Jayadratha, Dushasana, and the like reveals the bitter reality that patriarchal society treats women as the object of sexual satisfaction only. (144)

Though Paudel takes the stylistic route to interpret the texts, she also agrees with Srivastwa's claim on Draupadi: the myth stands as a classic example of women's suffering under patriarchy.

Devi, Ray, and Karki have written the myth of Draupadi for different purposes. The prevailing studies have focused on recontextualization, reassertion of traditional Hindu values, and feminist interpretation. Devi has appropriated Draupadi in Bengal in the 1970s. Her Draupadi appears as a rebel who has chosen to fight against the state. Ray's Draupadi reviews the journey of her life as she falls on her way to heaven. The text emerges out of a letter to her spiritual comrade Krishna. In the fictional autobiography, Draupadi reflects upon her life on the whole. In Karki's novel, Draupadi organises the conference and presents her observations on various episodes in her life. Prevailing critical scholarship has interpreted the texts in the light of gender, patriarchy, historical contexts, assertion of Hindu values through Draupadi, and Draupadi's stoic way of life. However, the studies have not addressed the political goal behind

writing Draupadi in contemporary times. This paper departs from the existing interpretations of the treatment of Draupadi in modern South Asian literature by analysing three fictions from Bengal, Odisha, and Nepal to explore the inner motive of the goal and design of fiction. This paper reads the fiction in their proper context in which they address the historical challenges arising in society by spotlighting Draupadi in the centre stage.

Reading a Myth through Contemporary Lens

The classical narratives of human life have resurfaced in modern life in one way or the other. The human interactions that have occurred at a particular moment in history have served people to understand similar kinds of situations and events. Similarly, myths transcend beyond the regularities of the quotidian world. As John S. Gentile defines, "Myth - as a term, as a concept, and as a field of study - is multivalent and ambiguous, and like its many narratives holds together binary opposites that enrich its study and enliven its discussion. Perhaps myth's major paradox may be that it can mean either truth or (particularly in casual conversation) falsehood" (80). Still, it serves life by helping to interpret the contemporary times. In this sense, a myth becomes a window for people to look into the classical world on the one hand and a world of present reality on the other. Myths become a lynchpin to hold present reality with the past. Often myths lose the power that they held once in the past. As Percy S. Cohen argues, "If myth anchors the present in the past, then prophecy anchors it in the future" (351). Contemporary readings of myths also add new meanings in the way they are interpreted and approached from a different point of view.

As a semiotic in the long chain of narratives, myth serves to observe the complete world and its power relations. The (im)balance in power structure results in an adverse impact on the regular lives of people. Since myth critiques social practices and relations, it also becomes a part of regular politics in life. Different theorists have examined the political functions of myth. As Robert A. Segal synthesises,

> What of the politics of myth? Like Jung, Eliade clearly categorizes mythologies by nations, but also like Jung he characterizes myths in other ways as well, such as by religions. For Eliade, as for Malinowski,

myth traces back the origin of present-day social phenomena and in that sense bolsters them. Myth thus brings the sacred forward to the present. But surely myth also takes one out of the present and back to the past. Eliade thus interprets political hopes for future paradise, including that of staunchly atheistic Marxism, as really a hoped-for return to the pre-political, prelapsarian past. (618)

Myth bridges the present with the past by spotlighting the perennial issues of human concerns. Dignity, honour, and ethics have always demanded a new definition as societies progress, unfolding novel values. The political implications of such factors are revealed further as time progresses in society. This study reads the political implications of the myth of Draupadi as it resurfaces in modern South Asian literature and explores the factors that push it in a particular design.

Writing Draupadi in South Asia

Modern South Asia depends on classical resources to interpret and understand the contemporary context through human narratives. Draupadi has remained one of the most reliable narratives of human suffering, helping various South Asian societies recover from the most grievous times. Mahasweta Devi's Bengali short fiction "Draupadi" (1978), Pratibha Ray's Oriya novel *Yajnaseni* (1984), and Neelam Karki's Nepali novel *Cheerharan* [The Disrobin] (2016) refer to a few representative instances of writing Draupadi in modern South Asia. The authors employ a new way of narrating Draupadi's tale in the modern context to serve the political goal in a specific context. Devi's Bengal was undergoing a historical transition in the 1970s. Ray sees social contradictions in the rules of gender in Odisha in the 1970s. The rules of marriage are differently set for men and women: women cannot marry and resettle again if their marriage fails. Ray treats the narrative of Draupadi to address the inequality of her society. After 2006, Nepal undergoes major political change, implementing a republican form of rule. To refer to the chaotic state of the nation, Karki retells Draupadi's stoic tale of loss and restoration of honour. To her, Draupadi unfolds the story of both despair and hope.

Draupadi appears in completely different forms in each of the narratives. Devi completely appropriates Draupadi in the local

context: the rebel girl from the Munda community retells Draupadi's life in her local context, where the tension ensues between her people and the state. Unlike Draupadi in the Mahabharata, Dopti Mehjan has not offended anybody by her choice. Devi's fiction highlights the structural victimisation of Draupadi as she reworks on the rebel self of the Naxalite movement. She murdered the upper-class "Surja Sahu and his son" and occupied "the upper-case wells and tube-wells during the drought" (392). Bengali Mundas were fighting against discrimination based on caste and class in the 1970s. They spoke against the exploitation of local feudal lords through armed struggle. In this context, Devi's Dopti Mehjan organises various activities to oppose the coercion of the local landlords (393). Draupadi and her husband Dulna employ guerrilla techniques to settle the issues with the feudal order. Devi narrates:

> Annihilation at sight of any and all practitioners of such warfare is the sacred duty of every soldier. Dopdi and Dulna belong to the *category* of such fighters, for they too kill by means of hatchet and scythe, bow and arrow, etc. In fact, their fighting power is greater than the gentlemen's. Not all gentlemen become experts in the explosion of "chambers"; they think the power will come out on its own if the gun is held. But since Dulna and Dopdi are illiterate, their kind have practised the use of weapons generation after generation. (394)

Devi's Draupadi emerges with full stature of agency: she does not raise questions only. She knows that change is inevitable and she has to realise it for her people. Structurally, the short fiction portrays an Adivasi woman as a modern Draupadi who fights to restore honour and justice to her people.

Unlike Draupadi in the Mahabharata, Devi's rebel seeks for the collective welfare, restoration of justice to all her people, and regaining the lost honour of her community. On the other hand, Ray's Draupadi falls on the way to heaven. The eldest husband, Yudhisthira continues his journey to heaven, asking his brothers not to look back at Draupadi. In the last moment of her life, she realises that her life was spent in vain. Ray pictures the plight of Draupadi in the following words:

> What agonies did I not suffer for preserving dharma? I had thought that on the strength of my adherence to dharma and fidelity as a wife I would be able to accompany my husbands to heaven. Yet, I had but touched the golden dust of Himalaya's foothills when my feet slipped

and I fell! Five husbands –but not one turned back even to look. Rather, Dharmaraj Yudhishthir, lord of righteousness, said to Bhim, "Do not turn back to look! Come forward!" (3)

Draupadi struggles hard throughout her life, bearing all sorts of humiliation and slander in front of her five husbands. She hopes to restore Dharma-justice — in society through her sacrifice and stoic way of life. However, her husbands leave her in the most helpless state of her life as she falls on the way to heaven.

Karki's Draupadi organises a conference to bring together four generations of women in the Mahabharata to share their stories in the largest possible forum. Satyavati represents the first generation; Ambika and Abalika tell their stories from the second generation; the third generation comprises of Gandhari and Kunti; and Draupadi, Ulupi, and Bhanumati lead the women of the fourth generation in the novel. Since Karki titles the novel after the disrobing in the assembly of Hastinapur and shows the presence of Asmita as the representative of her time, the author intends to discuss the loss and restoration of honour of the nation through the tale. After 2006, Nepal underwent the most nebulous time in the contemporary history of South Asia. Just like Draupadi, the novelist also seeks the best of the qualities for her nation. Draupadi wants five noble qualities in her husband: handsome, virtuous, strong, righteous, and noble. Krishna describes the fulfilment of her wish in the following words: "Krishna said, 'Our Panchali will get her man as per her choice -she wanted handsome, virtuous, strong, righteous, and the noble man for herself. Certainly, she will get such person.' He further added, "Don't get scared, Yajnaseni. Your wish will be fulfilled'" (275). Even though she gets five persons with the qualities, she remains critical about each of them.

Devi's narrative directly presents Draupadi with her committed husband Dulna Majhi. Both of them fight to bring about change in their society. The Adivasi husband does not gamble with anybody: he knows he has to restore the original order in his society. The couple has to punish Surja Sahu in Bakuli because he refuses to distribute water from his tubewell at the time of drought. He excludes the untouchables from using water from his tubewell. Draupadi, Dulna, and their comrades surround Surja Sahu's house at night to take action against him. Devi narrates:

> Surja Sahu's house was surrounded at night. Surja Sahu had brought out his gun. Surja was tied up with cow rope. His whitish eyeballs turned and turned, he was incontinent again and again. Dulna had said, I'll have the first blow, brothers. My great-grandfather took a bit of paddy from him, and I still give him free labour to repay the debt.

> Dopdi had said, His mouth watered when he looked at me. I'll pull out his eyes. (398)

Ray and Karki present a weak Draupadi who waits for Arjun at Swayamvar. Besides, Ray and Karki have their interpretation of the test set for the suitors. Ray's Draupadi feels attached to Krishna who convinces her to wait for Arjuna. Ray describes the scene of the test in the palace of Drupada thus: "A lovely dais had been made for the svayamvar with a long pole on it. On this pole was a revolving disc. Along with the swiftly revolving disc, the picture of the target would be reflected in the water of a vessel kept below. For this, near the pavilion a large water receptacle had been made ready" (28). For Ray, the complexity of the test carries the utmost significance in the narration of Draupadi's life. Karki thus narrates the test: "There were notices in the golden letters, announcing, 'The one who will be able to shoot an arrow into the eye of the fish fixed to the revolving circle by looking at its image reflected in the pond below will marry Princess Draupadi'" (265). Unlike Devi, Ray and Karki still seek Draupadi's adjustment in the existing social order. Devi's Draupadi wants to annihilate the discriminatory order and start anew, establishing law, order, and justice for everyone in her community.

Devi remakes the rebel self in her protagonist, while Ray and Karki capture a rather docile self in Draupadi. Devi's Draupadi has been utterly rejected and pushed to the margin by the mainstream. She suffers the direct, physical assault: she has developed the coping strategies for such torture. As Devi remarks, "Dopdi knows, has learned by hearing so often and so long, how one can come to terms with torture. If mind and body give way under torture, Dopdi will bite off her tongue. That boy did it. They countered him. When they counter you, your hands are tied behind you. All your bones are crushed, and your sex is terrible wound" (397). As an armed rebel, she knows the threats lurking ahead on her path. Ray and Karki model their Draupadi after the middle-class self. Ray's Draupadi was born as a mature youth from the Yajna. She is not trained in the ways

of the world in the usual ways. She begins to take an interest in the contradiction of society which looks typically middle-class in the modern sense. It takes a lot of time for her to understand being human and feeling human. As the critical mindset of her time, she critiques the mode of usual practices that reaches the core of society and critically views the contradictions lying therein (15). However, she does not oppose Kunti when she gets divided among the five brothers. As Ray narrates, "Overwhelmed with shyness I stood with head bowed. The elder brother was describing me in terms of a priceless object. My heart was thrilled with joy. From within, an easy but firm voice, their mother's, spoke: 'My sons, whatever you have brought divide it amongst the five of you equally!' (55). As the daughter-in-law of a middle-class family in contemporary society, Draupadi fails to raise her voice against Kunti's misunderstanding.

Karki's Draupadi invites women from across the generations to have a conversation to revisit the Mahabharata. As a unique narrative strategy, *Cheerharan* presents women in dialogue, exploring their stories. Karki infuses middle-class woman's self in Draupadi who accepts the things as they happen in her life. For instance, she accepts her second division when Sage Narad visits the Pandav Brothers and tells them about spending time with Draupadi in Indraprastha. They set a rule: one husband for a year. If anybody breaches the rule, he is expelled from the state to live the life of a pilgrim for twelve years (314). She secretly hopes that Arjuna will remain celibate during his exile from Indraprastha after breaching the rule (322). She is shocked and shattered when she hears that he married Ulupi (the Princess of the Naag) (326). Then, he marries the princess of Manipur, Chitrangada (326). Then, he marries Subhadra at which Draupadi weeps a lot (327). Though she has her spiritual companion Krishna accompanying Arjuna as well, she takes a long time to realise the ways of the world. Finally, she claims for her room in the palaces, refusing to change the room of her husbands. She demands a permanent room for herself where she can welcome her husbands. As Karki's narrator says, "I requested the King, 'From now on, there's no point in going from one room to the other every year. So, grant me a separate room where I will welcome my husbands in my own room' (329). Karki's Draupadi believes that dialogue can resolve the issues

and help her understand the world better. Therefore, she waits for a long time to realise the essential nature of the world and the people.

Devi's protagonist has lived a life of humiliation, resulting from caste-based discrimination and exploitation at the hands of local feudal lords. She never seeks to protect her honour by keeping her body inside the garment. Instead, she rejects the last piece of cloth on her body. They countlessly rape her in the barrack (401) the whole night. As she rejects the sense of shame to challenge the authority of men and the state, "She looks around and chooses the front of Senanayak's white bush shirt to spit a bloody gob at and says, There isn't a man here that I should be ashamed. I will not let you put my clothes on me. What more can you do? Come, *encounter* me –come on, *encounter* me— ?" (402). The intensity of the challenge is never realised in Ray or Karki's version of Draupadi. In the game of dice, Dharmaraj Yudhisthira places her at the stake and loses her. She is dragged to the assembly and called a prostitute (Karki 361). Still, she says to Yudhisthira, "Who did you lose first –you or me?" (364). The defeated husbands cannot stand in Draupadi's protection. Draupadi appeals for justice in the assembly as Ray writes: "Again I said, 'I do not beg for anyone's pity. I demand justice. To protect the honour of women is the dharma of a king. Then does it befit the Kuru kings to insult the bride of their own clan? I wish to know: has my husband got the right to stake me after he has already staked and lost his own self?'" (238). Helpless, she prays to Krishna to rescue her (Karki 361) as the disrobing happens in the assembly. Kari further states that Draupadi frees her husbands from slavery through her power of reasoning. As Karki's Draupadi narrates, "I was the shield to my husband who had staked himself and me in the game of dice and said, "King, it is useless to think that the sin will be washed away by giving something to us. Still, if you are staggering on the path to justice for a while, please grant my husband's liberation from slavery" (372). Despite multiple instances of humiliation of Draupadi, Ray, and Karki bend on exploring the assimilationist self in the narrator.

Devi's Draupadi stands at the crossroads of Bengal's transition in the 1970s. She voices for change to bring about equality for her people. As an agency, she has prepared to tolerate all sorts of violence that can befall her body. Her Santhal husband does not stake her at

the game of dice: they are together fighting against discrimination. In Ray and Karki, Draupadi is treated like her husband's possession in multiple instances. Still, she cannot let herself free from the mould of her middle-class self. She negotiates with the changing contexts, fights against everyone in the assembly, appeals for pity, justice, and dharma, and finally frees her husbands from the life of slavery. Devi's Draupadi rejects the idea of shame and honour as middle-class constructs, while Ray and Karki's Draupadi celebrate honour. In both Ray and Karki, Krishna responds to the prayer of his devotee and rescues her from being disrobed.

Poetics and Politics

Modern South Asian literature has written Draupadi's tale in various ways. This paper has taken three fictions from Bengal, Odisha, and Nepal. Each text has a unique narrative voice and structure. Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi" (1978) responds to the Bengal's historical transition in the 1970s. The omniscient narrator sees and reports everything that happens in Devi's society. She rewrites the myth to project a sharp agent who chooses an armed struggle against the state authority. Ray's 1984 Oriya novel follows the structure of Draupadi's letter to Krishna, reflecting on her life. In a sense, Ray's *Yajnaseni* is presented as Draupadi's fictional autobiography in which she interprets the major happenings in Ved Vyas's Mahabharata. Ray's Odisha was undergoing a social transformation in the late 1970s when the author saw the need to revise the rules of marriage for women. Ray presents a classical example of suffering, shame, guilt, revenge, and endurance in Draupadi who has seen all shades of life. Similarly, Karki's 2016 Nepali novel, *Cheerharan* turns into a conference of four generations of women from Vyas's the Mahabharata, retelling their stories to Asmita. Karki attempts to use Asmita as a bridge between the classical and the modern world. Politically, both Ray and Karki employ Draupadi as the representative of the middle-class female self who swiftly modifies and revises rules of gender as the ethos of age changes.

Devi's Draupadi significantly differs from Ray and Karki's since she aspires to rewrite it at the underlying core of society. Ray's Draupadi does not have a revolutionary self: she aims at modifying the rules by revising them in favour of women. Ray has presented a

typical middle-class woman's self in Draupadi. Since Ray and Karki set their protagonist in the reflective mode of narration, their Draupadi reinterprets the events from her point of view. In both instances, Draupadi seeks to revise the social structure to restore Dharma. However, Devi's Draupadi rejects the prevailing ways of power distribution to rewrite new rules to create a just society.

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Progressivism, Modernity and Decadence: A Study of Select Works of Ahmed Ali

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Abstract:

The modernity of the progressive writers has long borne the blame for being indebted to the Western trends of modernist thoughts. This article engages in challenging this notion by tracing the roots of Islamic modernity to the *qasbati* tradition of medieval eastern culture and its residual traces in 18th and 19th century India. The pre-Renaissance Muslim cultures in the Middle East and South Asia during the Caliphate rulers had a high intellectual heritage which propagated to India during the Mughals and concentrated within the *qasbahs*, thus resulting in the formation of a unique literary and cultural tradition. This dissertation shall argue with substantial historical evidence from Muslim literary history since the medieval era, that the modernity of the Progressive writers was not necessarily a Western import in colonial India rather it is rooted in a vibrant intellectual and cultural tradition propagated through generations in the *qasbahs*. In the process, it also aims to understand 'modernity' as a dynamic and all-encompassing state of intellectual understanding. Taking up select works of Ahmed Ali, this article attempts to substantiate the claim that *progressive* modernity is unique and is characterised by an attitude of assertion (of their own social values), interrogation and selective participation (in the new system), as manifested in the life and culture of the *qasbati* tradition.

Keywords: modernity, progressive, qasbahs, culture, interaction

Introduction

The Colonial West has always credited itself to be the harbinger of modernity; indirectly signifying the colonised as traditional or pre-modern or non-modern. Over the years, it seems that the colonised also adopted a similar attitude to label any deliberate transgression from the structured formula as Western deviants. This binary signification refuses the possibility of any intermediate existence

where a global outlook towards adopting a constructive reformation is supported by a strong foundation of the roots. The Progressive Writers fell into this ambit. During the late 19th and early 20th century their inexorable presence, though felt in almost all major languages of India in re-shaping the socio-political and literary consciousness of the age, over time has not only gone out of serious scholarly attention but also from a significant mention in the histories of Indian literature. Moreover, the tendency to view them as mere preachers of Western modernity and left-winged activists denounced their merit. With substantial historical evidence from Muslim literary history since the medieval era, this article attempts to challenge the accepted notion that the Progressive Writers' were mere products of Western modernity in a conservative Islamic society and foreground the uniqueness of the modernist spirit in select literary works of the All India Progressive Writers' Association.

Long before the dawn of European enlightenment, The Golden Age (approximately between 786 — 1258) of the medieval Islamic world richly practised and developed multiple branches of knowledge, especially Astronomy, Mathematics and Medicine. Physics, Zoology, Chemistry, Alchemy, Botany, Agronomy, Geography, Cartography, Opthalmology, Pharmacology, etc. were also practised and developed to a great extent. Works of mathematicians like Al-Khwarizmi, Avicenna, Jamshid al-Kashi have significant contributions in Algebra, Trigonometry, Geometry and Arabic numerals. Contributions of Al-Biruni in Physics, Mathematics, Astronomy, Medicine and also History and Literature, Ibn Al-Haytham in Physics, Abu Zayd al-Bakhi in Geography, Science and Psychology and many others in a variety of fields have enriched the disciplines of knowledge. Niall Ferguson in his seminal work *Civilization: The Six Killer Apps of Western Power* (2011), observes:

> The Abbasid caliphate was at the cutting edge of science. In the *Bayt al-Hikma* (House of Widom) founded in the ninth century Baghdad by Caliph Harun al-Rashid, Greek texts by Aristotle and other authors were translated into Arabic. The caliphate also produced what some regard as the first true hospitals, such as the *bimaristan* established at Damascus by Caliph al-Waleed bin Abdel Malek in 707, which was designed to cure rather than merely house the sick. It was home to what some regard as the first true institution of higher education, the University of Al-Karaouine founded in Fez in 859. Building on Greek

and especially Indian foundations, Muslim mathematicians established algebra (from the Arabic *al-jabr*, meaning 'restoration') as a discipline distinct from arithmetic and geometry. (51)

Islamic civilization inherited the influence of Greek, Assyrian, Indian and Persian civilizations. With the broadening of its horizon up to Central Asia through the conquest of Arabia, Egypt, and Mesopotamia during the Caliphate rulers major religious and cultural works from Greece, India, and Assyria were translated into Arabic and Persian. During the 9th to 11th centuries, there was consistent contact between Indian and Perso-Arabic scholarship. Al-Biruni travelled widely in India, learnt Sanskrit and wrote *Tarikh-al-Hind* (The History of India) where he mentions that Brahmagupta's (598 -668) text *Brahmasiddhanta* translated into Arabic by Alfazari during the rule of Al-Mansur (753 -774) was the first to acquaint the Arabs with the scientific system of Astronomy and Hindu numerals. The English thinker Roger Bacon acknowledged it: 'Philosophy is drawn from the Muslims' (51-52). Ferguson's book investigates the rationale behind the political deceleration of the Muslim world in its successive and consistent "fall" from grace while the West overtook the Muslims to establish its domination in the name of true enlightenment and modernity. But the West had always proclaimed its domination over the East in matters of scientific knowledge. Osman Bakar in his book *Tawhid and Science: Essays on the History and Philosophy of Islamic Science* (1991) observes that this *edge*, which the West proudly enjoyed and professed, is far from the truth.

Thus, it can be proposed that Muslims had already constructed their modernity whose residual reverberations may be found in the rich *qasbati* tradition that flourished in the Indian subcontinent after the decline of the Turkish Sultans of Delhi and the emergence of the Mughals. These waning reverberations of the culture of Muslim modernity may be located in the literature of the All-India Progressive Writers of the twentieth century in the form of radical voices that shared intellectual comradeship with European *avant-garde* modernity.

With the Delhi Sultanate regents (1206 -1526), Islamic dominance started in India which reached its peak during the Mughal Empire (1526 -1857). While there was a sharp decline in the native Sanskrit tradition during this period, distinguished litterateurs and scholars

from Persia, Iraq, Arabia and Central Asia were brought to serve the monarchy who gradually settled in *qasbahs* forming an educated and elite community. Diverse genres of writing thrived and flourished in these pre-Renaissance Muslim societies. M. Raisur Rehaman in his book, *Locale, Everyday Islam and Modernity: Qasbah Towns and Muslim Life in Colonial India* (2015) argued that modernity in Muslim literature owes its legacy to the *qasbati* tradition which prospered since the eleventh and twelfth century. The *qasbahs* were intermediate townships or hinterlands largely inhabited by the Muslim service gentry. Some of the renowned North Indian *qasbahs* were Amroha, Badaun, Bilgram, Rudauli, etc. under the kingdom of Awadh and Rohilkhand. Distinct from the political, commercial or bureaucratic culture of the cities and the agrarian nature of villages, the *qasbahs* were rich intellectual hubs which emphatically maintained their exclusive social and individual identities, despite their intercourses with local ways of life. A wide number of scholars, writers, bureaucrats and leaders fostered these *qasbahs* long before the entry of colonial modernity. Abdul Qadir Badauni (1540 — 1615), Mir Abdul Jalil Bilgrami (1661-1725), famous poet Mirza Ghalib (1796-1869), Mir Taqi Mir (1723-1810), Maulavi Daad Ali Abbasi (1824-95), Chaudhury Mohammad Ali Rudaulvi (1882 -1959) are only a few of them. *Qasbahs* also housed highly revered Sufis, saints, mystics, their shrines, successors and followers. Extensive genres of writing such as *shajrah* (genealogies), *zikra* (autobiographies and memoirs), *safarnama* (travelogues), *tarikh* (histories), *tazkhira* (biographical dictionaries), *khutoot* (correspondence), *rasail* (periodicals) and *akhbarat* (newspapers), *shairi* (poetry), *mushairah* (oral transmission of poetry), *malfuzat* (collection of Sufi sayings), having flourished during the period, bear testimony to the uniqueness of Muslim modernity.

These highly culturally potent intellectual and literary traditions were proactively handed over to a posterity that facilitated their proliferation and perpetuation, beyond communities. Almost all *qasbati* artists were keen to compile their family genealogies in organized and well-indexed formats as evidence of their inheritance and identity. Saiyid Faizan Ali Naqvis's *Faizan-e- Sadaat* which constructs the family tree of Saiyid Muslims of Amroha from the 11th century to 2000 CE is one of many such instances. Documentation of local and regional histories was also widely practised. For example,

Tarikh-e-Amroha (1930) records the history of Amroha since its invasion by Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni, also contributing a major section to discuss the various Hindu rulers before him (Rehman 101-106). Their openness to learning and broadening their horizons inspired them to undertake higher education along with the Madrasa in colleges and institutions in both Arabo-Persian curriculum and English even outside the home. The encounter with colonial rule encouraged their interaction with Western modes of knowledge and culture since the late nineteenth century. However, this interaction was not a unidirectional compliance. Before the British rule or even the Muslim reign, the city of Delhi and adjacent regions, being the periphery of the seat of power under the kings were also rich in education and culture. As the city had been conquered and rebuilt several times under different dynasties, it had by then interacted and negotiated with multiple communities and cultures that accepted and adopted British instruments of modernity according to their ways and necessities. The Aligarh Movement and the establishment of Mohammadan Anglo-Oriental College (1875) was the reflection of that distinctive aspect of indigenous modernity which not only promoted modern English education but at the same time earnestly contributed to the maintenance of the high standards of Muslim culture: "The contribution of *qasbahs* to Urdu literature, Islamic didactic writings, education, compilation of genealogies and the Progressive Writers' movement has been disproportionately large, showing how locales and localities determine mainstream cultures, ideas and identities" (Rehman 4).

This article has taken up select works of Ahmed Ali — two novels, *Twilight in Delhi* and *Ocean of Night* along with a reference to his short stories in *Angaaray* in order to understand *modernity* as a dynamic and all-encompassing state of intellectual understanding as manifested in the life and culture of the *qasbati* tradition. Born in Delhi in 1910, Prof. Ali's lineage can be traced back to the great Muslim mystic leader, Shaikh Abdul Qadir Jilani of Baghdad. His ancestors came to India under the Mughal patronage to serve as *ulemas* (religious teachers) at the court. Starting his English education at the Wesley Mission High School in Azamgarh, he attended Aligarh Muslim University and later completed his BA and MA with English Honours from Lucknow University. A similar trend can be traced in

the life and lineage of several of Ali's progressive contemporaries. The aspiration for education and intellectual ingenuity of these authors can be traced back to the familial inheritance where their previous generations also grew up and undertook higher education and prestigious services. This can be viewed as a reflection of their modern attitude to openness and progress.

Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* (1940) and *Ocean of Night* (1964) narrate the life and culture of the Muslims as it was led during that period. These novels describe the history of time as it passed through generations to "depict a phase of national life and the decay of a whole culture, a particular mode of thought and living, values now dead and gone before our eyes." (Ali xxi). The title of the novel in the inner cover is followed by a poem by Bahadur Shah, the last Mughal Emperor:

> Delhi was once a paradise
> Such peace had abided here
> But they have ravished its name and pride
> Remain now only ruins and care.

The novel is set in the period after the War of 1857 when the British government usurped the dominion of the country in its hands. Set in Old Delhi, the decaying centre of the lost legacies of Muslim civilization, the plot of the novel is woven around the lives of two generations, the old father Mir Nihal and his son Asghar, which can also be seen metaphorically as the life of the city itself. In a poignant tone, the author narrates the gradual decline of a way of life through minute picturesque details. A middle-class businessman in his sixties, Mir Nihal is a typical feudal gentleman, with aristocratic interests and passion. He belongs to the generation who has not only seen the grandeur of the Mughal period but is also living evidence of British atrocities during the Sepoy Mutiny. Mir Nihal, thus in one sense is a reflection of the author's self who always felt a strong attachment to his roots. Time and again in the novel Mir Nihal gets engrossed in the thoughts and memories of the past, the glories of the Muslim reign and also the cruelties of the Company. His posterity which has just seen the pomp and show of the British rule was not aware of that. He longs for his grandson to fight the British.

Fazlur Rehman delves into the origin of Islamic education which started with *The Quran* at the centre and the variety of responses generated on its encounter with Western modernity in different other fields of education. In his *Islam and Modernity: Transformation of an Intellectual Tradition* (1982), Rehman points out that colonial exploitation and economic imperialism of Europe developed an antipathy among the majority of the Muslim population towards Western modernity. Paradoxically, on the one hand, while European enlightenment brought technological advancements in the material world; on the other, it derailed the socio-political structures, destroyed the cultural diversity and swept away the vast intellectual tradition of the Orient. Ahmed Ali in his Introduction to *Twilight in Delhi* condemns the British policies of education which were solely designed to demolish the age-old cultural values under the name of reformation.

The novel covers the period from 1910-1920 and is divided into four parts. Though written in English, all four sections are introduced with Urdu epigraphs which are suggestive of the misery of the great country under foreign rule. In other words, the use of these poems by famous Urdu writers also reflects the author's strong connection with the indigenous culture and literature. Throughout the novel, he continuously uses his protagonist's memories to connect the past and the present. In that sense, the novel forges a modern version of a *tarikh* (history) or a *tazkhira* (biographical dictionary), two famous genres of writing prevalent in the *qasbati* tradition. The novel represents the transition of a period, both historically and ideologically. It records the confrontation of the old and new, tradition and the trend within a particular culture.

The ending of the novel in the twilight significantly connotes the mystery and uncertainty of the night ahead — overlooking the darkness of life in an uprooted civilization. It ends in a crisis where the old is dead or is made obsolete and the new is thrown into uncertainty and dilemma even before its birth. The author records from the memory of his protagonists the devastation perpetrated by the British on the life and culture of these people. "It was this very mosque (Jama Masjid), Mir Nihal remembered with blood in his eyes which the English had insisted on demolishing or turning into a church during 1857....It was on the fourteenth day of September

1857..." (145). Life, before the advent of British rule, was never outdated and morbid; rather it was rich in art, literature, education and infrastructure. The European rulers forcefully destroyed the richness of the city and threw its long-preserved culture into oblivion. Kings turned beggars and people lost shelter. The objective of this article has been to attempt a close reading of *Twilight in Delhi* as it lifts the veil off the British narrative of its role in shaping Indian modernity. Besides, the novel also exposes the role of the British in facilitating the gradual erasure of *qasbati* modernity through the lure and perpetuation of its models of modern culture.

The terrible heat of Delhi, its epidemic outbreaks, the World War and the atrocious Rowlatt Act, all deliver mortal blows to the disintegrated city and its population. When survival is at stake, the cultivation and propagation of the finer intellectual tastes become secondary preoccupations. Moreover, people from other provinces with different customs and habits are huddled into the city with the establishment of the Company's Capital.

> New ways and ideas had come into being. A hybrid culture which had nothing in it of the past was forcing itself upon Hindustan, a hodge-podge of Indian and Western ways that he failed to understand... The old had gone, the new was feeble and effete. At least it had nothing in common with his ideals and scheme of things... The richness of life had been looted and despoiled by the foreigners and vulgarity and cheapness had taken its place.... What had happened to the great poets of Hindustan? Where were Mir, Ghalib and Insha? Gone they were and gone with them was the wealth of poetry. Only a poverty of thought had come to stay, reflected Mir Nihal, and in place of emotion and sentiments a vulgar sentimentality. Time has reversed the order of things, and life had been replaced by a death-in-life. No beauty seemed to remain anywhere and ugliness had blackened the face of Hindustan...." (240-41)

While *Twilight in Delhi* is the nostalgic chronicle of cultural disintegration in the wake of foreign encroachment, *Ocean of Night* probes into the psychology of declining feudalism (or feudal atrophy) and examines the cultural rift in the face of socioeconomic depression. It narrates the tragic love story of a beautiful courtesan, Huma in search of love and fulfilment. But within the story, the author gives an aesthetic account of the music and poetry of Lucknow which were patronised and enriched by the aristocrats and

courtesans. Huma has grown up to be an expert singer and dancer under the strict vigilance of her mother, Azizan Jan. She is the mistress of Nawab Chhakan, a patron of taste and much prospect who has provided economic security to the mother and daughter. But later, his affections shift to another courtesan Kesari Bai and he gradually reduces the frequency of his visits to Huma's. Her own bitter experiences of life in this profession make Azizan anxious about Huma's future because only a prosperous patron could single-handedly shield her daughter from the maelstrom of brothel-life. On one occasion, she regrets:

> Life had become disjointed and too fast to allow any leisure for the cultivation of the fine arts of conversation and dancing that centred around the courtesan... Music had died; dancing had become just a painted mask with only ready emotions to show. The fineness of expression which the courtesan had practised found no buyers in the marketplace. Who cared for the animation of words by gestures of the hands, the eyes, the eyebrows and the muscles of the body? Who cared for the chastity of the Urdu tongue? The correct idiom had fallen into disuse. (65-66)

She worries that the Nawabs and Rajas now go in search of perverted emotions or exotic European beauties (66). The richness of the arts which her generation used to practise is now getting diluted and debased with the infusion of cheap foreign elements.

The novel was written almost twenty years before its publication in a crucial period of political volatility. Though there is no apparent mention of this, the story records the strains of the period, the entry of Western modernity into a feudal society. It tries to explore the extinction of the refined elements in an old structure with the upsurge of coarse mechanical modernity where "(M)achines had taken away the beauty of hand-made things." (65). Within the broader narrative matrix of a declining feudal culture, the author blends multiple elements of the political and economic, the mystical and intellectual, and the traditional and recent trends in Muslim culture of the period.

From a completely different point of view, both novels can also be seen as depicting the decline of a generation which has succumbed to idleness and stagnation. With the advent of the Industrial Revolution and material progress life has become fast and disjointed.

When the global economic transformation set in, one day or other its reverberation would certainly shake the very foundation of the old society based on agriculture and landed property. The refusal to accept the changes particular to certain classes and communities has made society stagnant. Turning a blind eye to the rapid disintegration, the whole society was fashionably busy in idle pursuits like kite flying, pigeon flying or maintaining clandestine relationships with courtesans or dancing girls. Both Mir Nihal and Asghar went to the house of courtesans leaving their wives at home, Nawab Chhakan drained all his wealth in maintaining the pomp and show of aristocracy, on drinks and pimps. Even the last of the Mughal emperors who was more a poet than a king failed to prove his worth as a protector of his race. Mir Nihal representing the first generation of the family has a deep-seated aversion for the British government but he failed to direct his son to lead a better life. Mir Nihal became stagnant in his thoughts and Asghar ended up in confusion and bewilderment in the new situation.

Ahmed Ali along with a group of budding writers was deeply influenced by Western social and literary currents, the Russian Revolution, the consequent popularity of the socialist thought abroad, and the rising nationalist spirit and anti-imperialist sentiments at home. They call themselves *Progressives* who sought to unveil the hypocrisies and bigotries of the existing social, political, and religious institutions thus drawing attention to grave social issues like oppression of women, religious dogmatism, social conservatism and political impositions. Their primary aim had been to manufacture a climate of thought, and mould it suitably, to make it acceptable to the Muslim fraternity. Filled with the dream of freedom and independence, four of these writers made an audacious attempt to publish a collection of Urdu short stories titled *Angaaray* (1932) to mirror the truth of society. However the book received a hostile response from readers, and the government proscribed the book on charges of obscenity.

Ali, in *Angaaray*, contributed two short stories, 'The Clouds Aren't Coming' (Badal Nahin Aate) and 'A Night of Winter Rains' (Mahavaton ki Ek Raat). Both narratives have been composed as interior monologues of two ordinary Muslim women, voicing their worldview from the interiors of their households. A close reading of

both stories confirms Ali's indebtedness to the Western *avant-garde* technique of the interior monologue. However, one may find in them echoes of lost *qasbati* genres like *zikr* (autobiography) and *khutoot* (correspondence). Both stories are private effusions of women confined to their domestic spaces. It is interesting to explore the writings of the Progressives literary blends of Western modernity and the rich *qasbati* traditions consciously or unconsciously bequeathed to them by their predecessors.

Conclusion

It would be an oversimplification to infer that the literature produced by the Progressive writers are mere by-products of Western modernity because modernity emerges out of a necessity to analyse and understand the present reality in a certain temporality and space. It involves conflict, contestation, interrogation, rejection and finally negotiation. Though the colonial power claims to be the pioneers of Enlightenment, it is only a half-truth. It cannot be denied that the advancement in technology took place during the British rule. But there is ample evidence that the branches of philosophy, logic, education, science, art and culture flourished in the country thousands of years before the British Empire. The British colony was set up in India for its wealth and resources. According to Shashi Tharoor:

> By the end of the nineteenth century, India was Britain's biggest source of revenue, the world's biggest purchaser of British exports and the source of highly paid employment for British civil servants and soldiers all at India's own expense. (*An Era of Darkness* 24)

The exploitation and denunciation were a part of the Company's policy. The age-old heritage was gradually demolished and on the ruins of destruction, the British government established its structures and framed its self-catering autocratic policies and modes of governance. The Orient was misinterpreted and the colonial policies were framed based on those misinterpretations. As a result, the colonised "did not swallow them whole or frame their responses in predictable ways to predictable circumstances." (Rehman 209). To explain the possibility of a socially engaged habitus in a colonial situation, Priyamvada Gopal suggests,

...it was to be negotiated and developed through exigencies of daily
existence at the intersections of the colonial, the modern, the feudal, the
industrial, the familial, the public, the traditional, the private, the
communitarian and the national. (Gopal 63-64)

Modernity is marked by a faith in inevitable social and
technological progress, industrialisation, rationalization and
professionalization along with the development of a nation-state. It
may be mentioned here that the social and literary movements
associated with the modernity of the West were marked by revolts
against socio-political restrictions and impositions. As a result, a
sense of pessimism prevailed around the creative expressions of
Western modernity. The Progressive writers' understanding of the
social realities though shaped and reshaped by their interactions with
Western currents of thought, is never pessimistic. They launched
their attack with a professed mission of representing the
contemporary world along with the exposure of its darker areas at
times suggesting the ways to come out of it. They used the Western
tools of modernity to confront the problems created by the West.
Their modernity thus, combines a sense of hope underneath the
apparent tirades. This uniqueness of their modernity, perhaps,
resulted out of a faithful assertion to the roots of their cultural
identity, their own indigenous *qasbati* modernity. Rahman observes:

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, *qasbati*
Muslims learned about Western culture through growing interactions
and parallel networks with the British. …. (T)he perspectives on
modernity that emerged from *qasbahs* were selective, highly interactive,
and negotiated with greater ease than elsewhere owing to their
traditional pluralism. Moreover, the encounter with modernity
intensified the emergence of new Muslim self-definitions." (208)

In a country of diversity, where multiple cultures work together
in a conducive environment without compromising each other's
individuality, it is impossible to understand modernity from the
aspect of one particular centre. Modernity here is an all-embracing
faculty, an attitude which encourages progress and development.
Although the Progressive writers milked their inspiration from the
West, their modernity has resulted from their interactions with their
present based on the foundations of their previous knowledge and
experience.

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10

The War of the Worlds: Reading the Fragile Existence of Humans in the Age of Anthropocene

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Abstract

H.G. Wells' science fiction *The War of the Worlds* (1898) in its imagined reality connects the isolated human existence with the universe and the unknown that exists beyond human understanding. The anticipation of the possibility of extraterrestrial life beyond human existence gave way to the understanding that humans on earth are not superior. Wells' being influenced by the ideas of evolution propagated by Charles Darwin drew a conflict between organic beings with and beyond life on earth and its ecosystems. If looked through an ecocritical perspective, Well's work can be seen as containing a greater sense of destruction and fragility of life on earth beyond human existence. The novel has inspired several other works and has been adapted into various films. While many interpretations of the text have revolved around social and political conflicts, a latest adaptation, an ongoing television series *War of the Worlds* (first aired in 2019) narrates concerns relevant to the age of the Anthropocene. One of the major changes is the aliens depicted in the series. The series re-imagines the weird Martians as aliens who are found to be a race of humans from the future. This paper will explore how the new adaptation draws from the original novel, but changing the aliens gives way to address the issues that are lurking in this age. With the arrival of the alien race on the Earth, the TV series shows an awareness of human beings as planetary forces through the struggle for survival between the two races of human life. The TV series brings about a dialogue relevant to the current time about who we are as humans, the fragility of human existence, and how humans are consciously transforming the planet we live in and its environment.

Keywords: Ecology, Fragility, Anthropocene, Science Fiction, Human, Climate Change, Survival

Anthropocene, as coined and defined by Paul J. Crutzen and Eugene F. Stoermer in the early twenty-first century, denotes an ecological epoch that emerged due to the increased dominance of human beings on every process of the Earth. Jonathan Hay in the article "(Post)human Temporalities: Science Fiction in the Anthropocene" (2019) notes that Crutzen and Stoermer defined "the Anthropocene as the rapid intensification of our species' adverse impact upon our host planet" (Hay 131). Hay in the same article considers the Anthropocene as a "damning acknowledgement of the planetary changes prompted by our species' unqualified failure to sustain a mutualistic interaction with the Earth" (Hay 131). The connection between our incapability to maintain an interdependent relationship with the natural world and the adverse effect of our species' action has been argued by Stacy Alaimo (2020) in an interview to come from the position that human beings have held in this age of Anthropocene. Alaimo states, "the way it's often represented... is that the transhistorical human agent is separate from the world that "he" has transformed. I think that's problematic because it gives us the illusion that we're safely disconnected from the world we have negatively impacted" (Alaimo 138). Instead of being optimistic or taking pride in the position and role that we hold and play, Alaimo asks to address the interconnections with nonhuman nature and vulnerability to which different groups of human beings are exposed in this age as part of her ecological vision. A genre which, in its choice of subject and representation, problematizes and critiques the fixed position enjoyed by human beings is the speculative narrative of Science Fiction. Existing works of the Science Fiction genre tend to imagine conditions on the Earth, speculating on the future of the Earth. In such works, the unknown Space beyond the life on Earth in other worlds and dimensions are portrayed as threatening to the position of human beings and the survival of our home planet.

Benjamin Bühlerin, in his work, "Other Environments: Ecocriticism and Science Fiction" (2019) points out that science fiction works are compatible with ecocritical thinking, "the design of alien environments and the focus on the relationship between human and these environments make SF a particularly interesting genre for ecocriticism" (Bühler127). The stories work as "metaphors that address issues such as ecological problems, the consequences of

globalization, or the appearance of new technologies" (Bühler127). Patrick D. Murphy in the introduction chapter of the book, *Ecofeminist Science Fiction* (2021) while trying to define Science Fiction notes it to be "a mode of imaginative prose fiction" (Vakoch 1) which seems to have begun with the publication of Mary Shelley's most celebrated *Frankenstein* (1818). The imaginative form of writing tends to speculate on the relationship between human and nature severed by technological advancements and the subsequent exploitations. As Serenella Iovino writes, "Unexpected kinships, cautionary tales, problematic intimacies, and visions of futures embedded in our present: for more than a century, speculative fiction has spoken the language of our ecological imagination" (Iovino). It therefore gives an opportunity for us to face the existing along with the imminent threats to our own and planetary existence.

Interestingly, Science fiction as we know it today had its beginning in the nineteenth century, coinciding with the beginning of the age of Anthropocene which Crutzen has dated to have begun in the nineteenth century with the use of steam engines and the rise of the industrial culture in England. Both the Anthropocene and the Science fiction tend to imply a posthuman future. The idea of the Posthuman is quite inseparable in a work of science fiction, playing a significant role ranging from embracing a technologically embodied human being of the future to implying a sense of fear through imagining a techno-scientifically modified future for the humans. The posthuman helps to identify the fragility of human existence and proposes the necessity to make changes that would help to achieve a symbiotic environmental condition for the survival of the earth and humans alike.

The idea of posthuman embraces plurality and rejects the rigidity of human exceptionalism that promotes anthropocentrism. It does not demonize science or technology that enhances or supports human life. It creates the possibility of developing a shift in the boundaries of agencies in relation to ecology. In "Posthumanism in Literature and Ecocriticism," Serenella Iovino writes about the posthuman that "it moves, relentlessly shifting the boundaries of being and things, of ontology, epistemology…. And these boundaries, especially those between human and nonhuman, are not only shifting

but also porous: based on the — biological, cultural, structural — combination of agencies…." (Iovino 11)

In the current world, the extinction of several animal species due to the manufactured environment by human actions has created the fearful possibility of extinction of humans as we know. Threatening conditions for human lives due to their own unsustainable actions affect the chances of their livability on the earth. Currently, this seems to be an inevitable future. Acknowledging the enlarged, embodied human existence and the necessity for an ethical understanding in the present for a better future is proposed to be the prerequisite for survival in the age of the Anthropocene.

The Anthropocene along with the depiction of a posthuman future in a work of science fiction gives us an opportunity to understand our time, to see what can be the impending future. This paper studies H.G. Wells' novel *The War of the Worlds* (1898) along with the latest TV series adaptation, an ongoing show called *War of the Worlds* (aired since 2019). The original text and the adaptation present to us a posthuman future, two different environments and ecologies of two different spatial-temporal points of the age of the Anthropocene. Considering Crutzen had already stated that the Anthropocene "could be said to have started in the latter part of the eighteenth century" (Crutzen 23), Wells' writing is included within the age of Anthropocene. The original text is based on the experiences of the author of the Victorian period and the TV series set in the twenty-first century provides a historical background to the narratives. It is proposed that these works provide grounds to look at the fragility of human existence and the fallibility of their power position.

Wells, while writing the novel, was influenced by the Victorian world that he lived in and he provided criticism to the prevalent social, economic, and political issues of the time through the representation of the Martian aliens as he himself talked about (Brown 7-8). Those who read the text as a critique of colonialism look at the interplanetary colonialism represented as a reversal of the European whites. This work looks at the apocalyptic space invasion story as a critique of the human position in complex ecological

conditions working as a warning about the impending future, fate of humans.

Acknowledging the wider universe, Wells plays on the position of humans. He raises questions while he toys with the idea of the world, real and imagined, through the imagining of the encounters between human beings and the Martian aliens. Considering that humans had claimed their position of exceptionalism on the Earth due to their power established through the industrial and colonial triumph of the Victorian world, Wells presents the term 'world' to critique humans. If we look at the various ways the term 'world' generally appears, we will see that it primarily indicates planets in the universe, mainly used to indicate the Earth. Secondly, it is used to indicate life created by human beings — their desires, anxieties, and interests connected through creative imagination that affects their relationships. Thirdly, the whole of everything, something that binds everything together in reality.

The epigraph used at the beginning of the novel— "But who shall dwell in these worlds if they are inhabited?... Are we or they Lords of the World?... And how are all things made for man?" (qtd. in Wells) indicates, if literally taken, the possibility of existence of multiple planets and lifeforms to question the position assumed by man on the Earth by breaking the illusion of fixed position of exclusivity of humans. Wells explores this fluidity of power and existence in the novel. A similar question is posited by Helen Feder in "Ecocriticism, Posthumanism, and the Biological Idea of Culture" about "we" and the "world." Feder asks to think whether "We *or* the world or we *as* the world?" (Feder 225; emphasis added) as the general tendency of the human race is to think of ourselves as the peak of nature and its order. She goes on to add that in the idea of the world in relation to human self that is, "we are the world too—our bodies are themselves ecosystems, our atoms the very fibers of it" (Feder 225).

Wells presents the aliens in his novel to challenge and expose the vulnerability or fragility of both human beings and the environment which sustains us. Based in and around London and the Southern part of England, the alien life problematizes life on Earth as outsiders. The presence of the aliens, acting as the archnemesis of the humans,

indicates entanglements of life beyond humans. The aliens are described biologically as 'non-human' and based on this they are referred to as extra-terrestrial, animals, or creatures. In any work of science fiction, the aliens appear to be far more superior in intelligence and technology. Their awareness of the universe advanced in comparison to humans. While the human species in England continued to dominate their host planet through several destructive practices such as land use, exploitation of plant life, depletion of biodiversity, increase in atmospheric pollution due to burning of coal within their own country and in other colonial lands, the arrival of the Martian aliens mirrors their actions.

Anatomically distinctly different from the humans, the Martian aliens unwelcoming towards their host planet have arrived in cylinders which stuck, "into the skin of our old planet Earth like a poisoned dart" (Wells 59) notes the unnamed narrator. The 'Heat Ray' released from their war machines unmindfully trample over plants, slaughter humans, split and burn trees; depriving the humans of any vegetation or refuge. Scenes of destruction are seen to be uniformly affecting including the relics of human civilization such as "the towers of the Oriental College" and the natural world's "pine trees" (Wells 70). Humans are shown to have been reduced to the status of lower animals and insects. They hide in the underground and suffer from constant fear of being hunted down as food for the aliens. An interesting scene involving the unnamed narrator shows the reduced status of humans on the planet they assumed as their own. Along with attacking the earth with the heat ray which instantly kills any life and turns it into dust, the aliens also cause massive pollution with their invasive technique of discharging "enormous clouds of a black and poisonous vapour by means of rockets" referred to as 'black smoke' (Wells95). Along with spreading through the valleys, the Thames River is described in the novel as being covered by black smoke, choking humans to death. The dual extermination of the natural world and humans reflects two the reality of the fragility of human beings and their interconnectedness to the natural world. The Martian aliens from their position of power and through their actions show their ethical detachment from the planet they have come to inhabit after depleting the entire resource of their home planet.

The purgatory dystopic condition makes the Curate ask questions about the sins that humans might have committed to face such conditions as the possibility of mass extinction. As he is dying, the Curate's conscience makes him feel responsible, "There was poverty, sorrow; the poor were trodden in the dust, and I held my peace" (Wells141). The existential crisis raises questions about the consequences of seeing the world as "we" or "they" instead of seeing it as "us." The "we" is determined by the power position enjoyed. At a time when empirical achievements were being triumphed through the mechanical achievement of the industrial worlds, Wells discusses the dichotomy of mind/body dualism. "Without the body the brain would, of course, become a mere selfish intelligence, without any of the emotional substratum of the human being" (Wells139), says the narrator while talking about the Martian aliens whose anatomy is only composed of brain. The mind/body dualism fuels different forms of exploitation which thinkers find necessary to address "the ecological crisis of the age of Anthropocene" (Buran2). The Martian aliens share no conscious connection or commitment between themselves and the world they have come to inhabit. Their destructive actions for their selfish fulfilment raise a question for the human beings whose home is the earth. Why are human beings blind-sighted about the well-being of their own home and its survival?

Wells questions the moral problem of anthropocentric thinking and speculates about the impending future of life on the Earth by questioning the position of human beings as the end of all power positions on the Earth. Such an idea was distinct from what was being believed during the author's times. The TV series adaptation does not use the aliens as a 'nonhuman' outsider of the human self but rather focuses on the figure of the alien differently that is well suited to the posthuman world of the Anthropocene. Although similar in the essence of prevalent concerns, the presence of different aliens makes the adaptation interesting. The aliens are humans from the future, an alien race born out of an accidental union between two people with degenerative genes. At one point, these aliens were exiled to outer space where they took residence on an exoplanet. They have travelled back in time by manipulating space, time, and the universe on a quantum level to seek revenge. They have invaded

a time in the past to kill the scientist, Bill Ward, to stop him from creating a virus which further weakens their immune system. Another reason for their return is that they had exhausted the exoplanet of its resources which caused most of their race to die. They are posthumans, scientifically and technologically far more advanced than their predecessors on the Earth. They have evolved telepathic capabilities but they are fully aware that they are not indispensable or at the centre of the life system. Their position is not fixed. In their struggle for the survival of their race, they have chosen to claim the earth as their home.

These degenerating alien race humans therefore stand against the once complacent human beings of Earth. True to a science fiction narrative, a war is waged between the two sides, shown through the characters, creating a complex moral dilemma for the viewers of the series. Their war over the inhabitation of the earth guarantees the extinction of one human race at the end. The series raises conversation between the "we" and the "us" where the actors are not distinctly different but rather are a metaphorical representative of a dialogue between human predecessors and successors. Interestingly, the human alien race from the future deals with the current human beings and the earth from an alienated gaze quite similar to the viewpoint of the Martian aliens in the original text. The opening episode of the first season begins with Bill Ward's monologue "they wanted to wipe us from the face of the Earth. But we kept asking ourselves "why?" ("Episode 1" 00:00:27-00:00:32). His words resonate with the question that is repeatedly asked throughout the series in all the aired seasons. I believe this distinction maintained between the two races of the humans, their struggles for survival shown separately against each other has the possibility of greater impact on the show's consumer's consciousness. There is guilt in Bill Ward's action when he creates the virus to stop the cycle of wrath of the alien race but no remorse is observable in the act of mass killing done by the aliens. A leader of the aliens says "It's either us or them" ("Episode 2" 00:18:22-00:18:23). Ward tries to find a reason for such behaviour. When he speaks of "all the centuries of mindless cruelty, [he states] maybe we shouldn't have been surprised" ("Episode 1"00:00:34- 00:00:38) it is an acknowledgement of the notoriety of human actions. Wells in the novel in a similar tone wrote, "we must

remember what ruthless and utter destruction our own species has wrought….” (Wells 38)The series beautifully depicts the dilemma of cohabitation and the issues that arise.

The makers of the show have consciously delved into this narrative. In an interview, Gabriel Byrne who plays the role of Bill Ward, the neuroscientist, and the saviour of the current human race, speaks “In our time, the threat no longer comes from space, but from our very planet, whether we are talking about environmental disaster, alienation from the major industrial powers, or potential nuclear cataclysm. We have children, our children will have children … And yet, nothing says that we are not going to disappear in the short term” (Kuru). Byrne sees the aliens as representing our anxieties for the future. The creator of the series, BAFTA award winner Howard Overman in an interview with *Variety* Magazine makes it clear that he wanted to explore the alien invasion in the series to understand what “that could mean for us today,” realistically setting in a posthuman world where there is no postapocalyptic rubble of the cities to “getting inside the characters’ heads” (Croll).

The actions of the alien-human race from the future are of particular interest. Their women suffer from infertility. Their wombs are incapable of carrying a child to full term, showing the dual impact of an imbalanced environment and their genetic defect. Eerily, their conditions mirror the issues that already many women across the globe suffer from at the current time. These alien women try to repopulate their race by stealing babies and foetuses of advanced pregnant women whom they nurture with the help of the technologically advanced machineries they developed. The fighting machines of this alien race resemble a real dog in its structure. Made of organic core with an exoskeleton made of metal, they work for and protect the aliens much like the real animals. Later in the third season, a machine dog playing with a ball is shown in a scene. This is one of the hints given to show the desperation of the younger human from the future. Such scenes possibly reflect a cry of plea for the preceding human inhabitants who in the future might not leave a habitable planet to survive.

Another issue that is significantly depicted in the series is climate change. Climate change as a manmade result is depicted in the season 3. Due to the massive manipulation done by both the races, a huge black hole is shown to have formed, enveloping the sky of London. It affects the climate and quality of breathable air for all living beings, even the machine dogs. This black hole formed in the current reality parallels an alternative future reality which is already heavily affected by the environmental effects of the appearance of this black hole. Catherine Durand, an astronomer, learns to project her consciousness by creating tiny black holes in a lab. She speaks of the possibility of multiple dimensions and multiple existences of the world. The black hole threatens to annihilate all the world. Durand tries to stop the annihilation from happening with the help of Ward and his friends.

The tension and war fought among the alien humans from the future and the current human race speculates the jarring future of life on earth for humans that is possible. It is not from outside but rather within the human race that resides the evil i.e., the one who will bring destruction, create a vulnerable environment, and will not leave a sustainable future for the upcoming generations. The arrival of the aliens is cathartic, an awakening call to recognize that we are biological, fragile beings who are vulnerable and dispensable. It is a struggle for biological survival despite our engineered technological achievements. To end, Katherine Hayles's words that she wrote in her monograph *How we became Posthuman* (1999) shares a good message and reminds us — "Let us remember the fragility of a material world that cannot be replaced" (Hayles 49).

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11

Reconstructing the Partition Hi(story): Between Sincerity and Satire in Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand* (*Ret Samadhi*)

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Abstract

This research paper positions Geetanjali Shree's International Booker Prize winner Hindi-language novel *Ret Samadhi* (2018), translated into English *Tomb of Sand* (2022) by Daisy Rockwell, as a metamodern text and tries to pitch the idea that this novel redraws partition boundaries illustrated in the Indian partition literature. This novel develops postmodern irony and metafiction into David Foster Wallace's brainchild *Post-Irony* and Lee Konstantinou's idea of *Credulous Metafiction* to establish *new sincerity* in Indian partition literature. An octogenarian grandmother, *Ma* or *Amma*, wishes to visit Pakistan and eventually not only succeeds in visiting her ancestral home in Lahore but also offers a new understanding of India's partition and boundaries between the two nations. The novel views India's partition tragedy from a metamodern perspective of oscillation between a modern enthusiasm and postmodern irony and portrays the partition as painful as it was in past or as alleviative as it can become at present. Self-reflexive irony in the novel constantly proposes new meanings of partition trauma highlighted in Ma's vagaries with a unique narrative strategy agglutinating the stories of modern urban life, history, folklore, environment, and womanhood with the main story. How a contemporary story on India's partition *oscillates* [Vermeulen and Van Den Akkar] between modern and postmodern interpretations of displacement seeking candour and authenticity with the help of its self-referential metafiction dubbed as 'Credulous Metafiction' by Lee Konstantinou to locate *New-Sincerity* [Adam Kelly] in partition literature is the major point discussed in this paper.

Keywords: Credulous Metafiction, Metamodern, New-sincerity, Partition, Post-irony.

Introduction

Partition literature, at present, seems to be evolving into significant thematic and narrative experimentation. Whereas modern writers remained fascinated with invoking communal unity in tragic separation, postmodern writers privileged plurality of partition misery and trauma. The emerging metamodern narrative, a new entrant in this dialectical hierarchy of partition documentation, re-writes the partition story by favouring the proliferation of tragedy over unity or plurality of human predicament during and after partition. *Tomb of Sand* tells the story of an eighty-year-old woman who gives new meaning to partition trauma and in times when partition literature is believed to have reached its exhaustive point, this story surprises everyone. Ma's decision to travel to Pakistan at such an old age and Shree's telling of this story with interwoven incessant sub-stories at once depolarize so many definitions and boundaries of partition literature. What could be the most innovative way to tell the partition story oscillating across modern hope and postmodern apathy even after seven decades of this tragedy, finds an apt expression and structure in Shree's hands. In a clear departure from modern political and postmodern apolitical approach towards partition literature, this novel takes a metamodern way to revisit trauma and displacement by reversing the roles of irony and metafiction to achieve coherence because "*understanding* [of partition] has become a much eroded, much-abused word, to the point that its sense has come to mean to *establish meaning* when its real sense is to *displace meaning*," (*Tomb of Sand* 177).

The first part of the story takes the readers into the domestic world of mother *Ma*, son *Bade,* daughter *Beti*, daughter-in-law *Bahu*, grandsons *Sid* and *Overseas Son*. The mundane activities of these family members, predominantly concentrated around old Ma, map their fears, taboos, grudges, and vagaries, and also contain the zeitgeist of culture, society, politics, pollution and customs of the day. Similarly in the Second part when *Ma* starts living with her outcast *Beti*, readers not only experience Ma's transition from a fragile bed-ridden old woman to an assertive and hearty woman making most of the remaining days of her life but also get to know about the issues of woman freedom, female sexuality and transgender identity explored

through Ma's friend Rosie Bua, a transgender. This part ends with Ma's shocking declaration that she wants to visit Pakistan.

The third part starts with Ma and Beti at the Wagah border and the story somersaults from the poles of domestic sensibilities to the poles of partition displacement and trauma. Their expeditions in Pakistan make the border, "a horizon. Where two worlds meet and embrace" (*Tomb of Sand* 653) and readers realize that Shree had been constantly invoking this metamodern dimension of Indo-Pak separation through post-ironical and credulous metafictional elements since the beginning of the story when it was hard to have an inkling that an old woman will emerge as a focal point of partition narrative full of, in translator Daisy Rockwell's words, "modern urban life, ancient history, folklore, feminism, global warming, Buddhism, and much more" (*Tomb of Sand* 732). These episodes are woven interchangeably with metafictional chapters full of premonitions and intimations. The sub-stories in the novel (un)spooling the main story of Ma neither overshadow the main plot nor grow mere customary to churn out the closure of Ma's journey and trace exuberance and sincerity in partition tragedy to, "promise … that the trauma of the past can be healed, or known — reformed at last" (Toth 46).

From Sincerity to New-Sincerity

Tomb of Sand offers a metamodern understanding of India's partition by extending irony into post-irony and making metafictional elements a source of textual self-referential humour to establish the coherent connections of new-sincerity to liberate the partition from trauma. The historical contexts and conditions of partition explored in stories sincerely documenting the misery of thousands of people are indeed impregnable. However, this narrative intensity/sincerity in partition literature seems to be plunged into a miasma of distinguished borders eventually unable to dissolve boundaries. New-sincerity, without repudiating the established [sincere] aspects of the partition saga, searches opportunities for converting historical into ahistorical or political into apolitical as far as new meanings of India's partition are concerned. Can the narratives of India vs. Pakistan; collective misery; moral implication or traumatic memories in partition literature be rearranged into a discernible or original

whole of displacement history? Can there be a new perspective, oscillating between negation and establishment of partition trauma, as if, "there are convergences and divergences between these [partition] conceptualizations; they complement each other as much as they compete" ("Postmodernism is Dead. What Comes Next?" Gibbons), or as if in Ma's words that, "a border does not enclose, it opens out. It creates a shape … it gives strength. It doesn't tear apart. A border increases recognition. Where two sides meet and both flourish" (*Tomb of Sand* 652).

Both content and form in this novel originate from particular conditions of India's partitions. Readerly experience oscillates between the components of modernity honouring boundaries and postmodernity defusing the notion of nations. At a time, the narrative grows confrontational and adamant to declare the authorial positions in analyzing partition tragedy but the very next moment an assurance of reaching an in-depth analysis of displacement seems visible, thus opening the "wide scope of the novel's speculative world, carefully examining how the text confronts the readers with both its form (textual and physical) and the exaggerated, twisted, and often darkly comic version of" (Balliro 53) partition story. The attainment of sincerity through irony or the assimilation of humour and seriousness reveals Shree's agenda of telling Ma's story with the audacity to bend partition narrative both at the thematic as well as narrative level with a clear aim of attaining originality with the playfulness of the content and form.

> The fun is really in the process of writing unless the writer has an agenda. If the writer has an agenda, then their whole agony is different. The process is what will lead to the whole structure. But that does not mean that one didn't feel stuck or wondered how to proceed at times. (Shree qtd. in "Partition was Never Complete")

The story oscillates between the tropes of Indian narrative tradition and the exhaustive boundaries of partition literature. It is embedded in excitement and monotony and conjointly traverses many worlds along with that of Ma's world. The novel makes an excruciating readerly experience of modern urban life, cultural history, domesticity of traditional Indian families, global warming evoked through humdrum anecdotes of Ma's renouncement of her family, her son's life as an administrator, her daughter's choice of

freedom at the cost of family, Ma's missing and her relation with Rosie. This new understanding of partition established behind discernible or indiscernible; coiled or uncoiled anecdotes remains at the centre of a new-sincerity which propagates that, "if there are limits and boundaries, then crossing them is also important," (Shree qtd. in "If there are limits and boundaries"). In this novel, boundaries are crossed in the story and the telling of the story as well.

From Metafiction to Credulous Metafiction

In practice, the use of irony to convert scepticism into authenticity may complicate readers' textual advances and inferences due to their inability to look beyond the deconstructive nature of irony and conditioning in postmodern incredulity. At the beginning of the story it seems difficult to decipher the ends of irony in Ma's predicament whether she is a victim in the family as, "she had grown tired of breathing for them, feeling their feelings," or an epitome of resurrection who, "neither stops for anyone, nor hesitates at any boundary," (*Tomb of Sand* 39). The Metafictional refrain here hints towards an unforeseen possibility in the story resonating with Vermeulen's observation that "the point here is not to make the reader believe, connect or immerse themselves in the reality but rather to suggest to them the possibility of a real world" (111). Certainly, it is the narrative technique which uses postmodern literary tools (inviting readers to create a fictive imagination) to reject postmodern fragmented content (jeopardizing Ma's actual position in the text). This simultaneous overt and covert use of fictionality of the fiction elevates metafiction, the dearest literary tool for ironical settings, to credulous metafiction.

The opening sentences of the story, "a tale tells itself. It can be complete, but also incomplete, the way all tales are," (*Tomb of Sand* 11) invite the readers to recognize metafictional elements in the narrative using, "postmodern form … to reject postmodern content, either denying the validity of theories of postmodern reality, or more commonly trying to move beyond its failings" (Konstantinou 93). Similarly, the authorial confession by the end of the story, "world is in dire need of literature because literature is a source of hope and life. It seeks to erase its despair by revelling in unique ways of freeing itself from the world that literature employs … succeeds when the

tale of a dying woman evolves into a story about her thriving and flourishing. Green patches of shoots and leaves greet the world amongst the rubble of destruction," (*Tomb of Sand* 698) highlights the use of fictionality of fiction to reconstruct readers' capability of finding conviction in confusion. This narrative strategy structures Ma's story oscillating across incessant poles but never lets the partition tragedy go out of sight and Shree's self-referential metafiction makes irony not a mere tool of showing Ma's predicament but a source of epiphany as Ma unexpectedly decides to cross borders.

Shree doesn't reveal her plan of taking the story to the realms of partition literature and readers are not exposed directly to the theme of the novel as the first two parts of Ma's story explain nothing about partition. However, she keeps reminding the readers, engrossed in a domestic story, about the unexpected turns. In an instance, when Ma goes missing, she speculates, "Who knows where a path will lead. If there were only one angle, one path, then the whole thing would be finished as soon as it started" (*Tomb of Sand* 177). Ma's story intertwined with cryptic and speculative chapters meanders through the episodes where Bahu's Reebok shoes become the source of commentary on consumerism; Bade's retirement ushers into a detailed description of Indian cuisines; candid moments of Ma and Beti suddenly transpires into the issue of global warming and at last, as per metafictional plan of the novel, during the conflict between son and daughter Ma unexpectedly declares that she wants to visit Pakistan.

These metafictional stories within the story destabilize not only the structure of the novel but also the ontological levels of partition trauma and displacement. By the time readers get used to the narrative haphazardness which seems to be settling at the juncture of the story where Ma at last starts living intently and lively with Beti, a sudden authorial claim that "the beginning begins at the beginning" (*Tomb of Sand* 324) forces readers to rummage through the previous chapters to ascertain their doubts that story is not entirely about an emotionally exhausted old lady and the very first metafictional statement in the text that, " this particular tale has a border and women who come and go as they please" (*Tomb of Sand* 11) clears this doubt by initiating the readers into a partition story. Thus, two

metafictional comments made across the gap of three hundred pages in the novel lead readers back and forth through the pages to destabilize the fictionality of fiction and, "use metafiction not to cultivate incredulity or irony but rather foster faith, conviction, immersion and emotional connection. Dissociated from irony, metafiction becomes a means of returning to 'old-fashioned' content" (Konstantinou 93).

By the time Ma and Beti reach Wagah border, previous intermittent ironical comments and situations narrated on the partition predicament start resurfacing, gaining originality and wholesomeness in defining Ma's pain and trauma with certitude rather than pity. "The road they're on is called the Grand Trunk Road. It comes this way and goes that way too" (*Tomb of Sand* 553) mitigating the sense of border with the use of irony. The incident of Ma's killing is narrated twice in the story, first when, "a bullet came, punctured her body, shot through and out the other side," (*Tomb of Sand* 13) with a metafictional addendum promising originality rather than irony in the story, "those who consider death to be an ending took this to be hers. But those in the know knew that this was no ending; knew she'd simply crossed yet another border" (*Tomb of Sand* 14). Second, by the end of the story with a prior warning that "the crux of the matter is that those who haven't cared to read this far are advised not to read ahead either. But for those who relish colours and paths, why should they stop?"(*Tomb of Sand* 683) and, "at that very moment the big shadow screamed, Run! The little shadow did not run. It was eighty years old … the bullet hit it from behind" (*Tomb of Sand* 698). This insertion of prior and subsequent metafictional comments by Shree, more than the playfulness of the narrative, lends credulity to a partition story trying to rise above trauma and pain.

The metafictional statement that, "every tale has haphazard elements, but such features aren't' necessarily hazardous," (*Tomb of Sand* 59) repudiates its own burlesque irony and allows the reader to speculate a new originality in Ma's journey to Pakistan with the vision that "if a story is stuck somewhere, it becomes evident that there's more of it to be told," (*Tomb of Sand* 82). How this story opens up into many credible understandings of partition within the range of postmodern ironical and metafictional elements is itself the consolidation of the metamodern sensibility in a partition story

unburdened from postmodern themes explored in the narratives of displacement and trauma. This is the metamodern narrative technique in which self-referential fiction becomes "credulous metafiction[which] uses the tools that cut short the relationship of the words to things (i.e. 'reality') precisely to try and put the two together again in whatever form it manages to muster, like a puzzle made with no instructions," (Vermeulen 111).

Shree constantly and consciously allows the readers to participate in the narrative scheme of the novel. It may appear as a postmodern exercise but these fragmented and plural episodes of Ma's story start collaborating to give a new meaning to partition tale with the use of metafiction and irony. Her experiment with the story and its telling, "try to convince us that what we initially thought was gimmicky experiments are elaborate attempts by the actual author, rather than the implied author, to communicate directly with us, "(Konstantinou 93) with a strong penchant to tell a partition tale free of all established apprehensions and convictions about memory, trauma and boundaries by making irony and metafiction constructive to attain new-sincerity.

A new form of metafiction which consciously destabilizes its fictionality, unlike the postmodern use of metafiction to intensify fictionality, inspires readers to attach to the narrative emotionally. The story consistently tells about itself and earnestly uses irony not to traumatize displacement but to mythically mitigate partition pain through Ma's adventure with her daughter in Pakistan. This expedition ends with the killing of Ma by Pakistani soldiers in Khyber invoking many aspects of life and world; nationality and family; culture and tradition and language and art unfurling in different contexts and Shree like true, "metamodernists [who are] aware of political, economic, climatological, and other forms of chaos as is anyone else, but … choose to remain optimistic and to engage communities proactively even when … a cause has been lost" (Abramson 128) because, "when a country divides, enmity jostles amity and visas and borders depend on mood" (*Tomb of Sand* 532) probably on the line of new-sincerity to counter postmodern irony and its cynicism.

From Irony to Post-irony

Partition literature offers few consolations. The absurdity of India's partition has placed tragic irony at the centre of Indian partition literature evoking terror, pain and futility of human life. The iconic use of irony in partition literature creates incongruity between never ending socio-cultural miasma and the reposes of compassion and credibility in partition narratives in accordance with David Foster Wallace's apprehensions that irony, "seemed downright socially useful in its capacity for what counterculture critics call a *critical negation* that would make it self-evident to everyone that the world is not as it seems … serves an exclusively negative function" (*E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S.Fiction* 183). Shree seems to be aware of the debilitating effects of irony, "you know perfectly well this has been a headache for both countries, that neither has been able to figure out to this day who has the right to live where, who belongs where, and whom the law favours" (*Tomb of Sand* 589) and draws morality even from the tropes of sustained violence and trauma in partition literature by extending the limits of irony into post-irony where, "the distaste [of partition trauma] may well remain, but the distance[between two countries] has not," (Wallace, *Fictional Futures and the Conspicuously Young*, 5).

In a clichéd setting of partition literature where a displaced octogenarian woman can easily become the ideal weapon to exert trauma and misery of displacement, Ma's decision to visit Pakistan comes as a surprise to the family members and readers also. Her belief that "when a country divides enmity jostles amenity and visas and borders depend on the mood," (*Tomb of Sand* 532) is as ironic as the plight of thousands of Indians who want to visit Pakistan in their last days but never get the opportunity and as assertive as to unburden the partition story from painful experience. The most crucial moment of the story, "Ma is asking Bade for passport. *Pakistan*. When Amma said it, everyone in shock" (*Tomb of Sand* 527), ironically narrated by the author "even at this age, desire is desire, and why should anyone die without giving a shot," (*Tomb of Sand* 527) becomes thoroughly thoughtful when Bade says, "how far Pakistan is, Amma, it's so far! At which Amma got bit annoyed," and says, "It is where it is. We're the ones who are far," (*Tomb of Sand* 528) infusing new-sincerity into irony. Ma's visit to Pakistan evokes

playfulness; celebration of fragmentations; acceptance of displacement and ironic deconstruction of borders for the earnest ends resonating with Berel Lang's observation that:

> One ironic turn opens the way to another and that one opens on still another, with no nonironic end in sight except for the ironic consciousness itself with its denial of any stopping point that might interrupt its continuing reflection. On this view, irony initiates (more precisely, takes place in) an infinite movement, perhaps regress, perhaps progress that violates the supposed boundaries of every context in which it appears: it is irony that irony affirms, not just this or that single turn. (571)

Magic realism evoked with the incarnations of partition writers at Wagah border expands the ironical dimensions of displacement and violence of partition to an earnest level and this chapter marking the beginning of Ma's journey to Pakistan becomes the most important episode in the story liberating irony from cynicism and solemnizes partition scepticism into sincerity. The whole league of partition writers and the characters created in their partition stories are incarnated as the audience watches the parade at the exact moment when Ma and Beti are about to cross the India-Pakistan boundary. Shree pitches the idea that partition truths are not unconditional and can be changed according to the situation with the help of irony itself. Shree obfuscates and traverses two domains of cynicism and sincerity simultaneously by invoking partition writers and their protagonists with full awareness of the fictionality in, "there sits Intizar Hussain Sahib writing *Basti*," (*Tomb of Sand* 536) "Krishna Sobti forging ahead, as though fashioning new borders," (*Tomb of Sand* 537) "Khuswant Singh, growling like a tiger," (*Tomb of Sand* 541) and "Bhisham Sahni ji stands at the gate staring in astonishment," (*Tomb of Sand* 541).

She deftly uses irony in telling the partition story by recollecting history to obfuscate the reality of time and space in India's partition ideally fixed at the Wagah border to, "define irony as ethos, a stance that interprets the world and language via a corrosive practice of symptomatic, sceptical or paranoid reading," (Konstantinou 88). Shree, by declaring that, "here we are at Wagah, where the tale is drama and the story is partition," (*Tomb of Sand* 535), opens the possibility of analyzing trauma and pain with a modified sense of

irony in Wallace's words that, "we have an innate predilection for visual stimulation … we experience a degree of manipulation as neutral, a fact of life," (Wallace, *Fictional Futures and the Conspicuously Young*, 5). She says the unsayable in accepting that the parade at the Wagah border is not necessarily a symbol of the two-nation theory because as far as the parade is concerned, "no one is an enemy during rehearsal. There must have been laughter and joking. You'll kick your leg so high … as if you're going to kick yourself in the head, then I'll kick as if I'm going bust my own head," creating confusion that, " is it a fight or a game," (*Tomb of Sand* 543).

This reversed use of irony designates the effort to defuse socio-political miasma in partition writings because, "postironists don't advocate a simple return to sincerity — they are not anti-ironists — but rather wish to preserve postmodernism's critical insights (in various domains) while overcoming its disturbing dimensions," (Konstantinou 88). Blustering parade by the soldiers of both nations loses its sheen and seriousness by its ironical documentation when, "the guards in the crested turbans were in a great hurry to execute their duty correctly, though they hid their haste," but in the very next moment, Shree muddles this irony with earnestness when, "they'd already shaken hands with one another with excessive alertness, as if to say, Buddy, it's you and me together today; the enemy is some third party," (*Tomb of Sand* 546).

Contrary to readerly expectations, Ma inherits a new role and unlike envisaged break-downs and severe nostalgia, she starts challenging the gloomy atmosphere of reunion in a post-ironical way during an interrogation by a Pakistani police officer who reads Ma's name on her passport as Chandraprabha Devi and Ma claims that she is Chanda of undivided India.

> [Officer asks] This name is not in your passport. [Ma replies] Chanda was sent off without a passport. [Officer asks] You have no visa. [Ma replies] Chanda was sent away without a visa. [Officer asks] Your address is in India, which is very far from here. [Ma replies] It is where it is, you're the one who's far, son. [Officer asks] I'm from here, you've travelled here. [Ma replies] No, son, I didn't come here, I left here. (*Tomb of Sand* 628)

Ma is a victim of partition. Her resurrection as a lone octogenarian woman who chooses to go back to the country of her

origin and her response in this conversation muddles comic and serious together and immediately takes the readers to the first chapter of the novel where it was propounded by the author that this partition story is no way doomed to be ended on a predestined order but in fact, "a story is created, changes, flows, free from this side to that" (*Tomb of Sand* 683). Once it becomes clear that this back journey of Chandraprabha Devi or Chanda to Pakistan, "will jump, it will cross over, the story will not end" (*Tomb of Sand* 579), the idea of writing a partition story based on ironical treatments achieves the next level where, "irony is not something in an object that you either "get" or fail to "get": irony "happens" for you (or, better, you make it "happen") when two meanings, one said and the other unsaid, come together, usually with a certain critical edge" (Hutcheon, 22). The parody and cynicism of being divided into two countries and of two identities fall flat in front of Ma's even more ironical statement that, "a border is not created to be removed. It is meant to illuminate both sides" (*Tomb of Sand* 652), and oscillates between modernist hope and postmodern fragmentation neither removing border nor accepting its demarcations.

Ma's paranoid conversations are full of ironical elements as it becomes clear that her answers to the investigating officer will not fetch her freedom and confusion is created that when such an old woman can convincingly decide to visit Pakistan then why she doesn't put her answers straight. She creates a linguistic dystopia where irony becomes the tool of criticizing irony to lend a metamodern authenticity to the issues of nations and borders. Her plight reminds me of Manto's *Toba Tek Singh* who is ironically stranded across two nations and his denial of the border between India and Pakistan trivializes the notion of partition not to highlight postmodern cynicism but to infuse originality in the partition narrative as Ma states, "why I should have a visa? I never had one before, why should I have one at this age?" (*Tomb of Sand* 651) and perhaps, "designates the effort to move beyond the problems that irony has created for contemporary life and culture" (Konstantinou 88). The extension of irony into post-irony underlines the ascent of irony from cynicism to positivism as a literary device and relates to the broader meanings of socio-cultural events to liberate stories, as in

the case of this novel, from cliché-ridden thematic as well as narrative scheme.

Conclusion

Geetanjali Shree, most fundamentally, allocates new dimensions to the post (modern) dialectic of partition trauma and boundaries by necessitating a new metamodern rise in partition stories. *Tomb of Sand* neither abhors poignancy nor celebrates the plurality of partition; neither abandons modern doubts nor criticizes postmodern playfulness in partition aftermaths. *Ma*'s visit to Pakistan in search of her identity typically opposes the modern utopias of partition like a true postmodern but at the same time with a sincere belief, like that of a modern, in postmodern criticality registered in partition narratives. *Ma*'s visit to Pakistan remains complete and incomplete also like the metamodern oscillation in which the irony of her pain and trauma is poignant and self-critical simultaneously. This results in the documentation of the tragedy of partition with the help of postmodern negation and modern sincerity equally contesting with each other.

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From Temporal Existence to Eternal Quest: Upanishadic Themes in Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium"

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Abstract

The main objective of this article is to unveil the core themes of Upanishads in W. B. Yeats's poem "Sailing to Byzantium". Upanishads, the foundational texts of Vedic philosophy, propound the nature of gross reality, self and its relation with the eternal reality. These concepts find their reflections and intersections in "Sailing to Byzantium". Both of them also propel the limitations of this gross world and the bliss of transcending the confinements of metempsychosis. Besides, they project that beyond the realm of ephemeral mask lies the effulgence of the cosmic consciousness which can be only radiated by realizing the dichotomy between soul and body. To expound these insights, they both underpin the parallel themes, symbols, images, and allegories. Likewise, the propagation of spiritual evolution to ignite the light within beyond the temporal existence is the Upanishadic motif that recurs in Yeats's poem. By delving into these core themes, this study contributes a fresh revisiting and explores how the ideas, images and philosophy transcend geographical boundaries and diverse cultures. In its essence, this study involves a qualitative study to research by implementing the subtlety and interpretive analysis of the selected verses from the Upanishad and "Sailing to Byzantium".

Keywords: Bliss, eternity**,** gross reality, temporal existence, transcendence

Introduction

This article explores the intricate parallels between W. B. Yeats's poem "Sailing to Byzantium" and the Upanishadic quest for transcendence, spirituality, and eternity. Yeats grapples with the theme of the dichotomy between the gross reality and the eternal self in the poem which strikingly aligns with the concepts of ultimate reality, inner

soul, and physical body propounded in the Upanishads. Both of them delve into the goal of human life, and the way to achieve the bliss. The images and symbols expressed in the poem bear their significant resemblance with the images, symbols and ideas expressed in the major Upanishads like *Kata, Brihadaranyaka, Chandogya, Mundaka, Aitteriya* and *Kena Upanishad.* In essence, the realm of Byzantium and the image of sailing to it resonate with the Upanishadic concept of transcending this phenomenal manifestation for the highest level of a spiritual quest that is the abode of *Brahman*. Thus, it remains to make a fresh revisiting to interpret the poem with this new outlook of themes, concepts, and philosophical speculations propounded in the classical Upanishads.

"Sailing to Byzantium", published in 1928 in the poetic collection "The Tower", is an enigmatic work of W. B Yeats. This poem presents Yeats's fascination for Byzantium, an ancient city that represents the rich artistic creation and cultural heritage. By blending the symbols, images and allegory, the poet propounds the vision of immortality contrasting it with the temporal existence of this mundane world. Because of its engraved meaningful insights, the poem has captivated scholars since the days of its publication. One underlying and important lens to view this poem is from the Upanishadic thoughts because the theme of transcendence, immortality, and the quest for spiritual reality underpins the poem. William Paul Kadar rightly affirms that Indian Philosophy along with the Upanishads influenced Yeats. So the concept of body and soul echoes the influence of Indian philosophy (43). Various discussions in the different contexts also have noted a similar connection of Yeats to the Eastern Philosophy of the Upanishads.

The prominent scholar to discuss the intricate interconnection between Upanishadic echoes in Yeats's poem is Philip Goldberg. He writes, "Yeats, the most beloved of Irish bards, wrote that 'the mystical life is the centre of all that I do and all that I think and all that I write.' He discovered Vedanta when he was about thirty and found that it 'confirmed the vague speculations and seemed at once logical and boundless'" (270). This is one of the fundamental patterns that Yeats's poems often explicate the themes of Indian thoughts of *karma*, the interconnectedness of the spiritual world and the phenomenal world. Similarly, the detachment to the phenomenal

existence is the underlying Upanishadic tones that reecho in this poem. So, A. Norman Jeffares concludes that the poem expresses the imposition of old age and the limitations of temporal existence (229). In this regard, "Sailing to Byzantium" also marks these Upanishadic footsteps, so it is justifiable to perceive it through the prism of Upanishadic reading.

Yeats's works postulate the mystical insights of Indian philosophy because of his connections with Rabindra Nath Tagore. Likewise, the Upanishadic tones increased their vibrations when he came in contact with Theosophical society where he met Mohini Chatterjee. Later on, he met Shri Purohit Swami in 1931. Then a newly born pattern of Upanishadic visions influenced him. Margaret Mills Harper shows the Upanishadic influence on Yeats:

> From 1932 through 1936 Yeats and Shri Purohit Swami collaborated on a translation of the Upanishads after the publication of the latter's autobiography, for which Yeats supplied an introduction. Yeats also wrote an introduction to a translation by Shri Purohit Swami of a book by his Master, Bhagwan Shri Hamsa, recounting a pilgrimage to Mount Kailas, or Meru, a holy site in Tibet. Yeats's intense "Supernatural Songs" as well as the prose pieces "The Mandukya Upanishad" and the two introductions are a good deal more interesting than the translation of *The Ten Principal Upanishads*. (162)

Harper's explanation proves that Yeats was deeply inspired, influenced and interconnected with the Upanishadic readings. That's why, the blending of the unique symbolism and imagery of both the East and the West makes his works influential throughout the time and needs a fresh revisiting with new interpretations. Naresh Guha also claims Yeats's connection with the Indian philosophy and the Upanishads. He is of the view that Yeats's numerous references in his letters and poems are the shreds of evidence to prove how deeply he was influenced by Indian philosophy throughout the different phases of his literary life (1). In essence, this study remains a milestone to solidify the bridge between the philosophical thoughts of classical Upanishads that "Sailing to Byzantium" resonates in its new forms of symbolism, images, and allegory.

Yeats's poem "Sailing to Byzantium" promulgates the profound insight of a spiritual quest that is beyond temporal reality. The themes of ultimate reality, the nature of self, and the realization of

eternity and bliss are exposed in symbols and images that find their origin in Upanishadic thoughts. Still, the poem lacks a comprehensive interpretation from the lens of Upanishadic philosophy of temporal existence, the ultimate reality, spiritual evolution and bliss. So, this article fulfils the gap of study by exploring these research questions:

a) What are the major themes of Upanishads expounded by Yeats in "Sailing to Byzantium"?

b) How does he incorporate these themes by blending them into the symbols, imagery, and allegory of the poem?

By seeking to address these questions, this paper aims to embark on the influence of the Upanishads in Yeats. Likewise, it also aims to expose these themes in the poem that deepen our understanding of Yeats's works.

The age of grand narratives and theories has come to an end. According to Uwe Flick, the pluralization of the worldview and social relations has become the dominant subject of our time and qualitative research explores these milieus and subcultures (12). The bridges between the diverse fields have been prevalent nowadays. John W. Cresswell also focuses on the qualitative approach as the exploration of different social aspects (4). This way of research applies flexibility and an open approach to the study. The exploration of Upanishadic themes in Yeats's poem unveils a new perspective. That's why, the philosophical lens of Upanishads provides new vibrations while analyzing "Sailing to Byzantium" with a new outlook. The study applies judgemental sampling because this sampling method, says Kumar, only explores the information that is helpful to achieve the objective of the study (374). This study only explores the ideations of temporal existence, ultimate reality and dichotomy between body and the soul propounded by the Upanishads in Yeats's poem. Thus, Yeats's poem "Sailing to Byzantium " has become the source of primary concepts, while related criticisms, commentaries and reviews on it have been considered as the source of secondary information to formulate the arguments.

Temporal Existence and Transcendence in Upanishads and "Sailing to Byzantium"

The Upanishadic idea of *Brahman* as the eternal essence of the entirety underlies the main theme of the poem because it talks about the transient nature of this world, and desires for the eternal world that is beyond. The poem strongly exposes the glory of this eternity that can be attained in the realm of transcendence. The Upanishads radiate the ideations that *Brahman* is the ultimate reality which moves the phenomenal world. All the mundane aspects are merely the reflections. *Mundaka Upanishad* states, "The immortal *brahman* is ahead, that *brahman* is behind, that *brahman* is right and left. It spreads forth below and above; *Brahman* alone is all this universe, it is the highest" (2.2: 12; Muller trans. 52). *Brahman*, as the eternal reality, has its root "*brh*" which signifies " 'to grow, to burst forth'. The derivation suggests gushing forth, bubbling over, ceaseless growth" (Radhakrishnan 52). It, thus, remains the primal source of cosmic power and the essence of everything that precipitated from its omnipresence and omnipotence. These phenomenal happenings are its attributes and only the great human of wisdom has the potential to deserve its competence and realize that "I am *brahman*" (*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* 1.4:10; Muller trans. 79). This realization brings the sense that we all are the drops of an infinite ocean. The same cosmic power integrates us. Our personal itself is *Brahman* as postulated by *Mandukya Upanishad*, "All this, verily is Brahman, but Brahman, is this Atman (the soul)" (1; Deussen trans.413). When the spark of this cosmic radiance animates every happening at the microcosmic level, then it becomes "the divine inmate of the mortal coil and is identical with the Self (*atman*)" (Zimmer 79). It means we carry that supreme reality within. This realization is the supreme goal of life. Everything goes in peril, but it is beyond the decay and destruction. The deepest reality dwells inside us. Human beings long to know the oneness of it. The moment this oneness is established, one transcends the metempsychosis. These are the main fundamentals of Upanishad that recur in Yeats's "Sailing to Byzantium".

The poem begins to show a longing to transcend this phenomenal world of decay and impermanence that remains encircled by sorrow, troubles and tribulations. The sense of

discomfort and a desire for detachment from this transient world crystallize in the very beginning line of the poem, "That is no country for old men" (Yeats 1951). This creates an image of the material world and the impermanent nature of life. Besides, the culmination of enjoying this gross world does not create any jubilant joy. It has come to its culmination and searching for something permanent that transcends decay and change. Since this gross body is confined, the *atman* (Self) that lies as the spark of reality within longs for its abode with the eternal *Brahman*. The first stanza, furthermore, says, "The young in one another's arms, birds in the trees" (Yeats 1951). It shows the life of natural fecundity of this world of attributes which is sure to decay because the poem exposes the starkest truth of this manifested world and its creations by exposing, "Those dying generations" and even the greatest reality "Whatever is begotten, born and dies" (Yeats 1951). The jubilant thing of today perils one day. In this regard, Yeats is consolidating Upanishadic ideas that what we see is not reality; the reality is beyond, and we have to realize the essence of reality that remains within us. It is the spark of *Brahman*. Realizing the eternity is the goal, not the "artifice of eternity" (Yeats 1951). These ideas converge with these dialogues between son and father expressed in *Chandogya Upanishad*, "Believe me, my son, an invisible and subtle essence is the Spirit of the whole universe. That is Reality. That is Atman. THOU ART THAT" (6.12:3; Mascaro trans. 117). When Yeats longs "To the holy city of Byzantium" (1951), his self (*atman)* heads for the *Brahman*. If the world of Byzantium signifies the perfection for Yeats, it is not other than the abode of *Brahman*. The image of fish, fowl and fowl juxtaposes with the longing for the ageless intellect. It germinates a realization of the perfection. According to William Paul Kadar, in the first stanza, the speaker perceives the banalities of this life and its repercussions and its source on the sensual desires that even confine the optimum knowledge (22). A realization that the self is confined by the banalities and attachment of life instigates the speaker to transcend these limitations to be assimilated into the domain of perfection.

The power of *Brahman* radiates throughout every dimension of the creation. He is in all and everything is in him. He is ungraspable, but everything can be grasped with the power of it. His nature is somehow antithetical but beyond the mask of this antagonism,

everything merges and becomes one as described by Zimmer when he views, in the abode of *Brahman*, there is the "coincidence of opposites" (313). *Kena Upanishad* projects the omnipresence and omnipotence of the *Brahman* as the ultimate reality:

> What cannot be spoken with words, but that whereby words are spoken: Know that alone to be Brahman, the Spirit; and not what people here adore.
>
> What cannot be thought with the mind, but that whereby the mind can think: Know that alone to be Brahman, the Spirit; and not what people here adore.
>
> What cannot be seen with the eye, but that whereby the eye can see: Know that alone to be Brahman, the Spirit; and not what people here adore. (1:5,6, 7; Mascaro trans. 51)

The nature of *Brahman* as the ultimate reality is pervasive. Since duality merges in that stage, these phenomenal manifestations are just the play. That is why, they lack permanency here. This idea is strongly intricated in the tapestry of the poem. For the realization of that reality, one should realize that it is "not what people adore here "because everyone is "Caught in that sensual music" (Yeats 1951) of these worldly affairs. However, the connection between that world of divinity and this world of impermanence is the reason "all neglect| Monuments of unageing intellect" (Yeats 1951). For Yeats, "monuments of unageing intellect" is not here, it is beyond there in the world of eternity that he labels as the world of Byzantium. Although the worldly manifestations are the attributes of a single reality, this does not stand out alone. Aldous Huxley clarifies that this gross world of matter with its "individualized consciousness is the manifestations of a Divine Ground within which all partial realities have their being, and apart from which they would be nonexistent" (13). Then, how could Yeats rely on this transitory world? He is even saying that everything is confined to sensual pleasures and people close their eyes to the "unageing intellect" which leads for eternity i.e. the world of Byzantium.

With the insight of "unageing intellect", the speaker detaches the personal self from the transience of the world. The dichotomy between soul and body is crucial in the second stanza because, after the realization that he has perceived in the first stanza, he attains a height toee what is self from the non-self. The second stanza of the

poem explicates spiritual transformation and the proximity to the abode of eternity:

> An aged man is but a paltry thing,
> A tattered coat upon a stick, unless
> Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing
> Nor every tatter in its mortal dress,
> Monuments of its own magnificence;
> And therefore I have sailed the seas and come
> To the holy city of Byzantium. (Stanza 2, 1951)

The speaker realizes that the soul (*Ataman*), being the radiance of *Brahman*, is the ruler of the body. It intensifies the idea that the spark of cosmic consciousness (soul) is the breath of life because the moment the "soul clap its hands and sing", life starts to dance its rhythm.

This idea conjoins with the *Brahman* as the source of cosmic consciousness as expressed in Upanishads. *Aitareya Upanishad* postulates, "It rests on consciousness (the self). The world is led by (produced) by consciousness (the self)….Consciousness is *brahman*" (3:3; Muller trans. 46). The image of "paltry thing", "a tattered coat upon a stick" signifies the transitoriness and vanity of earthly things. They are useless unless one realizes the beat of the eternal radiance of *Brahman* that lies within. One gets a higher step with the perception of "unaging knowledge" that is described in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* as "*mantavyo nididhyasitavyah* (to be reflected on, to be meditated upon" (4.5:6; Radhakrishnan trans. 283). Only the knowledge of one-pointedness can lead to that glorious stage beyond the level of passion, pain and turbulence. That's why, M.H. Abrams clarifies that Yeats in his Byzantium world wants to detach from this hectic world and land to the calmness of eternal life (1931). The eternity then comes when one attains the stage to detach from this life, no matter whether it lasts in the artistic form or in the form of insights.

The Dichotomy between Body and Soul and the Eternal Quest

The detachment comes when one subtracts from the passions and desires. The inner realization sings its song when one sees the dichotomy of the body and self-relationship. The second stanza of the

poem reminds us that the poet might have been enthralled by these *mantras* from *Katha Upanishad:*

> Know the Self as lord of the chariot,
>
> The body as the chariot itself,
> The discriminating intellect as
> The charioteer, and the mind as reins.
> The senses, say the wise, are the horses;
> Selfish desires are the roads they travel.
>
> When the Self is confused with the body,
> Mind, and senses, they point out, he seems
> To enjoy pleasure and suffer sorrow. (1.3:3,4; Eawasran trans. 81)

The realization of this body\soul dichotomy brings a transformation and a person seeks the essence of eternity which transcends the bodily decay and earthly passions and desires which bring only the short form of pleasure rather than the bliss that lasts forever. After igniting the inner vision, one rises above the fetters and perceives that the "paltry thing" and "tattered coat upon the stick" are just the mere showdown. The moment one sails beyond as Yeats says, "And therefore I have sailed the seas and come \To the holy city of Byzantium" (Stanza 2, 1951), one has visualized the eternity because his soul has risen and realized the genuine truth. This is hierarchically expressed in *the Bhagavadgita* which aligns with Yeats' ideas of sailing to Byzantium:

> The senses, they say, are high;
> Higher than the senses is the thought organ;
> But higher than the thought-organ is the consciousness;
> While higher than the consciousness is He
>
> > > (the soul). (3:42; Edgerton trans. 41)

The parallels between Yeats about the purity of the spiritual journey signified by Byzantium and the lines from *the Bhagavadgita* reflect the concepts of landing on the higher state of reality. Yeats's notion of sailing signifies going beyond the phenomenal reality to the world of eternity which is Byzantium. It stands for the plenum of spiritual attainment much like the concept of soul in the highest plane expressed in verse from *the Bhagavadgita*. Byzantium is the metaphor which can be landed stepwise after realizing the hierarchical processes projected in the lines of the *Bhagavadgita*. The

most significant aspect is the speaker's journey aligns with the stratifications of existence postulated in the verse from *the Bhagavadgita* which is from the gross reality to beyond. Each step has to be transcended for the quest of higher spiritual realization until one attains salvation or *moksha*. They both have the same destinations of inward evolution of realizing the self for the attainment of eternity. In this regard, Brian Arkins claims that the poem is "completely preoccupied with the world of the spirit, with infinite metaphysical existence" (143) and ignores the world of sensual pleasures and decay for the sake of spiritual evolution with the infinite intellect.

The speaker, in the third stanza, becomes the evolved sage after transcending the embroilment of the mortal coil. He can be the master of his soul because one can "be the master singing- masters of my soul" (Yeats 1951). For Yeats, in this stage every aspect of reality is merged and becomes one as he has expressed in his "Vision": "religious, aesthetic, and practical life were one" (qtd. in Kadar 22). He is consumed in the totality of ultimate reality where every duality vanishes as he says, "Consumed my heart away (Yeats 1951). The longings for passions and desires are "fastened to a dying animal" (Yeats 1551). This clinging is the outcome of the worldly embroilment of *Maya* (illusion). He wants an intellectual escape from this stage of the gross world. In other words, after sailing to the domain of Byzantium, he finds the perfection of bliss because he "knows not what it is" (Yeats 1551). He is immortalized because he has crossed the cycles of metempsychosis and become one with the world of *Brahman*. This is the stage as clearly expressed in the *Katha Upanishad*, "When all desires that dwell in the heart cease, then mortal becomes immortal, and obtain *brahman*.\ \ When all the ties of the heart are severed here on the earth, then the mortal becomes immortal"2.3:14,15; (Muller trans.15). After sailing to Byzantium, the world of eternity, he has now attained the stage of spiritual perfection where because he has become the light without any attributes and perceived the light as expressed in *Tao Te Ching*:

> Its rising is not bright;
> Its setting is not dark,
> Endlessly, the nameless goes on,
> Merging and returning to Nothingness. (Tzu 14)

The speaker has been liberated after crossing the bondages of *samsara*. His quest for artistic perfection has crossed the confinement of birth and death which akin to the ultimate *Brahman* postulated in the Upanishads.

These ideations are found if one ponders on Yeats's idea of the Upanishadic notion of self and spirit in the stage of perfection. He has expressed this insight as he says, "Matter or the soul's relation to time has disappeared; souls that have found like freedom in the remote past or will find it in the future, enter into it or are entered by it at will, nor is bound to any part of space, nor any process, it depends only upon itself, is Spirit, that which has value in itself" (qtd. in Kadar 43). He has become a spirit that has merged in the abode of *Brahman* because Yeats has expressed in his Aphorisms about the insights of Upanishads that propound the personal Self and the One are the single reality (cited in Kadar 44). Thus, the world of Byzantium and the Upanishadic notion of ultimate reality find their perfect blending at this point.

The final stanza is the metaphorical reflection of the realization after the liberated stage. The poet has transcended the material limitations after sailing to the domain of Byzantium. The speaker yearns for the spirit over the body when he says, "Once out of nature I shall never take\My bodily form from any natural thing" (Yeats 1951). The desire to go beyond the cycle of *samsara* (world), merging in the eternal world of cosmic self is a state of super consciousness. This is attained after breaking the confinement of body passions, and attachment. This is a dominating idea expressed in the Upanishads. The speaker has attained the realm beyond metempsychosis because no bodily attachment remains there. The image of golden form created by the Grecian goldsmith in the line "But such a form as Grecian goldsmith make\Of hammered gold and gold enamelling" (Yeats 1951) brings the Upanishadic metaphor of *Atman*'s (souls) journey to the eternal *brahman*. The realm of Byzantium now becomes the higher stage of consciousness when seen from the Upanishadic point of view because Yeats's "desire to control his own body was allied with an imported Hindu spirituality that promised him a chance to succeed at this daunting project" (Harper 161). He might have known the limitations of the body when he was deeply influenced by the Upanishads in the process of translating them in

collaboration with Purohit Swami. The body-soul dichotomy that the speaker envisions in the image of the above lines and "Or set upon a golden bough to sing" (Yeats 1951) align with the dichotomy expounded in *the Mundaka Upanishad:* "Two birds of the same kind and inseparable as friends, cling to the same tree. One of them eats the sweet fruit, the other looks on without eating" (3.1:1; Muller trans. 53). Here the tree symbolizes the bodily, fruits stand for the worldly pleasures and attachments.

The birds represent the two aspects of the self (soul). The bird that enjoys the fruit is engaged with the body clings to the gross reality and enjoys the pleasure and pains produced by the actions (*karma*). The second bird, which watches the game of pleasures and pains generated by worldly affairs being unbiased, is the form of the supreme soul (*Brahman*). It remains unpolluted and unaffected by bodily actions, attachment, and passions and therefore is the radiance of bliss and eternity within. James Lovic Allen suggests that the images of a golden bird and bough in Yeats's poem are his connection with the Upanishads (61). The realization of this dichotomy radiates the perfect realization. So, the speaker desires to sing a song of liberation and inner evolution song sitting on the golden bough that is never to fade away, decay and vanish. The final yearning is played out after reaching the culmination when the speaker realizes eternity as delivered in the final lines, "To lords and ladies of Byzantium\Of what is past or passing, or to come" (Yeats 1952). The boundary of time in the forms of past, present and future is blurred in the state of perfect wisdom. The speaker has become the timeless Upanishadic sage or seer who lights the many cycles of time with the light of perfect wisdom perennially. The line "To lords and ladies of Byzantium" expects a higher level of enlightened audience who can only perceive the integrity of knowledge. The speaker, after casting out the gross passions, has attained the highest zenith of bliss, sainthood and the stage of super consciousness postulated in *the Bhagavadgita*:

> This, O son of Pritha, is the Brahman-state. Attaining this none is deluded. He who abides therein even at the hour of death passes to the Calm of Brahamn. (2:72; Hill trans. 94)

The speaker's *Atman* finds its abode in *Brahamn* and remains unaffected by the cause-and-effect course of this temporal world.

Speaker's aspirations have found their highest haven after knowing the limitations of this world. He has been blessed by wisdom and immortality as the enlightened seers who postulated their perennial philosophy in the Upanishads.

Conclusion

Yeats's poem "Sailing to Byzantium" echoes Upanishadic concepts of transcending the gross world with the inner evolution. The inner evolution opens the way for supreme bliss and eternity. The seeker is blessed with the effulgence of the ultimate reality. The speaker in the poem from the very beginning is apathetic to worldly pleasures. The images like old men, dying generations, birds in trees and so on in the first stanza of the poem all add to the fleeting nature of the temporal world which the speaker wants to transcend with the never-dying intellect. Going beyond the temporal reality remains the fundamental mission for the speaker. His sails to the world of Byzantium resemble the Upanashadic idea of transcending the phenomenal world because the reality is not dual which the Upanishads postulate as the concept of *Brahman.* That's why; the speaker of the poem meditates on the self-realizing that this inner self is the spark reality of *Brahman*. These ideations of Upanishad like "I am the ultimate reality; you are the reality; my self is the reality" reverberate in the poem when the speaker projects the world of Byzantium as the eternal that lasts throughout the phases of time. Once this stage is attained, there is no return because it is like the abode of *Brahman* postulated by the Upanishads. The images of golden birds singing on the branch recur the Vedic symbols that differentiate the bodily self and eternal self. In essence, Yeats speaks as if he is a modern Upanishadic seer because his longing for the bliss in eternity sailing beyond this world aligns with the spiritual quest of classical seers. The journey of one-pointedness to the world of Byzantium and the bliss that he realized signify the yogic experience that the Upanishadic seers perceived after a trance. The poem radiates the message about the supremacy of the soul over the body. If this dichotomy is realized, modern man can achieve the plentitude of ideal humanity. This study opens the floor for further interpretations of this poem through the lens of Shamkhya and Yoga philosophy to expose how the poet has shown the dichotomy of the phenomenal world and the domain of *spiritus mundi.*

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13

Submersion of Soil: An Ecocritical Reading of Land in Na D' Souza's *Dweepa*

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Abstract

The paper explores the enduring struggle in human existence, where survival remains the foremost concern despite facing numerous obstacles. Through an analysis of the first displacement Kannada novella *Dweepa* (2013) written by Lanard D'Souza, the study emphasizes the detrimental consequences of displacement and modernization on underprivileged communities situated at the lower rungs of India's caste-based social hierarchy. The novel vividly depicts the hardships endured by Ganapayya and the generations of families uprooted from their ancestral homes on the Sharavathi river island Hosamanehalli, shedding light on the devastating ramifications brought about by the construction of Linganamakki dam. Furthermore, it underscores the intricate relationship between nature, culture, and human agency in development and modernization. In this paper, we delve into the profound and enduring struggles that encompass human existence, where the pursuit of survival remains paramount despite the many challenges faced. It examines the far-reaching consequences that contemporary technologies and societal systems impose on individuals, often resulting in the marginalization and isolation of specific groups within society. To shed light on these issues, *Dweepa* serves as a powerful lens through which we can discern the detrimental effects of displacement and modernization on underprivileged communities positioned at the lower echelons of India's deeply entrenched caste-based social hierarchy.

Keywords: Dweepa Island, Ecocriticism, Submersion, Struggle, Displacement, Marginalized.

Ecocriticism promotes a path toward sustainable progress, aiming for a better future for humanity. Every living entity has the inherent right to survive in its unique manner. Whether it is plants, animals, women, marginalized communities, or indigenous groups, each has a

crucial role to play in preserving the fundamental life support system of the planet. Utilizing resources in a controlled manner will ensure a secure and stable future for generations yet to come. "The most well-known measure to handle ecological emergencies is sustainable improvement" (Frederick 128). It ultimately implies the necessary utilization of shared resources without jeopardizing the entire condition and the prosperity of everyone (Essays in Ecocriticism 36).

Renowned experts and prominent elected officials of the nation made grand pledges to individuals to relinquish all their possessions to support the greater goal of nation-building. For instance, Jawaharlal Nehru, India's inaugural Prime Minister, laid the cornerstone of the Hirakud dam on the former grounds of Jamada village on April 13, 1948. He committed to offering displaced families a replacement parcel of land for their lost land and a new residence for their previous dwelling. His colleagues assured the residents would only be displaced once suitable resettlement is provided. This proposal encountered strong opposition from the populace for the same reason. Despite the formidable resistance from the locals, the movement against the dam ultimately did not achieve its intended outcome.

The Sharavathi river basin has undergone extensive development for hydroelectric power projects, effectively harnessing its abundant potential. This journey began with the inauguration of the Mahatma Gandhi Hydroelectric Project in 1948. Subsequently, the Sharavathi Generating Station came online in 1964-65, followed by the establishment of the Linganamakki Dam Powerhouse and the Sharavathi Tail Race Project at Gerusoppa in 2002. These combined initiatives collectively account for around 45% of the total installed capacity of hydroelectric power in the region. However, this development has not been without its challenges. The creation of the Linganamakki reservoir resulted in the partial or complete submergence of ninety-nine villages in the Sagar area and seventy-six villages in the Hosanagar Taluk of Shimoga district. It led to the displacement of approximately 12,000 people. Similarly, the Talakalale reservoir caused the submergence of parts of three villages in the Sagar Taluk. Furthermore, the establishment of the Gerusoppa reservoir resulted in the inundation of 5.96 kilometers of tropical

evergreen to semi-evergreen forests, adding to the ecological impact of these hydroelectric power projects.

Na D'Souza i.e. Lanard D'Souza's commitment to public service is exemplified by his 37-year-long career in the Karnataka Public Works Department. His tireless work in this sector demonstrated his dedication to improving the infrastructure and the lives of the people in Karnataka. A boundless odyssey through literature, his career encompasses a captivating sea of genres—novels, stories, plays, and even tales that ignite young imaginations. This remarkable journey has been met with both his own boundless creativity and the resounding applause of the world. With over 94 published books to his name, he has proven his enduring commitment to the world of letters. He received the Sahitya Akademi's Bala Sahitya Puraskar for his novel titled "Mulugadeya Oorige Bandavaru." D'Souza's fiction, *Dweepa*, and *Kadina Benki*, were adapted into motion pictures that received national awards. This adaptation showcased the universal appeal of his storytelling and further cemented his status as a literary giant in the Kannada language. He actively participated in various public interest movements and agitations, aligning his work with the broader social and community issues of his time. This commitment to societal betterment reinforces his image as a writer deeply rooted in the reality of his surroundings: "The problem of submersion of land in the cause of modernisation and the ensuing displacement of the local people is something that has bothered me for a long time."(xi)

One of the few Kannada novels with the main theme of development-induced damage is *Dweepa*. The term "Island" or "Dweepa" inherently implies detachment from the mainland, surrounded by expansive bodies of water. This river island existed at Hosamanehalli, a small village on the banks of the Sharavathi River, where five families have lived for generations. However, the march of progress has introduced new avenues of life, and the government has formulated plans to construct a dam on the Sharavathi River. This impending development necessitates the evacuation of the five families from their ancestral homes in the face of the imminent dam's impact. *Dweepa* is organized into seven chapters, each named after a star associated with different phases of the monsoon, namely Krithika, Rohini, Mrigashira, Aridhraa, Punarvasu, Pushya, and Aslesha. These stars symbolize the diverse influences on the

monsoons, mirroring the narrative's progression. In this poignant tale, the impact of modernization and development on traditional ways of life is vividly portrayed through the lens of the river island and its inhabitants, providing a powerful commentary on the struggles and sacrifices borne by marginalized communities in the face of progress-driven displacement.

The complete responsibility for Ganapayya and his family's tragic downfall lies with the government. The government's failure to provide timely compensation is the leading cause of their ruin. Had the government acted promptly and appropriately, Ganapayya and his family could have been rescued from their unfortunate fate. Duggajja loved the land; "he loved his piece of land with attachment a woman feels for her mother's house" (*Dweepa* 12). This level of attachment he felt for his land was profound. It brought him immense joy to reside on the island and nurture his family there with affection and attentive care. Ganapayya shared a similar perspective. Therefore, he says, "Even if the government compensates me with land and money right now, I'm not the kind who'll get up and go immediately. I'm going to stay here this monsoon and reap a harvest on my land. Let whatever happens happen" (Island 13). Nevertheless, this was different with Herambha, another farmer from Hosamanehalli who highly regarded the city. "He was attracted to the city, and so he decided to loosen the bonds that bound him to Hosamanehalli" (Island 15).

The unchecked development and progress led to a separation between nature and humans, causing people to feel disconnected and estranged from the previously unified entity. The past two decades have seen a flourishing of new ecological thought. These theories bridge the chasm between intellectualizing the environment and experiencing it firsthand. They're pushing a nature-centered perspective to the forefront of diverse fields. These endeavours run parallel to considering other crucial factors such as class, race, and gender.

The consequences of dam construction during the Nehruvian era were multi-faceted and had far-reaching effects on India's development and environment. Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, initiated several ambitious dam projects as part of

his vision for rapid industrialization and economic growth. While these projects aimed to provide irrigation, electricity, and water resources for agriculture and industries, they also brought significant social, environmental, and economic changes. They also often lead to various social, economic, and environmental impacts affecting local communities.

Creating reservoirs behind dams often requires the displacement of local communities residing in the affected areas, which leads to the loss of homes, land, and traditional livelihoods. The three families living at Hosamanehalli were worried because the dam's construction may submerge their houses. Ganapayya, Herambha Hedge, and Parameshwarayya rushed to the Submersion Office to check for any truth about the submersion. As they received the information from the government to vacate the land, Parameshwarayya and Herambha decided to move from Hossamanehalli to the place which the government had sanctioned them. "I will have to move from here today or tomorrow, anyway. Why should I stay on and strain myself through the monsoon, craving to reap a profit from harvesting areca nut and paddy? Who knows how high the water will rise this year? The hillock may not drown. But where's the guarantee that our lands won't? That's why I decided to move '' (Island 10), said Herambha to Ganapayya.

Haunted by the relentless threat of floods, Ganapayya desperately questioned officials about compensation, his voice raw with the fear of displacement. Their empty reassurances offered no solace. Despite the rising panic, he clung fiercely to his home, a place woven with memories. Even if submerged, a sliver of hope remained - to somehow endure. Nagaveni, his wife, urged him to find temporary refuge with family. Leaving their home was a bitter pill to swallow, but the specter of food shortages after the floods loomed large. Torn between his attachment and the looming crisis, Ganapayya couldn't bring himself to leave. A glimmer of possibility emerged in the form of Herambha's abandoned land. But the solution was tainted. Cultivating it would require hiring cheap labor from marginalized communities, perpetuating the exploitation he witnessed around him. Ganapayya's predicament transcended his personal struggle. It mirrored the plight of the marginalized, their vulnerability preyed upon in times of hardship.

The urgency of the situation hung heavy as Ganapayya set out for Talaguppa the next day. He needed to find workers for their land, but the journey also held another purpose for Nagaveni. With the impending monsoon rains isolating their village, she intended to visit family they wouldn't see for months to come. Progress, in the form of the dam, had become an obstacle. The once-familiar river crossing, a convenient eight-anna ferry ride, was swallowed by rising waters. Now, a longer bus route stretched before them, winding through unfamiliar towns like Hosamanehalli, Aralagodu, and Kargal, for a steeper fare of one rupee and eight annas. Disappointment awaited them in Talaguppa. Their search for workers yielded nothing. Ever resourceful, Nagaveni offered a solution. Krishnayya, practically a son to them, possessed a strong work ethic and could be their saving grace. The day itself mirrored Ganapayya's mood. The clear blue sky had surrendered to a canvas of churning grey clouds. The downpour that began wasn't a gentle sprinkle, but a relentless assault, echoing the turmoil within him. The wind howled a mournful tune, punctuated by the booming pronouncements of thunder and the sharp crackle of lightning. These were all grim omens of the relentless deluge foretold by local wisdom — four long months of unceasing rain that would grip the land. This harsh reality struck Ganapayya with the force of a physical blow. Stockpiling supplies and firewood weren't a chore anymore; it was a matter of survival for the siege that loomed ahead. "Heavy wind, thunder, and lightning were harbingers of the mirage phase of the monsoon. Once this intermittent rain became incessant, it would stop only after four months" (Na D'Souza 35). The impending monsoon spurred him into action - gathering firewood and supplies became his top priority.

For eight relentless days after their return, the rain poured down like a relentless waterfall, mirroring the one the dam now choked. The Mirugi festival, a time for celebration, was marred by the downpour, keeping the farmhands away from their work. As if adding insult to injury, Ganapayya discovered their poorly built farmhouse had suffered water damage. The very river that once flowed freely towards the falls, a familiar landmark, was now a captive, its path ruthlessly blocked by the dam. "The Sharavathi lay like a pregnant woman, full and ready for birthing" (D'Souza 37). Alarming news reached Ganapayya through whispers among the

workers. The river, they claimed, had risen to the level of the hill, effectively cutting off the village from outside help. Disheartened, Ganapayya realized his search for external labor was futile. Fortunately, Krishnayya stepped forward, offering his assistance. However, his offer came with a sobering warning: the relentless river had risen dramatically, reaching the very hill overlooking the village. Krishnayya cautioned that isolation was imminent, with the only escape route being the road towards Aralagodu. The rising water threatened to turn their village into a marooned island if it continued its relentless climb.

> "But now that her flow was blocked further down, she had begun to spread out, encroaching the neighboring forest and valley. Trees, shrubs, and bamboo were already knee-deep in rainwater, in red muddy water, still and silent…. Who ever thought the government would bring us to this state, Ayya?". (D'Souza 45)

The relentless rain continued unabated, lasting for an additional eight days. The proverb "Survive the Aridhraa, you are sure of a harvest" (Na D'Souza 45) remained a constant reminder to Krishnayya as he desperately sought farmhands from Aralagodu. However, the pouring Aridhraa rain made it impossible to find any available labor. Ganapayya had no choice but to sow Herambha's field alongside his own. While Krishnayya assisted, additional laborers were still needed. The road to Aralagodu from Hosamane remained in fair condition, with only six more feet of water needed to flood it. Ganapayya, with unwavering determination and the promise of a higher daily wage of eight annas, finally managed to secure some laborers for his land. During the third phase of Aridhraa rain, Duggajja sadly succumbed to illness, but Ganapayya refrained from notifying anyone outside the village as he witnessed the water swallowing up the hillock.

The relentless wind howled, a counterpoint to the drumming rain. Despite the onslaught, the young saplings in the fields, slender but defiant, clung to life. The areca farm, banana trees, and palms strained against the downpour. Water, like a relentless tide, surged from the overflowing pond towards the already brimming river. Parameshwarayya's land had succumbed, swallowed whole by the flood. Herambha's farm teetered on the brink, mirroring the river's dangerous fullness. Hosamanehalli, once a vibrant village, was now a

solitary island, marooned by the floodwaters. All contact with the outside world had been severed, leaving behind an eerie silence broken only by the storm's fury. Ganapayya, Nagaveni, and Krishnayya were the only inhabitants left, the weight of their isolation pressing down on them.

Eleven days of reprieve were shattered as the relentless rain roared back to life. Krishnayya, gazing at the overflowing river, made a grim realization: the dam, intended for progress, had become their prison. It choked the natural flow, isolating Hosamanehalli from any hope of outside help. A suffocating sense of isolation pressed down on the two men. Their precarious situation offered no easy solutions and no way to reach the outside world. The rising water wasn't just a threat to their village. It was a siren call to the wild. Stagnant water attracted unexpected visitors — foxes, deer, and wild goats, all seeking refuge on higher ground. The Malenadu forests, usually home to tigers, cheetahs, bison, and wild boars, might be experiencing similar disruptions. The displaced wildlife, like refugees themselves, could potentially venture closer to the village, adding another layer of danger to their predicament. All these factors weighed heavily on the minds of the three villagers, especially as their restless cattle mooed throughout the night, prompting concerns about a nearby tiger. The Aridhraa rain continued, heavy and unrelenting, as if competing with the earlier Mrigashira rain.

Krishnayya ascended Sita Parvatha, his heart sinking with each step. Reaching the summit, he was met with a sight that stole his breath. The land, once a tapestry of fields and forests, had transformed into a boundless sea of water. It stretched as far as the eye could see, a chilling mirror of the colossal waterfall the dam had silenced. Only the faint silhouette of Aralagodu hill remained in the distance, a ghostly reminder of what was lost. The water's surface, once teeming with life, now held a grim reminder of the storm's fury. Krishnayya waded into the water, the chill a stark contrast to the internal heat of worry. As he took each hesitant step, a grim spectacle unfolded — bloated carcasses of rabbits, wildfowl, and deer bobbed in the current, victims of the relentless downpour and the wind's cruel assault.

Ganapayya called for Krishnayya's help, but the young man was caught in a bind. His employer, respectfully addressed as 'Yajamanaru,' had insisted on Krishnayya staying with them for the next four months. Krishnayya tried to weasel out of the situation with excuses, but ultimately, he had no power to disobey his master's orders. While Krishnayya and Nagaveni had grown up close, their current social positions were a barrier. Nagaveni was, after all, his master's daughter, and her mother had always scrutinized their interactions. Krishnayya was aware of Nagaveni's change in behaviour around him and worried about how her husband might interpret it.

Ganapayya, despite his reservations, couldn't deny the practicality of keeping Krishnayya. He wrestled with an unsettling feeling, a gnawing awareness of the bond between his wife and their helper. However, the urgency of the situation left him with no other viable option. When Krishnayya suggested that he would return if that was what they wanted and even offered to leave if he ever beat Nagaveni again, Ganapayya had no choice but to accept these terms. Nagaveni, on the other hand, wished to be with Krishnayya but feared the opinions of others and could not bear to deceive her husband.

The relocation process can be disruptive, causing social upheaval and emotional distress among the affected population. Dams can inundate areas that hold cultural and historical significance for indigenous and local communities. This loss of cultural heritage can sever ties to traditional practices, sacred sites, and community identity. The displacement caused by dam construction can disrupt traditional livelihoods such as farming, fishing, and forest-based activities. Natives who relied on these activities for sustenance may struggle to adapt to new economic opportunities, potentially leading to poverty and unemployment. Dams alter the natural flow of rivers and can impact local ecosystems. The change in water levels and flow patterns can affect aquatic life, disrupting fish populations and biodiversity.

Reduced downstream water flow can also affect agriculture and water availability for nearby communities. Dams sometimes lead to conflicts over water sharing and resource allocation, particularly

between upstream and downstream communities. These conflicts can escalate and strain inter-community relations. While dams can bring economic benefits through irrigation and power generation, they can also create economic disparities. The benefits may only sometimes reach the local communities, leading to unequal distribution of resources and wealth. Dam construction can attract migrant labour and transient populations, which can alter the social fabric of local communities. The influx of outsiders can lead to cultural clashes and disrupt community dynamics.

Monsoon rain has brought great havoc to the family, filling the surrounding areas with water. Water stood in the neighbouring forests and valleys during monsoon. Nature comprises everything under the sun and on earth: "Nature came to be generally equated with wild and wilderness, and culture with tamed, refined and domesticated" (*Ecological Criticism* 5). With the destruction of forests and animals' habitats, wild animals lurk for prey and rest. Wild animals would come towards Sita Parvatha, seeking refuge. Furthermore, foxes, deer, and wild goats scrolled fearlessly behind the house, looking for shelter. A python crept into the wood shack beside the kitchen. Rabbits scurried about the veranda. The cattle had mooed restlessly a few nights earlier. Nagaveni said she had heard the low oomphs and coughs of a tiger near the cattle shed before dawn. (Island 50-51)

Ganapayya's situation was distinct; he was prepared to relinquish his land, yet the government failed to compensate him, ultimately leading the impoverished farmer to a tragic demise. Furthermore, his life partner Nagaveni abandoned him and fled with Krishnayya. Another aspect of displacement involves the ratio of those uprooted and adversely impacted by such projects, particularly from marginalized groups like tribal communities and Dalits. Historically, this proportion has been considerable, and it continues to increase today.

In recent times, the rapid pace of development has favoured a privileged minority, leaving the rest of the population to bear the negative consequences. Effective project planning ensures that the benefits are distributed fairly among all stakeholders. Madan Mohan, in his work titled "Ecology and Development," discusses the concept

of sustainable development. He emphasizes the need to balance industrial progress and ecological well-being by formulating plans harmonizing with nature. This environmental strategy encompasses three key aspects: environment management, assessment of environmental impacts, and the promotion of eco-development. In this novella, a dam is a metaphor for the Anthropocene epoch that threatens to consume interpersonal relationships. This malevolence takes various forms, such as a tiger invading human habitats. Nature, although not always benign, can also display its fury when disrupted by dam construction and other environmentally detrimental projects.

Submersion and displacement in Sunderbans are also dealt with by Amitav Ghosh in his narrative, *The Hungry Tide* (2004), which is separated into two plots: the first explores the predicament of displaced people, a group of refugees from Bangladesh; the second side of the story addresses the subject of how humans and animals coexist in a hazardous and complex ecosystem.

Pankaj Sekhsaria is another prominent Indian environmental activist who has dedicated several decades to environmental research and the anthropocentric impact on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, as well as their indigenous populations. His debut novel, *The Last Wave: An Island Novel* (2014), is a poignant portrayal of the excesses of modern industrial society. Sekhsaria skillfully weaves real-life environmental and social concerns into a work of fiction. The central themes of the novel revolve around pressing issues such as deforestation, animal poaching, encroachment on forested areas, and the displacement of the Jarawa tribe. Through his storytelling, Sekhsaria sheds light on the very real and urgent challenges faced by the islands and their indigenous communities due to modernization and development.

In *The Last Wave*, another significant issue addressed by the author is the construction of roads, particularly the Andaman Trunk Road. While roads are typically viewed as a critical component of development, facilitating transportation, improving access to raw materials, and reducing rural poverty, the Andaman Trunk Road takes on a more complex role. The Andaman Trunk Road is portrayed as a gateway to resource extraction, which has dire consequences for the Andaman Islands. The road is seen as

facilitating the depletion of the islands' forests and negatively impacting the native population. Timber logging and poaching have become more accessible due to the highways that connect the islands' forests. The road network enables settlers in the islands to exploit the natural resources, much like termites drilling into a wooden frame, rapidly depleting everything in their path.

With the construction of roads, there comes a significant threat to the island's biodiversity and the indigenous Jarawas. The once dark and impenetrable evergreen forests of the Andaman Islands are transformed into a brown and fragile landscape, indicating the ecological damage caused by these development activities. In this context, the novel underscores the dual-edged nature of development. While roads can bring benefits, they can also lead to environmental degradation, resource exploitation, and harm to indigenous communities. Pankaj Sekhsaria's work serves as a stark reminder of the need for responsible and sustainable development practices that consider the long-term well-being of both the environment and the indigenous populations.

In conclusion, the effect of road construction in the Andaman Islands and the effect of dam construction on the natives of Karnataka are a mix of both positive and negative outcomes. While dams can contribute to economic development and improved infrastructure, they can also disrupt lives, traditions, and ecosystems, disproportionately affecting local communities. It is crucial for policymakers to consider the needs and concerns of these communities when planning and executing dam projects and to ensure that appropriate measures are taken to mitigate negative impacts and promote sustainable development.

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14

We, the Animals: Studying Interspecies Relationships in *Never Cry Wolf* and *Mia and the White Lion*

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Abstract

Cinema has undergone multiple shifts in recent times and one of the major shifts is towards the eco cinema, where ecocritical theories, primarily focusing on interspecies relationships are highlighted. These theories also include the basic rights of animals, human's relationship with animals and nature, and also reject anthropocentric beliefs. In one of his articles titled, "The Human Animal: An Ecocritical View of Animal Imagery in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*", Erik Fredriksson argues that, "Ecocriticism begins to see human and non-human nature as interconnected and part of a whole. The distinction between human and animal is questioned and animal stories are examined to illuminate how we think about animals. The idea is also to promote empathy towards animals by highlighting kinship and to break up patterns of anthropocentric thinking." In this paper, the focus will be on two films based on real-life events, *Never Cry Wolf*, based on Farley Mowat's book, and *Mia and the White Lion*, which talks about the fate of lions in the hands of the canned hunters in South Africa, which will blur the line between reel and real. This paper will also highlight the interspecies interactions and relationships, more specifically, the unconventional interaction between the supposed 'dangerous and ferocious' wolves and lions and the two central characters, Tyler and Mia.

Keywords: interspecies relationship, eco-cinema, ecocriticism, solarpunk

Elements of Ecocriticism in the Films

Never Cry Wolf showcases how a wolf is perceived by people commonly which does not have any similarities with reality. When Tyler, an environmentalist, and a biologist, went on an expedition in the Canadian Arctic to investigate the wolves and whether they are

responsible for the declining population of caribou, he witnessed a completely different scenario in the wilderness. In *Understanding the Call of the Wild: A Student Casebook to Issues, Sources, and Historical Documents*, Claudie Johnson states that "So-called science and imperfect observation as well as folklore perpetuated the view of the wolf as an aggressive and fearless devourer of sheep, cows, defenseless men, women, and, especially, children and a grave robber who craved the flesh of dead humans. In Europe, this resulted in the wholesale slaughter of wolves." (Johnson 225). However, in reality, the behaviour of the wolves is different since they "live in extended family groups that include a breeding pair typically two strong, experienced individuals along with several generations of their offspring," as mentioned by Sharon Levy in "Family Values: Why Wolves Belong Together." While staying in northern Canada, Tyler experienced a similar behaviour as his life got entangled with the family of the wolves, somewhere he became one with them. In a place where he was surrounded by thick sheets of ice, emptiness, danger, and extreme temperatures, Tyler's only source of inspiration was this animal, who shared a complex social life with him without showing any signs of brutality. As his interaction with the wolf intensified in the wilderness, Tyler's view of seeing the wolf as a wild and ferocious creature transformed into perceiving them as loving.

The audience witnesses a similar situation in Maistre's film *Mia and the White Lion* where a young girl, Mia gradually befriends a white lion cub and later saves him from the canned hunters. The white lion, Charlie, (real name Thor) shown in the film was in reality purchased by the famous "Lion Whisperer", the animal custodian in South Africa, Kevin Richardson from a "captive lion breeding facility in South Africa where he was destined to enter the cycle of farmed lions that inevitably ends in a canned hunt." (Richardson) The story revolves around Mia, who was born in New York and has been persuaded to come to South Africa since her father owned a lion farm. At the beginning of the film, the young girl tries to cope with the new surroundings, people, school, and most importantly the animals. She feels like a fish out of water, mostly disappointed and disinterested until his father gifts her a lion cub on Christmas. Though she tries to ignore the innocent and delicate newborn, Charlie manages to win her attention with his warmth and

friendliness. Mia breaks her cocoon and forms a unique bond, entirely based on trust and friendship, which doesn't stop Mia from taking drastic steps and going beyond her comfort area to save the lion later.

In one of the interviews with Daniah de Villiers, the one who played the character of Mia, mentioned the harmonious relationship that Kevin shares with these 'ferocious creatures' and said, "The way Kevin builds his relationships with all of his lions is on such an intimate level of trust. It was so unique seeing how the lions love him and the respect and love he has for them in return. It's strange to witness at first but it became my everyday norm. The amount of love and energy that Kevin has dedicated to all of his animals is so inspiring, it has sparked my passion to help them even more." Lions are known to be one of the world's most dangerous animals but Kevin has proven that with love, understanding, and trust, even these big cats can be loving animals. In one of his books titled, "Part of the Pride: My Life Among the Big Cats of Africa", Kevin Richardson clearly stated that he never uses sticks or chains to tame the animals but he considers them to be his brothers and also gets the same respect back. Kevin's contribution in making the film, training the young actress, and also introducing the lions have been commendable and somewhere it blurs the line between cinema and reality to showcase the actual existence of interspecies relationships. The author further explains his love for nature and animals since childhood, when he was fond of birds, frogs, and fish, and sometimes, dogs and cats too. In the chapter titled "The Bird Man of Orange Grove" (Part of the Pride), Kevin states, "My career choices as a child included bird trainer, veterinarian, zookeeper or game ranger." (Richardson 9) his contribution as a wildlife conservationist is truly remarkable.

Human, Nature, and Animals - The Interconnections

In the article "With Respect for Nature Living as a Part of the Natural World" J. Claudie Evans opines that "the belief that the human species, along with all other species, are integral elements in a system of interdependence such that the survival of each living thing, as well as its chances of faring well or poorly, is determined not only by the physical conditions of its environment but also by its relations to

other living things" and this is the major essence of the film, *Never Cry Wolf*. Tyler, in the film, portrays the unique interconnection between humans, animals, and nature since in that barren land there was no other life except the wolves, caribou, and other smaller beasts. In this situation, humans seemed to be the intruders in the land of animals and nature. But surprisingly none of the animals protested the 'invasion' of humans but rather taught them how to be in harmony with each other. Even the Eskimos, who are the ancient inhabitants of the place, have always maintained a cordial relationship with them. The Eskimos believe that nature can be the best teacher and when we all maintain a bond; we create a better world because our needs are thoroughly entangled. Claudia D Johnson states that wolves hold a sacred place in the lives of Eskimos and the former is also a part of their folklore, which has been passed on from one generation to the other. Johnson writes, "The wolf continued to be admired and cherished in Native American culture at a time when wolves were feared and hated by whites. Each tribe had a slightly different view of the wolf, but all seemed to regard the wolf as representative of all the variety and complexity, the strength and the weakness, of nature itself … Some tribes, like the Ojibwas, focused on the wolf's family structure and faithfulness. Others, like the Oneidas, especially admired the wolf's endurance and courage. The Navajos believed that the wolf had magical powers. To the Inuit, the relationship between the predator wolf and its prey illustrated the oneness of all nature."(Johnson 225) One of the most important characters whose life was entangled with animals and nature was Ootek, who had the special ability to understand the wolf language and he also considered himself to be so connected with the wolves that he could converse with them easily. Ootek's special ability to understand the wolf's conversation has been projected in the film multiple times and it was Ootek who enlightened Tyler about the importance of the wolf-caribou relationship which opened Tyler's eyes to the reality of the situation and how the wolves were simply used as a facade by the hunters to justify the reason behind the declining population of caribou. He mentioned that "the caribou and the wolf are one; for the caribou feeds the wolf, but it is the wolf who keeps the caribou strong."(Tilseth). Ootek also said that the wolves were only feeding on the sick and weak caribou so that the land

could have strong and healthy caribou needed to maintain a balance in the ecosystem. Farley Mowat, in this book, also highlighted that "The wolf serves a vital role in maintaining the long-term well-being of its prey species is not a threat to human beings, is responsible for only minor losses of domestic stock, and for the most part, will not even live in proximity to human settlements or agricultural enterprises" (Mowat vii-viii)

Mia and the White Lion also puts forward the arguments on the same line to showcase harmonious relationships between animals and humans and also the cruel side where humans legally kill lions for the sake of entertainment or to showcase their power. Unlike Tyler, Mia has neither been portrayed as an environmentalist nor as a lover of nature initially. However, Mia finds comfort, happiness, and harmony in the company of a lion cub, who grows up to be her closest friend. Mia is portrayed as a simple girl who is unaware of her father's secrets. Mr. Owen (Mia's father) had an animal farm which was known to all but what turned out to be his darkest secret was his involvement in selling off lions for canned hunting. The secret is revealed to Mia when she hides herself inside her father's van and visits the place where one of their lions was being taken only to witness the horrific sight of trophy hunting. This incident completely shook Mia, whose only motive was to save Charlie and somehow send him to the Timbavati Nature Reserve, where no one could harm him. Like Ootek could decode the language and conversation of the wolves and caribou, Mia could at least understand the language of Charlie, who in turn chose to be a gentle giant in front of her.

Though Mia and her family had seen Charlie since his birth and Mr. Owen was the one to hand over the cub to Mia, he is initially portrayed as an individual who is more concerned about money than the life of an innocent animal. However, this materialistic side never emerged in Mia's mind since the bond that they both shared was purely based on love, respect, and trust which they maintained throughout. Mia single-handedly left no stone unturned to save Charlie from her father. She even went to the extent of secretly taking her father's van and Charlie inside it to Timbavati Nature Reserve. Mia did not even think of her own life and the risk that she might have to encounter to carry the lion to such a faraway place. She embarks on a dangerous and unnerving journey where her only

mission is to protect Charlie with whatever she has and though she faces a lot of challenges, Mia is successful in protecting Charlie. The unusual relationship between a lion and a human instantly broke the myth of considering lions to be ferocious and harmful animals only. Charlie and Mia proved that even a dangerous animal can be gentle provided we give them equal love and respect because they are a part of nature as much as we are.

Solarpunk Elements in the Films

Solarpunk can be defined as a sub-genre of science fiction, which primarily emerged as a response to the dark and apocalyptic Cyberpunk genre. In an article titled, "Solarpunk is the Future We Should Strive For", "the 'punk' element in solarpunk refers to the movement's unapologetically optimistic take on the future despite our growing pessimism and even apathy, and passionately calls for radical societal change and abandoning current capitalist markets and infrastructure." Solarpunk believes in interspecies relationship, harmony between humans and nonhumans which can contribute to creating a better and more positive world. Interspecies relationship has been showcased in multiple solarpunk anthologies, poems, and articles, however, the most recent and prominent one is *Multispecies Cities: Solarpunk Urban Futures* where more than human futuristic stories have been compiled to showcase how a city would look like in the future where humans, plants, animals and insects would live together, these are stories of inclusion offering an optimistic view of the future urban spaces.

The films that are being studied in this article also have solarpunk elements and both Mia and Tyler can be considered as solarpunk heroes. They take charge of safeguarding innocent animals and in turn, break the myth of anthropocentrism. They not only protect the animals but also encourage others to love, respect, and preserve the wildlife, which is essential to maintaining a balance in the ecosystem. Mia and Tyler give the audience a ray of hope about the future and also motivate them to conserve nature. The importance of listening, not only to human beings but also to the words of nature, holds a primordial space in the solarpunk genre. This concept has been beautifully projected by Priya Sarukkai Chabria, in her poem "Listen: A Memoir" where she highlights the

fact that everything speaks, we just have to listen to them closely. A similar belief has been reiterated in *Never Cry Wolf* through the character of Ootek and in *Mia and the White Lion* through the central character, Mia. Ootek (later Tyler as well) and Mia could listen to the call of the wild, understand the language of the animals, and share a deep connection that can only be felt and not expressed in words. The Solarpunk elements in these films have transformed the plot to be more realistic and contemporary, which is not a fictional tale but is very much tangible.

Conclusion

The most unique features of these films are that they have animalized humans and humanized the animals. The virtues of the wolves along with the love and warmth of the 'ferocious' lions had enlarged the horizon of understanding and opened the eyes of Mia and Tyler to witness the actions of humans from a different perspective. Both the characters gradually understand that humans have attempted to justify the heinous crimes committed by them or have tried to project it on a different being who has lesser power. In these films, humans are shown to exert beastly behaviour towards the animals when the trappers simply blamed the wolves for killing the caribou, solely out of thirst for blood when in reality the trappers were hunting them just as a part of the sport. A similar activity has also been portrayed in Mia and the White Lion when Mia exposes the reality of her father who reared the lions just to sell them off at higher prices to the trophy hunters. These films have constantly tried to dismiss the ancient myth of wolves and lions to be savage killers of other animals and humans. As the film progresses, the viewers also have captured an entirely different image of the animals. While living with the wolves, Tyler understood the reality, "On three separate occasions in less than a week I had been completely at the mercy of these 'savage killers;' but far from attempting to tear me limb from limb, they had displayed a restraint verging on contempt, even when I invaded their home and appeared to be posing a direct threat to the young pups" (Mowat 51). Similarly, when Mia's parents thought Charlie to be a threat to her and the entire family, the reality was just the opposite, while Charlie maintained a cordial relation and trusted them, Mia's father almost left him to accept death in the hands of the canned

hunters. Hence, these two films showcase the fact that unless humans and animals intermingle and know each other, they will never understand the interdependency. Once humans enter the world of non-humans and engage with them, they keep looking at them through the lens of how they are projected and not how they are. Just like humans can create myths regarding animals, they also can break them and present a fresh perspective which would be beneficial for the entire ecosystem.

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15

Picture a Scientist: Insights into Gender and Racial Harassment of Women Scientists

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Abstract

Mankind's technological progress and transition into an industrialised society is intended for the welfare of society, including women. But due to patriarchy's construction of multiple gender binaries (men/women, reason/emotion), the field of science and technology has become male occupied and dominated. Therefore, in the present scenario, the underrepresentation of women in science, due to gender bias, discrimination, and harassment exists across science disciplines and research worldwide. Women scientists' work in the STEM field includes visiting and working in remote field sites that require extensive hiking and camping, late nights in observatories, working with male colleagues, etc. National Academies of Science, Medicine, and Engineering in STEM fields report (2018) states that "about 50% of women faculty and staff experience sexual harassment" (*PAS*1:20:06-19:59) in which sexual harassment as a form of gender harassment comprises "subtle exclusions, being left off an email, not being invited to collaborate, vulgar name-calling, obscene gestures, hostility, passed over for promotions, relentless pressure for dates" (*PAS*1:18:41-26), etc. The present paper attempts to study the various facets of gender and racial discrimination, and harassment experienced by both white women and women of colour scientists/researchers/faculty members in the science disciplines by analysing the *testimonios* of three women scientists in Cheney and Shattuck's documentary *Picture a Scientist* (2020). In *Picture a Scientist* biologist Nancy Hopkins, chemist Raychelle Burks, and geologist Jane Willenbring share their day-to-day life experiences of gender inequality and racial discrimination in their professional field. These women's narratives not only expose the bias of the patriarchal mindset in the male dominated field of science which drifts women scientists toward gender and racially biased unequal scientific society but also provide new perspectives on how to make science more diverse, equitable, and bias-free for women.

Keywords: women scientists, racial discrimination, sexual harassment, empowerment, space

Women's participation in science and their subsequent progress in scientific careers have been low in technologically advanced countries as women remained: "excluded from universities for over 700 years-since their [universities] founding in the 12th century until the nineteenth century" ("Women in Science" Schiebinger 16). Traditional gender roles ascribed to men and women in the past decades confined women to the domestic sphere whereas males were encouraged to pursue studies in sciences, making the field of science and technology male-centric/dominated:

> Rather than being completely objective and value-free, the scientific method, as typically defined, reflects hegemonic masculinity and the subordination of femininity. The masculine bias in science is expressed in its sexist language, masculinist structure and methodologies, and androcentric epistemology (Letts 2001).

In STEM, women scientists' recruitment, upward mobility through promotions in the organization, winning awards and patents for innovation, etc., are blocked by multiple constraints and bias: "There is a correspondence between stereotypical masculine traits and the definition of the scientific method. Masculinity is associated with competitiveness, dominance hierarchies .., as opposed to emotionally driven, thought" (Beggan 2007). In the United States, feminist scholarship refers to it as the 'glass ceiling' that embodies "those artificial barriers based on attitudinal organizational bias that prevent qualified individuals from advancing upward in their organization into management-level positions" (Martin 1991). 'Glass ceiling effect' unearths the discrimination and unfairness against women, and women of colour based on the prejudice that emerged from the biological and genetic theories of 'cognitive ability' collectively known as 'biological determinism' which teaches that "something in the physical, psychological, and intellectual nature of women prohibits them from producing great science", thereby emphasizing women's inferior status in the male dominated field of science (15). This concept of women's social inferiority with respect to biological differences between men and women can be traced back to Aristotle. In ancient times, Aristotle, Hippocrates, and Galen constructed a biased picture of the nature of women, which provided

justification and propagation of women's inferior social status. In this regard, Aristotle put forth the argument that: "women are colder and weaker than men, and that women do not have sufficient heat to cook the blood and thus purify the soul" ("Skeltons in the Closet" Schiebinger 43). In another attempt to emphasize and scientifically prove the differences between sexes, social Darwinists studied the evolutionary biology of human beings to argue that "woman was a man whose evolution-both physical and mental had been arrested in a primitive stage" ("Women in Science" Schiebinger 16).

In 1759, French anatomist Genevive-Charlotte Thirouxd' Arconville published the drawings of a female skeleton wherein: "she portrayed the female skull as smaller than the male skull, and the female pelvis as larger than the male pelvis" (qtd. in "Skeltons in the Closet" Schiebinger 43). The rationale of the study was to propagate the idea of 'natural' inferiority of intellectual capabilities of women over men, reinforce the 'natural' role of motherhood, and confine them to homely duties. It emerged in opposition to the eighteenth-century debates relating to women's participation in the public sphere of government, science, and commerce. These studies seek out scientific justifications for the unequal division of power and privilege between the sexes.

Consequently, the number of women scientists acquiring top positions as professors, deans, directors, and vice chancellors diminishes as they go up the organizational hierarchy. Women in science suffer from what Margaret Rossiter calls 'hierarchical discrimination', which clearly underlines a considerable gap between the number of women enrolling for graduate-level science and technology courses, and the women with Ph.D.'s and stable careers in sciences.

Another kind of discrimination women in the arena of science frequently face is "territorial discrimination or sex-typing of occupations" ("Women in Science" Schiebinger 15). The conventional age-old role of women in the private and domestic sphere, the biological role of being a birth giver and rearer of children, led to the validation of socio-cultural roles that propagate the idea of confining women to unpaid work in the domestic sphere. Slowly with the technological advances and changing socio-economic scenario,

women started working outside the home but were allowed to work in certain areas/territory marked as women's fields. Moreover, this prevalence of territorial discrimination even today continues in the sciences.

In the western countries during the 1920s, the key fields chosen by men were chemistry, medical sciences and engineering. In contrast, women were encouraged to study subjects like "botany, zoology, and psychology", where salaries were low leading women to "Gendered choice behaviors in adolescence when girls, despite gender equal performance levels in mathematics and science, report less motivation to learn, lower competence belief and higher levels of anxiety in regard to mathematics than boys," (Lazarides and Ittel 1). Therefore, lower proficiency belief in young girls with regard to sciences is not inherent but is a result of deep cultural roots: "The choice of toys — dolls for girls, building blocks and cars for boys –, for example, creates a major difference in building stereotypes..." (British Council 6) and the kind of education they receive to prepare them for homemaking roles and secondary work in the job market dominated by patriarchy.

Against this background, the present paper analyses Ian Cheney and Sharon Shattuck's documentary *Picture a Scientist* (2020), wherein biologist Nancy Hopkins, chemist Raychelle Burks, and geologist Jane Willenbring share their life experiences relating to gender inequality and racial discrimination in the professional arena of sciences, and their journey toward making science more diverse, equitable, bias-free and giving space to women to pursue careers in science. The underrepresentation of women in science, accompanied by gender bias, discrimination, and harassment, exists across all science disciplines. Women scientists' work in the STEM field includes visiting and working in remote field sites that require extensive hiking and camping, late nights in observatories, etc., which often expose them to different kinds of harassment, violence, and bias.

The report released in 2018 by the National Academics of Science, Medicine, and Engineering in STEM fields states that "about 50% of women faculty and staff experience sexual harassment" (1:20:07-00). Sexual harassment, as a form of gender harassment in

sciences, in most cases, comprises implicit biases against women and women of colour: "subtle exclusions, being left off an email, not being invited to collaborate, vulgar name-calling, obscene gestures, hostility, passed over for promotions, relentless pressure for dates, remarks about bodies, sabotaging of equipment" (*PAS*1:18:46-23).

Jane Willenbring is a tenured faculty at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography at UC San Diego. As a graduate student in 1999 at Boston University she became a victim of biased conduct. She narrates traumatising sexual harassment at the hands of Professor David Marchant during a field trip to East Antarctica: "There were four people in the group. So there was Dave Marchant, his brother, and also a master's student from the University of Maine, Adam Lewis" (1:25:14-1:25:04). The male dominant culture in sciences looked upon sexual discrimination, sexual harassment, and mistreatment of women to be normal. David Marchant with his privilege and authoritative power tried to break Jane's spirit to pursue science (geology) through misogynistic verbal and physical abuse as they reached the site of the field trip at a secluded place in Antarctica: "Dave would start off from that sort of pop culture reference to just calling me a slut, and then slut went to whore, and then whore went to cunt. . . . and I just wanted to talk about science" (1:24:29-03). It includes negative damaging behaviour and verbal abuse by the person with power and authority. David Marchant bullied and harassed Jane by resorting to inhumane activities to make her feel unworthy and unwanted in the group: "every time I had to go to the bathroom just throw rocks at me" (1:23:52-47), which was "so embarrassing and demeaning and so I stopped, um… I stopped drinking water during the day. . . so I ended up getting a bladder infection" (1:23:37-18). She became the target of misogynistic attitude, inhumane actions, and verbal abuse of power exhibiting representative of a male-centred science. The negative impact was not only psychological but she also suffered from serious health issues for many years. These episodes of consistent sexual harassment at a remote field trip were intended to desist Jane from pursuing her career in sciences. Hegemonic masculinity influenced by socio-cultural values and sexism: "The message that's given is that you somehow don't belong here" (*PAS*1:33:47-38) impacted Jane adversely.

Jane Willenbring felt powerless. Her future and career were in David Marchant's hands, which restrained her from reporting the incidents of sexual harassment to the authorities for several years though she lived in the grip of traumatic memories. However, she continued her studies and promised herself to take action against David Marchant at an appropriate time. In the United States of America, Title IX of the Education Amendment of 1972 forbids discrimination based on sex in education programs and activities that receive federal financial assistance, it states: "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any educational program or activity receiving federal financial assistance" (20 U.S. Code 1681) to help women achieve equal access to education. After securing a faculty position, Jane Willenbring wrote the first draft of the Title IX complaint against David Marchant: "It was a bit liberating, I have to say. It was 17 years after the fact. I definitely waited until after getting tenure." (1:05:05-55) with a vision to make sciences bias-free for future generations: "make the whole enterprise something that is welcoming to women" (*PAS*1:34:51-47).

Nancy Hopkins, a former professor of biology at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (1973-2014), shares her experiences of sexual harassment and unequal treatment throughout her professional career. She recalls an incident when she was sitting in the lab in Jim Watson's office when he pounced on her: "I was in the room alone and there's standing Francis Crick. He comes flying across the room, put his hands on my chest—breast, and says, 'what are you working on?'" (*PAS* 1:29:35-24). Nancy Hopkins shocked and startled at Francis Crick's inappropriate behaviour immediately composed herself and replied: "I am doing this experiment, I am trying to do this" (1:29:18-09). She behaved as if nothing had happened: "I didn't want Francis to be embarrassed. I didn't want Jim to be embarrassed. So, I just tried to pretend nothing had happened" (1:29:03-1:28:54).

Women's underrepresentation in the discipline of science is due to various barriers. When a woman enters into the science discipline as a faculty member, certain systemic factors collectively operate to keep her at the margins. Barbara Reskin explains that women are excluded from the communication networks crucial for their development of ideas even if they were allowed to work in a

laboratory. Women encounter "little lady syndrome" (1789), which assumes that "female staff members are support personnel or that they won't be knowledgeable about complex science and political issues" ("Women in Science" Shiebinger1789). Later on, when Nancy Hopkins began her career as a junior faculty at MIT, the senior faculty members including males, treated her like a technician: "These postdocs, I think, saw you more as a technician than a faculty member" (1:11:20-15). As a part of gendered harassment in STEM, another major issue includes not giving credit for research innovations: "I started publishing papers and then I found you'd publish the papers and you would have trouble getting credit for the discovery" (*PAS* 1:10:36-30).

It has been observed that in premier institutions like the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), the systemic and structural bias against women faculty and scientists is pervasive in the faculty of science. The male-centered/dominated educational institutes encompass organisational gender bias wherein women faculty members encounter institutional barriers such as unequal research space, disproportionate salaries, sexual harassment, inappropriate emails, problems related to getting credit for published research, etc. Nancy Hopkins, a senior faculty at MIT, required more research space (labs) for studying genetics in zebrafish: "I needed 200 square feet of space to put the fish tanks in, and I couldn't" (1:06:30-24). She noticed her research space was smaller than her male counterparts working as junior faculty. The male-centred culture at MIT was not ready to listen to her demand for larger space instead their response was filled with phrases of 'microinsult' as one man in the department questioned her intellectual capabilities: "You don't think you could really handle a bigger lab, do you" (1:06:23-15). To prove the fact that there is an unequal distribution of lab spaces for male and female faculty members, she collected data: "Men 2936 sq. ft., Women 1974 sq. ft. (1:07:45-40)", by measuring the room spaces of all faculty members in the department and confronted the authorities with the evidence: "But when I got the measurements and showed them to the person in charge of space, he refused to look at them. And that's when I became a radical activist, I guess. Um, against my wishes" (*PAS* 1:08:59-46). The preconceived notion of women being incompetent is deeply ingrained in the psyche of the male

stakeholders that the infrastructure is built in such a way as to exclude/slow down the intellectual 'space of progress' of women scientists. The denial of adequate physical space by male-centered scientific culture ignited in Nancy Hopkin a spark to speak and stand against the injustices done to women scientists in the discipline of sciences.

Raychelle Burks, an associate professor of analytical chemistry at St. Edward's University, shares her experiences of gendered racial discrimination in sciences as a tenured African-American professor. During her early years of college, she witnessed: "there were no black women chemistry professors that I had" (1:14:56-50). In sciences, it is observed that fewer than 1 in 4 speakers at chemistry conferences is a woman. Fewer than 1 in 25 is a woman of colour, as Raychelle Burks emphasises: "academia is especially historically marginalized" (*PAS* 1:01:54-51) which makes black women more vulnerable to discrimination and harassment in the white male-dominated discipline of Sciences. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics report, in 2015, the percentage of women of colour attending higher education who earned STEM degrees was 2.9.

Gender harassment sometimes includes uncivil and disrespectful behaviour called "Microaggressions" (Sue et al. 271), which refers to "the everyday verbal, nonverbal, and environmental slights, snubs, or insults, whether intentional or unintentional, which communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership" (Sue). Raychelle Burks experienced discrimination, harassment, and the issue of invisibility from white male and female faculty. The kind of oppression black women face at the workplace is 'double bind' as the reason for biased treatment and discrimination has its roots in the historical treatment of black women as slaves ('racism') during slavery in the United States and persistent 'sexism' which refers to "an attitude and a behavior which is based on the presumed inferiority or difference of women as a group" (Weber and Wade 303). Being a black women scientist, Raychelle Burks faced the "effects of sexism and racism simultaneously throughout the STEM pathway" (Malcolm et al. 1975). She underwent oppression and marginalisation multiple times and admits that the environment of

white male-dominated conferences excludes women of colour: "like a lot of science spaces, there's always a bit of discomfort" (1:04:12-08). She recounts how most of her work time was spent in dealing with the "oppressive systems" (1:10:14-11) like answering an inappropriate e-mail when other faculty members remained busy experimenting or demonstrating to students.

"Racial Microaggressions", a term coined by Pierce in 1970, refers to "subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are 'put downs'" (Pierce, Carew, Pierce Gonzalez, & Willis 66). It can be further described as "subtle insults (verbal, nonverbal, and/or visual) directed toward people of color, often automatically or unconsciously" (Solo´rzano et al. 19). Racial microaggressions manifest themselves in the form of 'microassault', 'microinsult', and 'microinvalidation'. The intention behind this kind of treatment of black women with hidden messages is to demean them on a personal or group level, convey that they are lesser human beings, children of lesser god to threaten and relegate them to inferior status and treatment. Raychelle Burks describes how she has been constantly ignored in the meetings: "I've been in meetings where you've made a suggestion or said, 'Well, what about this?' And it was like you'd never spoken at all, but if a white guy says it, you're like, and now it'll magically be heard, everybody watches this" (1:13:49-37). This 'microinvalidation' wherein the message communicated is that black women's contribution in their respective fields is unimportant and they are unworthy of attention. She narrates another incident when despite having a faculty nameplate outside her room, she was considered a caretaker of the room and deliberately reminded of her marginalised status through 'microinsult': "…once sitting at my desk, at my computer, like I've got, you know, papers spread out. Someone comes into my office, and for some reason assumes I am janitor" (1:13:60-53) to reinforce the idea that a black woman cannot be a professor in academia but only suitable for lower jobs like keepers, watchmen, and sweepers, which demand low or no intellectual expertise in science.

The physical space in which Raychelle Burks worked with other colleagues was not inclusive and professional. Instead, the space became the metaphor of oppression for her and every African-American faculty: "People can insult us on our face with

inappropriate language and derogatory terminology, but we're the ones that are supposed to be respectful and civil, it's not that you take it personally . . . you just don't expect any different" (1:01:40-27). The issue of invisibility and biased treatment from white male and female faculty members become an indispensable part of their (black women scientist's) daily routine as women of colour "get used to be underestimated. You get used to being treated bit shabbily" (*PAS* 1:01:48-41).

Despite being the victims of gendered and/or racial harassment, these three women scientists remained firm and determined to put efforts into making science inclusive and bias-free for young women students and scientists. Due to the persistent and strenuous efforts of Geologist Jane Willenbring, in 2019, Bob Brown, the president of Boston University, terminated the services of Professor David Merchant, who was found guilty of sexual harassment. For the first time at MIT, Nancy Hopkins, along with other female faculty members from different disciplines, addressed and communicated to higher authorities the issue of systemic and invisible prejudice against women faculty members in STEM along with a detailed study report regarding the unequal distribution of spaces for men and women. Raychelle Burks, who represents black marginalised women scientists, became a role model for young female students/researchers. She often appears on various TV shows, encouraging women to take up science disciplines, and apprises them on the advantages of becoming a scientist. These three women scientists have become public figures in their own ways, contributing to encouraging children (especially females) to establish careers in sciences by working toward slowly eradicating the age-old biases and stereotypes.

The implicit and persistent gender and racial harassment against women faculty members and students ensures women's negligible or lower participation in higher positions and leadership roles. It prevents women from reaching out and accessing the power to establish inclusivity and diversity among faculty members in STEM. These three prominent women scientists: Jane Willenbring, Nancy Hopkins, and Raychelle Burks by articulating, resisting, and exposing gendered and racial harassment that exists within the male-centered field of science, not only liberated themselves but also acted as a

voice for the oppressed silent class of women scientists and students who encountered biased behaviour and discrimination for years. By sharing their journey from being victims of gender and racial harassment to becoming empowered women scientists and radical activists, role models by providing an image/picture of a scientist who can be a woman (in opposition to the conventional image of male scientists only), making way for inclusive and bias-free science fields for future generations of women scientists as Sally Ride, the first American women in space puts forth: "Young girls need to see role models in whatever careers they may choose, just so they can picture themselves doing those jobs someday. You can't be what you can't see" (Interviewed by Alison Beard).

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16

Decolonising English Studies in India

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Abstract

The paper deals with the theory and praxis of decolonising English Studies in India. The paper suggests appropriate measures to pull out English Studies from the Macaulayan paradigm and to recast the priorities in English Studies in the light of changing role for emerging India in the unipolar world realities, rising aspirations of the middle classes, and democratic and egalitarian needs. The project of 'decolonising' education at the macro-level and English Studies at the micro-level has been discussed with reference to curriculum, teaching methods, materials, evaluation, research and publication and medium of instruction in all possible details in the paper. The paper attempts to deal with contemporary realities like various treaties and market economy and issues like making a distinction between real knowledge and colonial knowledge along with the historical context of English Studies. Several measures have been suggested to make English Studies in India relevant to contemporary times, to save them from being derivative and to reshape Euro-American knowledge about English culture, Literature and Language from an Indian perspective. Practical suggestions to decolonise curriculum have been made keeping in view the distinction between teaching literature and language in the first and the second language situations.

Keywords: Curriculum, Decolonisation, Education, English Literature/ Language, Gandhi, India, Macaulay, Publications, Research, Teaching Methods.

Introduction

To set the tone of my paper let me begin by citing three different authorities separated by time and place:

> "If I were to look over the whole world to find out the country most richly endowed with all the wealth, power, and beauty that nature can bestow—in some parts a very paradise on earth—I should point to India. If I were asked under what sky the human mind has most fully

developed some of its choicest gifts, has most deeply pondered on the greatest problems of life, and has found solutions to some of them which well deserve the attention even of those who have studied Plato and Kant—I should point to India. And if I were to ask myself from what literature we, here in Europe, who have been nurtured almost exclusively on the thoughts of Greeks and Romans, and of one Semitic race, the Jewish, may draw that corrective which is most wanted to make our inner life more perfect, more comprehensive, more universal, in fact more truly human, a life, not for this life only, but a transfigured and eternal life—again I should point to India." (F K M Max Müller 5)

"… the official intelligentsia of post-independence India [eschew] their own culture and [turn] to Western, mechanistic dogmas, from Marxism to neoliberalism. Whether they worship the State or the Market, such intellectuals dishonour their [country's] noblest traditions. They are as craven as those American and British academics who place politically correct considerations before the pursuit of truth and intellectual freedom. In the best of Indian popular culture, however, [one may find] an integrity, a latitudinarian tolerance and a connectedness to nature lacking in intellectual circles - and lacking in Western civilisation today." (Rankin Aidan viii-ix)

"O members of the Indian intelligentsia! … speaking polished English, and putting down your own countrymen, specially anybody who has a Hindu connection, makes you an intellectual. But in the process, you have not only lost your roots, you have turned your back on a culture and civilisation that is thousands of years old and has given so much to the world. You are forgetting what a privilege it is to be born an Indian — and a Hindu at that — inheritors of a spirituality that accepts that God manifests Himself under different names, at different times, when today the world's two biggest monotheistic religions still think their God is the only true one and it is their duty to convert everybody by guile or force." (Francois Gautier n.pag.)

Decolonization

The term decolonization has been a part of academic discourse since 1932 though it perhaps first appeared in 1836[2]. *Britannica* defines decolonization as "the process by which colonies become independent of the colonizing country." (Britannica) The process is "often long, tortuous, and violent, by which colonies achieve their national aspirations for political independence from the colonial metropolitan power." (Watts 361) It involves a kind of "restorative justice" in the form of racial, ethnic, social, cultural, legal, physical, emotional, intellectual, cultural and spiritual well-being through the

process of economic, cultural and psychological freedom. The term is also used to refer to the intellectual decolonization from the colonisers' ideas that made the colonised feel inferior. (Mignolo) Because "decolonization is an interrogation of the European concept of territoriality" (Kubayanda 26) true decolonisation seeks to challenge and change White superiority, nationalistic history and the colonisers' "truth". Bill Ashcroft et al. therefore, correctly describe decolonization as "the process of dismantling the hidden aspects of those institutional and cultural forces that had maintained the colonialist power and that remains even after political independence is achieved." (Ashcroft et al 56) Some scholars also argue that "the term decolonization should be replaced by 'elimination of the white supremacy mindset'." (Binagwaho et. al 2)

Why Decolonise English Studies in India

Gauri Viswanathan rightly holds that the study of English and the growth of the empire proceeded from a single ideological climate (*Masks*). "Valid knowledge" is different from "colonial knowledge" because of their different objectives. While the goal of the former is to explore truth, the latter is a tool in the hands of the colonisers for the consolidation and perpetuation of their rule in the colony. Chinweizu in his "Colonizer's Logic" puts it very cogently with a tinge of irony: "The Natives are unintelligent—/ We do not understand their language" (Chinweizu 32). Because the "civilized imperialist" pretends not to understand the "primitive colonised's languages" the former undertakes the civilising mission, coupled with religious fervour zestfully, and uses his euro-centric knowledge to help "the natives come out of their ignorance and darkness in their lives". With the emergence of postcolonial theory to the centre stage of theoretical studies in Humanities, the need for scrutinising various colonial institutions, including "knowledge" and "knowledge production" has been felt more intensely. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Decolonising the Mind* (1986) and *Globalectics: Theory and the Politics of Knowing* (2012) have accelerated the process of scrutiny that was started by Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978). A close audit of "the institutions of knowledge production" that set the canon of studies is the crying need of the hour in postcolonial India, a society that happens to be the oldest surviving civilization in the world. The project of colonial

education in India was undertaken with a target to make the Indian mind "barren of any originality", to keep Indians perpetually "in ignorance" by "paralysing and stupefying [their] minds", to feed Indian minds with stories of England's greatness and "mission" in the world, and to obliterate their race-consciousness from their minds.

The modern education system in India, the brainchild of Macaulay, is a highly respected colonial remnant which runs on the presumptive principle of the "intrinsic superiority of the Western literature" (columbia.edu). English studies in India greatly strengthen the Macaulayan presumptive principle. In India both of them (Education system and English Studies) continue to be highly derivative; the only dent that has come to them since 1947 is because of the growing influence of the USA in several spheres of life. While education, especially higher education in India was Anglo-centric earlier, as a result of the new political and economic order, it is Anglo-American-centric now. Even a cursory comparison of the course lists, items/ topics therein, and the lists of prescribed and recommended books will prove my point. The decolonisation of education including English studies in India is much needed if India has to stand on its own, assert her identity in the world, provide some sort of vision for an alternative world and also, if "*Bharat ko vishguru banana hai*" (India is to be a world leader) to use an expression from the right-wing rhetoric. Decolonising is to take place in respect of the following four main components of an educational system: Curriculum and Courses, Research and Publications, Medium of Instruction, and Examination and Writing.

Colonial Legacy of Curriculum and Courses

A cursory glance at the prescribed books and recommended books in the curricula of the UG/PG programmes in the Universities will make one realise that almost all the books are by either British or American authors or from Indian authors who parrot Western ideas and arguments. There are hardly any books from the countries where English is taught as a second/ foreign language or from the Indian authors who present an Indian perspective/ point of view. This ignoring of a vast reservoir of the knowledge and experiences of the similarly situated people is to our detriment. The curricula developed

by the Curriculum Development Centre are no different. Their study also highlights the fact that an undue emphasis on teaching English Literature is there in the curricula. This is a sort of colonial hangover which is justified unabashedly by many intellectuals located in India and abroad. Let me illustrate it with an example from a typical PG course titled "Literary Criticism (From Plato to Leavis)" (though it covers critics up to Showalter) being offered at Indian Institute of Technology Madras (archive.NPTEL). The course deals only with Ameri-Euro Critics and ignores Indian critics altogether. It is well known that reading literature evokes certain emotions. But, in this course in particular and the curriculum at large, no course is offered that talks about these emotions and the process of evoking them. In the Ameri-Euro tradition, Aristotle is the only literary critic who refers to emotions; he mentions two emotions (pity and fear) with reference to tragedy and refers to one (comic) in the context of Comedy. In his *Natya Shastra*, Bharata, on the other hand, discusses eight rasa/emotions)[10] in detail. Naturally, a student who knows about twenty-three emotions/rasas is in a better position to understand and appreciate literature and life than one who knows only about two. Bharata is ignored in this course because he is a native; this ignorance of the teacher/ students helps in maintaining colonial hegemony; besides the student's understanding of literature remains incomplete.

The modern Indian education system has not only impacted our collective epistemological viewpoints but our society as a whole has also been impacted; we seem to be a rootless society that suddenly came into existence in 1947 out of nothing. Racism is not basically about colour; it's about power. The present education system does not empower the Indians; it becomes so visible in the matter of economic achievements. This is very clear from the statistics about imports and exports. "India's share of the world economy was 23 per cent, as large as all of Europe put together [when Britain arrived on it's shores, but] by the time the British departed [from] India, it had dropped to just over 3 per cent." (Tharoor 4) "India's share of global gross domestic product (GDP) rose to 7.09 percent in 2019" (O'Neill Oct 27) The exports and imports of India in 2019 were: the total value of exports (FoB) was 323,251 million; the total value of imports (CIF) was 478,884 million." (wits.world bank) This powerlessness can also be

measured in terms of the meagre number of publications from Indian universities on one hand and those from Western university presses like Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, Durham etc on the other. It is so obvious that the opinion-building power (soft power) rests with the West. Money-minting-power by way of the export of the books and ideas also lies with them. So, decolonising the curriculum is not needed solely for cultural or intellectual reasons but also economic reasons.

There are a large number of academicians who claim that the teaching of English literature in India (TELI) is necessitated because English is a lingua franca in India and is patronised by the Government of India as an Official language. Such persons speak only half-truths as no literature can be the "lingua franca"; they deliberately gloss over the fact that English Language and English Literature are two different issues/disciplines. The belief that by teaching English Literature *alone* proficiency in the English Language can be achieved/ increased is not backed by any authentic data/ research. Even the postulation that English Literature/ Language are synonymous or interdependent does not prove English to be the lingua franca in India. As regards, the English Language being the official language, the Constitution does not envisage perpetuating its status forever as the provision has been inserted to meet a particular contingency. Again, if English is the *lingua franca* of the anglicised Indian academicians or the Indian people needs scrutiny based on some authentic data. That English is the "*lingua franca* of the people" is just a presumption, not backed up by the figures in the Census (2011). According to the 2011 Census, just 0.02 % of the total Indian population (Males: 1,29,115, Females:1,30,563, Total 2,59,678) (census India) recognized English as their mother-tongue and only 10.6% of the total population use it as a second and third language. (Wikipedia, censusindia). While 8,27,17,239 persons (6.835% of the total Indian population) use it as their second language, 4,55,62,173 Indians (3.765% of the total Indian population) use it as their third language. In the Census its decadal (2001-2011) percentage growth has been reported to be 14.67, much less in comparison to several other languages. In a nationally representative sample survey conducted by Lok Foundation and Oxford University, administered by the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy in 2019, "just 6% of

respondents said they could speak English, less than what the 2011 Census showed." (livemint) If about 90-95% population of this huge multi-lingual and multicultural country do not know/use English is it justifiable to describe the English language as the lingua franca of India? Again, it has been reported in a Lok Foundation survey that "English speakers are richer, more educated and more likely to be upper caste." (livemint.com) This minority group because of the colonial hangover holds considerable economic power and assumes the role of opinion and decision-makers in this country. Can this minority group be allowed to continue the social ostracization of the majority by holding power against the egalitarian norms? Can this socially elite group of people be the sole representative of India against all democratic norms? These academicians argue in the manner of Macaulay who believed that scholars of English could be produced in this country by teaching them English literature. If their arguments had been valid English courses in India would have seen the presence of Indian scholars in various syllabi.

In countries like France, Germany, Russia Japan etc. (where English is not the medium of instruction) foreign scholars (who go there for higher studies) are taught the language (of the respective country) in one year with such proficiency that they are not only able to complete their higher studies but also write doctoral dissertation and publish papers in that language in the journals of international repute. On the contrary, in India despite teaching English literature for more than sixteen years the students fumble for words to express themselves, what to say of writing and publishing a research paper in correct English. If my testimony on the worthlessness of the approach/ course is any good, here it goes: "I, along with some others, was associated with the evaluation of the answer scripts in a recently held competitive examination for the post of lecturer in Government intermediate colleges. This examination was open to the Indians holding at least an MA (English) degree; about 1500 candidates appeared in this examination after passing a screening test. Only a few answer scripts were written in tolerably correct English; the answers largely gave no clue of the examinees' comprehension of the questions and the instructions — neither in the literature section nor in the grammar section. Having examined such scripts, I felt I had wasted forty years of my life just to earn wages.

My experience of interviewing candidates for the post of Assistant Professor (English) has rarely been better."

On the question of the value of native literature, the opinion of the Oriental and Occidental groups was unanimous as is apparent from the following two opinions. Macaulay haughtily held, "that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia. The intrinsic superiority of the Western literature is indeed fully admitted by those members of the committee who support the oriental plan of education." (columbia.edu) Likewise, a member of the Oriental group, Henry Thoby Prinsep, held:

> "It is laid down that the vernacular dialects are not fit to be made the vehicle of instruction in science or literature, that the choice is therefore between English on one hand and Sanscrit and Arabic on the other— the latter is dismissed on the ground that their literature is worthless and the superiority of that of England is set forth in an animated description of the treasures of science and of intelligence it contains any of the stores of intellectual enjoyment it opens. *There is nobody acquainted with both literatures that will not subscribe to all that is said in the minute of the superiority of that of England… ."* (emphasis added) (Sharp 121)

The unanimity on the issue of denigrating native literatures seems to be emanating from their "national pride" which to an Indian is a euphuism for colonial pride. Indians have been quite meek to ask about the qualification of the members of both the groups i.e., occidental and oriental plan to know the extent of their familiarity with European and Indian languages and literatures to pass a judgment. The educated Indians have largely accepted Macaulay's judgment as they have been taught just to accept English opinions without any critical scrutiny. The Indian teachers of English go a step further and act as Macaulay's trumpeting agents who spread unsubstantiated claims and propagate myths like "English is used all over the world", "English Literature is the best/ universal literature", "Shakespeare is a universal dramatist", "India/Indians will not prosper without English" and "For a majority of Indians English has become their own language, their only language of expression" (Banu 17) etc. for they have their axe to grind at the cost of truth and the cost of national mental freedom.

English Language and English Literature

The word "English" as a noun does not find a place singularly in the Constitution of India though the expression "English Language" finds a mention at fifteen places in the Constitution. English is not find mentioned in the list of the Indian languages given in the eighth schedule of the Constitution. It is very clear from this that the role of English in the Constitution has simply been envisaged as a means of communication for different purposes. It is also to be noted that nowhere has it been specified that "English" stands for "British English" (or any other variety of English) as a means of communication. It is an unwritten law/ convention for the custodians of English in India (the neo-colonialists), the public service commissions, the university/college departments, the intellectual elites, and the authors that by English they understand "British English". The reason for this hegemony lies in the colonial hangover which is continued and glorified as "tradition". Though Braj B Kachru and his spouse Yamuna Kachru tried their level best to establish the identity of Indian English[29] as an independent variety of English their intellectually rich research efforts neither got support from the highly colonial Indian authors in English nor the Indian academia. Little do the intellectual elites realize that it is the tradition of "intellectual slavery" that they have been cherishing and promoting. Whether this slavery springs up from historical positioning, ignorance, lack of synergetic language planning, lack of initiative and intellectual prowess or helplessness or some other factors is more a matter of common sense than of some deep research.

Most of the people who wish to join higher education in India need English language. People also see English as a passport to better jobs and better social positioning. Because of their ignorance, many of them do not make any distinction between the English language and English literature. R N Srivastava in *English, August* says, "… I began to read English on my own. I had to because English was compulsory for the Civil Services exam. So I read Shakespeare and Wordsworth and people like that, very difficult. It's still important to know English, it gives one … confidence.'... ." (Chatterjee 59-60) With the Government policy of taking higher education to the doorsteps of people one finds universities and colleges in the remote corners of

India. With this even English has also reached all the nooks and corners of the country. The teachers and the institutions either very subtly hoodwink or push the learners to join a course in English Literature. R N Srivastav says, "'That a young man in Azamganj should find it essential to study *something as unnecessary as Hamlet, that is absurd*, no, but also inevitable, and just as inevitably, if we behave ourselves, in three generations it will fade.'" (emphasis added Chatterjee 60) Unlike the situation in Germany or Russia where a foreign student studies the language of the country in India, a student has to study English for about 12 years before joining a university. Then the realization dawns upon him/her that (s)he is not sufficiently proficient in English to pursue a course satisfactorily. I wish our teachers could just compare 12 years to one year of training to teach an alien language to meet the needs of society.

While most of the foreign universities in the EFL/ ESL situation do not lay emphasis on literature in teaching the second/foreign language, in India, it is almost mandatory to talk of dated authors like Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, Wordsworth and the like. Most of the universities have been awarding degrees in "English" or "English Literature" after teaching almost the same content in English Literature. The course contents also consist of largely British Literature; there is hardly any paper dealing with teaching/ learning skills of a language. The result of this is reflected in the following sentence of a very senior teacher: "A student who writes ten pages about Hamlet's madness is unable to draft an application in English." This indicates not only the quality of teaching but also the misdirected effort of emphasising teaching English Literature in place of the English Language against the spirit of the Constitution. Our over-enthusiastic teachers either fail to grasp the basic fact or they pretend to ignore the fact that learning literature in any language is possible only after some basic proficiency in the language has been achieved. No wonder our post-graduates in English literature fail to deliver what is expected of them. A fictional account of Agastya by Upamanyu Chatterjee in his *English, August* is sufficient to prove my point.

For the development of ELT and related issues, to improve the standard of teaching of English and to undertake relevant research in the field the Government opened a new Institute, Central Institute of

English in 1958 with the mandate: "instructional, research and extension facilities in the teaching of English and foreign languages and literatures in India" (efluniversity). In 1972 it was converted to Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages. However, this did not deter other universities from changing their policies of teaching and propagating English Literature on a very unusually large scale in an independent country. In other words, the cultural imperialism of English Literature has kept on spreading undeterred even in independent India. With the passage of time, it became English and Foreign Language University, a Central University. The phenomenon is so powerful that even EFLU came under its influence and it has emerged as a new centre for spreading and disseminating English literary culture, spreading the idea of the "inherent superiority of the Western literature" and colonising the Indian mindset further.

The governance of the country according to the colonial rules and colonial mindset is rubbing the salt to the wound. For example, the 1921 rules that govern the recruitment of teachers in a school/college affiliated to UP Secondary Board specify the minimum qualification as a graduate in English Literature though in matters of other languages it just mentions Hindi Urdu or Sanskrit. It is to be noted that the job of a trained graduate teacher in a UP Board secondary school is to teach both English literature and English language. The situation has been prevalent and continuing since the days of Macaulay who designed a course of English literature for imparting training in English. All those graduates who take their graduation in English Language are denied a job opportunity as per the existing law and are put in a disadvantageous position. Nobody seems to have noticed this anomaly. While a course in English literature should have been replaced by one in English Language after independence, those who study the English language are discriminated against. This also means that those who are competent to discharge his/her duties are declared technically unqualified to their peril. Some of such persons have been contesting cases in the High Court at Allahabad and a verdict is still awaited.

Decolonising Teaching Strategies in English Studies

If the reading lists in the university courses are any evidence, it is clear that Indian universities are Indian only in their location. There is hardly a book in the lists that does not come from either the US or the UK authors or the presses located there. In terms of syllabus, almost all the Indian universities have introduced papers on American Literature and New literatures like Australian/ Canadian/ Caribbean / Commonwealth Literature, Indian Aesthetics, Linguistics, and World Literature etc. along with British Literature. However, the reference books and the reading lists in these courses are full of Anglo-American critics. Again, even the canon of the texts is defined and set by Anglo-American critics. This also proves that not only the flow of knowledge is uni-directional i.e., from the West to the East but also that the Indian intellectuals do not show any sign of independent thinking and judgment. Again, even if some Indian names are there in the list, they hardly represent the Indian perspective. Thus, it may safely be said that all the recommended books represent the typical Western point of view. This tendency is indicative of either the absence of the Indian perspective or considering Indians as brain-dead. Let me illustrate this with an example. In Allahabad University there used to be a tradition of printing the Lecture Lists which comprised the list of the authors and works prescribed for detailed and non-detailed study, reference books, pattern of question paper and the topics of the lectures that the concerned teachers were supposed to deliver.

Conclusion

The primary purpose of education is the betterment of society as a whole by developing rational, mature and empathetic human beings. All teaching activities including reading, writing and evaluating students focus on this and have to be organised with this objective in mind. The objective of a course in literature is to develop understanding of an individual by honing his/her analytical skills. By carefully selecting literary works, the teachers try to show their students how the world works, how to find relevance and meaning in their lives, how to enjoy reading literature and how to find out merit and meaning in a text. With this view in mind, a close, objective and text-centred literary analysis is the primary focus in a literature

course/ classroom. Certain evaluation strategies are used to evaluate the performance and understanding of the learners. Whether the evaluation of candidates is possible in English or other languages (mother tongues) has been a point of controversy in the second language situation. The related issue is if the research articles have to be written in English or in the regional languages. Currently, in the Indian situation, only Sahitya Akademi felicitates some sort of bilingualism in matters of publications — e. g. a paper on a Punjabi author may get published in English, in the literary magazine, *Indian Literature* or a paper on Vikram Seth's poetry may be published in Hindi in *Samkāleen Bhārtiya Sāhitya*.

Bilingual methods of teaching (materials, medium of instruction and evaluation) and research are very well recognised all over the world and have gainfully been used at primary and secondary levels. It has also been used in some Indian universities (un)officially to teach English literature as is clear from the popularity of various bi-lingual university level textbooks in different states. However, this sort of teaching and book production is frowned upon by some of the Indian academicians who deride it as substandard teaching/learning material for the rustics.

There appears to be a symbiotic relationship between economic prosperity and attitude towards languages. If the figures of bilinguals and tri-linguals in the Indian Census 2011 are any proof monolingualism leads to poverty. Those states that have the higher number of bilinguals and tri-linguals are developed but the states where predominantly monolinguals stay, are backward. Of late, a new class of monolingual, English speaking, social elites have emerged particularly in the metros through expensive English medium schooling; they are not only blind to several dimensions of culture but they also perceive reality only through one lens. Their appreciation of literature also is just an extension of the Christo-Anglo-American literary view. On the other hand, we have a large number of colleges and universities in the far-flung areas where the students wish to acquire some skills in the English language somehow and the teachers wish that the students should somehow be able to follow, understand and appreciate their lectures. The bilingual method comes handy to such teachers and students. However, some professors and their sponsor, British Council of India

or American agencies and some publishing house, close their eyes to this issue. Ignoring the advantages of bilingualism they advocate the monolingualism of English and try to thrust it on people in several ways. It may not be out of place to mention that the books published by the so-called elite publishers are exorbitantly priced in comparison to bilingual books or the books in the regional languages as the publishers are eyeing people from different economic backgrounds.

One may note that the idea of decolonisation was initiated by African scholars though African scholarship has always been ignored not only in the Euro-American intellectual world but also in Asia. The African scholars' ideas are being appropriated in almost all the former colonies because they are so convincing and down to earth. One sometimes wonders why books like *Decolonising the Mind* or *The Wretched of the Earth* or *The Colonizer and the Colonized* could not be produced by Indian (leftist/moderate/ liberal) scholars though the idea of communism in India is as old as communism itself. Otherwise, also there is hardly any seminal book by such scholars about Indian reality or human reality in the colonial world to my mind. In the prevailing situation, there is hardly any possibility in the future either. After all no nation can survive only on the borrowed ideas and technology in the long run. One needs to have a sense of pride and attachment to one's roots to produce an influential work of this nature. I also realize that unless our education/ English Studies are oriented towards the nation there is no possibility of any important work being produced in English either. A crown is never put on a borrowed head. The above discussion/article is the result of exploring such questions.

Homi Bhabha has written about the ambivalence and hybridity of cultures and people. There are no "original" or "pure" cultures or people and there have perhaps never been. In fact, if someone tries to retrieve the past and claims to gain the "inherent authenticity or purity of cultures" as exists in some texts or in someone's imagination the person is moving against the natural tendency of moving ahead by learning appropriate lessons from various encounters. One has to struggle to look for the roots and has to see that the grafting of some ideas on the plant should not endanger the plant itself. The purpose of decolonisation is to save the mother plant, the original culture of the native people so that the inhabitants are not rendered "nowhere

men". The process is not easy but is desirable. The needs of the society, bureaucracy and people have changed since the times of Macaulay. A cosmetic surgery of the syllabus by way of the replacement of one text by another is not enough. Drastic changes are needed in attitude, syllabus, teaching materials and methods, medium of instruction, evaluation strategies and research to cater to these needs. The movement to decolonise English Studies will get momentum in the coming days; NEP 2020 will give it the required impetus. 'Learning Outcomes based Curriculum Framework' is a step in that direction. The times of basking in the sunshine of the Raj seem to be over for the teachers of English.

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17

An Ecocritical Reading of Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil*

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Abstract

The article reads Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil* with the critical tool of ecocriticism. Victorian England witnessed the high rise of industrialism and mechanized culture that deeply affected the ecological balance and had a profound impact on the lives of the common masses. The article examines Benjamin Disraeli's novel *Sybil* with the critical tool of ecocriticism to explore his concerns and criticisms over environmental depletion, toxic environment due to industrial pollution, the suffering of factory workers, and unhealthy living conditions. His description of the contaminated environment, depleted ecology, endangered human life, and exploitation due to the huge gap between the rich and the poor damaging mutual social relations reflect the novel's deeper ecological mode. He kept his faith in humane qualities like compassion, mutuality, and a sense of responsibility in the characters to regain some positivity in ecology for a cohesive social-ecological existence.

Keywords: Victorian, Ecocriticism, Ecology, Toxic, Compassion, Mutuality.

Introduction

Victorian England has always been a hot topic for researchers. There is ample research on the period's social and economic condition, its people, its ideas, its religion, emerging industries, science, and, of course, its writers and literature. The Victorian period is remarkable in the sense that it witnessed the most important reformation of England from being an agrarian country to a powerful industrial nation. Big cities and towns with "technoculture" (Ketabgian 6), huge wealth from the industry that even created sole manufacturing towns like Manchester, and wealth from imperial projects totally changed

the country's social and economic soul and, most importantly, the ecological soul. Carlyle's "Condition of the England" (1) question profoundly influenced Victorian thinkers like Charles Dickens, John Ruskin, Benjamin Disraeli, Charles Kingsley, and Elizabeth Gaskell, who attempted to raise collective awareness through their writings, especially novels, the consequences of the changes that the country underwent socially, economically, politically, and ecologically. Those authors and their works receive huge attention from present-day scholars as they seem to be a repository of the exact societal condition and conscience of that period. Benjamin Disraeli was one of the prominent political and literary figures of the period. This paper will try to explore Disraeli's novel *Sybil* (1845) by using ecocriticism as a critical tool.

Ecology and Ecocriticism

German Biologist and naturalist Earnest Haeckel first used the term ecology in 1869 to explain the science of reading the connection of the organism to the environment. The word 'ecology' came from two Greek words, *Oikos* and *Logos. Oikos* means home, and *logos* means reason or study of ecology, which suggests the connection of human beings with their home (earth). According to Vandana Shiva,

> ecology movements are political movements for a non-violent world order in which nature is conserved for conserving the potions for survival. These movements are small, but they are growing. They are local, but their success lies in non-local impact. They demand only the right to survival yet with that minimal demand is associated the right to live in a peaceful and just world…. Unless the world is reconstructed ecologically at the level of world-views and lifestyles, peace and justice will continue to be violated and ultimately the very survival of humanity will be threatened (37).

On the other hand, how human beings are connected to nature and how they interact with nature are the main concerns of ecocriticism. According to Bate, an ecologically conscious mind has concern and love towards nature. Cheryll Glotfelty found that William Rueckert first used the word 'ecocriticism' in 1978 in the essay named "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment of Ecocriticism." According to Glotfelty, for Rueckert, ecocriticism means "application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature" (Glotfelty xx). Glotfelty herself defined ecocriticism as "the

study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment… ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies" (xviii).

Greg Garrard's observation is important to show the links between ecology and ecocriticism. He found that

> ecocriticism is unique amongst contemporary literary and cultural theories because of its close relationship with the science of ecology. Ecocritics may not be qualified to contribute to debates about problems in ecology, but they must nevertheless transgress disciplinary boundaries and develop their own 'ecological literacy' as far as possible (5).

Carolyn Merchant, in *Radical Ecology*, discussed the "ecocentric ethics" (75). According to Merchant, the goals of ecocentric ethics are the "maintenance of the balance of nature and retention of the unity, stability, diversity, and harmony of the ecosystem…of primary importance is the survival of all living and non-living things as components of healthy ecosystems" (Merchant 76). Merchant then discussed "the partnership ethics" (83). She revealed that her "own synthesis between ecocentrism and environmental justice is partnership ethics" (83). According to Merchant, "a partnership ethic holds that the greatest good for the human and nonhuman communities is in their mutual living interdependence" (83). The concepts of interdependence or mutuality, compassion, and a sense of responsibility are very important in ecocriticism. According to Merchant, partnership ethics are very relevant to resolving all the differences between humans and human beings' relations with the environment. Merchant proposed that humans as partners should have care, compassion, and a sense of responsibility towards each other as well as a responsible attitude towards non-human nature and environment. According to Merchant, it does not mean that humans will not introduce new technologies and science into the ecosystem, but there should be ethical use and proper restraint to maintain a healthy balance of the ecosystem (196-97). The common anxiety that is shared by the ecocritics is the anxiety of a misbalanced earth ecology robbing of life-sustaining forces that endangered the existence of life, including humans.

Ecological Concerns in Victorian Scenario

Victorian England witnessed a toxic environment that became a threat to the ecology. Jesse Oak Taylor's "Where is Victorian Ecocriticism?" finds that Victorian ecology was human ecology. Victorian writers emphasized the quality of life of the common people after the changed physical and social environment. The Victorian problem writers delineated the polluted, noxious environment, the plight of the poor section, the lack of sanitation, extreme filth, contagious diseases, and high mortality. Taylor, in his essay, mentioned Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee's monograph *Natural Disasters and Victorian Empire: Famines, Fevers and the Literary Cultures of South Asia*. Mukherjee pointed out that Victorian ecocriticism could not be found in nature alone, separated from human beings. It was about the ecology of both humans and non-humans, where nature was very part of human being's biological and cultural entity. So, the main concern was to preserve human ecology to make a better living place, as the Victorians also believed that the environment had a decisive impact on every organism (Taylor 883). Human lives were endangered at that time due to the obnoxious environment and ecology, and the rising industrialism opened the scope for huge exploitation. The intoxication of the atmosphere posed a real risk to living in Victorian England.

Critical Research Review

Critics have usually emphasized Benjamin Disraeli's political views when interpreting his novels like *Coningsby*, *Sybil,* and others. Dr. Diniejko categorized Disraeli's novel *Sybil* as a Condition of England novel as the novel provides a critical presentation of contemporary social and political life. Ruth Bernard Yeazell, in "Why Political Novels Have Heroines: "*Sybil*, *Mary Barton*, and *Felix Holt*" also labelled *Sybil* as a political novel. Annette Cozzi, in the book named *The Discourses of Food in Nineteenth Century British Fiction*, perceived that in *Sybil*, the "shift from rural regionalism to the nationalism forged from industrial capitalism is represented by the legislation, commodification, and consumption of grain" (29). She found *Sybil* to be a kind of "*bildungsroman* that aims the construction of a national identity" (23). Michael Flavin's book *Benjamin Disraeli* finds that in the novel *Sybil*, there is interconnection between personal and political.

Suzanne Daly, in "Spinning Cotton: Domestic and Industrial Novels," observed that "*Sybil* is generally understood to promulgate Disraeli's political vision, in which a genuinely superior aristocracy is to supervise a social compact between rich and the poor" (275). Martin Fido, in "The Treatment of Rural Distress in Disraeli's '*Sybi*l,' "discussed Disraeli's portrayal of the suffering of poor commoners in rural England. John Parham's chapter named "Trajectory of a Victorian Ecology" in the book *Green Man Hopkins* rightly points out:

> industrialisation and urban expansion created environmental problems — poor sanitation, air quality, deforestation, and pollution — all of which added to equivalent problems in areas such as housing, working conditions, unemployment, or disease. As a consequence of this escalation of risk, Victorian literary culture became characterized by a conspicuous sense of social responsibility — observation, analysis, investigation — which, in turn, helped prompt a spirit of campaigning, political intervention, and legislation to which literary figures, and literary work, contributed (68).

Later, John Parham found out that Disraeli had written with such responsibility. In "'For You Pollution.' The Victorian novel and a human ecology: Disraeli's *Sybil* and Gaskell's *Mary Barton*," Parham discerned that Disraeli's *Sybil* has obvious elements of Green Materialism. It is because the writer deliberately dramatized all the industrial impacts on the physical environment. Parham found Disraeli to be a conscious portrayer of all the degraded living conditions, sanitation, and the endangered ecology, including humans; thus, his novel *Sybil* gets the label of a social, ecological novel. Later, scholars like M. S Kennedy tried to trace ecological awareness in the Victorian period. She discussed how Disraeli presented a toxic atmosphere in rural areas in *Sybil*. This paper will try a thorough ecocritical reading of Disraeli's novel *Sybil* to unravel environmental and ecological concerns and multiple layers of criticisms that may be embedded in the novel.

Benjamin Disraeli

Disraeli was a conservative with beliefs in the paternalism of aristocrats. Being a very socially active person, he joined politics. His writings began to reveal his anti-Whig and anti-utilitarian views. He became prime minister of England two times. *Sybil* (1845) is part of the trilogy succeeded by *Coningsby* (1844) and followed by *Tancred*

(1847), and the trilogy is known as Young England novels because the author was engaged with the Young England movement. Young England consisted of a group of young Tory idealists who dreamt of making a bond between the rich and the poor by exterminating all the discrepancies. They wanted to regain all the respect for the monarchy, old traditions, and the Church. The infamous Victorian compromise that meant the double standard of English society where the country got all the economic wealth at the cost of exploitation of lower classes and ecology was illustrated in Disraeli's Young England novels.

Sybil

The novel was set in a rural town named Marney. Charles Egremont was the younger brother of Lord Marney. Egremont disguised himself as Mr. Franklin, the journalist, and investigated the living conditions of the poor people of that place. He realised that the rich were unaware of the sufferings of the poor people. He found that his own brother, present Lord Marney, had no sympathy for the common people. When he met Sybil, the beautiful, sensible daughter of Walter Gerard, he fell in love. Walter Gerard worked to improve the lives of poor people. He also met Stephen Morley, who revealed his belief in communal living. Morley had a secret love for Gerard's daughter, Sybil. Mr. Trafford was a noble factory owner who had sympathy for his workers and tried to improve their living and working conditions. Miss Trafford was a well-wisher of Sybil. Gerard and Morley supported the Chartist movement. Sybil came to know about Egremont's good intentions regarding the poor people. She became impressed with Egremont. Walter Gerard died in a chartist agitation. Stephen Morley also died, but before his death, he found one document that would prove Sybil's aristocratic connection. Sybil was mentally shattered. She got support and consolation from Miss Trafford. Ultimately Sybil was united with Charles Egremont, accepting his love.

Ecological Concerns in *Sybil*

At the beginning of the novel *Sybil*, Disraeli presents the picturesque quality of the external environment of the rural town Marney only to show the degraded, poisonous environment inside the town

ironically. The place had an eye-soothing scenic view as it was situated in a dale with a small river surrounded by a garden, meadows, and hills of dense wood. But it was a "beautiful illusion! For behind that laughing landscape, penury, and disease fed upon the vitals of a miserable population!" (*Sybil* 1: 116). Inside, the picture was dirty and desolate, with open sewer drainage and stagnant pools of obnoxious smell. He sensationalized the dirt and the disease with graphic detailing. The poor people's cottages

> looked more like the top of a dunghill than a cottage. Before the doors of these dwellings, and often surrounding them, ran open drains full of animal and vegetable refuse, decomposing into disease, or sometimes in their imperfect course filling foul pits or spreading into stagnant pools, while a concentrated solution of every species of dissolving filth was allowed to soak through and thoroughly impregnate the walls and ground adjoining (*Sybil* 1: 117-18).

M. S Kennedy observed that Disraeli presented "damp and noxious rural atmospheres such as Marney" (511). Disraeli showed how the future generation was at risk when he repeatedly portrayed high infant mortality incidents in the novel. There was an incident of incendiarism that became a serious tendency during the period (*Sybil* 1: 248).

The mining industry destroyed and poisoned the natural environment of the mining region. Smoke obstructed the rays of the sun. Heaps of coal and dust polluted the environment. Every street should be stepped on carefully as there was a mouth of coal pits. The area lacked any sight of greenery. So, nature was completely barred out there. Workers used to work in the riskiest conditions in the mines, getting the most brutal treatment. They were treated as machines. Human emotion was also barren there, just like the barren nature lacking natural, emotional sensibilities. The absence of nature deprived them of the soothing, creative influence of nature. The absence of such influence made the lives of the dwellers gloomy. The workers' way of life became savage as they got the most savage treatment. They were like

> swarming multitude: bands of stalwart men, broad-chested and muscular, wet with toil, and black as the children of the tropics… naked to the waist, an iron chain fastened to a belt of leather runs between their legs… hauls and hurries tubs of coals up subterranean

roads, dark, precipitous, and plashy: that seems to have escaped the notice of the Society for the Abolition of Negro Slavery (*Sybil* 2: 3 - 4).

The suffering and the distress of those mine workers reminded the author of the plight of the Negro slaves. Disraeli harshly criticized those English gentlemen who condemned the brutal treatment of the Negro slaves but remained totally ignorant of the inhuman condition such poor working sections were forcefully enduring. Even the rich gentlemen practiced such brutality with the employed.

Wodgate had all the ill effects of industry where "a tree could not be seen, a flower was unknown" (*Sybil* 2: 53). There was not even any church or parish. The absence of any creative, artistic thing indicated the absence of nature. Wodgate men were ignorant as they were barren, not immoral, as they did not have any humane qualities. Wodgate was the filthiest place with the worst sanitation and disease. Stephen Morley observed how human lives were very vulnerable there. Most of the natives were physically deformed as Morley found "ricketty, smoke-dried, lank and haggard" boys, "stunted and meagre" (*Sybil* 2: 60) girls whose "cramping postures" (*Sybil* 2: 60) were all result of inhumanly heavy works and torture. The author's immediate change of scene from Wodgate to the most serene beauty of nature in Gerard's cottage reflects the author's intention to present accurately the 'best' and the 'worst' picture of the atmosphere only to highlight how much different the 'worst' was from the 'best'. Sybil and her father, Gerard, had a close bond with nature, and the natural abundance in their cottage made them sensitive human beings with humane and emotional qualities. Their beautiful chemistry with their pet dog, Harold, revealed them as compassionate and caring human beings (*Sybil* 2: 66-69). They had what ecofeminists term an "interconnected sense of self" (Gaard 3). Disraeli consequently presented two different places in two different chapters, probably to show the constructing role nature plays in the formation of the ecology of a place and its dwellers as Vandana Shiva observed: "Nature as Prakriti is inherently active, a powerful, productive force in the dialectic of the creation, renewal, and sustenance of all life" (38). Nature is a life-sustaining and enhancing force that soothes and nourishes. The absence of such a nourishing influence of Nature becomes degenerating for ecology and its organisms, as Disraeli had already shown in places like the mining district and Wodgate.

He presented a place just half a mile away from Marney in a less polluted environment with fresh water, dense woods, and "luxuriant vegetation" (*Sybil* 1: 128). Charles Egremont found remnants of the old abbey, which once had a very sustaining role in the lives of the helpless poor, giving them food and shelter. The old building of the Abbey church was a symbol used by Disraeli to present the old system of society, the old aristocracy. The old aristocracy had a very reciprocal relationship with the poor ones, guiding them as their guardian. All the things in the old abbey reminded Egremont of the old system of society and the old aristocracy. Egremont felt that the old connection was cut. Egremont "amidst these solemn ruins, offered the perfection of solitude;" (*Sybil* 1: 133-34) and thought, "why was England not the same land as in the days of his light-hearted youth?" (*Sybil* 1: 134). Disraeli was quite depressed about the fact that the poor people who were pillars of English wealth and progress were forced to live the most depleted lives. So, the poor remained only the instruments or objects for earning profits and luxury for the upper classes. Disraeli criticized such social exploitation.

Sybil's father proudly recollected the memories of the old aristocracy. They once gave nice monasteries with greenery, neat farms, clean water, and gardens. Stephen observed that the monasteries proposed communal living, which gave a sense of unity. He found such a sense of connection was dead afterward. Alienated life in cities and towns merely for one's own sake made people selfish, cutting all sense of connection with nature and among themselves. According to Stephen, communal living was necessary for a healthy living place. Through Stephen, Disraeli questioned the national concept of England (*Sybil* 1: 146-48). Disraeli found two nations in England: one of the Rich's and the other of the Poor's, living totally apart without any mutuality (*Sybil* 1: 150).

The industrial city of Mowbray was portrayed to show the harmful consequences of industry and factories on the physical environment. Disraeli portrayed the place with high chimneys, big factories, smoke hovering over the sky as clouds, soot, and labourer's dingy slums. The factories had an unhealthy working environment without proper ventilation and sanitation, which was thus highly dangerous for the workers. Disraeli referred to the infanticide

practiced in slums. The children were vulnerable to fatal accidents as they were left alone in their homes and sometimes became handicapped for their entire lives. Workers like Dandy Mick suffered such accidents in childhood. Another worker, Devil Dust, grew even without a name until the age of five, escaping all dangers.

The author presented the exploitation of the child's innocence in those mines where children of younger, tender ages worked in the dark alone. The conversations among the workers revealed their daily suffering in dark, damp cellars. The incident of the innocent little child who was starved but came to buy food for his sick mother and ultimately dying from the violent confusion in the shop shocks readers with the meaninglessness of poor lives there (*Sybil* 2: 48-49). Among the working class, seventeen was the average life expectancy, showing how life was at risk there. In Victorian England, the poor, marginalized sections became the victims of contagious diseases more, and the rich remained ignorant of that. The unequal distribution of risk due to environmental hazards was seen in English society as the poor, helpless people were more vulnerable to toxicity as they were malnourished and were forced to live and work in unhealthy environments and had huge exposure to harmful materials and chemicals.

He presented the plight of the once happy farmers who were the victims of the English economy's change from agrarian to industrial. The farmer became waged labourers. Sarcastically, the author presented how the waged labourers themselves remained starved after cultivating "the broad fields of merry England" (*Sybil* 1: 121). Val Plumwood, in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature,* used the term "instrumentalism" (53) or objectification, which, according to her, is the feature of a dualistic hierarchized society. Plumwood thought that the upper side of the hierarchy, that is, the elite, rich class: the 'self' objectified the poor, marginalized section and used them as instruments to fulfill their greed. The waged labourers of England that Disraeli portrayed in *Sybil* were such instruments who were exploited by the rich landowners to gain profit.

In the pre-industrial era, people were peasants who cultivated their own land, which earned them a decent life and peace in their cottages. However, the advent of industrialization forced them to

migrate to towns and live in rented cellars. They became deprived of the basic sustenance of life. In the growing industry of Victorian England, factory production and earning profit became very important for the English economy, but that made the life of the poor, common people degenerate. As Vandana Shiva rightly pointed out, "when commodity production as the prime economic activity is introduced as development, it destroys the potential of nature…for basic needs. More commodities and more cash mean less life" (7).

Sybil was very soft-hearted and had a unique, compassionate sense of connection with other human and nonhuman beings. She was empathetic, just like her father. She believed that if "the people support the people, the divine blessing will not be wanting" (*Sybil* 1: 277). She gave all the nourishments: food, warmth, comfort, compassion, and love to the starved family of her father's weaver friend Warner. The author presented Sybil's motherly affection through her tender care and love for the little child of Warner (*Sybil* 1: 274-75). Sybil carried her father's belief in old medieval aristocracy, whose parental guidance helped the poor a lot. Gerard was keen to observe the deep chasm between the two classes- the rich and the poor. The relationship among the Englishmen was not so warm anymore. Gerard tried to break Egremont's illusion of English progress based on statistical data, and it reminded him of the older days, the pre-industrial era when common people had decent living styles with sufficient food, drink, clothes, and cottages (*Sybil* 2: 76-77).

Carolyn Merchant in *Radical Ecology* suggested human beings' ethical use of new technology with proper restraint to maintain a healthy balance in ecology (196-97). Disraeli portrayed the factory owner, Mr. Trafford, in such a way. Mr. Trafford had a very warm and mutual understanding with his workers. Trafford's sensible heart made all the safe and healthy arrangements for his workers in the factory and living places. In Trafford's factory, there was good ventilation and proper sanitation, and workers had decent homes with beautiful gardens, public baths, and horticulture. By depicting Trafford's efforts, the author delineated the picture of an ideal village ecology with a cleaner environment. Such a positive ecology of the place positively influenced the minds of his workers. They remained honest and happy with moral sensibilities (*Sybil* 2: 97-101).

Egremont thought that men like Mr. Trafford were needed to improve the lives of the poor workers. However, Morley thought communal living was the perfect solution for reconstructing society. Egremont became the representative of a new aristocracy who had a profound sense of responsibility towards others. Egremont assured Sybil that the new generation of aristocrats were sensible and compassionate, not tyrants. Suzanne Daly observed,

> the dishonest practices of the mill owners like Shuffle and Screw are contrasted with the enlightened system put in place by Mr. Trafford…who practices benevolent paternalism, housing and educating his workers and providing them with safe working conditions (276).

The author had positive hopes regarding new aristocrats to create sustainable mutuality among the people of English society. The novel ends on a very positive note. Though Gerard died, most of the other good characters have happy domestic lives, giving at least a positive balance in human ecology. Though at the end of the novel, Sybil's noble identity was revealed but, she remained the representative of the people, and her marriage with Egremont presents an "idealized alliance of High Toryism with the people" (Parham, "For" 32).

Conclusion

Parham rightly pointed out that the author of *Sybil* illustrated "dramatization of the consequences of industrialization on the physical existence" ("For" 6). Disraeli showed how environmental and ecological hazards affected and depleted human lives as they were integral parts of nature and ecology. So, in *Sybil*, one can find the apparent presence of most of the commonly avowed tenets of ecocriticism. Disraeli showed how the environment was badly affected by the pollution from factories and industrial waste. The novel has illustrations of some serene natural environment still undamaged by human interference in a few areas of the countryside. The contrast of such places with the industrially devastated areas emphasized the high price the English environment and ecology paid for the industrial and urban projects. Disraeli presented the damaged ecology's intense reaction to human lives and society. Ecocritics believe that human beings are part of the cohesive whole that is earth

(Garrard 24); any change in earth's ecology will have obvious effects on human life and society. As Vandana Shiva pointed out, "assumed categories of progress and development destroy the living forces which arise from relationships within the 'web of life'" (3). Disraeli presented and critiqued both the life-destroying forces and the "life-support systems" (Shiva 7) in the novel against the backdrop of an ecological crisis period due to industrial advancement and mechanized urbanism.

The novel has an accurate portrayal of all the environmental damage and ecological disharmony that the Victorians had to endure as hazardous consequences of industrial and urban infrastructures. Disraeli's sense of ecology, like the Victorian sense of ecology, includes human lives and societal concerns, as Mukherjee suggested. Disraeli portrayed some characters with true "ecological self" (Plumwood 154), like Gerard, his daughter Sybil, and the aristocrat Egremont. "The ecological self can be viewed as a type of relational self, one which includes the goal of the flourishing of earth others and the earth community among its own primary ends, and hence respects or cares for these others for their own sake" (Plumwood 154-55). "Concepts of care, solidarity and friendship" (Plumwood 155) are vital in such ecological self. Disraeli's effort to retrieve some ecological balance in the novel was by giving the characters happiness and peace through compassion, a sense of responsibility, and healthy mutual relationships among themselves. Educated, sensible new aristocrats like Egremont played a creative role in regaining the peace of the place. Carolyn Merchant's partnership ethic (83) suggested care, compassion, mutuality among humans for each other, and a sense of responsibility towards living and non-living beings to overcome ecological problems. Disraeli suggested compassion, reciprocal relationships, and sensible, responsible attitudes of characters like Gerard, Egremont, Sybil, and Mr. Trafford as his way of solution to helping incohesive social-ecological existence. So, it can be said that Disraeli's novel *Sybil* reflects "ecological literacy" (Garrard 5) meticulously.

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18

Growing with Green Literature: Inspiring Young Minds with Ruskin Bond & Manjula Padmanabhan

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Abstract

The world is facing terrible ecological catastrophes at the turn of the millennium. So, it is no longer a choice but a necessity to raise ecologically responsible children, as we are passing on a fractured environment to future generations. People often observe a twofold interaction between children and nature. According to one perspective, as William Wordsworth portrays, children are full of innocence and have a special bond with nature. In contrast to this perspective, John Locke's theory of *tabula rasa* contends that children lack knowledge and experience. Thus, elders are accountable for keeping them aware of their surroundings. This paper explores the importance of instilling eco-consciousness in children early on through eco-writing. It also examines how, by using stories and picture books, children can attain greater insight into the interconnectedness of their lives with their surroundings. The findings suggest that, through storytelling, children can comprehend more fully the relationships between themselves and others, as well as nature and society. For younger readers who are not yet able to grasp complex plotlines, it is also proposed that picture books can be used to develop these connections. This research delves into specific works of children's literature by Ruskin Bond and Manjula Padmanabhan, in which they convey their exceptional affinity with nature. By recognising the importance of eco-literature, this study looks to provide a model for a more sustainable approach to living, which can potentially shape the future of humanity and the planet.

Keywords: Ecological catastrophes, *tabula rasa*, eco-consciousness, children's literature, eco-literature, sustainable approach

Introduction

For thousands of years, nature and its resources have been worshipped in India and deemed superior to humans. However, this adoration seems to have dwindled in the 21st century. It is undeniable that our environment has endured significant damage due to the over-exploitation of natural resources, climate change, the decline in biodiversity, soil erosion, and deterioration of water quality. That is why educating children to be environmentally conscious is crucial to understand their responsibility and to protect the environment for future generations. Unfortunately, children today are growing up in a highly urbanised and technologically advanced world, making it challenging to feel connected to nature. Therefore, parents and educators must devise creative ways to restore the lost connection between children and the natural world and teach them to respect nature. By doing so, children can learn to appreciate the beauty of nature and understand how to protect and preserve it.

Ecocriticism has emerged as a significant field of inquiry in recent years, drawing heavily from Western ecocritical frameworks. However, it is essential to note that this field also has roots in ancient Indian philosophies and scriptures. The classical writings and Upanishads of ancient India contain several ecocritical principles, such as a deep reverence for nature, a commitment to its care, and a focus on its preservation and sustenance. A notable contribution to this body of work is the *Panchatantra* and *Jataka* stories, which have effectively promoted eco-consciousness among children and adults. "Animal fables from this source are predominant and remain just a grandmother away," writes A.K. Ramanujam. (Ramaswamy 16).

"Eco-literacy, according to Wikipedia, is the ability to understand the natural systems that make life on earth possible." In addition, it encourages us to consider the implications of our actions on the natural environment and to strive for balance in our relationship with the natural world. Achieving eco-literacy involves bringing a conscious attitude towards the environment, thereby protecting it consciously due to their knowledge of the environment.

Exploring the Interconnectedness of Nature and Children

As per the research conducted in the book titled "Children and Nature: Psychological, Sociocultural, and Evolutionary Investigations", it is essential for the healthy development of a child to experience nature firsthand, as no other activity can replace this unique and valuable exposure. Studies indicate that children choose the natural surroundings closest to them as their preferred playground throughout history. This could range from a dense thicket in their backyard to a flowing stream or nearby forested area. The majority of kids were playing in the untamed nature on the outskirts of farms and fields during the day. They were free to play, discover, and interact with the natural world without being restricted or supervised. Sadly, this has changed, with modern play environments often designed around the concepts of structure and control rather than exploration and discovery. Researchers have identified the abrupt shift in children's lifestyle and decreased outdoor playtime as "a childhood of imprisonment". According to Pyle, this is the 'extinction of experience,' which develops indifference to environmental issues (Pyle 305-327).

People often observe a twofold interaction between children and nature. The prevalent belief among individuals is that children, as portrayed in William Wordsworth's "Ode on Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood," exhibit an untainted purity and an exceptional affiliation with the natural world. The poet himself alluded to his youthful meanderings. Wordsworth pens down,

> "There was a time when meadow, grove, and stream,
> The earth, and every common sight
> To me did seem
> Apparelled in celestial light,
> The glory and the freshness of a dream" (lines 4-8).

Others, following John Locke's *tabula rasa* theory, believe that children lack knowledge and experience, and it is the responsibility of adults to keep them aware of their surroundings. Regardless of which perspective is correct, this study aims to reveal the value of fostering eco-consciousness in children at a young age through eco-writing. It focuses on the best ways to utilise picture books and

stories to educate children about significant environmental concerns and to better understand how closely linked their lives are to their surroundings. This study examines the efficacy of employing picture books and storybooks designed to convey complex ecological ideas in teaching young children about eco-literacy. It also looks at specific works of children's literature by Ruskin Bond and Manjula Padmanabhan in which they showcase their exceptional affinity with nature.

Navigating the Challenges of Environmental Education

Environmental education often focuses solely on adults and fails to recognise children's curiosity and unique learning styles. This calls for a teaching approach that encourages exploration and hands-on learning rather than a lecture-based method. Direct teaching approaches may not be the most effective method for young learners, leading to confusion and anxiety, especially when they are presented with complex environmental issues beyond their understanding. It is essential to consider age-appropriate lessons, as middle school students may be ready to study topics like rainforest loss and ozone depletion. In contrast, younger students may still need to prepare for these lessons. Careful consideration must be taken to avoid the development of ecophobia, fear or aversion to the natural world, and ecological concerns. Love and knowledge, according to John Burroughs, are inextricably linked; without love, knowledge is frail and transitory, likely to crumble into dust. Knowledge can only genuinely thrive and take root in hearts and thoughts when love is the cornerstone of learning. However, regrettably, environmental education programmes often prioritise knowledge and responsibility above cultivating a loving relationship with the natural world. David Sobel claims that before being burdened with the task of protecting the planet, it is vital for youngsters to acquire a love and regard for it (Sobel 5-10).

Love for Nature: Nurturing Young Minds through Picture Books

"What is the use of a book without pictures or conversations?" Alice asks in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. Pictures have a newfound relevance in modern society thanks to the influence of visual media. Typically, the presence of illustrations is far more crucial than the

presence of words. Even before toddlers can talk, they are receptive to images. Using picture books in early education can provide students with multimodal learning opportunities. Studies have shown that early exposure to picture books stimulates cognitive development in young children. Through juxtaposing pictures and words, young learners are engaged and challenged to acquire knowledge in various ways. Initially targeted towards children, picture books have expanded their reach to include upper elementary and middle school students due to their vivid illustrations, rich and evocative language, and poignant and meaningful themes. They can stir our emotions, please our senses, awaken our imagination, and evoke memories of our past. They invite us to snuggle up and enjoy reading them.

According to Sobel (1996), in addition to frequent exposure to nature, encouraging children's interactions with animals is one of the most effective strategies to promote empathy in their early years. Surprisingly, studies have revealed that up to 80% of children under six dreams about animals (Acuff and Patterson 174). The use of picture books can effectively promote awareness about animals. This is especially crucial as a growing disconnect exists between humans and nature. The children's picture book *Mama, What is the Night*? by Manjula Padmanabhan is a captivating exploration of the behaviours of nocturnal creatures, from the tiny firefly to the owl, and it immerses readers in a world of facts, that reveals the hidden beauty of the night, all while showing off a stunning array of illustrations. It is a captivating work that captures the enigmatic and mystical ambiance of the night through its vivid illustrations. Complementing the visual appeal, the accompanying text offers intriguing insights into the world of nocturnal animals and the night-blooming cereus. The book presents an engaging narrative that seamlessly blends scientific facts with artistic expression. Padmanabhan's book combines science, art, and poetry to create a unique and magical experience that can stimulate concern for other living creatures and a sense of commitment in young readers. Through vivid imagery and poetic language, *Mama, What is the Night?* offers a valuable contribution to the realm of children's literature, promoting empathy with the understanding of the natural world.

Unlocking the Potential of Storybooks: A Pathway to Sustainability

According to a recent study published in *Frontiers in Psychology*, children tend to prefer storybooks that provide more causal information (McKnight 10-15). The genre of children's literature possesses a unique ability to influence the perspective of juvenile audiences through the narratives it conveys. Ruskin Bond's stories shed light on the connection between children and nature and the influence of nature on people of all ages. These stories demonstrate how outdoor experiences can shape one's personality and character development. In his short story "How Far Is the River", one can observe the themes of curiosity, exploration, and appreciation for the natural world. The story digs into the protagonist's psyche, a 12-year-old boy's intense desire to explore nature, to discover the beauty and secrets of the river hidden by the mountain since he had never had the opportunity to experience it himself. Driven by curiosity, he ventured into the unknown, determined to find the river and experience, appreciate its beauty, and 'know it personally'. Additionally, the boy's preference for being barefoot highlights the importance of connecting with nature and enjoying the small joys in life. The sensation of nature beneath his feet, combined with the ease of not removing his shoes, helps him connect to the environment around him more meaningfully. As he grows up, he will likely continue to appreciate the small things in life.

> "I was barefooted; not because I couldn't afford shoes, but because I felt free with my feet bare, because I liked the feel of warm stones and cool grass because not wearing shoes saved me the trouble of taking them off" (Bond 62).

The sensation of nature beneath his feet, combined with the ease of not removing his shoes, helps him connect to the environment around him more meaningfully. The story promotes appreciating and exploring nature instead of relying solely on technology for entertainment, such as televisions, computers, and electronic devices. This instills a long-lasting love for the natural world and a heightened awareness of our surroundings, leading to a greater appreciation for the environment. By cultivating reverence for nature, these values can be imparted to future generations and contribute to our planet's health and vitality.

In Ruskin Bond's other short story, "A New Flower", the protagonist, Usha, is a nine-year-old girl who discovers a rare flower and shows the narrator who had been wandering among Mussoorie's hills. She insists on plucking it for her friend, but he resists and encourages her to appreciate its beauty without taking it away from its natural environment. "No, I don't, I said. It may be the only one. If we break it, there may not be anymore. Let's leave it there and see if it seeds" (35). This promotes eco-consciousness in children by teaching them that nature should be respected and appreciated rather than taken or destroyed. The story also emphasises the importance of preserving biodiversity and protecting endangered species. By showing how even one small act can impact the environment, this story helps instil eco-friendly values in children at an early age.

Bond's "Henry: The Chameleon" effectively emphasises treating animals with care and respect. The author's portrayal of the narrator's grandfather saving a chameleon from harm serves as a potent reminder for humans to be mindful of their actions towards non-human creatures. Furthermore, the narrative highlights the dangers of accepting myths and false beliefs about animals. It is essential to recognise the significance of such works in promoting a more compassionate and informed approach to our interactions with the natural world (89-94).

Recently, the world has witnessed the outbreak of pandemics that have caused widespread fear and devastation. The children's story "The Living Planet" by Manjula Padmanabhan explores the aftermath of an imaginary pandemic that resembles the present situation. The story revolves around Bella, a little girl who listens to her grandfather's retelling of the "Dark Times," a time when viruses decided to teach humans a lesson.

> "Tell me again, Granpa," says Bella, "about the Dark Times. How many people were there in the world? How did the few become clever and kind? What happened to the many who remained cruel and stupid?" (Padmanabhan)

The story highlights the need for an alternative lifestyle to help us escape such threats. While some may argue that such narratives may trigger eco-anxiety or ecophobia in children, a careful reading of the story reveals that it has a positive message. The worldwide need for a more inclusive, nature-friendly lifestyle is emphasised, and the

narrative shows us how humans can learn to live in harmony with nature rather than trying to tame it to serve their greed. This story is a powerful reminder of the importance of adopting a sustainable way of life that considers our environmental impact.

Conclusion

Considering the world's ecological catastrophes in the new millennium, raising environmentally responsible children is no longer a choice but a necessity. We are passing on a fractured environment to future generations; therefore, raising awareness of environmental issues must start from the root. Throughout the annals, it has become clear that a profound nexus exists between the terrestrial realm and the world of literature. This ineluctable truth is underscored by the literary masterpieces of erudite wordsmiths hailing from diverse cultures and spanning aeons. Incorporating environmental topics into children's literature might raise ecological consciousness among upcoming generations. Through its ability to evoke emotions and empathy in readers, fiction has the power to reveal more profound truths that non-fiction may struggle to express. Woolley (1990) recognised this and posited that it is precisely because of the emotional resonance of fiction that it can convey truth in a more profound and meaningful way. While non-fiction may provide factual information, it is often through the emotional journey of fictional characters that readers can truly grasp the weight and significance of certain truths.

Stories hold a special place in children's hearts as they connect their inner world with the world outside their home. Butzow (1989) suggests that this connection is vital to make science less abstract and more relatable to young learners. Science can be challenging for kids to grasp, so it is essential to help them understand it in a way that resonates with their experiences. Using stories and creativity, science can be accessible, engaging, and unforgettable for the next generation (Butzow and Butzow 4-6). Another creative approach is to amalgamate a conventional medium, such as a picture book, with an engaging narrative that allows young minds to develop empathy for the environment and scientific understanding. David Mitchell's classification of these books as "picture storybooks" highlights the integral relationship between the illustrations and text. The pictures

and words work together seamlessly, and neither one is strong enough to stand alone to create a captivating and immersive storytelling experience (Bhalla 2).

The study conducted by Andi Febriana Tamrin delves into the intricate relationship between children and nature. This connection is rooted in four primary factors that shape the bond between children and their natural surroundings. As per the definition of nature, it is considered a place of origin; therefore, children are inherently connected to it from birth (Tamrin 167-171). Another humanistic approach further asserts the importance of this bond in the formation of the persona of a child. The custodianship of nature falls on the shoulders of children, and it is only through a well-nurtured personality that they can fulfill this responsibility and ensure the continued provision of resources by nature. Thus, understanding the nature-children relationship is crucial for the sustainable development of both.

Ruskin Bond's *All-Time Favourite Nature Stories*, Manjula Padmanabhan's *Mama, What is the Night?* and "The Living Planet" are significant contributions to the field of environmental writing. Bond's book, featuring illustrations by David Yambem, offers a distinct perspective on the magnificence and significance of nature. At the same time, Padmanabhan's works address critical environmental issues and provide insightful messages about the need for eco-consciousness. Employing children's literature, particularly storybooks and picture books, to inculcate a culture of sustainable living and ecological mindfulness among future generations can be a highly effective approach for research and pedagogical professionals. These literary resources can serve as invaluable instruments in fostering environmental consciousness among future generations.

Note

1. This shloka makes salutations to the holy Mother Earth and apologises for stepping on her and trampling her heavenly body with our feet. Recognising the sanctity of nature, this shloka serves to remind us of our responsibility to treat the environment with the utmost respect and reverence.

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Female Subjugation and Body Politics in Song's "Girl Powdering Her Neck" and Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress"

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Abstract

This paper examines female subjugation within the framework of body politics as depicted in Song's "Girl Powdering Her Neck" and Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress". Body politics specifically examines how societal norms and power dynamics shape perceptions and treatment of women's bodies. Drawing upon Susan Bordo's concept of "body politics" and Julie Rodgers and Fredrickson Roberts' "objectification theory," this study reveals that women are not only oppressed by societal beauty standards but also trapped within a vicious cycle of self-scrutiny, where they prioritize external appearance over their inner value. In Song's poem, the protagonist becomes a victim of body politics, where her worth is reduced to mere physical appearance putting her intellect and agency aside. Similarly, in Marvell's poem, the male speaker objectifies his beloved undermining her agency. This paper exposes the deceitful nature of patriarchal ideology, which drives women to conform to societal beauty standards at the cost of their individuality and self-esteem. By highlighting the plight of female subjects in these poems, this study advocates for resistance against oppressive body politics. It also urges women to reclaim their autonomy and value disregarding the superficial beauty standards imposed by patriarchy.

Keywords: Body Politics, Beauty Standards, Female Subjugation, Objectification, Patriarchy

Introduction

In Cathy Song's "Girl Powdering Her Neck" and Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress," women are predominantly viewed as objects of male pleasure within a patriarchal society. This perspective disregards their intelligence, morals, and personality, leading them to

prioritize their appearance while overlooking ability and other aspects of their identity. These poems highlight how women are driven to conform to beauty standards, often becoming objects for male admiration and gaze. Additionally, these poems highlight how women, influenced by "body politics" as articulated by Susan Bordo and the "objectification theory" proposed by Julie Rodgers and Fredrickson Roberts, are trapped in the self-scrutiny of their bodies to attract male attention. "Girl Powdering Her Neck" unveils the speaker's awareness of enhancing her appearance with cosmetics in preparation for sexual intimacy. Similarly, in "To His Coy Mistress," the speaker praises the bodily parts of his beloved to persuade her into a physical relationship. The foregrounding of the beloved's body serves the male gaze for utilitarian purposes. Consequently, these poems reveal the reduction of women to objects of sexual gratification undermining their agency and assertiveness.

In analyzing the selected poems through the perspectives of body politics and objectification theory, this paper argues that these poems serve as critiques of patriarchal views that reduce women to objects for male pleasure. Through this analysis, the paper not only sensitizes women to be critical of unfair beauty standards imposed by men but also urges them to assert their independence and worth based on more than just appearance—highlighting the importance of their personality, morals, intelligence, and abilities.

Previous studies have offered limited attention to the perspectives of body politics when examining the poems by Cathy Song and Andrew Marvell. Carl R. V. Brown analyses Song's poem "Girl Powdering Her Neck" within the context of an Asian girl beautifying herself before reuniting with her loved one in America. According to the critic, the poem:

> […] refers to a common familial pattern among Asians immigrating to the Americas in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—when the men came first to find work and their wives followed later, sometimes years later. Meanwhile, the new immigrants possessed only pictures of their brides until the couple could be reunited in their adopted land. (42)

This analysis depicts the girl in the poem as preparing herself to attract her husband's attention with her beauty upon their long-awaited reunion. However, Brown's analysis overlooks the influence

of body politics, which likely motivated the girl's efforts to beautify herself. Similarly, Alexandra Conte's argument centres on the customized beauty of the girl in the poem that demotivates her to express, and motivates her more to impress. His argument goes thus:

> [...] she does not possess personal expression, control, or beliefs; the beauty has created a masked figure of her, "she does not possess personal expression, control, or beliefs; the beauty has created a masked figure of her. The painting does not show her face it shows her reflection" (1).

Here, the focus is on the reflection rather than the genuine depiction of the girl. She appears to lack agency to express her true self and is instead depicted as solely concerned with impressing men. However, Conte's analysis misses the underlying influence of body politics, which shapes societal norms and expectations regarding female appearance and behaviour. Within this framework, the girl's efforts to conform to beauty standards can be seen as a manifestation of the pressures imposed by patriarchal ideals. Similarly, Asmaa Khalaf, in her examination of the power of poetry, emphasizes the poet's meticulous depiction of the girl's actions highlighting how poetry can animate the static image of the painting. She notes:

> The poet mentions something regarding her finishing her bathing, leaving her pair slippers outside the room, making her legs folded, brushing the mirror with the corner of her sleeve. All these behaviors are imagined to add life to the frozen image. The poet resorts to similes to reflect the beauty of the girl when he depicts the appearance of her shoulder to be like a hill moving towards snowy spot. Again this indicates the power of poetry in indulging in detail giving life to its theme. (23-24)

While praising poetry as a potent medium to give life to otherwise stable images, the critic ignores how body politics affects the girl. By only focusing on the girl's appearance, she misses how body politics shapes the girl's self-perception and influences her decisions in the poem. Many scholars have analysed Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress." Sibaprasad Dutta, in his article, "To His Coy Mistress: An Overview", interprets the poem as "a fine specimen of love lyric based on the theory of Carpe Diem and is yet marked by 'metaphysical' characteristics. Carpe Diem or Hedonism is the desperate bid to outwit the onslaught of time by engaging in material delight. The whole of "To His Coy Mistress" is suffused with this

spirit" (1-2). Despite the critic's interpretation of the poem through the lens of hedonism and its metaphysical aspect, the dimension of body politics remains absent. He appears to be indifferent to acknowledging the speaker's manipulation of societal beauty standards and gender norms to gain the affection of the coy mistress.

Likewise, Pramod C. Chaudhari, in his article, "Patriarchy's Notion of Beauty and Desire Reflected in Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress" discusses the thematic essence of the poem, highlighting its focus on the passionate desires of a man trying to allure a woman into sexual intimacy. Chaudhary's discussion goes thus:

> The poem 'To His Coy Mistress" focuses on the lustful desires of a man trying to allure a female virgin, the mistress, into sexual intimacy. The poem is dexterously crafted and structured by the poet so it is known as a seduction poem. Wit, allusions and conceits are exploited in a logical argument. The speaker is progressing logically through the stages of persuasion to change the lady's head and heart. He wishes to court and deflower her though she is reluctant. (231)

The critic agrees that Marvell's poem reflects the speaker's intense desire for his beloved. However, he ignores the influence of body politics—societal norms about the body—in the speaker's attempt to persuade his beloved to engage physically.

Correspondingly, Geoff Boucher interprets Marvell's poem as "a complex political theology, marked by ambivalence about sexuality that has all of the characteristics of psychological repression" (1). The critic, here, is hinting at the manifestation of the repressed sexual desire of the speaker. But his line of criticism does not trace the idea that while expressing sexual desire towards his beloved, the speaker unconsciously exerts body politics and his male sexual gaze towards his beloved becomes noticeable.

According to Kamda Singh Deo's observation, "Marvell sketches the entire character of his mistress against her sexual ability as if there is no more to her and the whole purpose of her life is to satisfy him, sexually" (45). Deo's observation centres on how Marvell portrays his beloved mainly for her sexual ability, suggesting that her sole purpose is to please the male speaker. Through a feminist lens, Deo points out how men often see women only as fulfilling their

sexual desires. Yet, his critique misses the connection to broader patriarchal body politics and objectification, which limit women's autonomy.

Similarly, Derek Hirst and Steven Zwicker view the speaker's exaggeration in Marvell's poem and note that "Marvell begins with obvious intentions of mockery, and outflanks Petrarchanism in a series of droll and brilliant exaggerations" (639). The critics highlight the speaker's exaggeration not only of his beloved's bodily parts but also his glorification of them. However, they fail to recognize that this exaggeration is simply the speaker's use of body politics to persuade his beloved into having sex.

In the same way, Clarence H. Miller's analysis of "To His Coy Mistress" sheds light on the use of syllogism within the poem thus:

> "To His Coy Mistress" seems to be clear:
> If we had sufficient time, we could delay;
> But we do not have time:
> herefore we cannot delay. (98)

While the syllogism may appear logically sound, Miller argues that the conclusion does not genuinely follow from the premises. He suggests that the speaker employs this logical framework merely as a rhetorical device to manipulate the sentiments of his reluctant beloved, who is not yet ready to engage in intimacy. However, the critic dismisses the speaker's manipulation and exploitation of societal norms, known as body politics, to persuade his beloved to give in.

In their analysis of the poem's rhetoric, Anthony Low and Paul J. Pival assert that "[T]he poem is a persuasion to love, and the lover uses the methods of formal logic to persuade his mistress to accept his suit" (415). The speaker's persuasive strategies are guided by the interplay of body politics and objectification mentality within societal expectations. However, the critics are oblivious to this dynamic in their critique. Navid Salehi Babamiri, in the same way, notes that "the poem has lots of connotations which one by one they zoom in on sexual desires and needs and since they have no implications to show the perpetual procreation, it avers Plato's theory that poem can be immoral and far from ethicality" (97). However, Babamiri overlooks

the presence of body politics in the poem, which influences the portrayal of sexual desires and societal norms regarding intimacy.

Existing reviews of both poems dismiss the influence of body politics perpetuated by patriarchy. This study aims to address this gap by examining the poems through the lens of body politics and objectification theory. It aims to reveal how women's bodies are reduced to mere tools for men's benefit and how women often internalize this ideology without resistance. The emphasis on the utilitarian value of beauty encourages women to accept body politics, which ultimately imposes negative effects on their agency and self-expression.

Body and the Theory of Objectification

 The body has long been a subject of fascination and exploration, not only in scientific and medical fields but also in philosophical and social contexts. One prominent theory that examines the body is the theory of objectification. This theory explores how the body can be viewed and treated as an object, rather than as a person with agency and individuality. Objectification can occur in various forms: from the way society values and commodifies certain bodies based on narrow standards of beauty to the way individuals may reduce others to their physical characteristics, disregarding their emotions, thoughts, and autonomy.

This paper uses "body politics" by Susan Bordo and "objectification theory" by Julie Rodgers and Fredrickson Roberts as frameworks to analyze female characters in selected poems. It examines how these characters are affected by body politics. Generally speaking, body politics is defined as a societal and institutional strategy to control the body with a great sense of vested interest. This study uses the body in the context of women's bodies that often become the target to control, caress and crave for carnal desire.

Body politics, according to Susan Bordo, "is a concept that refers to the direct grip that culture has on our bodies, through the practices and bodily habits of everyday life" (16). The patriarchal culture has taught women to impress men through their bodies rather than through their expression. The women's bodies have been the sites to

control their agencies and aspirations in patriarchy. And women are fated to conform to the parameters of beautiful bodies laid down by patriarchy. Body politics, Julie Rodgers asserts, "is concerned with examining the extent to which we try to control the body by creating boundaries and forcing performance and how we use the body, not just as a crucial locus of self-construction, but also as a means of protesting and expressing a wide range of emotions from hopes and aspirations to fears and malaise" (29). Body politics has become a controlling mechanism for women. It controls women by driving them to conform to the false ideas of men rather than contest with them. It also controls them through objectification. According to Fredrickson and Roberts:

> Objectification theory posits that girls and women are typically acculturated to internalize an observer's perspective as a primary view of their physical selves. This perspective on self can lead to habitual body monitoring which, in turn, can increase women's opportunities for shame and anxiety, reduce opportunities for peak motivational states, and diminish awareness of internal bodily states. (173)

The above lines suggest that women are often taught to see themselves mainly from the viewpoint of others, focusing on how they look physically. This perspective can drive them to constantly monitor their bodies, which can increase feelings of shame and anxiety forgetting other dimensions which are of great value to shape their personality such as intelligence, kindness, compassion, empathy, resilience, and a sense of humour, etc.

Fredrickson and Roberts' objectification theory also points out how society emphasizes women's physical appearance which leads them to constantly watch and judge themselves. This constant self-scrutiny of the body makes women feel ashamed and anxious about their appearance. They further problematize that "a culture that objectifies the female body presents women with a continuum stream of anxiety-provoking experiences, requiring them to maintain an almost chronic vigilance both to their physical appearance and to their physical safety" (183). When women are constantly seen as objects rather than individuals, it creates a lot of stress for women. They feel anxious because they always have to worry about how they should look and fulfil the expectations of society.

According to the theory of objectification, thus, individuals who experience objectification may internalize the external perspective and start to view themselves merely through a narrow lens of physical appearance and sexual desirability. This self-objectification can lead to negative consequences, such as body shame, low self-esteem, and a focus on appearance-related concerns rather than personal growth and well-being.

Objectifying Women in the Poems of Song and Marvell

Song's "Girl Powdering Her Neck" is an example of ekphrastic poetry— a verbal representation of an image or painting. In this type of poetry, the poet verbalizes the visuals. In this poem, a girl is in an elaborate process of beautifying her body. By applying cosmetics, she is customizing her appearance to draw the attention of a person, who, she is going to have a physical relationship with. She is fully concentrating on her job of impressing others through beauty.

> The light is the inside
> Sheen of an oyster shell,
> Sponged with talc and vapor,
> Moisture from a bath.
> A pair of slippers
> Are placed outside
> The rice paper doors. (1-7)

The first seven lines portray a scene where a girl is meticulously preparing herself for a physical encounter, emphasizing the role of beauty standards in relationships and intimacy.

The description of the girl's actions, such as applying cosmetics and focusing on her appearance highlights how women are often expected to conform to certain standards of beauty to be desirable or attractive to others.

> Morning begins the ritual
> wheel of the body,
> the application of translucent skins.
> She practices pleasure:
> the pressure of three fingertips
> applying powder.
> Fingerprints of pollen
> some other hand will trace. (16-23)

These lines depict the morning ritual of the girl who applies makeup as a part of her daily routine. The phrase "Wheel of the Body" suggests the repetitive nature of the girl's actions. The phrase "translucent skins", on the other hand, suggests the act of hiding imperfections and making the face look smoother and more polished for others. The pressure exerted by the girl's fingertips suggests the societal pressure to conform to beauty standards. These lines reveal the conflict between individual choice and societal pressures while trying to look beautiful.

In the following lines, the poet vividly describes the girl's attire, emphasizing its role in captivating the attention of men as part of her societal obligation. They also reflect how patriarchy expects the female body as an object to be admired and desired:

> The peach-dyed kimono
> patterned with maple leaves
> drifting across the silk,
> falls from right to left
> in a diagonal, revealing
> the nape of her neck
> and the curve of a shoulder
> like the slope of a hill (24-31)

The girl's clothes are designed to make her look attractive. The kimono with its maple leaf pattern is carefully chosen to draw attention to her body. The way the fabric falls reveals parts of her body, like her neck and shoulder, to make her look more appealing. It highlights how women's clothing often serves to make them objects of desire, following societal expectations of beauty and femininity.

The girl's body has actually become her power to tempt men. The girl in the poem is a victim of socially constructed parameters of beauty that she silently conforms to. While discussing the bodies as a social construct, Janet Holland et al. observe:

> Young women are under pressure to construct their material bodies into a particular model of femininity which is both inscribed on the surface of their bodies, through such skills as dress, make-up, dietary regimes, and disembodied in the sense of detachment from their sensuality and alienation from their material bodies. (Patni, 108)

As discussed above by the critics, women are pressured to remake their material bodies through dress, make-up, and dietary

regimes, which simply mar their multiple dimensions such as skills, schemes, and scholarships. This is nothing but the hegemonizing effects of body politics. How under the influence of body politics, women are desperate to scrutinize their bodies becomes clear from the following lines:

> She dips a corner of her sleeve
> like a brush into water
> to wipe the mirror;
> she is about to paint herself.
> The eyes narrow
> in a moment of self-scrutiny. (37-42)

These lines depict the girl engaging in a ritualistic act of self-reflection and self-modification. The action of dipping her sleeve into the water to wipe the mirror symbolizes a moment of preparation before she begins to "paint herself." This act can be interpreted as a manifestation of the pressure on women to conform to idealized standards of beauty imposed by society.

The assimilation of beauty standards and its impacts can be seen in the following lines that say, the girl wants to speak but then remains silent as her beautified appearance can be disturbed and she may become powerless to attract the men and entertain them.

> The mouth parts
> as if desiring to disturb
> the placid plum face;
> break the symmetry of silence.
> But the berry-stained lips,
> stenciled into the mask of beauty,
> do not speak. (43-49)

These lines reflect that the girl wants to speak up but she stops herself because she is worried about ruining her makeup and not being able to attract the men. Her lips painted to look pretty, do not say anything, showing how society's beauty standards can stop women from speaking up freely and frankly. The adverse effect of body politics is that it motivates women to suspend their competence and assimilate the societal norms established by patriarchy regarding how women should look and behave. Body politics discourages women from defying the set structures of a patriarchy-unleashed

society. It has merely induced them to impress rather than express themselves.

The speaker of "To His Coy Mistress", by applying the rhetoric of the "brevity of life" and "almighty time", exerts body politics just to have a physical relationship with his beloved and tries to objectify her body. Throughout the poem, the speaker gives a frontal value to the body of his beloved. The beloved is showing her shyness regarding sexual matters while the lover (the speaker) is trying to woo her from the very beginning.

> Had we but world enough, and time,
> This coyness, Lady, were no crime.
> We would sit down and think which way
> To walk and pass our long love's day.
> Thou by the Indian Ganges' side
> Shouldst rubies find: I by the tide
> Of Humber would complain. I would (Marvell 1-7)

These first seven lines of the poem tell us that the speaker is persuading his beloved to consummate love while she is not ready to give in. She, therefore, is showing her shyness. However, the speaker is saying that coyness is a crime as they do not have time to enjoy love. This is the right time to love. There is not enough time to date at the bank of Ganges and Humber. Banks of rivers have been ideal places for lovers to meet and express love. These lines suggest that the speaker focuses mainly on the physical aspect of their relationship, rather than valuing other qualities of his beloved.

In the following lines, the speaker focuses on physical attraction and the detailed imagery of the beloved's body supports the idea that he is primarily interested in satisfying his desires rather than valuing her as an independent person. To persuade her, he goes to the extent of glorifying her bodily parts by using an extended metaphor thus:

> My vegetable love should grow
> Vaster than empires, and more slow;
> A hundred years should go to praise
> Thine eyes and on thy forehead gaze;
> Two hundred to adore each breast;
> But thirty thousand to the rest;
> An age at least to every part, (11-17)

Here, the speaker praises the specific parts of the beloved's body like her eyes, forehead, and breasts. This shows the speaker's strong desire for her physical beauty rather than valuing her as a person with agency. The lines also reflect a narrow view where women are judged mainly on their appearance rather than on ability. This kind of focus can limit women's freedom and reduce them to objects of desire rather than individuals with their thoughts and feelings.

The speaker further uses rhetorical language not to praise his beloved's intelligence but to woo her for the consummation of love. By foregrounding the transitoriness of human life, he is striving to fulfil his desire to seek pleasure from her body thus:

> Thy beauty shall no more be found,
> Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound
> My echoing song: then worms shall try
> That long preserved virginity,
> And your quaint honour turn to dust
> And into ashes all my lust:
> The grave's a fine and private place,
> But none, I think, do there embrace. (25-32)

Under the guise of the rhetoric of "brevity of life", the speaker attempts to persuade his beloved by saying that her beauty will be not last with time. His youthful lust and her preserved virginity will also be turned into dust. The image of "grave" further unravels the uncertainties of life, so delay in enjoying sexual pleasure will merely be regretful in the end. The speaker further brings the image of sexual pleasure in the following lines:

> Now let us sport us while we may,
> And now, like amorous birds of prey,
> Rather at once our time devour
> Than languish in his slow-chapped power.
> Let us roll all our strength and all
> Our sweetness up into one ball,
> And tear our pleasures with rough strife
> Through the iron gates of life: (37- 44)

In the above lines, "Amorous birds of prey", "sport", "role all our strength" and "tear our pleasure" all suggest sexual activity. Throughout the poem, the speaker is wholeheartedly obsessed with the body of his beloved which too, is only for sexual pleasure. The speaker has objectified the body of his beloved. To say more

explicitly, she is sexually objectified. At the heart of this poem is the speaker's utmost emphasis on his beloved's youthful body only fit for making love, which brings his mindset of objectifying women's bodies—an agenda of body politics.

Conclusion

The poems by Song and Marvell, thus, are influential poems to show how women are the victims of body politics and objectifying gaze. The girl in Song's poem has become a victim of body politics, which drives her to obsess more over her appearance rather than her abilities. Consequently, she is in the process of applying elaborate makeup to customize her body. It is because she expects to increase her value in patriarchy-unleashed social setups. The beloved in Marvell's poem also undergoes the objectifying gaze of the male. The speaker is gazing at her bodily parts to have sex with her. For the speaker, as long as she remains attractive, his affection holds meaning. This reflects the speaker's underlying belief in patriarchal ideals, where a woman's worth is often judged based on her appearance rather than inner qualities. The politics of exaggeration executed by the speaker in the poem are solely guided by the utilitarian purpose of the female body. The poems, if critically observed, are capable of sensitizing women to go against the body politics and objectifying gaze that drive them to conform to monolithically set ideals and socio-cultural imperatives regarding the female body. The body politics and objectifying gaze mar the schemes, skills and scholarships of women and contribute to reducing them to passive objects rather than active subjects. It is, therefore, imperative for women to be aware of the false ideology of body politics before they are entrapped and subjugated under it.

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Review of Anisur Rahman's
Hazaaron Khwashishein Aisi:
The Wonderful World of Urdu Ghazals

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[*Hazaaron Khwashishein Aisi: The Wonderful World of Urdu Ghazals*. Anisur Rahman. Harper Collins Publishers, 2019, 456pp.]

Anisur Rahman's *Hazaaron Khwashishein Aisi: The Wonderful World of Urdu Ghazals* opens with a couplet from Ghalib's ghazal:

> *Hazaaron khwashishein aisi ke har khawahish pe dam nikle*
> *Bahut nikle mere armaan lekin phir bhi kam nikle*

Which Rahman translates differently from other translators:

> Desires in thousands I had, for each I would die
> With many I had luck, for many I would sigh

It is from this very couplet the title of the anthology is drawn. It has seven sections of translations of ghazals composed by sixty-five Urdu poets, from South Asian countries. *Hazaaron Khwashishein Aisi* is not like seven connected parts of the whole, but rather as seven snapshots of sample, Urdu ghazals during more than five centuries. Rahman, in the "Translator's Note", points out:

> I have identified seven literary periods and selected sixty-five poets to create a historical perspective and show the development of its poetic form in each translation. (452)

Rahman tries to retain the remarkable position of each *sher* by finding space for all units of ideas. Perhaps that is why Tabish Khair's 'Foreword' to the collection points out: 'it enables the readers to dip into the sample this rich world of letters, imagination, emotion, and thought'. He also discusses the earlier translators' attempts and the liberties they have exercised with punctuations in the English versions that have reduced the flexibility of the Urdu originals. But Rahman tries to minimize the 'tyranny of punctuation'. In the "Preface" to the compendium, Rahman discusses at length, the brief historiography of ghazal from Abdullah Jafar Rudaki, the first canonical ghazal writer of Persia from the ninth century to Aftab Hussain born in 1962 in Pakistan and based in Austria, one of the contemporary voices. In India, the ghazal found its 'hospital destination' during the 13th century in the works of Mohammed Quli Qutub Shah with its metaphysical beginnings. It later flourished under the Qutub Shahi dynasty of Golkonda when it received patronage from Mohammed Quli Qutub Shah, (1565- 1611), who was an avid poet of Deccani Urdu (a variant of Urdu) in his own right and also the ruler. He established the city of Hyderabad. Rahman points out:

> Poetry in the Deccan had a rich variety of sources to draw upon. It reflected the communal harmony of land represented its flora and fauna, absorbed the linguistic habits of its folk and recorded literature, and finally negotiated with the Persian influences without being unduly swayed by it. (20)

Another significant poet of the metaphysical period was Vali Deccani also known as Vali Gujarati. He was deeply interested in the mystic traditions of India. He is regarded as, 'a master image maker and innovator of refreshing similes and metaphors…'. Vali says:

> *'Ab judaayi na kar, Khuda soon dar*
> *Bewafai na kar, khuda soon dar(30)*

Rahman translates as:

> Don't part with me now, fear, God
> Don't break my love you, vow, fear God(31)

During the 18th century, Urdu poetry flourished into the *age of enlightenment* in the hands of Mir Taqi Mir, Khwaja Mir Dard, Siraj Aurangabadi, and others. New idioms and metaphors came into the form that expressed a sense of acute emotional and physical dislocations. Like others Mir's poetry ferrets out his despair and

philosophical reflections, broader manifestations of life and the world, he says:

Rafatagaan mein jahaan ke hum bhi hain
Saath us karwaan ke hum bhi hain (64)

Rahman translates:

Of those who left the world behind I too am one
Of that very passing caravan, I too am one (65)

The late 18th and 19th centuries witnessed the flourishing of two schools of Urdu ghazal in Lucknow and Delhi. The period is often billed as the 'golden period' and as the 'age of romance and realism'. The traditions which were established during the last four centuries reached their poetic excellence in the hands of Syed Inshallah Khan Insha, Qalandar Baksh Jurat and others in Lucknow; while in Delhi, major poetic voices were Bahadur Shah Zafar, Asadullah Khan Ghalib, Momin Khan Momin, Nawab Mirza Khan Dehlavi, Shaikh Ibrahim Zauq and others. The age also witnessed the rising popularity of mushairas. It gave rise to the new idiom, syntax and lexicon in poetry. Lucknow poets were more inclined to delicate human passions while in Delhi, poets heavily depended on Persian phrases. Bahadur Shah Zafar writes:

Baat karni mujhe mushkil kabhi aisi to na thi
Ab hai jaisi teri mehfil kabhi aisi to na thi (86)

Rahman translates it as:

It was never so very hard to speak, but now
Your assembly was never so bleak, but now (87)

After the First War of Independence, in 1857, modern sensibility gave rise to new liberties in ghazal poetics and poets such as Khawaja Altaf, Hussain, Ali Shahid Abadi, Hazrat Mohani, Mohammed Iqbal, Fani Badayuni, Jigar Moradabadi, and others. Firaq Gorakhpuri too belonged to the 'school of modernism'. They delved into traditional references to find space for the mundane and the metaphysical. Firaq writes:

sukoot-e shaam mitao bahut andheraa hai
sukhan ki shama jalao bahut andheraa hai (178)

Rahman translates:

Let not the quiet of dusk grow, it is too dark.
Let the flames of words glow, it is too dark. (179)

The next section of the book is about "progressive poets". According to Rahman, ghazal during this period was charged with Marxist ideology. It disengaged itself from cliches, and nurtured the spirit of decolonisation, the poets who wrote in this grouping were Asrarul Haq Majaz, Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Jan Nisar Akhtar, Majrooh Sultanpuri and others. Faiz Ahmad Faiz writes:

mit jaaegi makhlooq to insaaf karoge
munsif ho to ab hashr utha kyun nahi dete (196)

Rahman translates it:

When will you give verdict? After the living will perish?
If a real judge, why don't you pronounce a doomsday? (197)

During the mid-20th century, the majority, of progressive poets experimented with the form and content of ghazal that gave rise to the 'New Poetics". They lived in 'an increasingly shrinking world of migrations and diaspora belonging and estrangement'. They evolved a unique diction with fresh usage of metaphor and moods. they focused on major contemporary historical events in their poetry, such as India's Partition, 1947, the Indo-China war, 1965, India's nuclear experiments and Indo-Pak wars and several other similar incidents. Leading poets were Shah Munir Niazi, Jaun Elia, Ahmed Faraz, Basheer Badr, Shahryar, Nida Fazli and others. Shahryar says:

zakhmon ko rafu kar lein dil shaad kaarein phir se
khwaabon ki koi duniya aabaad kaarein phir se (346)

Rahman's translation is:

Let us stitch our wounds, let us make merry once again.
Let us find a world of dreams, let us roam it once again (347)

Shahryar's experimentation has a unique sense of absorbing traditions in it. The last section of the book 'Beyond New Poetics' focuses on the last two decades of the 20th century and early 21st century. The ghazal has come of age and now flourishes in contemporariness not only in South Asia but across the globe wherever South Asians have dispersed. Poets have an infinite passion for life and art, they engage with modern and post-modern paradigms in their poetry, and philosophical and mystic aspects are also covered. Rahman points out:

These poets, citizens of a larger world have chosen to defy social, and political, polarities, and speak in the language of common aspirations to compose a literary culture of greater inclusivity and strength. (388)

Interestingly, quite a few women ghazal composers have made significant contributions such as Praveen Shakir and Ishrat Afreen and others.

Praveen Shakir writes:

tera ghar aur mera jungle bheegata hai saath- saath
aisi barasatien ke baadal bheegata hai saath- saath

Rahman's translation is:

Both your home and my jungle get wet together
Such heavy rain. All clouds get wet together.

Both Shakir and Afreen are apprehensive about social biases against women.

Rahman's *Hazaaron Khwashishein Aisi: The Wonderful World of Urdu Ghazals* is a detailed account of the pretext, text and context of the ghazal. The poets and their ghazals shortlisted in the volume have contributed to the canon through the ages. The translations, never violate the structure of rhythm and end rhyme of any composition, Rahman reiterates in the 'Endnote' that:

The neutrality of gender and interchangeability of male, female and the divine makes the ghazal a complex site for the negotiation of meaning. (453)

According to Tabish Khair, 'the volume is a work of love, skill and scholarship'; on the blurb, Keki N Daruwalla feels that Rahman is, '…any translators envy'. Debjani Chatterjee believes that 'it is an exciting literary rollercoaster journey for its readers'.

It is a must-buy book for ghazal lovers because the ideas behind the translated ghazals are compelling and somewhat large in scope. The translator attempts to make connections across generations, decades and continents. Indeed, Rahman's style is a great gift, the multiple parts of each text wedded together beautifully. What seems clearest is his felicity with the language and canon, identity and effect. *Hazaaron Khwashishein Aisi,* harnesses and displays canny powers of precision and grace. The book is a precious gift for one and all.

2

Nostalgia and Renewal: A Lyrical Trope

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[Review of *When My Mother Sang: A Collection of Poems* by Subhransu Maitra, Penprints, Kolkata.2023. Pp 83]

*TDB College, Raniganj, West Bengal*When My Mother Sang is the debut poetry collection of Subhransu Maitra, a renowned translator and writer. The collection is a medley of 62 poems that touch on multiple issues, which though apparently nondescript, take on archetypal proportions. Maitra's poems traverse thoughts, incidents and entities that transport the reader to the past, shock them into the contemporary and even provoke them to squint into the future. The title poem 'When My Mother Sang', also printed on the cover of the book, strikes a chord of loss and nostalgia that also reverberates in the cover picture, in the peeled wall paint, the knocker on the wooden door, the Victorian seater and portrait of the lotus and bud framed on the wall. When his mother sang Tagore's invocation of renewal from her 'cramped attic' as a 'bird-like invalid', the juxtaposition of revival in his dying mother's song nudges the core of the reader's heart.

The collection of 62 poems comprises of many dedications to icons of poetry and music such as Jayanta Mahapatra, Shankha Ghosh, Omar Khayyam, Chad Walsh, Suchitra Mitra and Hemanta Mukherjee; and even symbolic sites of the identity of new Bengal such as College Street and Coffee House and even the turbulent Kolkata of 1970-71. In almost all his poems the poet is deeply introspective. The words, lines and progression of thought breathes a quintessential simplicity that evokes a lyrical resonance. The 'distant sunlit flower'(15) sends him on a mode of reversal as he contemplates another spring when the Viceroy and the leaders of the subcontinent

were brainstorming the division of India through partition in 1947. That he satirically describes as:

Courts, prisons and assorted structures of
The blood-dimmed satire of partition freedom
                                    Truncation ('Should the Flowers Eventuate', 15)

Maitra is by no means chained to tragedy and nostalgia of the past. In the poem 'Unlocking' he touches on the most recent denizens of psychological destruction.

The Bell tolls
Switch off the cell phones
Tear down the towers.
Abolish the net
Heed the call
Stop your earth-shattering Wall Street
                                    Dalal Street chatter. (28)

The poet travels through spaces, ages, and generations with easy elan. He boldly discusses the gang rape and murder of a dalit woman and its shameful political cover-up. ('Gravitas' 30-31) With incisive cynicism he refers to Nissim Ezekiel's 'Professor Seth' along with Gandhiji and the 'peaceful Sanatana Indians' concluding the poem with the cynical line:

"We worship our women as Devi" (31)

Along with such contemporary concerns, Maitra conglomerates the present, the past and the mythical in a cycle of re-evolution. When he describes present Kolkata as 'faecal excremental city' with a 'mudflat womb', mentions Ram Mohan Roy and Macaulay and ties them up with

"…Satyrs Centaurs Apsaras Vidyadhars Gandharvas
Trapped in Mahamaya's tropic trance…" (36)

he reveals his suppressed, simmering anger at the universal tragedies oh human history. In many of his poems, mundane Kolkata takes on mythical proportions. In his poem 'Pandemic Thoughts' he asks an existential question regarding the progress of science, globalization and glo-calization and yet one feels as if he has regressed into 'being a desolate island'. (41) Maitra's fascination with Kolkata is interesting and evident in many of his poems. Without flamboyantly romanticizing this city he details all its dusty, murky,

dark corners; unfailingly drawing a pen picture of a living, pulsating urbanature.

When all the poems are considered together, the poet appears to straddle the universe through his beloved city, his revered poets and singers, his mother and numerous incidents of the present and past. He attempts to charter a trajectory of human thought, belief, and action. Despite the apparently soft, almost lyrical cadence of most of the poems, he uses raw and harsh similies that jolts the reader out of his/her somnolence. He describes the sun as 'fatuous, feral' (Raison d'etre, 81). The metaphor of the 'pariah kite' is used multiple times in separate poems- 'a pariah kite on a declining rainy day'(Artifice,54) and while talking of the torn pieces in Gaza and Israel he says:

> Who the hell are the murderers sadist cannibal
> politicians and heads of states - guilty
> of infernal crimes… (13)

Maitra describes the 'great guardian trees' having 'naked ragged bows' when he attempts to place the Coffee house and College Street between the British Raj and post-independence Modern India. He describes them as 'two amorphous centuries' and 'two celebrant lacerating centuries'. In "Kolkata 1970-71" he boldly writes:

> Acute necrosis smote the city
> Threatening to chew through the land. (25)

Certain metaphors and images seem to recur in a repetitive manner through the poems whose echoes appear to string them into a cohesive whole. Notable among them are the tropes of spring, of rebirth, of a transient permanence that subverts the onslaught of disaster, of history, of myth, of certain vernacular words and motifs that ensure that these poems will abide for a long time to come. He does not allow the reality of death and departure to cloud his horizon; rather he supplants them with images and hints of a neo-resurrection that reaffirms the cycle of life-death-rebirth.

His love for his own city Kolkata pulses through most of his poems though. The city for him is a living, breathing entity that may be criticized but never disregarded. The poet's sensitive gaze records minute details that often escapes our glazed vision. At the end Durga Puja, the poet watches with compassion, the young, "ragged boys"(Raison d'etre, 81]who dismantle the Durga Puja structures and

prays to the holy Mother for their safety and better life. Spring for Maitra is akin to a life force that oxygenates the psyche and a ray of hope and indomitable strength. His repertoire is as wide as the history of human civilization. In 'On the Edge of the Stream' he describes Gautama driving through Kapilavastu, differentiating him from the Buddha who later achieved *nirvana*. He highlights the bloodbath of Dhaka on 21st February, 1952 ("Mysterious Mocking Fatality", 65) and the narrator's fugitive life across India (Chad Walsh, 57)

Every poem in this beautiful collection is a saga is a statement of the sensitive vision of the writer. His felicity of words, unexpected yet apt descriptions, the liminal use of ornamentation and a simple, soft, lilting style ensures good reading and provokes inquiry in the mind of the reader.

3

Nostalgia Unveiled: Ruskin Bond's Ode to the Heartwarming Past in *The Golden Years*

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Ruskin Bond's *The Golden Years: The Many Joys of Living a Good Long Life* is an exploration of nostalgia and enduring moments from the past. Through his evocative storytelling, Bond transports readers to a vivid mosaic of recollections, where the memories of bygone days resonate deeply. Renowned for his enchanting tales set in the scenic landscapes of the Indian Himalayas, Bond's latest offering, *The Golden Years*, diverges from his typical works, taking a unique and introspective turn. This book stands out as a distinctive addition to his literary repertoire, offering a profoundly personal journey. Returning as the venerable storyteller of the Indian Himalayas, Bond's narrative is both a gentle embrace and a testament to the grace of aging. In *The Golden Years*, he weaves together wisdom, fond memories, and insights, providing readers with a touching and insightful exploration of the art of living well in later stages.

The author explores the last two to three decades of his life in the book, sharing the wisdom and experiences gained in his 60s, 70s, and 80s. This work transcends mere memoir, evolving into a heartfelt guide for embracing the latter stages of life with openness. The narrative centers on the protagonist's journey from youth to old age, vividly brought to life by Bond's descriptive prowess and keen observations. His writings serve as a beacon of hope for those concerned about their own golden years, portraying a life rich in experiences and embracing aging with grace. Bond offers a profound

perspective, asserting that these later years can be some of life's most fulfilling.

Structured into 60 brief chapters, Bond's narrative captivates readers from the very first page. Each chapter is like a short story in its own right, serving as a microcosm of Bond's life experiences, thoughts, and lessons. He peels back the layers of his existence, sharing not just the highs but the lows, the challenges alongside the triumphs, and in doing so, presents a holistic picture of what it means to grow old with contentment. The narrative is a gentle, meandering stream, allowing readers to immerse themselves in the stories, anecdotes, remembrances, observations, and witticisms. While the narratives flow smoothly, there are moments when the pacing feels fast. Nonetheless, this hurried tempo makes reader feels the intricacies and sentiments that Bond masterfully portrays. His storytelling is a soothing salve for the soul, evoking laughter, tears, and an unshakable sense of nostalgia. As he reflects, "White, purple, magenta, those fresh-faced flowers nodded to me as I played on the lawns of the Jamnagar palace grounds and today, more than eighty years later, whenever I see the cosmos in bloom, I go among them, for they are eternal, even if I am not (71)." Through first person narration, the writer nudges us to rekindle our love for the simple pleasures, be it in a good book, a leisurely walk, or the embrace of nature. In one poignant moment, Bond reflects on the beauty of his surroundings, expressing, "I would go for long rambles, exploring the hillside, a mountain stream, hilltops and meadows, and I would often come across flowers that I had not seen before - clumps of wild primrose, traveler's joy, balsam commelina, periwinkle, buttercups…" (103). This vivid imagery not only encapsulates the tranquility he finds in nature but also underscores the profound connection between his personal experiences and the broader themes woven throughout his narrative. Bond's ability to find joy in the simple yet exquisite details of life becomes a powerful testament to the enduring beauty of the human spirit, inviting readers to join him on a reflective journey of appreciation and fulfillment.

What distinguishes *The Golden Years* is Ruskin Bond's adept ability to capture the essence of growing up, chronicling the follies and learned lessons that shape an individual's journey. Against the backdrop of this coming-of-age narrative, Bond imparts a timeless

wisdom: "Egotism, self-esteem is a self-destructive folly that has eaten away at the minds of men over the centuries, producing tyrants and dictators who can see and admire no images other than their own" (127). This serves as a poignant reminder of the destructive nature of unchecked egotism and self-absorption, a theme seamlessly woven into the fabric of the characters' experiences as they navigate the complexities of life and self-discovery. The memoir highlights various other themes, including love, loneliness, dreams, food, and notably, the sheer joy of reading. Bond's reflections on reading are particularly delightful, portraying it as a consolation, a lifelong intoxication, and a remedy for the restless mind, resonating with fellow bibliophiles. In one introspective moment, he humbly shares, "To be honest I am more a reader than a writer, but I will not read anything that I thrust upon myself; I like to make my own discoveries" (54). This candid revelation not only unveils Bond's personal approach to literature but also underscores the profound connection between the acts of reading and a journey of self-discovery.

The Golden Years serves as a poignant reminder that age need not signify the end of creative pursuits. Bond acknowledges social tendencies for retirement or reduced ambitions in old age but firmly asserts that creativity and passion need not wane with the passing years. To him, "the nice thing about growing old is that it gives us more to write about- all those years of love, friendship, adventure, achievements, a changing country, a changing world, changing ways of life, history in the making" (1). In a world often engaged in celebrating youth while fearing aging, Bond's perspective is refreshing. He argues that the later years can be a treasure trove of experiences and wisdom, providing an opportunity to indulge in childhood nostalgia and appreciate the beauty in life's small, often overlooked details: "Gradually those flowers and trees and the mountain stream found their way into my stories- 'The Cherry Tree', 'A Prospect of Flowers', 'Rain in the Mountains'- and instead of being distractions, they were now a part of my work as well as part of my life" (105). This illustrates Bond's philosophy, revealing how the seemingly mundane aspects of life, like flowers and trees, have evolved from mere distractions to integral components of both his storytelling and his existence. Through this integration, he not only

finds a harmonious balance between the past and present but also transforms his personal experiences into literary creations. He encourages readers to rekindle their inner child, revel in simple pleasures, and stay engaged in their life's work, whatever that may be. The narrator's reflections offer solace and inspiration to readers of every age bracket. Whether standing at the threshold of these years, firmly entrenched within them, or still a distant prospect, Bond's storytelling possesses the ability to cultivate an appreciation for the present. He advocates savouring life's beauty, relishing simple joys, and discovering contentment in each moment, irrespective of age.

Bond's lyrical prose captures the essence of his well-lived life, portraying vibrant adventures, misadventures, and unforgettable moments that shaped crucial life stages. His words, filled with authenticity and optimism, express a timeless truth: "When all the wars are done, a butterfly will still be beautiful…nature will reassert itself and gradually, over a period of time, the trees will recover and will come into new leaf" (139). His writing reminds us that beauty and renewal persist, even after tough times. It stands as a testament to his genuine love for unpretentious love for optimism. His passion for storytelling shines through every word, encouraging readers to pursue their interests for the sheer joy of it. "For you are a reader of the printed word, and those who have read widely- of philosophers, saints, great men, failed men- have acquired a knowledge of human nature and are better placed to make the right choices" (123). A notable quality of the book is the simplicity and elegance of Bond's prose. While undeniably eloquent, his writing is devoid of the ostentation often associated with literary works. His words flow naturally, akin to a conversation with an old friend, focused not on impressing but on sharing, enlightening, and uplifting.

Ruskin Bond's *The Golden Years* echoes the spirit of Diana Athill's *Somewhere Towards the End* (2009) as both share a common theme in their reflections on aging and life's journey. Both books draw from the authors' rich life experiences to explore the challenges and joys of growing older. Athill, with her candid and reflective style, and Bond, renowned for vivid storytelling, impart wisdom and life lessons for navigating the later stages of life. Emphasizing the importance of cherishing the present, both works encourage an appreciation for life's simple pleasures. Nostalgia and recollections are integral,

painting vibrant portraits of experiences and people who have influenced their lives. Athill takes a more philosophical stance, delving into existential aspects, while Bond's approach is marked by unique charm; however, both authors contribute to the literary exploration of aging, providing varied perspectives on the subject.

The Golden Years is an ideal choice for those wishing to relive the enchantment of their own golden days and looking for a sincere guide to embracing the later stages of life with openness. Nevertheless, it goes beyond age distinctions, providing timeless wisdom and inspiration to appreciate life's golden moments. This book stands as a cherished contribution to Bond's distinguished literary legacy, gently prompting us to welcome life's journey with open hearts and open eyes.

Thus, Ruskin Bond's *The Golden Years* is an extraordinary literary expedition, a heartfelt tribute to the latter phases of life, and evidence of the enduring allure of a seasoned storyteller. It transcends being just a book; instead, it extends a sincere invitation to embrace the golden moments of life, relish its subtle intricacies, and value the delight of aging gracefully. Ultimately, it stands as a repository of wisdom, poised to be explored and cherished by all who delve into its pages.

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