ISSN: 2348-4772

LITERARY ORACLE

Vol.8, Issue II, December 2024

A Journal of the Department of English,
Berhampur University, Odisha, India

AUTHORS P R E S S

DISCLAIMER:

The contents of all the articles included in this volume do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors. The authors of the articles are responsible for the opinions, criticisms and factual information presented. The contributors are also responsible for ensuring the proper adherence to the scientific rules of writing and copyright regulations. While the editors have tried their best to carefully review, format and make necessary corrections in the manuscripts, if there are still any lapses, the onus lies only with the authors of the articles.

Literary Oracle is an indexed peer reviewed Journal of the Post Graduate Department of English, Berhampur university, published from New Delhi by Authorspress, India. ***It is indexed in MLA International Bibliography, Directory of Periodicals, UGC CARE Group II, ERIH Plus, EBSCO Host, Google Scholar, WorldCat, Crossref, JGate among others.*** *It publishes original articles on Literature, Language, Culture and issues related to environment, indigenous people and related fields. Interdisciplinary papers with relation to humanities and social sciences are welcome.*

LO is published twice a year, once in May and once in December each year. The last date for submission for the May issue is 31st March and the last date for submission for the December issue is 31st October, respectively.

Literary Oracle publishes Research articles, Book Reviews and Interviews.

The Journal does not charge for publishing. The pdf version of the journal will be available on the journal website. However, a meagre Article Processing Fee is charged.

Subscription: Individual: $50; 1500 INR (For two Issues Annually); Institutions: $100, 4000 INR (For Two Issues Annually)

For Subscription Contact: editor.litoracle@gmail.com

CONTENTS

1.

Living under Borrowed Skin: Caste Prejudice, Dalit Trauma and Surname Manipulation in Yashica Dutt's *Coming Out As Dalit: A Memoir*

Abhisek Das

Assistant Professor, Govt. General Degree College,
Paschim Medinipur, West Bengal, India

Abstract

The way racist culture is a scar on professed Western liberalism, downgrading a group of people as Dalits and belittling them to the extent of non-humans is a similar indelible blot on Indian society. As an inevitable outcome of the constant negation of basic amenities and honour to Dalits and subsequent marginalisation of them to the bottom of society, Dalits, in general, share a collective consciousness of their eternal doom in a Brahminical society. Reservation of Dalits in educational sectors and jobs in India, on the other hand, makes them easy victims of mass hatred of job-hunting higher-class Hindu majority who feel Dalits are much below the level of standard of general category students to get access to education and jobs. Thus, a constant trauma of being outcasts is lived by the Dalits even today, so much so that they often resort to faking high-class social order to avoid humiliation, ostracisation, and confrontation with traumatic memories occasioned by a caste-prejudiced society. This situation is a trauma in itself, as it involves suppressing one's true identity under threat from social injustice. Through a critical analysis of Yashica's memoir, the present article will try to locate this trauma in an educated, apparently privileged Dalit who, though after initial hesitations over her Dalit identity for a significant period of her life, retorts back to the world declaring her true identity, can never get away with it.

Keywords: collective trauma, reservation, identity, casteism, memory, social injustice

Vasant Moon in *Growing Up Untouchable in India: A Dalit Autobiography* says, "At a time when all the children in the neighborhood around her called their mothers "Ma," she taught us to

call her "Mother," like children of the elite" (Moon, v). Likewise Rohith Vemula in his heart-wrenching suicide note that was published in Bangalore Mirror on 18th of January, 2016 stated that "The value of a man was reduced to his immediate identity and nearest possibility. To a vote. To a number. To a thing. Never was a man treated as a mind. As a glorious thing made up of star dust. In every field, in studies, in streets, in politics, and in dying and living". There is no glory in a jackdaw's hiding under the borrowed feathers of a peacock. We all have been categorically taught the lesson since our childhood that "borrowed feathers do not make fine birds" ("The Vain Jackdaw"). However, we have never been encouraged to look into the reason that might have prompted the jackdaw to hide its identity under the finery of another bird. We never even addressed the issue of the projected binary in this fable, where the peacock is at the centre, and the jackdaw is evidently pushed towards the margin. However, such questions will surely surface with all their critical underpinnings once Yashica Dutt's *Coming Out As Dalit* is read. The fabled story of the jackdaw and Yashica's memoir are analogous in several aspects. As a jackdaw in our perceived notion of bird society has often been thrust to the outskirts of the society despite its being one of the most efficacious ones, Dalits and their contributions, too, are constantly relegated in a Hindu society where Brahmins rule as the peacocks.

Interestingly, Dalit counter-narratives have emerged relatively recently, given the long history of injustices they have faced from upper-caste individuals. Several factors contribute to the delay in Dalits expressing their pain and suffering. Lack of access to education for most of the Dalits is one reason that they very often fail to voice their concerns on proper platforms. In a society where Dalits have been continuously denied even the basic amenities required for survival, along with a simultaneous negligence of their human values, education is a far-off dream. Worst was the scenario in the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century when no specific law allowed an equal right to education for all. G.B. Nambissan testifies to the same in the following lines:

> The reaction of caste Hindus was one of continuous opposition to the education of those who, in their eyes, were fated to a life of ignorance. Official reports in the late 19th and early 20th century are replete with

> accounts of the many trials and tribulations of untouchable children who persevered to receive an education even in 'special' schools set up exclusively for them. (1012)

Even after independence, they did not have enough access to education that could have prepared the platform for them to come out and make people aware of the atrocities they go through in their lives. Erik Fraser points out that despite several social programmes and government policies, the "Dalit literate population still remains much lower than that of the rest of India" since upper-caste hostility towards them always finds one or the other way to block their path to education (1). There is ample evidence highlighting the disturbing state of Dalit education in contemporary India. These records indicate that government apathy and a lack of sensitive approach towards Dalits are the primary obstacles hindering their educational progress.

If the significantly lower rate of education among the Dalits is one reason behind their reluctance to express frustrations against social deprivations, along with several other reasons, a constant refusal on the part of the Government and even mass leaders like Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi to acknowledge the inherent problem with caste hierarchy is another reason that this issue of Dalit oppression has never been highlighted. Gandhi believed that the caste system gave Indian society the uniqueness of organisational unity. As part of a speech delivered in Madras in 1916, he said:

> The vast organisation of caste answered not only the religious wants of the community, but it answered too its political needs. The villagers managed their internal affairs through the caste system, and through it they dealt with any oppression from the ruling power or powers. It is not possible to deny the organising capability of a nation that was capable of producing the caste system its wonderful power of organisation. (160-61)

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, a strong advocate for the complete dismantling of the caste system, found no salvation in Gandhi's support for a modified form of casteism that did not strictly adhere to the caste hierarchy. In his article "Gandhism," Ambedkar tried to expose the insubstantiality of Gandhi's claim as a sympathiser of the Dalits by referring to a series of excerpts from Gandhi's writings as published in the Gujarati journal *Nava-Jivan* during 1921-22. One such excerpt in Ambedkar's own translation from Gujarati to English can be quoted

here to attest to the fact that Gandhi, despite being the self-proclaimed patron of Dalits, ultimately failed to fathom the root of the caste problem:

> To destroy caste system and adopt Western European social system means that Hindus must give up the principle of hereditary occupation which is the soul of the caste system.
>
> Hereditary principle is an eternal principle. To change it is to create disorder. I have no use for a Brahmin if I cannot call him a Brahmin for my life. It will be a chaos if every day a Brahmin is to be changed into a Shudra and a Shudra is to be changed into a Brahmin. (276)

Another prominent Hindu figure, the monk Swami Vivekananda, did not perceive the caste system prevalent in Indian society as a significant issue. While he criticised the enjoyment of privileges outside of the caste hierarchy, he did not acknowledge the harm that the caste system could inflict on society. M. N. Singh points out that though Vivekananda "strongly cautions that any privilege derived out of caste must be discarded completely," he sticks to the view that "the caste system results in prospering or progressing the society" (2). By incorporating the views of Gandhi and Vivekananda on the caste system in India, in contrast to those of Dr. Ambedkar, I aim to highlight how Indians often overlook the caste issue, treating it as if it does not require systematic eradication. This situation has not changed significantly even after sixty years of Independence. This is evident from the Indian establishment's refusal to recognise caste discrimination on par with racism or apartheid at the World Conference against Racism in Durban in 2001 (Berg 5).

Thus, Dalit issues have often been marginalised and ignored in the name of Hindu or national unity. Efforts have consistently been made to create a social environment that conceals the underlying social injustices faced by Dalits in various aspects of Indian society and life. Yashica, in the Author's Note to her memoir, has pertinently brought this to our notice when she acknowledges how, under present circumstances, she, for an extended period, even failed to acknowledge the silent working of Dalit oppression in our society:

> Before I started thinking deeply about it, like most of us, I never saw caste for what it really is – the invisible arm that turns the gears in nearly every system in our country. It's been working silently for so

> long that we have stopped noticing it, even though it exists all around us. (ix)

Yashica had always regarded her Dalit identity as a secret source of shame, which she attempted to conceal by adopting an upper-caste persona until she visited New York in 2015 to study journalism at Columbia University. To her astonishment, she noticed her black, gay, and Hispanic classmates share their stories of discrimination unhesitatingly with all. What surprised her even more was how the rest of her class sympathetically responded to their stories, something she had never imagined to have experienced in her life. This gave her the positive impetus to bring herself before the mirror by casting off her assumed upper-caste identity.

Yashica's account is largely different from any other available Dalit memoir in the sense that it does not talk about any physical torture or hardship because of direct social ostracisation and subsequent troubles confronted by these oppressed sections of the society. Instead, it is a subtle depiction of how caste hierarchy and its resulting discrimination always work everywhere in a Hindu-dominated Indian social structure. She seems to be bearing all the time a collective trauma that several Dalit communities have been facing from the inception of caste hierarchy. This trauma is operational so deep within Yashica's mind that she tries to find a solution to get away with it by manipulating her surname. Her surname, 'Dutt,' which can easily be mistaken for a Brahmin one, provided her with the scope to posit a false upper-caste identity. Creating and constantly maintaining a false identity is not only psychologically exhausting but can also be traumatising. The opening lines of the Prologue to her book offer a clear glimpse into this anxiety:

> Hiding one aspect of your identity is like leading a double life. You don't feel like you belong anywhere. You create masks to wear in each of your lives and switch artfully between the two. Eventually, the two blur together and you no longer remember who you were.
>
> Pretending to be from a caste that's not Dalit is something like that. And there are so many of us who are living this lie. We avoid talking about caste, hoping to somehow find a place in the world of upper-casteness that has been forbidden to us. (xi)

This hiding of real identity cannot be intrinsic to one's nature, and some social or related circumstances must induce it. That being Dalit is a shame, and she should not speak about it openly are lessons she learned not only from her family but also after going through excruciating experiences of discrimination every now and then since her childhood. Her mother, aware of the potential obstacles posed by caste discrimination, always encouraged her to focus on her studies and appearance, even going so far as to pressure her to maintain a false upper-caste identity. Representing a Dalit community and simultaneously being unable to pursue her dream of higher education for several family reasons, Yashica's mother left no stone unturned to admit her daughter to the best educational institutions, even in severe financial constraints. She knew very well that it could be the only ladder a Dalit could move upward the social hierarchy. Yashica, in her memoir, also tried to put forth this view that since Dalits do not have any support of upper caste family background or the necessary "connections, networks and contacts that go back decades" to get established, only proper education could provide them with the requisite platform to get through the journey of life (67). In the pre-Independence era, Jyotirao Phule, his wife Savitribai Phule, and Ambedkar all put emphasis on proper access to education for the Dalits to tear apart the shroud of untouchability clouding any prospect of their upward social mobility. Ambedkar especially realised its indispensability in a Dalit's life in enabling him to raise questions against years of unjust:

> On account of the caste system, they could receive no education. They could not think out or know the way to their salvation. They were condemned to be lowly; and not knowing the way of escape, and not having the means of escape, they became reconciled to eternal servitude, which they accepted as their inescapable fate. (AoC 17.5)

Once, when even the doors of elementary education were closed to the Dalits, they strove hard to get to the schools; now, when at least primary education has become more or less available to them, it has become their most challenging job to compete in an English-speaking smart world to which the upper-castes have prior access. In a news article published in *The Guardian*, the necessity of acquiring proficiency in the English language among Dalits has been described in simple terms when Amarchand Jauhar, a Dalit English teacher, is

reported as saying that "without English, nothing is possible for us Dalits." Even though this deference shown to the English language seems quite unnatural and a result of "our internalized colonial hangover" to Yashica, she, too, echoes an equal penchant for the English language followed in her family to jump over the caste barrier (21, 22). She does not hesitate to acknowledge that English has created a scope for her family to camouflage their innate sense of inferiority caused by their Dalit identity. Other than resorting to English education, Yashica's mother took several different measures to emulate people of higher castes, however snobbish they may appear to others. They went on to make such a show of their supposed superior class among their neighbours that, most often, it betrayed blatantly their frustration to reach the higher steps of the social ladder by any means. These "curated performances" like "movie nights, occasional eating out, socializing with Dad's few friends," devised to break out from their lower status, were often met with stiff financial constraints (20). Yet, they never stopped making a show of the higher class. Keeping a cow in imitation of Brahminical culture or taking pride in their daughter's asking for a "date" instead of "khajoor" at a family wedding were all done in a desperate attempt to mimic upper castes (22). Yashica, in her life story, highlights the disturbing reality of caste identification based on skin complexion. She shares insights into her mother's concerns about Yashica's complexion, which was "more wheatish/ tan than fair" (27). In an obsessive attempt to address this, her mother applied ubtan, hoping to make her skin glow like that of a high-caste girl.

All through these attempts to act as an upper caste, Yashica always knew deep within her heart that this feigned "Parashar Brahmin" identity might get exposed at any time, and people would start despising her for being a Dalit (35). She had another fear associated with the same lurking inside her mind all the time, and it was the fear of being categorised as a quota student or, for the same reason, accused as an undue receiver of Government benefits in respect of admission to educational institutions and entry to public sector jobs. In this regard, she expresses her fear, vexed with anger towards the masked upper castes who, on the contrary, make a false show of sensitive citizens and maliciously boast that they do not allow caste culture to intrude their sphere:

> 'We are post-caste,' we are told. 'Casteism is over.' We are chided for addressing the inequality our Dalitness saddles us with and are sharply reminded of the 'unfairness' of reservation. (xii)

Her argument against posing as an upper-caste despite being a Dalit is on the deeper level balanced upon this proposition that it is indeed required sometimes to retain an honourable position in this new age India since here upper-caste people have resorted to a new kind of caste slur by way of raising fingers to the aspiring Dalit students condemning them for getting undeserved opportunities everywhere despite being supposedly low on merit quotient. She has contributed several pages of her book and quoted records from different sources to show how void such a claim made by the higher class people is. She feels that caste discrimination has never vanished from Indian territory, only it has become more subtle and shrewd in its operation by proclaiming Dalits as undeserving in the new social space:

> Indian society doesn't create spaces for Dalits to flourish. Constitutional reservation allows Dalits to enter and survive in a system that tries to keep them on the periphery. The system is designed to keep Dalits confined to undesirable professions. Dalits who use the reservation policy to advance are accused of being 'opportunistic' for using their only option for progress. (3)

She also presents several other references to show how, in private sectors, including media houses, Dalits are carefully sidelined to make room for upper caste Hindus and severely criticises anti-reservation drives by a section of the society as the new forms of subjugating Dalits. She notes that "the notion that constitutional reservation is an unfair government 'handout' to Scheduled Castes and Tribes, who 'obviously don't need it' is absurd. It is a corrective measure that reflects the socialist policies of the nation state and is 1,000 years overdue" (71).

Yashica's memoir takes a dual course throughout its projection, where she has not only chronicled her upbringing and related struggles as a Dalit but also provided a detailed analytical backdrop to Dalit struggle in general with personal commentaries on it. Though this parallel description of the Dalit struggle, along with the narrative of her own, is understandably meant for those readers who do not have any prior knowledge of the concept of Dalit and Dalit struggle, it can also be taken to form the basis of a collective identity

out of several previous or contemporary narratives. Yashica did not personally endure physical torture or perform menial jobs such as scavenging, cleaning toilets, or skinning dead animals – tasks often associated with the Dalits. However, she did experience moments in life when she witnessed people openly expressing their hatred toward those considered to be of low caste. Thus, from her understanding of the caste history and her day-to-day interaction with casteists, she had come to realise what her low caste might have brought her to had she not hidden her real caste identity under the upper-caste garb. To anyone, this masking of identity is not and cannot be any happy solution to shy away from such a serious confrontation with caste rhetoric. So, in the case of Yashica, too, this hiding of identity is like bearing with a constant collective trauma in a conscious attempt to defer the possibility of her confrontation with the already dreaded reality. Yashica was acutely aware that one day, she might have to confront a harsh reality: her true identity as a Dalit could be revealed, and she might be rejected by the very circle that had so far treated her with a patronising attitude. This constant anxiety of potentially being discovered at any moment, in itself, is both traumatizing and exhausting. It is her knowledge of caste from her past readings and social encounters that she has come to form a trauma within herself that lingers for a lifetime. Thus, the author herself becomes an inevitable part of "traumatic realism," a term popularised by Michael Rothberg to indicate an operation of trauma in everyday activity. But this trauma can no longer be situated only in the body; rather, it transmutes to a psychological scar and forms the collective memory of trauma as enlivened repeatedly through various narratives. As Aarelaid-Tart puts it, "very often it is not the human bodies, but the world view of a given collective that suffers in a collective trauma" (43). The trauma that Yashica seems to be suffering from is indistinguishable from this collective trauma situated in a particular cultural history which, according to Alexander, "occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, making their memories forever and changing their future identities in fundamental and irrevocable ways" (1). However, from the perspective of Dalit narratives, there is not one single traumatic event. Rather there are multiple trauma narratives that

leave "indelible marks" on the collective psyche (Alexander 1). Cathy Caruth who proposes a Lacanian interpretation of trauma, finds its presence in "belatedness" of the experience (92). In contrast, Judith Herman locates trauma in its unsayability. Both these features of trauma are effective in Yashica's inability to face the Dalit trauma for a long period of time. So far, she always tried to get away from this specific realisation of the trauma and resisted traumatic moments of its occurrence in her life by any means. However, when at Columbia University she was asked to write down her personal story, she, for the first time, came to terms with her traumatic realism and heaved a sigh of relief for being able to express her pangs:

> I spent a few days thinking about what to write in the essay, and remembered the struggles of my great-grandfather when he wanted to attend school in colonial India. I soon gave up trying to come up with something else because I realized that I had no other personal story to tell, apart from the most obvious one of hiding my lower caste. So I wrote about my caste, about growing up Bhangi and learning to hide it. The shame I had carried around for twenty-seven years slowly started to vaporize with each click of the keyboard. (151)

Judith Herman's proposition that narrative has a therapeutic power to alleviate the effects of trauma here also seems to work for Yashica. As she continued writing her essay, her own narrative of trauma, she felt that all her feelings of shame about being Dalit gradually diminished.

Though her own narrative opens up the floodgate of her emotional angst, it is not until the news of Rohith Vemula, a Dalit student's death as a result of institutional discrimination, that she comes out declaring her own identity as Dalit. It is like confronting the collective rejection undauntedly, without fear of being ostracised or being marked for Yashica. However, the question remains whether she has been able to completely get away with her trauma since she has made this declaration from the vantage position of staying abroad, far from the locus of this traumatic journey, and the same concern becomes evident in her narrative, too. When she called her mother after making the open announcement of her Dalitness to the world, her mother felt relieved to learn that Yashica was in New York, out of the clutch of caste propagandists of India. Again, when she declares that she no longer wishes to work in India anymore after this

unmasking of identity, it pathetically betrays her association with lingering trauma:

> When I wrote the note in which I came out as a Dalit, I was sitting in a comfortable chair in a café in Chelsea, far away from my caste roots. Even before I wrote the note, I had decided that I wasn't going to work in an Indian newsroom again. So by outing myself as Bhangi, I didn't feel like I was putting my career on the line. If some people decided I was less worthy or less qualified because of it, I didn't have to work with them. (159)

Since confronting trauma does not necessarily mean the end of the traumatic journey, especially when such trauma is deeply imbued within the cultural history of the society, Yashica, too, cannot go beyond its tentacles outright by just declaring her true caste identity or by deciding to not hide any longer under the borrowed skin. Now, what so far remained a repressed concern for her has only become exposed before the world.

Works Cited

Aarelaid-Tart, Aili. *Cultural Trauma and Life Stories*. Kikimora Publications, 2006.

Alexander, Jeffrey C., et al. *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*. University of California Press, 2004.

Ambedkar, B.R. *Annihilation of Caste: The Annotated Critical Edition*. Edited by S. Anand, E-book ed., Verso, 2014.

Ambedkar, Dr. Babasaheb. *Babasaheb Ambedkar: Works and Speeches*. Edited by Vasant Moon, Vol. 9, Dr. Ambedkar Foundation, 2019, http://drambedkarwritings.gov.in/content/writings-and-speeches/dr-babasaheb-ambedkar-writings-and-speeches-vol-9.php

Berg, Dag Erik. "Sovereignties, the World Conference against Racism 2001 and the Formation of a Dalit Human Rights Campaign." *Questions de Recherche / Research in Question*, no. 20, Apr. 2007, Centre d'études et de recherches internationales, Sciences Po.

Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.

Dutt, Yashica. *Coming Out As Dalit*. Aleph, 2019.

Fraser, Eric. "The Dalits of India: education and development." https://www.e-ir.info/2010/06/23/the-dalits-of-india-education-and-development/.

Gandhi, M.K. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*. Vol. 15, pp. 160-61, https://www.gandhiashramsevagram.org/gandhi-literature/mahatma-gandhi-collected-works-volume-15.pdf

Herman, Judith. *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. Basic Books, 1992.

Moon, Vasant. *Growing up Untouchable in India: A Dalit Autobiography*. Translated by Gail Omvedt, Rowmann & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000.

Nambissan, Geetha B. "Equity in Education? Schooling of Dalit Children in India." *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 31, no. 16/17, 1996, pp. 1011–1024. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/4404063.

Pavan, P. "'The Value of a Man Was Reduced to His Immediate Identity.'" *Bangalore Mirror*, Bangalore Mirror, 18 Jan. 2016, bangaloremirror.indiatimes.com/news/india/killed-dalit-student-aspired-to-become-carl-sagan/articleshow/50628141.cms.

Rahman, Maseeh. "India's Outcasts Put Faith in English." *The Guardian*, Jan. 11, 2011, https://www.theguardian.com/education/2011/jan/11/learning-english-india-dalits-rahman

Rothberg, Michael. *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation*. University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

Singh, Mayengbam Nandakishwor. "Revisiting Caste in the Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda." Sage Journals, Vol. 10, Issue 1, May 1, 2018, pp. 1-9, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2455328X17744628

"The Vain Jackdaw and his Borrowed Feathers." *The Aesop for Children*, http://www.read.gov/aesop/073.html

The Wire Staff. "My Birth is My Fatal Accident: Rohith Vemula'a Searing Letter is an Indictment of Social Prejudices." *The Wire*, 17 Jan. 2019, https://thewire.in/caste/rohith-vemula-letter-a-powerful-indictment-of-social-prejudices.

2

Dynamics of Violence in the North East: An Environmental Turn in the Mizo Uprising

Aishwarya Banerjee

Junior Research Fellow,Department of English Literature, Language and Cultural Studies, Vidyasagar University, West Bengal, India

Abstract

War annihilates civilization and heralds a demolition of culture and human consciousness. Countless lives get stuck in this hell-hole of war and violence, unable to find an agency to escape the stagnation. North East India is often racked by multiple layers of conflict, which are visibly manifested in everyday life. The Mizo Uprising, or the *Ram buai* of the 1960s, is one of the faces of the multifaceted violence in the North East that witnessed an unprecedented assault on humanity. However, violence in the North East must be looked beyond surface-level manifestations in the form of "direct violence" to consider the broader aspects that remain below the waterline. The impact of war violence on the Environment has long remained unrecorded, rendering Nature the silent casualty of war. Malsawmi Jacob, whose novel *Zorami: A Redemption Song* addresses the trials and tribulations of her land during *Ram buai*, also touches upon the interconnection between genocide and ecocide through her poems. This article explores the ecological rhetoric of violence through Jacob's poems. It examines how the twenty-year-long armed conflict in the serene Lushai hills vandalised human lives and profaned the ecological space.

Keywords: Violence, North East, Mizo, Uprising, environment.

Introduction

Temsula Ao's stark description of her hills in the lines below uncannily resonates with Malsawmi Jacob's depiction of her conflict-ridden land in the poem "These Hills" where she talks about how gunshots disturb the silence of the night "staining green hills red" (84).

> But today
> I no longer know my hills,

> The birdsong is gone,
> Replaced by the staccato
> Of sophisticated weaponry
> Temsula Ao, "My Hills". (49)

Violence is generally conceptualised as a degree of conflict that manifests itself only when conflict heightens to a certain temperature. However, most authors in Jolle Demmers' *Theories of Violent Conflict: An Introduction* suggest no evidence that a higher degree of conflict will lead to higher forms of violence. Rather, violence is a form of conflict. As Brubaker and Laitin define, "Violence is not a quantitative degree of conflict but a qualitative form of conflict, with its own dynamics" (426). The first and the most recognisable form of violence is "direct" or "manifest violence" which includes physical and psychological violence. War, being relentless in its own content, unleashes brutal "manifest violence," transforming every serene place into a site of an acrimonious struggle among the political leadership of armed oppositions. The brunt is borne mainly by common people who often find themselves stuck in the crossfire of war violence. This "direct" or "manifest violence" forms only the tip of the iceberg, while other undiscovered forms of violence often evade the common eye. The environmental turn in the theory of violence has long remained unregistered, rendering Nature a silent victim of war violence. Environmental desecration can no longer be considered collateral damage of war violence; rather, it should be treated as a crime. The term Ecocide, which means "killing the earth," has descended from two Greek words, "oikos" (home) and "caedere" (to kill). The concept transpired for the first time at the Washington Conference on War and National Responsibility in February 1970. Notable bioethicist Arthur Galston, to whom the coinage is attributed, has used the word in response to the application of Agent Orange (herbicide) by the United States in the Vietnam War from 1961 to 1971. He discussed widely about ecocide at the conference,

> After the end of World War II, and as a result of the Nuremberg trials, we justly condemned the willful destruction of an entire people and its culture, calling this crime against humanity – genocide. It seems to me that the willful and permanent destruction of the environment in which the people can live in a manner of their own choosing ought similarly to be considered as a crime against humanity, to be designated by the term ecocide. (Galston)

Environmental lobbyist Polly Higgins has provided a more detailed analysis of the term ecocide as "the extensive destruction, damage or loss of ecosystem(s) of a given territory, whether by human agency or by other causes, to such an extent that peaceful enjoyment by the inhabitants of that territory has been severely diminished" (3). Ecocide initiates critical dialogue about guilt, responsibility, and justice, revealing the structural connection between violence against humanity and violence against Nature. Thus, the environmental turn in Conflict Studies is imperative to reevaluate conflict and violence regarding non-human scales and traverse a path toward a more dynamic conception of victimhood.

"Scorched-earth policy," which refers to the desperate obliteration of natural resources necessary for enemy sustenance, makes the environment the cause, tool, and paradoxically even the victim of war violence. In the year 1943, Germans flooded the Pontine Marshes with salt water, catalysed the breeding of Anopheles flies, and hindered the supply of fresh water to impede the advancing Allied Forces. The application of the toxic defoliant Agent Orange by the American forces in Vietnam resulted in appalling damage to humans and Nature alike. The retreating Iraqi army at the end of the Gulf War in the year 1991 unleashed a similar ecological terrorism by igniting more than seven hundred Kuwaiti oil wells and emptying umpteen numbers of oil barrels into the sea. Ecocide, thereby, is posited as both the weapon and the consequence of war where humans and Nature are prosecuted at an equal rate, fastening them in a palindromic genocide-ecocide nexus.

The cartographic construct of India's North East reflects a history of conflict and violence. The region has often been defined by separatist struggles against the Indian nation-state and the latter's attempts to crush it. The Mizo National Front initiated a similar secessionist armed struggle ("Operation Jericho") 1966. Even fifty-eight years after the initiation of the struggle, a gaping void can still be located in the documentation of the Mizo Uprising, as the environmental casualty has remained unaccounted for. Malsawmi Jacob, however, has endeavoured to address that gap in her work. The Mizo uprising has been archived in granular detail in her novel *Zorami: A Redemption Song*, which sheds light on the heart-rending experiences of the Mizo people during the Uprising. Equally

important are Jacob's poems that address her land's trials and tribulations, emphasising how the war on humanity is also a war against geography, territory and Nature. Jacob's *Four Gardens and Other Poems* is thus "infused with a rich mosaic of imagery, cultural nuances, social ethos, group laments, angst and reconciliation that confront both particular and imaginary circumstances in the daily acts of life" (Sarangi 7).

Historical Context: The Mizo Uprising

The Mizo Uprising, spanning twenty years from 1966 to 1986, is one of the most tumultuous episodes in the history of North East India. "Mautam" is a cyclic phenomenon occurring almost every fifty years in Mizoram, Tripura, Manipur, Assam, and Myanmar. This event is triggered by a mass flowering of a particular bamboo species across an expansive area when rats thrive in response to hefty supplies of bamboo seeds. Once these bamboo seeds are exhausted, the rats hunt stored grain, resulting in terrible "bamboo famines." In 1959, Lushai Hills, a part of present-day Mizoram, was devastated by a bamboo famine. The genesis of the Mizo Uprising can be traced back to the socio-political consciousness that led the members of the Mizo Cultural Society to shift their attention towards famine relief efforts, assuming the name Mizo National Famine Front or MNFF. Meanwhile, popular sentiments were rising against the neglect and inaction of both the Assam government and the Indian government. Unable to procure massive help from the governments during the famine, MNFF transformed into a political party, naming it Mizo National Front or MNF. Under the leadership of Laldenga, the MNF resorted to arms on 28 February 1966, declaring independence from India. The repercussions followed sooner when the Indian government designated Mizoram to be "a disturbed area," and the Indian Air Force ushered a series of aerial attacks dropping bombs in several parts of Aizawl on 5 March 1966. This heralded the twenty-year-long *Ram buai*.[1] Sanjoy Hazarika gives a vivid account of the Uprising:

> Four days after the rebel assault erupted on 1 March 1966, fighter jets of the Indian Air Force came screaming over Aizawl…It (MNF) had believed that there would be retaliation but not the scale of the counter-strike that followed, which smashed and burnt villages, molested and

> raped women, virtually displaced the district's entire population, destroyed property and tortured elderly men and youth. (96-98)

Just as the insidious grip of "manifest violence" extends to the human psyche long after they have been manifested, the impact of violence on the ecological space covertly breathes under the surface even after "political peace" has returned. Lushai hills, which boasted of verdant forest cover before the 1960s, witnessed a steep decline in the years of *Ram buai.* Aerial bombing, village regrouping and several other counter-uprising operations took a heavy toll on the environment revealing the bizarre face of Anthropocene. The wounds inflicted remain supine in the ecological consciousness of Lushai hills, paralysed by war. However, if there is one thing that the war cannot paralyse, then that would be words; the words that are shot from the barrels of poets, making the age-old proverb more accurate than ever that pen is indeed mightier than any sword.

Ecopoetry: The Genocide-Ecocide Connection

Kate Dunning opines that "ecological thinking"[2] remains hidden in the kernel of ecopoetry, and ecopoetry always surfaces with "the desire to issue a 'warning' of some kind" (69-70). It is imperative to heed this "warning" as ecopoetry provides a stark rendition of the prognosis of environmental catastrophe. Ursula K. Heise rightly suggests that eco-poetry is "related to the broadest genre of nature poetry but can be distinguished from it by its portrayal of nature as threatened by human activities" (437). In the Anthropocene age, man has assumed a logocentric position, and this influence is so overpowering that it has tampered with the ecological equilibrium. The ecological realm of the Lushai hills is intrinsically connected with the Mizo consciousness, so much so that their sense of the self merges in an umbilical bond with the land. The Mizo worldview upholds a symbiotic correspondence with Nature that delineates the quintessence of their existence. Against the backdrop of the Mizo Uprising, this relationship with Nature starts disintegrating as the history of physical violence in the Mizo community exists on a shared paradigm of ecological exploitation. Malsawmi Jacob's poems, while addressing the trials and tribulations of her people, touch upon the "ethical entanglement with the other" (Morton 47), thereby also dealing with violence on the non-human other during the *Ram buai*.

Her adamantine association with the natural world and concern for the ecological space make her poems a mouthpiece for the human and the non-human world, the people and her land, the Zoram, and the Mizoram.

In her poems, Jacob presents us with the profound intertwining of Nature's beauty with the grim reality of violence. The poet's grief over the transformation of the idyllic to the abhorrent functions is a stark critique of humanitarian and ecological decay. The juxtaposition of scenes in the poem "Roses, Tar and Blood," such as roses blooming in the garden and the sun and moon as erstwhile friends, with the brutal images of misdeeds and violence is a reminder of the discord between Nature and human beings:

> It would be fun to tell
> tales of sun and moon
> invent fanciful stories
> how they once were friends
> then quarrelled one day
> and parted ways (Jacob 82)

The severed relationship of humankind with Nature during the Mizo Uprising reminds us of the sun's fatuous trials to rejuvenate the soldier's body in Wilfred Owen's "Futility," evoking a sense of moral and environmental contravention. Just as the violence during the Mizo Uprising dampens the kinship between the sun and the moon in Jacob's poem, the sun's warmth is rendered powerless in restoring life to the First World War soldier in Owen's verse. Jacob wishes to write about more straightforward subjects. However, the sinister intrusion of violence in her land, defiles the sanctity of the ink of her pen and transforms it from the colour of the sky to the oppressive colour of tar. Through grim metaphors, Jacob conveys how war pollutes the purity of Nature, as blood and tar muddle in the streets, staining everything:

> But our land is smeared with dark deeds
> crimes so beastly no beast would commit
> So my ink becomes tar
> sluggish stinking sewage…
> treading down
> part of humanity
> spilling blood (82-83)

The desecration of the ecological space is typical of ecocide, where the structural oppression of human beings parallels the systematic devastation of Nature. The "sluggish stinking sewage" that the ink has metamorphosed into is a visceral depiction of the environmental degradation due to anthropocentric pursuits that defile both the land and its people. The poignant utterance "treading down part of humanity" associates itself with the concept of genocide, where the targeted killing of a particular community aligns with the targeted killing of the ecosystem. The poet's "pen" flowing with "blood" (82) can be viewed as a fervent image of the cyclical visage of violence where the universality of misery is represented through the indiscriminate nature of barbarity on both the humans and the environment. However, Jacob's poem, "Roses, Tar and Blood," does not only mourn for the losses; the poem also speaks of resilience. The image of "roses in your ruby beauty" blooming amidst the conflux of "blood and tar" on the streets captures the innate strength of Nature even in front of violence, thereby urging for an immediate need to restore peace to the land:

> Bloom away, roses
> in your ruby beauty,
> though blood and tar meet
> in the street. (Jacob 83)

Jacob's "Peace Land," with its graphic delineation of a ravaged Earth, is an allegory for the armed conflict marked by environmental destruction. The perpetrator/victim binary comes under serious interrogation in the case of ecological violence, as it often becomes difficult to categorise a specific perpetrator or establish a visible victim. However, the devastation of the natural world due to anthropocentric activities like war drives us headlong toward an irreversible eco-apocalypse. The eco-apocalypse is a direct consequence of ecocide as the organic and sustainable preservation of natural resources is superseded by mindless violence against Nature. The opening lines of "Peace Land" bring home the physical violation of Nature, hinting at the violence that is inflicted on a woman's body, thereby paving the path for an ecofeminist discourse:

> Earth lies lacerated, desecrated,
> plundered, groaning; her cries
> heaven will hear, her wrongs
> avenged. (Jacob 106)

This poem's recurrent use of vivid images of violence aligns with the accounts of the government's military strategy against the Mizo Uprising, which involved the aerial bombing of Aizawl and the scorched-earth policy, resulting in massive deforestation and habitat destruction. Prior to the 1960s, the region was covered by luxuriant evergreen forests. In fact, "The Inner Line regulation prohibiting entry of outsiders into Lushai Hills without obtaining prior permission from the Deputy Commissioner certainly helped in the prevention of the hill tribes and from the exploitation of forests by outsiders" (Vanlalruati et al. 1032). In such a scenario, the aerial bombing not only massacred the people living in Aizawl but also desecrated the lush forests of the hills. The deliberate usage of the environment as a weapon of warfare can be felt through the counter-uprising operations and village regrouping, which involved clearing vast tracts of forests and rapid resource extraction to create and sustain new settlements. Reports reveal that there has been a sharp decline in the forest cover by 914 sq. km (4.78 percentage change) between 1982 and 1987 (1034). The groaning Earth in Jacob's poem reflects this ghastly portrayal of the Lushai hills, where Nature became a silent victim of armed conflict.

Violence against Nature can occur both at a slow and fast pace. For instance, an oil spill or a nuclear disaster turns out to be "spectacular" violence or "fast" violence with identifiable perpetrators and victims. In contrast, instances of pollution, global warming, and climate change are more structurally ingrained, earning the name of "slow violence" as its trajectory is latent and long-drawn. Its consequences are far vicious, as Rob Nixon opines:

> By slow violence I mean a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all…We need, I believe, to engage a different kind of violence, a violence that is neither spectacular nor instantaneous, but rather incremental and accretive, its calamitous repercussions playing out across a range of temporal scales. (2)

The environmental cataclysm triggered by the Mizo Emergency fits into the category of slow violence, where the ecocide ran parallelly with the genocide but remained indiscernible to the common eye. However, the poem's subsequent imagery of a "Cleansing River" that

will "wash her wounds" and a "Healing balm" that will "soothe her sores" suggest an idea of hope and restoration. Nature, in spite of its wreckage, retains an inherent energy for recovery. This vision in the poem "Peace Land" resonates with resilience and speaks of the ability of ecosystems to recover from depredation:

> Cleansing river will wash her wounds
> healing balm will soothe her sores
> she will be renewed restored.
> Deserts will flourish with flowers
> fields and forests fruit as Eden
> and Snake's poison will be powerless
> Hunter and Soldier will leave their guns
> stalker will not be allowed to enter
> hatred and anger will be banished
> quarrel and fight will be shoved out.
> No hurting, no killing in this country
> the place only for lovers of peace. (Jacob 106)

Parallel to the concept of ecocide, the poem also highlights genocide, employing the metaphor of the "Snake's poison," which stands as a symbol of the vicious ideologies and brutal actions that caused ceaseless suffering to the Mizo people. However, the deserts eventually bloom and the poison turns "powerless" hinting at a hopeful overpowering of the oppressive agents. The image of "Hunter and Soldier" leaving "their guns" brings both the violators on an equal paradigm. However, the banishment of their weapons and the plea for "No hurting no killing in this country" imply that true peace means the cessation of conflict and the cultivation of ecological ethos deeply rooted in empathy and justice.

Violence in the Lushai hills heralded death and decay wreaking havoc on the silent land turning every home into a battlespace. The dense forest cover of the Lushai hills was a part of the Mizo identity, and ecological decay meant an erasure of their identity. The spatial colonialism of the Lushai hills has been poignantly captured by Jacob in her poem "Home no More":

> The Pine tree is cut down
> poinsettia too;
> red geranium, gladioli and dahlia
> all died, one by one. (92)

The expeditious demise of all aspects of Nature emphasizes the mindless violence hurled on the flora and fauna of Lushai hills. In her poem, "The Songster's Lament," Jacob continues to reflect on how the airspace meant for birds and insects has been drastically overthrown by blackbirds or the black fighter jets of the Indian army that hovered across the sky carrying out an aerial raid:

> When guns sounded in our land
> bombs shouted
> fire screamed
> cicadas stopped singing
> homes went up in flame
> hearths were razed
> the sacred profaned (Jacob 48)

Expressions like "fire screamed" and "cicadas stopped singing" reiterate the devastating consequence of war on the ecosystem. The cicadas falling silent is an ominous signal of the probable ecocide that the "Anthropos" had already committed, pushing Nature to the edge of her exhaustion. In another of her poems, "At the Fountain," Jacob warns against a similar omen of the land getting parched and the wells going dry, calling not just April but all the months as cruel. Angela Hume and Gillian Osborne, bringing home the concept of "ecopoetics," speak about an ethical liaison between humans and non-human other in which the former should exist on a plane that acknowledges the symbiosis with the latter. A negation of such a symbiosis, otherwise, becomes so lethal that it proves detrimental to humans. Ecocide often transcends the mundane physical domain to erase even the minutest association of humankind with its cultural space and land. Jacob's expression, "sacred profaned," in "The Songster's Lament" suggests a similar desecration of cultural sites integral to the well-being of the Mizo community and the entire ecosystem. The poet punctuates the destruction of homes and hearths with the devastation of Nature, highlighting the intricately woven ecocide-genocide nexus. The conversion of laughter to shrieks, as depicted in the following lines of "The Songster's Lament," is again a potent picture of not only the "spectacular violence" hurled on the Mizos of Lushai hills during the Uprising but is also indicative of the "slow violence" that the environment has been injected with. Sadly, the shrieks are so silent that they fail to reach the ambit of mainstream attention:

music fell silent
laughter turned to shrieks
dreams to nightmare
wild wolves prowled
fear stalked every street
songs curdled
frozen by night. (Jacob 48)

In this context, Rosanne Kennedy's "multidirectional eco-memory" holds true in which she elaborates on how the memories of human suffering are intertwined with the histories of sufferings of the non-humans and how they are placed "in an expanded multispecies frame of remembrance that could facilitate new visions of justice that hold humans responsible and accountable for our actions towards non-human species" (Kennedy 506). Nonetheless, there is a sense of optimism in the poem's last lines, where the poet waits for better days to come, for the sun to shine on their hills again. The hope for the dawn turning over the bamboo hills sets the tune of a longing for relief, renewal, and restoration where the broken kinship with the sun will be revived with greater intensity to make way for a world without violence and acrimony. Jacob concludes her poem, "The Songster's Lament," with such hope, "I'm waiting, waiting / Will the great bear turn around / over our bamboo hills?" (48). Jacob, in all her poems, not only suggests a crisis and warns against an ecological backlash but also envisages a world that runs on environmental ethics where humanity returns to Nature and exists in an equipoise with it.

Conclusion

Kate Dunning's concept of ecopoetry with its ability to "warn" reminds us of a similar stance when Wilfred Owen, commenting on the war and the "pity of war" says, "All the poet can do to-day is to warn" (ix). Both Owen's anti-war poetry and ecopoetry condemn human propensity for violence, revealing a common concern about destructive cycles of harm that intimidate humans and non-humans alike. Malsawmi Jacob's relentless attempts to document the physical and psychological scars of Mizo Uprising through her poems establish her poems as anti-war poetry, and her concern with ecology and the non-human world defines her poems as "ecopoems" as well. Her poems are a testament to the warning about the futility and

desolation of war. This is the reason why the unacknowledged legislators of the world, like Jacob, incessantly pose a rhetorical question to the acknowledged ones, and I quote Satyajit Ray here:

> O re Halla Rajar Sena
> Tora judhho kore korbi ki ta bol![3]
>
> O You King Halla's troops
> What will you gain from this war? (My translation)

Notes

1. Disturbance in the Land.
2. The expression has been borrowed from Leonard Scigaj. It is used in his work, *Sustainable Poetry: Four American Ecopoets*.
3. Satyajit Ray wrote the song for his film *Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne.* In contemporary times, it can be interpreted as an anti-war verse.

Works Cited

Ao, Temsula. "My Hills." *Songs of Many Moods.* Kohima Sahitya Sabha, 1995, pp. 49.

Craps, Stef, et al. "Memory studies and the Anthropocene: A Roundtable." *Memory Studies*, vol. 11, no. 4, 2018, pp. 498–515.

Demmers, Jolle. *Theories of Violent Conflict: An Introduction*. Routledge, 2017.

Dunning, Kate. "From Environmental Poetry to Ecopoetry: W. S. Merwin's Poetic Forest." *Merwin Studies: Poetry/Poetics/Ecology*, vol. 1, 2013.

Galston, Arthur. "War and National Responsibility." *Conference on War and and National Responsibility*, February 1970, Washington D.C.

Ghoshal, Anup. "Ore Halla Rajar Sena." *Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne*, Angel Records, 1969. *YouTube.*

Hazarika, Sanjoy. *Strangers No More: New Narratives from India's Northeast*. Aleph Books, 2018.

Heise, Ursula K. "Environment and Poetry." *The Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics*, edited by R. Greene et al., Princeton University Press, 2012.

Higgins, Polly. *Earth is our Business: Changing the Rules of the Game*. Shepheard-Walwyn, 2012.

Hume, Angela, and Gillian Osborne, editors. *Ecopoetics: Essays in the Field*. University of Iowa Press, 2018.

Jacob, Malsawmi. "At the Fountain." *Four Gardens and Other Poems.* Authorspress, 2017, pp. 104.

---. "Home no More." *Four Gardens and Other Poems.* Authorspress, 2017, pp. 92.

---. "Peace Land." *Four Gardens and Other Poems.* Authorspress, 2017, pp. 106.

---. "Roses, Tar and Blood." *Four Gardens and Other Poems.* Authorspress, 2017, pp. 82-83.

---. "The Songster's Lament." *Four Gardens and Other Poems.* Authorspress, 2017, pp. 48.

---. "These Hills." *Four Gardens and Other Poems.* Authorspress, 2017, pp. 84-85.

---. *Zorami*: *A Redemption Song*. Morph Books, 2015.

Kennedy, Rosanne. "Multidirectional eco-memory in an Era of Extinction: Colonial Whaling and Indigenous Dispossession in Kim Scott's *That Deadman Dance*." *The Routledge Companion to the Environmental Humanities*, edited by Ursula Heise, J Christensen and M Niemann, 2017, pp. 268–277.

Morton, Timothy. *The Ecological Thought*. Harvard University Press, 2010.

Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Harvard University Press, 2011.

Owen, Wilfred. "Futility." *Poems*, Chatto & Windus, 1921, pp. 25.

---. Preface. *Poems*. Chatto & Windus, 1921, pp. ix.

Sarangi, Jaydeep. Foreword. *Four Gardens and Other Poems,* by Malsawmi Jacob, Authorspress, 2017, pp. 7-11.

Scigaj, Leonard. *Sustainable Poetry: Four American Ecopoets*. University Press of Kentucky, 1999.

Vanlalruati, C. et al. "Mizoram Forest After India's Independence: Types And Resources." *International Journal of Advanced Research*, vol. 12, no. 7, 2024, pp. 1032-1040.

3.

Yellow Rice and a Misnomer: The Hyperreality of Bangla Biryani, Armchair Nostalgia and Refugee Identity in the Urbanspace of Agartala

Ashes Gupta

Dept. of English, Tripura University, Agartala, India

Abstract

This article, as a combination of life-writing and mnemonics, reads into the intricacies that 'Bangla biryani', a popular dish of yellow rice available at Bangla market of Agartala provides in terms of the intrinsic grid of refugee experience (both real and virtual) and imagined loss that simulates gastronomic (armchair) nostalgia, blurring the boundaries of physical space of the land of refuge and the imaginary homeland lost. Bangla biryani for me, in stark contrast to the lived experiences and the ruminations of a 'real' refugee dislocated from the homeland and subsequently relocated in the land of refuge, has actually been an 'invented tradition', a simulacrum[1] that emerged as a heady-mix of sensibilities infused by refugee food narratives of my grandma, the lived experience of my past in Agartala, familiarity with literature and films on partition and migration, as well as countless olfactory encounters with its aroma on the way past the Battala market and its iconic status, courtesy urban food vlogs flooding social media in the present timeframe, thus becoming a hyperreality. For third generation refugees like me born into refugee families, who lack the reality of the lived experiences of partition, forced migration and refuge, such cultural spaces as Bangla biryani offer scope to fabricate the authenticity of a refugee past never lived, except for repetitive episodes of engrossed listening to oral food narratives of the homeland. And in all its complexity and the problematic of its conceptualization and theorization, Bangla biryani presents itself as a space for engaging in an interesting discourse on refugee food narratives, authenticity and immediacy of its pastness and the processes involved in 'cooking up' a strain of nostalgia under the semblance of truth.

Keywords: Gastronomy, nostalgia, imagined loss, homeland, land of refuge, simulacrum, food narratives, partition, migration, food vlogs, mnemonics, hyperreality

Regina Bendix's words in *In Search of Autheticity* says, "Behind the assiduous documentation and defense of the authentic lies an unarticulated anxiety of losing the subject" (10) resonates with my argument in this paper. As I negotiated the dense traffic from Jawahar Bridge at Battala[2], I drove straight with Bangla market on my left. Amid the filth and squalor, the stink of rotting garbage of a municipality that did not care, I sniffed the wafting fragrance, distinct of that yellow rice sprinkled with fried peanuts and served with a bit of chicken curry gravy – the Bangla biriyani (spelt and pronounced 'biryani' in Agartala Bangla[3] and henceforth this shall be the mis/spelling to be used in this article). Immediately, my school days came to my mind as I sat insulated and secluded from the heat and dust of the jostling multitude – a sense of the forlorn gradually seeping into my being. I was alone in an alien world, far from all those who were very close once upon a time, but are now no more. Fleeting memories flashed by, of the altered trousers that I wore at school and college, my friends, my family precariously balanced on the middle class margins courtesy the efforts of my parents to make both ends meet, an occasional episode of my father carrying home the yellow rice which as a misnomer was known as 'Bangla biryani' and our joy at savoring this delicacy, since at that time we had no idea about authentic biriyani[4], neither Awadhi nor Hyderabadi[5]. Luxury was a faraway dream, but happiness, inspite of all its transience, was an immediacy.

Swapan Sengupta invokes Agartala, my hometown, positioned on the easel of memory like an unfinished wash painting:

> Bring me a huge brush,
> I wanna smudge off the heat from this city.
> you can paint rains,
> incessant, unending-
> let people get drenched,
> houses,
> streets and drains be drenched totally.
>
> On the face of this city let rain smear
> a retreat after wetting the ducks.
>
> ('Rain in the City', Swapan Sengupta, *Mystic Mountain*, p.42)

However, my Agartala was not a city yet, but a semi-urban settlement dotted with bamboo houses and a few intermittent haughty buildings. In putrid summer, I sniffed the coming of incessant rains – a relief from the occasional dampness of the spirit. The serenading evening glided across soundscapes of the blowing conch, young hesitant fingers across rickety harmonium reeds, frantic reciting of the primer peppered with interludes of a strange call to bring the erratic ducks back home "….aa..choi choi…..choi choi…"[6]. The night replete with fireflies, howling jackals and the occasional tingling of a cycle bell faded in stealthily as I lay huddled under a cozy quilt, waiting expectantly for the next dew drop on the tin roof to break the eerie silence. Life was simple – an almost linear affair, with an occasional lip-smacking gastronomic epiphany of chicken on a Sunday afternoon or mutton on Poila Baisakh – the Bengali New Year's day[7].

Evoking a nostalgic recollection of my small town bordered by Bangladesh on all three sides matters here, since its gastronomic culture and heritage are intrinsically interwoven with its topography and spatiality, its history of migration and its ethnicity. My hometown Agartala appeals to me in terms of synesthesia[8] – a unique sensual fusion. And believe me, for a 'virtual' refugee like me (virtual since I was born in Agartala in a refugee family that migrated to Tripura from Bangladesh and hence, cannot claim to be a 'real' refugee like my grandparents who were born in undivided Tripura[9] on the other side of the border), being brought up in a constant nostalgic ambience of food narratives from our 'Adibari[10]' in Medda village of Brahmanbaria district, Bangladesh, which I have never seen or visited, but which to me was more real than Agartala, I imagined life on the otherside of the border to be as idyllic as it happens in a Shirsendu Mukhopadhyay[11] story. Somewhere down the line the construct of the border separating India and Bangladesh was to me more of an abstract entity which I had almost symbolically annihilated, something that could not stop the fluidity of human movement, both physical and mnemonic.

The Bengali has always lived and thrived by the tongue, and as I chip in the almost archetypal bipolarity of the self-proclaimed sophisticated Ghoti (the original inhabitants of West Bengal who did not undergo migration or dislocation due to partition of India) vis-à-

vis the abominable Bangal (inhabitants of East Bengal and now Bangladesh), pushed to frenzied heights by the age old rivalry of the football giants Mohan Bagan and East Bengal[12] respectively, it becomes pertinent to underline the homeless Bangal refugee's tremendous gastronomic nostalgia in this discourse in sync with Ketu Katrak, the Indian American culture critic who suggests that culinary narratives, suffused with nostalgia, often manage immigrant's (read 'refugee' here) imagined returns to the homeland (qtd. in Mannur, 2007). The issues of memory, nostalgia and food are intertwined in the refugee psyche and relive themselves through triggers that operate in the alien land and landscape of refuge. Gastronomic nostalgia is an interesting term and its curious workings in the cultural context of a refugee deserve scrutiny and analysis, since food here serves both as an intellectual and emotional anchor, a refuge in itself. Research in culinary traditions and gastronomy invariably transcends immediate disciplinary boundaries by eliciting memories, ideas and discussions beyond and contributes towards identity formation as has been pointed out by Doreen Fernandez. This is also the aim of this rather queerly titled article that tends to read into the sentimental ramifications of a typically yellow coloured aromatic rice, courtesy turmeric powder, fried in cinnamon and cardamom for flavor, sprinkled with a handful of peanuts that is served in the Battala market of Agartala, also known as the Bangla market (Bangla from Bangladesh), Bangladesh market or simply Foreign market, but has no historical traces in Bangladesh (erstwhile East Pakistan) and neither does it lend itself to any gastronomic legacy beyond the immediacy of territorial Agartala, thus problematising the nostalgia evoked by it in terms of refugee mnemonics.

The dish known as Bangla biryani or 'Bangla marketer biryani' (biryani of the Bangla market), is overambitious in its nomenclature, since it is far removed from the delicacies served in the name of biriyani all over India (Hyderabad and Lucknow or Awadh to name a few) with their illustrious culinary histories that smack of royalty and aristocracy. This was a poor man's delight and hence to call it biriyani is a 'misnomer' in itself. But as the article explores the grid that this delicacy, courtesy its apparently ambitious nostalgic value, forms a part of, I attempt to come to terms with refugee identity, memory issues and gastronomic nostalgia that trigger associations and

recollections in the mnemonic space, often in curiously constructed parallels that are the inevitable inventions of a formative mind oriented by oral food narratives bordering on the bipolarities of hunger versus satiety, scarcity versus abundance, approximation versus authenticity in the context of the land of refuge vis-à-vis the lost homeland, as told by real refugees like my grandma. And I propose to view food as a complex cultural entity of the refugee Bangal that extends beyond the mundane kitchen of daily domesticity to offerings to supernatural realms of divinity ('bhog'[13]) and occult ('baraan'[14]). The same conceptually extends to the emergence of the multilayered construct of Bangla biryani as not just a simulacrum but a hyperreality in itself which in turn also highlights the schematic orientation of this article. True to Baudrillard's postulations, in this case too, Bangla biryani, inspite of all my research, did not show any original version that was traceable either in the geography of Bangladesh or in the narrative spaces of my grandma's food narratives. This article traces the way in which the simulacrum of Bangla biryani becomes a hyperreality in the complex negotiations of the listener's psyche oriented in his formative years by such narratives that blur the margins across the territorial domains of Agartala and the imagined homeland.

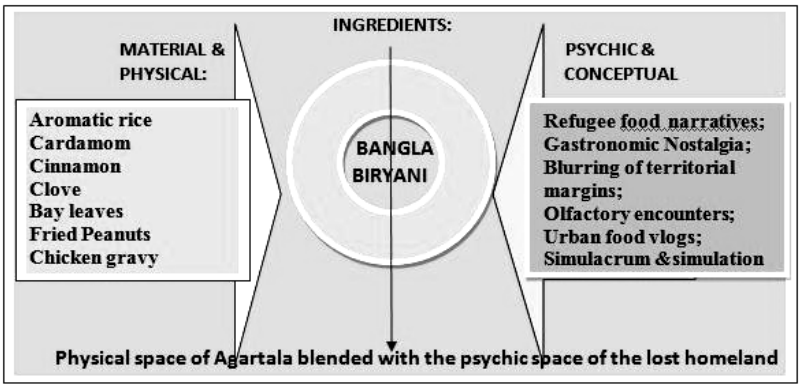

Fig.1.1. A diagrammatic representational attempt of Bangla Biryani as a space that provides for a convergence/blend of various ingredients at different levels and results in the formation of a hyperreality triggered by armchair nostalgia through the simulacrum of an imagined loss.

This attempt is not meant to establish a one-to one-correspondence between Bangla biryani and refugee identity as it

happens in the case of the food narratives of my grandma that range from delicacies like the palm jaggery payesh[15] whose aroma would float to distances unknown, or the humble taro[16] that transformed itself through a culinary miracle into an exquisite platter. And these narrativisations with their abundant use of superlatives to underline purity, plenty and palatability often bordered the risk of distorting real lived experience in the homeland that must have had its own share of poverty, scarcity, and criminality too. This article, on the other hand, tends to destabilize this usual monolithic and stereotyped relation that food, refugee identity and gastronomic nostalgia validates through taste and smell, since the trigger for gastronomic nostalgia for me here is not the food item itself, but the suffix 'Bangla' associated with the stem 'biryani', all the more because this form of 'biryani' never ever existed in Bangladesh as numerous personal interviews (Sanit Debroy, Manas Paul, Tirthankar Das etal.) endorsed. The name 'Bangla' (abbreviated for 'Bangladesh') weaves in a matrix of 'Armchair nostalgia' (Appadurai, 1996) in a third generation descendant of a Hindu Bangal refugee family like me, who has never ever been to the otherside of the border and to whom the imagined sites of authentic homeland food are a consequence of analogous food narratives of the real refugees like my grandmother, idealized and validated by notions of purity and authenticity. Curiously, the Bangla biryani had no mention in her stories owing to the fact that none of her food narratives ever transcended religious boundaries and food taboos. Chicken was a strict no-no in a Hindu Bangal household back in the homeland and for a longtime, till my grandparents were alive in Agartala, the land of refuge, it never gained entry into the kitchen, but was cooked, if ever due to the insistence of my father, in a corner of the courtyard on a makeshift Chula[17]. Gastronomic syncretism was totally absent in her lost homeland and both communities, Hindu and Muslim Bangals stuck to their culinary traditions. Hence, to speak about biriyani (a distinct Islamic fare) was unimaginable for a Bangla Hindu refugee girl, who graduated through marriage to widowhood, being an eyewitness to the human tragedy of partition.

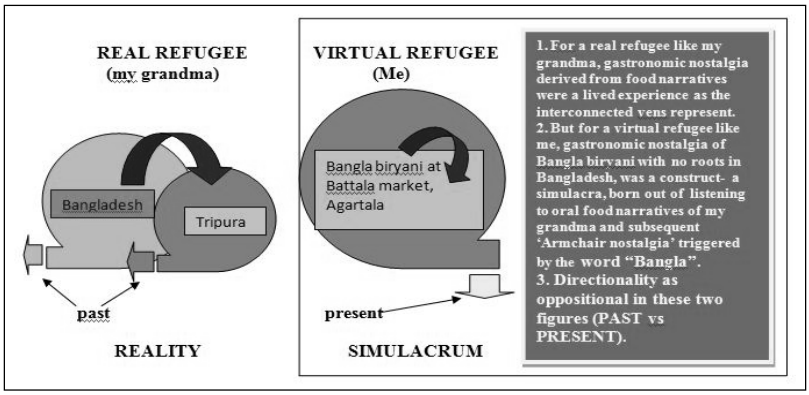

Fig.1.2 Food narratives and gastronomic nostalgia of a real refugee vis-à-vis the armchair nostalgia of a virtual refugee that transforms food like Bangla biryani and relocates it in the grids of refugee sensibility resulting in a simulacrum that becomes a hyperreality in itself. The former is directed to the past while the latter is rooted in the present.

The diagrammatic representation tries to make sense of this peculiar condition, a concoction where the limits of land and landscape starts getting overlapped and finally gets blurred as I imagine the loss of a land which was never mine, and instead of correlating this nostalgic mnemonics with the immediate site of Agartala town of my school and college days, I tend to extend it to a land that was my grandparents' home, courtesy the term 'Bangla'. The resultant construction through simulation of an 'imagined refugee experience' triggered by food narratives of the lost land born out of lived experiences of refugee narrators, concocted a virtual past for Bangla biryani and invented/wrote its culinary history in terms of partition, loss and refuge transfixing its roots in erstwhile East Pakistan now Bangladesh. And the word 'Bangla' prefixed to it as an indicator of Bangla market in Agartala, erroneously served as the catalyst and connector to the lost land of Bangladesh for me and many others like me. Hence for me the food item 'Bangla biryani' is a site of conflict, a hyperreality, having no authentic counterpart ever in Bangladesh (erstwhile East Pakistan) in conformity with Baudrillard's proposition, and yet being nostalgic in nomenclature courtesy my refugee heritage that stamps it with the geo-cultural tag of the lost homeland, blending the real and the imagined seamlessly.

Its inevitable that the 'inheritance of loss' that has been handed down to me by my Hindu Bangal refugee grandparents, especially my grandma Late Hashibala Gupta (my grandpa passed away when I was just three years old) has made the lost land and landscape (of erstwhile East Pakistan and now Bangladesh) more real than Tripura where I was born and brought up, such is the power of narrative performance. Nostalgia, like a time machine, does not only facilitate re-experiencing/reliving of the emotional past, but also triggers a longing for times and places that one has never experienced. It is pertinent to mention here that indigenous food practices of the Bangal refugee were inevitably determined by environment and place and were rooted in the availability of ingredients and specific farming techniques, a cultural heritage that was either lost or modified out of compulsion in the land of refuge. The refugee psyche sought cultural significations in specific food items in order to create collective identities of race and community in terms of territorial configurations synced with the coordinates of the lost homeland. And food also functioned as space for the refugee to reposition himself/herself and negotiate alienation in the unfamiliar and hostile environs of the land of refuge bringing in the notions of the authentic and the original in gastronomy. Cases in point are the annual community festivals such as Srihatta[18] Sammelan[19], Noakhali[20] Sammelan etc. organized by societies that represent their displaced migrant members both in India and abroad in all their culture specific performances, and are incomplete without feasts that cater to and uphold/ preserve the nuances of their varied culinary traditions (the authentic) against perceived threats of amalgamation and adulteration in the globalised food scenario.

This also operates in terms of scarcity as in the case of fish for a Bangal refugee migrated to Tripura during and post-partition, and the melancholic longing for 'authentic' Hilsa[21] from Padma River in Bangladesh. But it also extends further to the 'Hilsa diplomacy' of Sheikh Hasina towards India and the threat of banning hilsa export by Bangladesh's new regime during this year's Durga Puja, itself the result of a diplomatic fall out between the two nations courtesy the ouster of Hasina govt. Or for that matter, the dynamics of 'hunger' as conceived by the Bangal refugee hoarded in Sealdah station of Kolkata post-partition, and expressed as a desperate longing for

ricebran as substitute for rice, immortalized in corresponding Bengali literature and films of the 60s and 70s (films by Nemai Ghosh, Rittwik Ghatak etal). It's also symptomatic of food shaming that the Bangal refugee was subjected to, courtesy the stigma that the Ghoti harbored towards the abominable 'Shutkey' (dry fish) that was a staple of the former's cuisine. Interestingly, this practice of drying fish in the gastronomy and food practices of the Bangal was not born out of scarcity, since fish was abundanct in the lost homeland, but a strange and curious twist to the prevalent culinary practices that added a contrastive twang (both gastronomic and olfactory) to the usual paradigm of freshness circumscribing a contrastive palatability. And eventually, this 'abominable contraption' as viewed by the Ghoti, in course of time, reinforced the Bangal refugee's polarized/oppositional identity in the land of refuge (as in West Bengal). Interestingly however, 'shutkey' itself is an essential point of convergence, a space for gastronomic syncretism in Tripura, where, inspite of the myriad differences between the migrant Bangal and the ethnic populace that are often showcased for political mileage, dry and fermented fish known as 'berma' is an omnipresence in ethnic cuisine. And there is hardly any gastronomic compartmentalization between the two.

However, Bangla biryani for me, in stark contrast to the lived experiences and the ruminations of a 'real' refugee dislocated from the homeland and subsequently relocated in the land of refuge, has actually been an 'invented tradition', a simulacrum that emerged as a hyperreality courtesy the heady-mix of sensibilities infused by refugee food narratives of my grandma, the lived experience of my past in Agartala, familiarity with literature and films (directed by Nemai Ghosh, Rittwik Ghatak, Tarekh Masood, Tanvir Mokammel) on partition and migration, as well as countless olfactory encounters with its aroma on the way past the Battala market and its iconic status, courtesy urban food vlogs flooding social media in the present timeframe. For third generation refugees like me born into refugee families, who lack the reality of the lived experiences of partition, forced migration and refuge, such cultural spaces as Bangla biryani offer scope to fabricate the authenticity of a refugee past never lived, except for repetitive episodes of engrossed listening to oral food narratives of the lost homeland. And in all its complexity and the

problematic of its conceptualization and theorization, Bangla biryani presents itself as a space for engaging in an interesting discourse on refugee food narratives, authenticity, denial of the immediacy of its pastness and the processes involved in 'cooking up' a strain of nostalgia under the semblance of truth.

Notes

1. Jean Baudrillard, French semiotician and social theorist proposes in his seminal work *Simulacra and Simulation* that a simulacrum is not a copy of the real, but becomes truth in its own right: the hyperreal.
2. A jostling market in Agartala
3. A dialectical variant of colloquial Bangla or Bengali spoken in Agartala with obvious East Bengal overtones.
4. A rice dish cooked to perfection with a condiment of spices and meat dumplings.
5. Both the former and the latter (now Lucknow) are cities in India famous for Biriyani.
6. An onomatopoeic sound that is untranslatable and probably has no meaning.
7. Is celebrated on the first day of the Bengali solar calendar month of Baisakh with pomp and festivity in the Bengali diaspora.
8. Sensory crossovers such as hearing a colour and smelling a sound.
9. The erstwhile princely state before merger with India also included the Comilla district of Bangladesh and parts of the Chitagong Hill Tracts (CHT).
10. The original home, here 'Bari' refers to the 'home' and emotional construct as opposed to 'basha' or 'house', a structural entity. Wedding cards of the Hindu Bangal families in Agratala still carry two addresses, one in the land of refuge and the other in the lost homeland.
11. A very famous author of Bengali literature whose childrens' literature creations often have a formulaic idyllic rural Bengal setting.
12. Legendary football clubs of Kolkata whose rivalry is well known, the former had the rare distinction of being the first Indian team to defeat a European team, the East Yorkshire Regiment, 2-1 to lift the 1911 IFA Shield.
13. Elaborate food offerings to the deity later to be consumed as Prasad
14. Elaborate food offerings as a part of Hindu Bengali funeral rites to the deceased consisting usually of all those items which the latter liked, usually left at deserted places to be eaten unnoticed..
15. A sweet milk and rice preparation typical to Bengal. South India has its own counterpart as in Kerala known as 'payasam'.

16. Botanical name Colocasia esculenta is a root vegetable and is a widely cultivated species of several plants in the family Araceae used as food and known by regional names such as yam, kosu or kochu.
17. Indian earthen oven usually used in villages and fueled by firewood or its substitutes.
18. A district in Bangladesh.
19. Conference/ get together/ meeting.
20. A district in Bangladesh.
21. *Tenualosa ilisha* belongs to the family of Clupeidae. It distinctive taste makes it very popular in the Bengal region. It is the national fish of Bangladesh and state fish of the Indian state of West Bengal.

Works cited

Appadurai, Arjun. "How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India." *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 30, no. 1, 1988, pp. 3–24. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/179020. Accessed 14 Oct. 2024.

Baudrillard, Jean. "Simulacra And Simulations." *Literary Theories: A Reader and Guide*, edited by Julian Wolfreys, Edinburgh University Press, 1999, pp. 381–94. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctvxcrcgh.46. Accessed 14 Oct. 2024.

Bendix, Regina. In *Search of Auhtenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies*, Maddison U of Wisconsin P, 1997.

Chatterjee, Partha. *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse*. Oxford University Press. 1986.

Dasgupta, Subhoranjan and Jasodhara Bagchi, eds, *The Trauma and the Triumph: Gender and Partition in Eastern India.* Stree, 2007.

Gupta, Ashes. "Living the dream: narrating a landscape lost and a land left behind." Sengupta, Jayita ed. *Barbed Wire: Borders and Partitions in South Asia.* Routledge, 2012; pp: 50-65.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara, and Doreen G. Fernandez. "Culture Ingested: On the Indigenization of Phillipine Food." *Gastronomica*, vol. 3, no. 1, 2003, pp. 58–71. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.1525/gfc.2003.3.1.58. Accessed 14 Dec. 2024.

Sengupta, Jayita. (eds.) *Barbed Wire: Borders and Partitions in South Asia*. Routledge, 2012.

Mannur, Anita. "Culinary Nostalgia: Authenticity, Nationalism, and Diaspora." *MELUS*, vol. 32, no. 4, 2007, pp. 11–31. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/30029829. Accessed 14 Dec. 2024.

Films on partition:

Ghosh, Nemai, dir. *Chinnomul,* 1951.

Ghatak, Ritwik, dir. *Meghe Dhaka Taara*, 1960.

---, dir. *Komal Gandhar*, 1961.

---, dir. *Subarnarekha*, 1962.

---, dir. *Titas Ekti Nadir Naam*, 1973.

Masud, Tarekh, dir. *Maatir Moina*, 2002.

Mokammel,Tanvir, dir. *Chitra Nadir Paare*, 1999.

Personal Interviews:

Das, Tirthankar. Personal Interview. 11th September, 2024

DebRoy, Shanit. Personal Interview. 5th October, 2024.

Paul, Manas. Personal Interview. 5th October, 2024

4.

Grace of Sacrifice: A Study of Henry James' *The Wings of the Dove*

Bhanu Bhakta Sharma Kandel

PhD, Associate Professor of English, PN Campus, Tribhuvan University, Nepal

Abstract

The Wings of the Dove, a novel by Henry James, is rich with themes of love, sacrifice, and moral ambiguity. Central to its narrative is the character of Milly Theale, a wealthy American heiress stricken with a fatal illness, whose fortune attracts the attention of Kate Croy and Merton Densher, two lovers entangled in a complex web of desire and ambition. This article explores the concept of sacrifice embodied by Milly's character, examining how her impending death catalyzes profound emotional and ethical dilemmas for those around her. Milly's sacrificial nature serves as a lens through which James critiques individuals' moral compromises in pursuit of their desires, highlighting the tension between self-interest and altruism. Through Milly's story, James delves into the complexities of human relationships, revealing the profound impact of sacrifice on the sacrificial giver and its beneficiary. James claims that he has used his theory of the 'Art of Fiction' to deal with the actual happenings in his novels, which have made his novels real rather than realistic. This article attempts to see whether he has successfully applied his theory in his creations and whether the representation of 'life-lived' is possible in literature, as he claims. It is qualitative research based on library material. The study's finding is that it is neither possible to create a formula for reading and writing fiction nor is it possible to represent real life in literature.

Keywords: Consciousness, lived experience, reality, realization, victimization.

Introduction

Henry James was the first American novelist writing in England who later became a champion of modern English novels. Leaving aside the romanticism of his predecessors and the 'art for art's sake' movement of his contemporaries, he has chosen to be a realist of different types who neither preached to people nor did he leave the

realities of the world without bringing them to the forth. He is the most famous among them all, not only for his new style and technique of storytelling but also for his new theory in the world of fictional criticism.

He emerged as a prominent literary figure in the second half of the nineteenth century who dealt with changing norms, values, ethos, tempos, and ways of thinking. He discovered himself with differences in style and narrative technique from his contemporary literary giants like Thomas Hardy and Samuel Butler. He is among the most famous among them, not only for his new style and technique of storytelling but also for his new theory in the world of fictional criticism. He emphasizes the first-hand personal experiences of his principal characters because experience sharpens the person's consciousness and develops the worldview of the person who undergoes the kind of realistic experience, if not the real one. Readers can learn from the characters' experiences, and it is the beauty of reading realistic literature to learn from others' mistakes and the happenings they undergo.

Henry James is a novelist who emphasizes realistic events, the materialistic character of the people, and the life of the European middle class of his time, with records of the discounts of spiritual and transcendental values. He has made a deft analysis of human thoughts and feelings in his novels. As realized by Tanner, "James is a man with the imagination of a poet, the wit of a keen humorist, the conscience of an impeccable moralist, the temperament of a philosopher, and the wisdom of a rarely experienced witness of the world" (16). He is indifferent to the religious dogma but exceptionally aware of spiritual reality. He despises didactic fiction and contends valorously for the right of the artist to choose his/her subject. Literature, for him, is an excellent repository of life. In his novel The Wings of the Dove, he has reflected on all the facets of the reality of modern men and their living of life experienced by himself and others, giving the highest importance to the portrayal of reality rather than to romance because he believes, as noted by Daniel R. Schwarz "Romance frees the artist from reality, from fact and observation, and that romance does not insist the artist imitate life" (48), even though a realist artist has to take help of romance to strengthen the impact of realistic presentation.

He is not only a practitioner of a new type of fiction with new techniques but also one of the finest critics and theorists. He is the first theorist to speak about novels, the form of literature 'novel' by origin and nature. The main subject of his critical theory is 'life' – the representation of life that is reality. James is, as F. R. Leavis remarks in this context, "... a critic who would be intelligent about the novel must be intelligent about life; no discussion of the novel by the other kind of critic is worth attention (17)." He is well aware that a piece of art, especially a novel, must have a great deal of appeal to real life, for which a novelist should be intelligent enough to catch every minor bit of the happenings in the lived experience of life. For him, the creativity of art is the creativity of life – that "... the creative impulsion is life and could be nothing else" (Leavis 08). James has always sought concrete and palpable art and wants it handled directly and freely.

Warren Beach remarks that *'The Wings of the Dove* seems to have been less steadily and convincingly conceived as its companion works *The Ambassadors* (1903) and *The Golden Bowl* (1904). According to him, "It may appeal more to our imagination, with its mystery so maintained, but our intelligence remains unsatisfied, "where" the surface is too much broken up with choppy waves and cross-currents, for us to make this out without more study than the artist can properly demand" (262-3). The story is intrigued by Jacobean crudeness and ugliness, which the dramatist would have used, and in the end, James has proved himself of fineness and straightness.

Tony Tanner, in his book *British Writers, Vol II*, remarks:

> James had a young cousin, Mary Temple, a brilliant life hungry girl who died tragically young. She became the very image of a generous but doomed consciousness, which James was to explore and dramatize in different ways. This he most beautifully did in *The Wings of the Dove*. (12)

He further says in the same book about the problem of the book, ". . . the issue of 'life' is central to the book. No one knew better than James that society is maintained and structured on varied degrees of fiction, fabrication, suppression, and misrepresentation–a whole scale of collusion and duplicity" (13). The novelist knew the reality of life better because he was born to an affluent family in the US who came back to Europe in search of his roots but to his sad experience.

His novels are criticized for representing only a sophisticated and aristocratic circle of society, which has no touch with the objective reality of life the general people live. His so-called exploration of the old and new worlds is only his personal experience; what he shows in the name of his characters' manner and civilization is very limited; he shows his feeling of hatred for the life and living of the modern world and its developments in various fields to both sides of the Pacific. However, there are specific issues that the readers have the right to know their answers;

- What is the impact of wealth on the people living in the modern world?
- Why do people in sophisticated societies run after wealth and betray innocent people?
- What is the importance of sacrificing one's wealth and life for humanity?

As this research is qualitative and library-based, his theoretical essay 'The Art of Fiction' with other relevant critical works if necessary, and his novel *The Wings of the Dove* is chosen to apply his theoretical bases to have close thematic analysis with unique and extensive attention to the character, their psychology, their experience, and impressions. The reality Henry James presents in the novel is his response to his generation's human predicament, which James felt with unusual acuteness because of his sensitive mind. He has described what he saw and created what lay under what he saw.

The Mundane Life of Londoners

The Wings of the Dove starts with "waiting," a waiting of a general kind, in which the most active woman character, Kate Croy, a daughter of a poor father, Lionel Croy, waits in the vulgar little room of an old house in the vulgar little street in London. While awaiting her father, "She tried to be sad, so as not to be angry, but it made her angry that she could not be sad" (11) because she has come to her father to talk about some critical familial issues from her "Prodigious" aunt, Aunt Maud Manningham Lowder, a wealthy but treacherous woman of Lancaster Gate.

Croy family is a low-income family in London. Their poverty has made Kate live with the aunt, and her father has "positively been, in his way, by the force of his particular type, a terrible husband not to live with" (16) for his wife and incompetent for his children. Croy's family needs wealth, an essential life requirement in today's materialistic world. Aunt Maud has proposed to Kate to live with her, but with the condition that she should not have any link with her poor father.

Lionel Croy, though he is now destitute, does not realize his reality and declares, "One doesn't give up the use of a spoon because one's reduced to living on broth" (18). He, instead, wants to use her daughter as a tool in achieving Aunt Maud's wealth through Kate, who is an *asset* for him and can be used as a material to gain the property because he is well conscious "of the deplorably superficial morality of the age" (19) which has brutalized the life. Croy, father, and daughter agree to play a game to "square" Aunt Maud, the basket full of golden eggs. Kate Croy wants to come to her father to live with her because she is conscious that she would be used by her father Croy, and the father does not want Kate to marry a "blackguard without a penny" (23) too. Contemporary materialistic obligations have compelled them to give up family sentiment and love at the cost of money, resulting from a lack of wealth. Kate's affair with Merton Densher, a penniless London journalist, is refuted outright by her family because and only because he is not rich enough to support their needs. In this respect, Kate says, "If it's so easy for us to marry men who want us to scatter gold, I wonder if any of us do anything else" (33). It exemplifies the mental condition of the aristocratic circle of the people.

It is money again that comes in the way of the ardent lovers. Kate Croy and Merton Densher are too deep in love and full of scrupulosity, sincerity, and fidelity, but they cannot make their love 'magnificent' because both are penniless. They meet and exchange love in public places and try to hide themselves from the public. "They had accepted their acquaintance as too short for an engagement, but they had treated it as long enough for almost anything else, and marriage was somehow before them like a temple without an avenue" (44). Both of them are conscious of their plight, when the cause of love and money put on the scales, "sometimes the

right was down and sometimes the left, never a happy equipoise – one or the other always kicking the beam" (46). Kate and Densher both are surrounded within the walls of problems that "marrying for money mightn't, after all, a smaller cause of shame than the more dread of marrying with" (46). Being conscious of their misery and paying enough vigil to their state of being in danger of every kind, they sustain their love forward anyway.

Kate is always conscious of Aunt Maud's gilded claws, who have fixed them upon her and wants to escape the aunt, who is somehow taking Merton's help. However, Merton Densher is conscious, "She was in fine quite the largest possible quantity to deal with, and he was in the cage of the lioness without his whip" (54). When Merton sees the Aunt, the house language speaks to him: everything rich and prosperous, magnificent and prodigious, hypocritical. She likes people precisely to her taste, and according to her taste, she accepted Kate, one of the fifty nieces. She wants her "to marry a great man" (58). It is in the womb of the future; what is the hidden reason behind her desire for her niece to be in the light? Is it not for exploitation? Aunt gives her real introduction to Densher in her own words "I can bite your head off any day, any day I really open my mouth and I'm dealing with you now, see– and successfully judge–without opening it" (59) which reveals her inner psychology that she is a female devil in the form of woman beauty, one of the many living female devils found in quite a large number around the world who do not hesitate even to sell their pieces of heart, their children to quench their brutal personal thirst, hideous one either of wealth r of something else like abusive sexual activities.

Milly's Experience with the Londoners

Mildred Theale (Milly) enters Europe slowly through Switzerland. Milly, not more than two and twenty, is alone, stricken, rich, and particularly strange in her spirit, having the angst of living and enjoying her freedom. Though stricken and too weak physically, she has such a strong aspiration and willpower for life that she even wants to climb up and across the Alps. She has restlessness and a great deal of zeal to live life fully and vividly, hoping that Europe could help her desire to be fulfilled to its peak because "Europe was the great American sedative" (76). The best words for her description

can be chosen as James has, "When Milly smiled it was a public event-when she didn't it was a chapter of history" (78). She wants to live smiling and die with a smile, enjoying the best and most beautiful creations of nature, having the consciousness of the difference between the material and natural world, preferring the latter. Like all the young, beautiful, and rich girls, Milly wants to make her life full of adventures, fabulous, and dreamlike, enjoying every possible means. She has a mass of material and wants more natural and spiritual things to add flavor to her life.

Our heroine wants "people" in Europe and wants to be in London, as Henry James wanted. She is fond of London and its people but innocent of everything in Europe. Because of this, she risks everything to be in London and with its people. She seems conscious of London life and people as she risks everything herself. However, she is still ignorant of the materialistic exploitation of innocent creatures like her in the super-civilized civilization of Europe.

Milly is rough and crude initially, like other first-timer Americans in London. American girls receive, at first sight, the impression that English girls have an exceptionally intense beauty, which she experiences when she sees Kate Croy, England. In the pilgrimage, Milly experiences "Mrs. Lowder and her niece, however dissimilar, had at least in common that each was a great reality" (94), the reality of the old world. She also experiences that they knew what to do but did not know what not to do. It is a common problem for everyone abroad, in a different land, culture, and civilization.

By the way, they mention Merton Densher for the first time, and Kate, too, mentions him hiding all the secrets between the lovers. However, Susan Shepherd is suspicious of something black with them. She says, "My dear child, we move in a labyrinth" (116). However, Milly ignores this and argues that she wants to have *abysses*. Aunt Maud wants Kate to marry Lord Mark, who is rich and has some social status, though old and not a fit suitor, whereas Kate does not care about Aunt's desire but keeps loving Merton more and wants to marry the 'blackguard' paying every cost of life. It shows the struggle between the generations, and the generation gap also causes a significant difference in thinking. After Milly comes to their world,

Aunt wants Densher to be engaged with Milly so that she cannot free her niece from him to marry Lord Mark. Aunt plays and does everything to bring Merton and Milly nearer, and Kate continues further with her hero, the prince of dreams, though she too is squared by her beautiful niece. Milly, too, gathers the knowledge that Aunt does not like Merton because he does not own fortune and private means: he is as poor as poverty (121). After Milly learns the complexity of Merton, she begins to love Merton (him), who was already an acquaintance in New York before she came to London, though out of sympathy. She does not like to weigh love in the scales of fortune that one possesses.

Exploitation of the Innocent Dove

The game of betrayal begins when Milly secretly shows love and sympathy towards Merton. Kate ensures she has nothing of that affair and affection for Densher; only Densher likes her, a sided admirer. Mrs. Susan, too, though it is innocent, supports the game and urges Milly to love Densher, to make him a partner of happiness and sorrow so that Milly can fulfill her desire to be complete, total of life vividly. Milly, brought to Lord Mark's house, sees a portrait of a fantastic bronzer as beautiful as herself, admired by all, feels that she has full lips, a long neck, recorded jewels, brocaded and wasted reds, a very great personage – only unaccompanied by joy and she is 'dead, dead, dead' (135) which makes her so conscious of her realization that she is no better than the portrait.

Even though it is not with Milly, beauty and riches beget pride and, in some cases, arrogance in the beautiful rich girls, which becomes the fatal cause of their destruction. They may be compelled to live alone and alone forever, or it may cause some mishaps for the beautiful girls in the long run of their lives. The portrait makes Milly aware again of her reality that she is fatally ill and is a guest in this beautiful. However, the wicked world only for a few counted days, and she has everything admirable now, but it is that " . . . there is no sun without shadow, and it is essential to know the night" (Camus 69), which pushes Milly to think again that she is no better than a dead. She wants to live noticeably but wants to die without it being noticed. They visit the doctor, Sir Luke Street, and Milly finds that she is not getting well but is getting worse. "She hadn't had it

(knowledge of death) when she went in, and she had it when she came out" (141), but she says, "I don't hate it a bit" (141). When her friends ask her to take their help, she shows her existential pride, announcing, "Only one's situation is what it is, it's me it concerns. Nobody can really help" (145) in this world without oneself. Supporting her view, the doctor also suggests she enjoys every possible happiness using every possible means, wasting no time in thinking.

She wants to live and is living by option, by volition; though the doctor suggests she leave London for good health, she does not follow the doctor's advice and roams aimlessly through the streets to feel she is still living. However, there comes a big question in the mind: whether one could live if one would or if one would live if one could. When Aunt Maud cross-questions Milly about Densher, she replies proudly that she knows him well and likes him too; she is interested in him, to which Aunt remarks, "Proud young women are proud young women…" (162). Aunt Maud wants to know the reality of the relationship between Kate and Densher through Milly; Kate denies all the possibilities of her being in love with Densher beyond Aunt's desire, which develops the fertile ground for her game of squaring both Milly and Aunt Maud, through which Kate wants to fulfill her demonic lust of being wealthy, to be high in the light, and marrying her lover, killing two birds with a stone. She has been rearing the scheme of being wealthy, and it becomes more assertive when she comes to know the real plight of Milly and her fortune, though she pretends to be a real friend of Milly, suggesting ". . . to drop us while you can" (170) and " . . . we've not really done for you the least thing worth speaking of" (170). It is reality, but she is treacherous in her inner desires. Kate convinces Milly so quickly that she announces that Milly is a *Dove*. By exploiting such an innocent and pure creature, she is going to fulfill her lust and greed of being rich.

She (Kate) makes her plan to use her lover, Densher, as an 'emissary' to make her mission successful, using two human beings as tools to acquire the material, a Marlovian characteristic. Kate convinces Densher by her love to feign love for Milly for the time being as long as she lives so that the big fish in hand may not escape. Densher, the devotee of love and a passive actor, agrees to play a role

in the drama directed by Kate, though it is not that his conscience does not prick him. That is more than what they are doing. "He repeated to himself that if it was not in the line of triumph, it was in the line of muddle" (189). He feels it is a sin to betray someone innocent, but Kate convinces him that no one in the world is free from some sin (s).

They act such a perfect hand that they keep every secret in the muddle and play deceiving, baffling Milly. Kate makes Densher play so beautifully and perfectly: "Densher saw himself for the moment as in his purchased stall at the play – the watchful manager was in the depths of a box and the poor actress in the glare of footlights" (201). Aunt Maud, too, though innocent of the scheme of her niece, supports their design by convincing Milly that Densher is fit as her lover in every way.

Milly does not comment about Densher's activities, but she is not quite unaware of Kate's secrets; she says, "She is beautiful, but I don't say she's easy to know" (205) in response of Susan's remark that Kate is "a thousand and one things" (205) whereas Milly is incapable to change. The remark of these two ladies supports the Hindus, saying that even the omniscient is not capable of knowing everything about a woman's character, let alone the mortals. On the other hand, Kate convinces Densher of Milly's love for him when she says, "She wants not to miss you – though she also wants also not to show she wants you" (211). Kate's mind speaks out correctly, "If you can imagine an angel with a thumping bank account, you'll have the simplest expression of the kind of thing. Her fortune is absolutely huge" (211). She wants Densher to get her (Milly) in his confidence. She is, as Densher remarks, "... a whole library of the unknown, the uncut" (217), and he also suspects that she spoils him (219). Kate persuades Merton that whatever she is playing is not for her but for him, "I've told the proper lie for you" (221). Milly eventually gets by her proper lie, and their activities are "successfully deceived" (222); they deceive a pure-hearted, innocent bird for nothing but the material. They forget everything humane, like morality, humanity, sincerity, faith, and fidelity to one's dearest and nearest. They exhibit the cultivation of the minds of modern people and how they want to be rich to enjoy the material deceiving one's devotion and faith.

Failure of the Game of Squaring

The story takes a turn when the love between Milly and Densher starts growing. Though Kate and Densher succeed in deceiving Milly's innocence, Milly's innocence and pure and devoted love also win Densher's heart. As 'the poor girl liked him (228),' it is a nutrient for the fiction in which a man's fortune with the woman who does not care for him is positively promoted by the woman who does. It is interesting, ironically, to note that even if Milly is conscious of Kate's hidden secrets, she does not believe that Kate bullies her. It is a fact that Milly is forward but has yet to be advanced, whereas Kate is 'backward' but 'advanced' to a high degree.

Desher is entirely conscious, in this respect, of the game they are playing against Milly's good-will towards them and the possible consequence of the 'unveil' of their design and says to Kate, "It's not I who am responsible for her, my dear. It seems to me it's you" (235). His psychology speaks out the reality, though, in their privacy. If he is something, he is only an emissary of Kate's mission. However, Kate is playing the game so well that "Kate was not in danger, Kate was not pathetic, Kate Croy, whatever happened would take care of Kate Croy" (250), the efficient designer and manager.

Milly, only after she is betrayed, decides to leave London for Venice, meets Doctor Luke, gets a suggestion to live as vividly as she can, and ensures her that he will visit whenever she needs him. She wants awkwardly–any more wants a life, a career, a consciousness, than want a hose, a carriage, or a cook (264), which she could manage with her money. She wants something spiritual (i.e., love) which cannot be bought with money.

During the enactment of the play, Kate and Densher become so intact that they develop a telepathy in communication. Once, when Densher comes back to London to see her from Venice, she says to Densher, observing him, "You are in love with her, you know" (294), of which Denshr himself is not quite aware. He is unaware he has more for Milly but less for her (Kate). Kate also perceives the psychological fact that they (Densher and Milly) have gone too far, and Densher does not want to kill Milly now. Densher, too, now comes to realize, though passively, that he is spoilt; he is spoilt only

as a tool of an engineer who wants to destroy something precious already built to prove her hands perfect and design well done.

The material speaks to its optimum of the super civilized people of the world in the party Milly gives to all her acquaintances in Venice where she decorates herself with a beautiful, unusual white dress, despite her usual black moaning dress and the long priceless chain of pearls, wound twice round the neck, hung, heavy and pure down the front of the wearer's breast. The secret suitors salivate to see her pearls so highly that Kate cannot help but say, "But she is too nice. Everything suits her so–especially her pearls. They go so with her told lace. I'll trouble you really to look at them" (306). To Densher, "She is a dove and one somehow does not think of doves as bejeweled. Yet they suit her down to the ground" (307). Densher feels the hidden reality under Kate, "She was exceptionally under the impression of that element of wealth in her which was a power, which was a great power…" (307). It is the ultimate reality of Densher that it was the pearls precisely that he would never give Kate if they lived as they were.

Milly, though she is quite conscious of her inevitable death, wants to live and thinks aloud, "I mean, I'm capable of life" (322), but Lord Mark is envious of the love between Milly and Densher, jealous of Milly's fortune that Densher may acquire and revengeful to Milly herself of her denial of his marriage proposal, discloses the secret between Kate and Densher. It makes Milly sensitively wounded. It is not any superficial wound on her body that could be recovered with some medicine, but it is a wounded sensibility' that is curable with no medicine. It is such a vigil sensibility that she is poorly betrayed by the nearest, dearest, and most trusted one to whom she was ready to give even her life without asking for anything but pure love. She is poorly hunted and victimized by the very trusted ones. Milly, amongst the thousands of desires to live and live vividly, " . . . turned her face to the wall. . .," turns face to the wall never to speak to anybody because there is no one who can be trusted in her paradise of dream– 'a conscious fool's paradise'(353). Life, for her, becomes a mere aesthetic instinct of mankind (353) – only illusive sun and shadow for four days, only the veil of *Maya*.

Kate is such a character who wants Milly to die for her wealth, and at the same time, she does not want her to die and scolds Densher because he does not lie that they were not engaged and says, "Of course we're still engaged but to save her life–!" (366) and says to Densher "You have fallen in love with her" (368). Though it is not in physical love, it is Milly's spiritual love Densher has fallen into. Nevertheless, what matters is the spiritual love for the material and physically hungry eyes. Milly is shown to be an alienated, isolated character badly victimized by the worldly material world throughout the novel, among the crowd of admirers, as the author himself was alienated as an expatriate to Europe. Alienated and betrayed, Milly is conscious throughout her life that she wants the peace of being loved. She is always kept in suspense because the taste of life has the 'taste of suspense' (376). On the other hand, Milly is now a highly developed vessel of consciousness.

Victimisation and the Victimisers

The news of Milly's premature demise breaks on Christmas day, which Kate expresses, "Unless it's more true that she has spread them (wings) the wider" (385). This was the very Christmas day on which Christ had sacrificed himself for the betterment of humanity, the betrayers. Milly, too, dies like Christ for the benefit of her betrayers and deceivers, for the people full of Judas complex.

Based on her impression of Milly, it is Kate's evaluation: "There was never anyone in the world like her "(394). Of course, no one is like her in this world except Christ himself. She died fully informed of their betrayal, yet left her all fortune for the fulfillment of the betrayer's wishes: "You'll have it (property) all from New York" (403). Kate burns Milly's letter to Densher before without breaking its seal, but now, as it is the season of gifts, she opens it carefully. "You see I've not hesitated this time to break your seal" (409) because it is, she knows, the document of handing over Milly's property to Densher. She comes to be true to open and see the documents of bequeathment of Milly's all fortune to Densher. However, all the development of an environment is in Kate's favor, and all her dreams break into pieces when Densher renounces the property: "I won't touch the money" (411). Conversely, Kate's aspirations and hopes are

shattered into pieces: acquiring the whole amount of Milly's property and marrying her lover magnificently.

The consequence of Densher's renunciation of the property bequeathed by Milly is, "It had come to the point, really, that they showed each other pale faces, and that all the unspoken between them looked out of their eyes in a dim terror of their further conflict" (421). The conflict is that Densher is not ready to marry Kate on the price of Milly's property to be enjoyed by the betrayer of the Dove, whereas Kate is not at all costs ready to leave both of them as she thinks both to be the reward of her triumph on her scheme. Kate feels, "And you are afraid – it's wonderful! – to be in love with her" (413). To speak the truth, Densher has come to experience his spiritual love with Milly and has the guilty feeling of playing unfair on her being only an emissary of a brutal woman, a devil, the materialist. Densher is pricked now and again by his consciousness for Milly's victimization, the victimization of an ardent lover of life, and the scarce vessel of good conscience and consciousness. He is bitterly grieved by the dove's tragic end.

Densher's conscience ultimately compels him to say to Kate, "You'll marry me without money; you won't marry me with it" (413). However, Kate wants to retain what she acquired after a great struggle. Kate, at last, speaks, impressed by the reality that "her memory's your love, you want no other" (414). It reminds the worldly reality that one lives dead here, but one lives only after one's death. People never encourage one to live when alive, but he is remembered, even worshipped only after death. Milly proves all, as she used to say, "Since I've lived all these years as if I were dead, I shall die no doubt as if I were alive" (199). The story's development, to end, makes such an impression that victimizers themselves are victimized by the development of consciousness in them, one loving only material and the other loving it no more. It invites the tragedy of life, which has been almost the providence of materialistic, super-civilized, and hypocritical people. They cannot attain spiritual peace because the question of whether to always go after money or to discard and live without it makes them always restless, pricking their minds. The psychological difference has compelled people to choose their own kind–an existential choice–and ultimately realize "one always finds own burden again" (Camus 70). Milly's character, thus,

has proved to be the catalyst causing the fundamental difference in other characters–one developing himself as the worshipper of spiritual beauty and the other remaining unchanged as an ardent devotee of the material. It shows that there is no escape from one's tragic life–to wait for something to fall on one. Desires are never fulfilled as mortals desire. The Maya of fulfilling one's desires always remains unfulfilled, making one never satisfied with one's life and attainments(s).

Milly's alluring entrance into the life of the Europeans and her striking, though peaceful, departure from their way, the impressions left by her, her activities and her generosity, and her moral fineness have significantly impacted them. Their psychology has developed to differ highly, so they cannot accept one another as their partner for the remaining life. The public would surely laugh at them whether they marry with or without Milly's property. One loves Milly's money, whereas the other loves her spirit, kindness, and sacrificial character.

Henry James' irony is not directed not only against the vanity of self-centeredness or arrogance as such; rather, it is intended to direct the reader's attention to the perpetual struggle of the main characters. There is a profound spiritual dilemma shared by some of his most highly developed vessels of consciousness, arising from the co-presence in them of the creative passion for knowledge, which ultimately puts them being not careful enough about the worldly world, into the hands and helpless, victim of a cruel combination of circumstances which they have been powerless and shabbiness of modern life and opens the eyes so wide to the stupidity, the depravity, the ignorance of humankind.

Milly Theale is well conscious of a great capacity for life but condemned to die a tragic, premature death. James's experience of the condition of modern people in *The Wings of the Dove* is treated in optimum magnitude and grandeur, where everything is larger than life. The principal tragic theme of his novel is the impact of the worldly world upon the unworldly-its power to undermine, reduce, and finally destroy those who cannot accommodate themselves to its values. The chief weapon for the work of such destruction is the

characteristic virtues of the victims themselves: their ignorance, innocence, good faith, generosity, and tenderness.

Conclusion

The Jamesian female heroes are Poor Rich Little Girls, for they are rich by virtue of their money, but they are poor and deprived because they are amidst the thick cloud of expectations. Milly would live if she could be happy, but she could not wrest happiness out of the world that was hostile to her very being. The so-called dearest and nearest friend of hers makes a diabolical design to destroy her, and her 'lover' betrays her for being part of the design. As the tragic dramatist, James has made the wicked and greedy love slaughter the innocent bird, followed by a just punishment of the wicked in the last scene – exhibiting the worldly world in the perfection of its horror. The act of victimization of innocent human creatures is due mainly to the most powerful sub-terranean force of the Waste Landers struggling to maintain a traditionally high standard of life on perpetually dwindling resources. They take money as the 'good luck' which they carve the most for, for its precious, for them, power to secure the freedom they long for. Milly Theale's passion is principally a passion for self-knowledge, for which she is prepared to suffer pain, confusion, and humiliation, and finally, total deprivation and disinterested passion for self-knowledge. Milly's Theale's beauty and the power of truth receive a very difficult tribute. She magnificently rises to a sacrificial death, living an influential life for her sacrifices after her death. Milly, a vigilant sufferer, is the development of Jamesian major characters from an ignorant and carefree American spirit. The development of her character has been so radiant that, though the plot against her succeeds superficially, the plotters are separated by disgust at their own shameful act to regret forever.

Works Cited

Beach, Joseph Warren. *The Method of Henry James*. Albert Saifer, 1954.

James, Henry. *The Wings of the Dove.* 1902. Eyre and Spottiswood, 1948.

Kimbal, Jean. "The Abyss and *The Wings of the Dove:* The Image as a Revelation." *Henry James: Modern Judgements*. Edited by Tony Tanner, Macmillan, 1968, pp. 266–281.

Leavis, F.R. "James as Critic." *Henry James: Selected Criticism*. Edited by Morris Shapira, Penguin Books, 1963, pp. 13–24.

Lubbock, Percy. *The Craft of Fiction.* B.I. Publications, 1983.

Matthiessen, F.O. *Henry James: The Major Phase.* Oxford UP, 1944.

Quinn, Arthur Hobson. *American Fiction: An Historical and Critical Survey*. Appleton Century, 1936.

Read, Herbert. Introduction. *The Wings of the Dove* by Henry James. Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1948, pp. v-vii.

Schwarz, Daniel R. "James's Theory of Fiction and Its Legacy." *A Companion to Henry James Studies*. Edited by Dawiel Mark Fogel, Greenwood, 1993, pp. 41-53.

Tanner, Tony. *An Introduction to Henry James*. Macmillan, 1962.

Ward, J.A. "Social Disintegration in *The Wings of the Dove*." *Henry James: The Wings of the Dove*. Edited by Icrowly Donald and Richard A Hocks. W.W. Norton, 1975, pp. 198–99.

5.

Folklife in the Anthropocene: Critiquing Capitalocene in the Folk-World of Mahasweta Devi's Select Non-Fictions

Dayal Chakrabortty

Research Scholar, Dept. of Humanities (English), Veer Surendra Sai University of Technology, Burla, Odisha, India.

Abstract

In the most recent geological epoch, the Anthropocene, human activities have significantly impacted planetary systems, ushering in global environmental changes. Mahasweta Devi's writings focus on the marginalized tribal communities, examining their place in a world dominated by the destructive forces of capitalism. This article critiques India's capitalist mode of civilization and its effect on the tribal and folk communities, as depicted in Devi's non-fictional works like "Witch Sabbath at Singbhum" and "A Countryside Slowly Dying." Devi's portrayal of capitalist greed highlights the plight of these communities in the context of environmental devastation and the erosion of their folklife. The capitalist drive for exploitation in the Anthropocene, or more accurately, the Capitalocene, is critiqued, with special attention given to how tribals resist and negotiate these changes while maintaining their folk practices. The essay concludes by reflecting on the potential of moving toward an 'Ecocene' – a more sustainable and ecologically conscious future.

Keywords: Anthropocene, Folklife, Tribal, Capitalocene, Folklore, Ecocene

Introduction: Anthropocene or Capitalocene?

Contemporary environmental changes are vast and planetary in scale, driven by human activities over the last two centuries. Industrialization, urbanization, and rampant resource extraction have caused significant alterations to the Earth's biosphere, atmosphere, lithosphere, and hydrosphere. The term *Anthropocene*, coined by atmospheric chemist Paul Crutzen, signifies this profound human impact on planetary systems. It marks an epoch where humans have

become the dominant force shaping the environment, leaving indelible marks on the climate, ecosystems, and geology.

However, the Anthropocene concept can be problematic when it comes to assigning responsibility. By using the term 'Anthropocene,' the narrative implicitly suggests that all humans are equally responsible for environmental destruction, overlooking the vast differences in how different human communities interact with nature. It creates a homogenized image of humanity that blurs the sharp lines between those who contribute to environmental devastation and those who suffer its consequences. While industrial activities have dramatically altered the Earth's systems, it is essential to recognize that not all humans are equally contributing to this damage. Indigenous and tribal communities, the 'folk'ones, for instance, have lived in harmony with nature for centuries, practicing sustainable ways of life that preserve ecosystems rather than exploit them.

In fact, these communities are often the first to suffer the consequences of environmental destruction despite having contributed little to the causes. Tribal societies, particularly in countries like India, closely relate to their natural surroundings. Their economies are small-scale, subsistence-based, and often centred on the principles of conservation and respect for nature. Traditional tribal practices like rotational farming, foraging, and forest management are designed to sustain natural ecosystems rather than deplete them. These groups live what some call a *folk ecology*, where their lifestyles and livelihoods are deeply connected to the land and its natural cycles. In contrast to capitalist societies that exploit nature for profit, tribal and indigenous communities embody sustainable modes of existence, resisting the logic of commodification.

The true drivers of environmental degradation are capitalist forces, particularly those associated with large-scale industrialization, urbanization, and resource extraction. The capitalist elite, especially in third-world nations like India, have aggressively pursued economic growth at the cost of ecological health and the lives of marginalized people. Corporations extract resources – such as minerals, timber, and fossil fuels – at unsustainable rates, polluting rivers, air, and soil and leaving behind devastated landscapes. These

capitalist systems prioritize profit over people and nature, externalizing environmental costs onto the most vulnerable populations, such as tribals who depend directly on the land for survival.

The industrialized countries of the Global North, as well as the capitalist elites within developing nations, have reaped the benefits of this growth while placing the burdens of environmental destruction on the poorest and most marginalized communities. In India, for example, large corporations and government-backed industrial projects often displace entire tribal populations from their ancestral lands, leading to the erosion of their culture, livelihoods, and folklife. When the forests, rivers, and ecosystems that sustain their traditions and rituals are destroyed, it disrupts their physical survival. It undermines their cultural identity, intricately tied to their natural environment.

Given these stark inequalities, scholars such as Andreas Malm and Jason Moore have argued that *Capitalocene* is a more accurate descriptor of the current ecological crisis. The *Capitalocene* emphasizes that the root cause of environmental degradation is not humanity but the capitalist mode of production driven by profit, accumulation, and exploitation. It highlights how capitalism is fundamentally unsustainable as an economic system because it treats nature as an infinite resource to be commodified and exploited for financial gain. This system extracts resources at unsustainable rates and externalizes environmental and social costs, destroying ecosystems and marginalizing vulnerable communities.

The Capitalocene framework also provides a more nuanced understanding of the global ecological crisis by acknowledging unevenly distributed environmental destruction. While some communities in industrialized nations enjoy the material benefits of capitalist growth, others – predominantly Indigenous and tribal communities in the Global South, bear the brunt of its costs. In India, for instance, the tribal communities of Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha, and Chhattisgarh have seen their lands ravaged by mining, logging, and industrial projects, leading to deforestation, water scarcity, and pollution. These communities, who once lived sustainably, are now

displaced, their livelihoods destroyed, and their cultural practices threatened.

Moreover, the *Capitalocene* not only disrupts the environment but also dismantles the folklife of tribal communities. Folklife, which includes a community's customs, rituals, oral traditions, and practices, is often deeply intertwined with the environment. Tribal communities' connection to their land informs their stories, myths, and religious practices, creating a unique folk ecology. For example, the *Sarhul* festival, celebrated by the tribes of Jharkhand, is a ritual that honours the trees and forests. Such practices reinforce a reciprocal relationship between humans and nature, where the environment is not seen as a resource to be exploited but as a sacred space that sustains life.

When capitalist projects displace these communities from their lands, they lose their physical homes and the cultural landscapes that sustain their folk life. As mining operations destroy forests and rivers, tribal communities are cut off from the natural elements that shape their myths, songs, and rituals. The forced migration of tribals into urban or industrial areas erodes their folk traditions, leading to cultural dislocation and the disintegration of their collective memory. The Capitalocene thus represents not just an ecological disaster but a cultural one, as the traditions and knowledge systems of indigenous and tribal communities are lost to the forces of capitalism.

Therefore, the term *Capitalocene* is more fitting when critiquing the environmental crisis in India and similar contexts. It highlights the responsibility of capitalist systems for the ecological degradation disproportionately experienced by marginalized communities. It also draws attention to how capitalism disrupts ecosystems and the cultural practices, folklife, and social fabric of indigenous and tribal communities. As Mahasweta Devi's works illustrate, the Capitalocene has devastating effects on the environment and the people who have lived in harmony for centuries. Her writings document the erosion of tribal livelihoods and traditions, offering a powerful critique of capitalism's unsustainable and exploitative nature. In critiquing the Capitalocene, this article explores how the capitalist mode of civilization, which prioritizes profit and growth, has wrought irreversible damage to both the natural environment and the folk

world of tribal communities. Through the lens of Mahasweta Devi's non-fictional works, this critique underscores the urgent need to recognize the interconnectedness of ecological sustainability and the preservation of folklife in a post-capitalist world.

Mahasweta Devi as an Alternative Historian of Folklife:

Mahasweta Devi's writing serves not only as a detailed account of the suffering and marginalization of tribal communities but also as a profound exploration of their folklife – the beliefs, practices, traditions, and relationships with nature that form the foundation of their identity. For Devi, folklife is intricately connected to the land, and it is through the land that tribal communities sustain their rituals, myths, and social structures. The disruption of these communities through capitalist encroachment, industrialization, and forced displacement threatens their physical survival and cultural and spiritual lifeblood. Devi's works present these traditions as living, dynamic systems of knowledge that are far from static or obsolete. Instead, they serve as active forms of resistance against the forces of industrialization and capitalism, which seek to obliterate the tribals' environment and cultural world.

In her non-fictional essays, particularly those compiled in *Dust on the Road* (1997), Devi documents how industrialization and capitalist exploitation directly lead to the erosion of tribal folklife. Capitalist projects, such as mining, deforestation, and the establishment of factories, result in the displacement of tribal communities from their ancestral lands. With the loss of land, tribal communities are severed from the ecological and cultural ties that have sustained their traditions for generations. For instance, the sacred connection to rivers, forests, and mountains – central to many tribal rituals and myths – cannot be maintained when industrial activities destroy or pollute these natural landscapes. As environmental degradation takes its toll, so does the erosion of oral histories, traditional knowledge systems, and communal practices that form the core of tribal identities (Devi, *Dust on the Road* 81).

Devi's understanding of folklife as a dynamic and evolving form of resistance is crucial to her portrayal of tribal communities. In her works, Folklore is not relegated to the past but remains a vital tool for survival and defiance in the face of capitalist aggression. Scholars

have noted that Devi's writings emphasize the "active negotiation" that tribal communities undertake to preserve their traditions while adapting to changing circumstances. Folklife, in this sense, becomes a mode of resilience. As anthropologist Jack Goody has pointed out, folklore is not merely a "repository of cultural memory" but a mechanism for "sustaining and renewing cultural practices in new social and political contexts" (Goody 46). For Devi, these folk traditions act as cultural resistance to the violence of capitalist encroachment, providing tribal communities with a sense of continuity even as their physical environments are being destroyed.

Moreover, Devi's portrayal of folklore emphasizes its rootedness in the ecological landscape. In her essay "Witch Sabbath at Singbhum," Devi writes of the symbolic connection between tribal women and the forests they protect. In the face of corporate mining interests, these women continue to perform rituals and ceremonies that link them to the land. Even as cement factories destroy their environment, they resist the disintegration of their folk practices, viewing these traditions as integral to their identity and survival (Devi, *Dust on the Road* 75). In this way, Devi frames folklore as a cultural artifact and an ecological practice that intertwines with the rhythms of nature and sustains a worldview that opposes capitalist exploitation.

In critiquing the capitalist disruption of folklife, Mahasweta Devi acts as an 'alternative historian,' challenging the dominant narratives of progress and development that often accompany industrialization. Scholar Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in her seminal essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" underscores how Devi's works reveal the 'silenced histories' of marginalized groups, mainly tribals, whose voices are excluded from the official records of history and development (Spivak 83). In reclaiming these narratives, Devi provides a platform for these communities' oral histories, myths, and traditions to be heard, resisting the forces that seek to erase their existence. Her activism is rooted in the belief that preserving folklore is essential to the survival of tribal communities, both culturally and physically.

Through her writings, Devi demonstrates that folklore is not merely a set of stories or practices but a vital framework through which tribal communities understand their place in the world. It is a

living archive of their relationship with the land, a form of knowledge that has sustained them for centuries. As scholars have observed, the relationship between folklore and ecology is central to understanding how tribal communities resist the forces of capitalism. The destruction of the environment is not just an ecological disaster but also a cultural one, as it leads to the erasure of the folk traditions that are inextricably tied to the natural world (Merchant 74).

Devi's essays in *Dust on the Road* highlight the urgency of preserving both the environment and the folklife of tribal communities. Her writing reveals that the destruction of forests, rivers, and mountains has profound cultural implications, threatening the fabric of tribal society. As Carolyn Merchant argues, "The capitalist transformation of landscapes not only alters the physical environment but erases the folk narratives and rituals that sustain indigenous cultures" (Merchant 67). Devi's activism, therefore, is as much about environmental conservation as it is about cultural preservation, recognizing that the two are inseparable in the tribal worldview.

In conclusion, Mahasweta Devi's writing serves as a powerful counter-narrative to the dominant histories of development and progress that overlook the lives of tribals. Her portrayal of folklife offers an alternative vision of history that foregrounds the resilience of tribal communities in the face of ecological and cultural destruction. By documenting their struggles to preserve their folk traditions, Devi positions folklore as a living and evolving practice of resistance – one that has the potential to challenge the forces of capitalism and offer pathways to more sustainable and equitable futures.

The Disintegration of Folklife in "Witch Sabbath at Singbhum" and "A Countryside Slowly Dying"

In "Witch Sabbath at Singbhum," Mahasweta Devi explores how capitalist ventures encroach upon the folklife of tribal communities. The Alliance Cement Company (ACC) in Jhikpani has devastated the local environment and, with it, the sacred ties the tribal people had to their land. For the tribals, land is not a commodity but a living entity filled with stories, rituals, and spirits. Folklife, for these communities, is intertwined with nature – they engage in rituals for the fertility of

the land, celebrate harvests, and practice sustainable farming based on ancestral knowledge. The cement dust covering their fields symbolizes the death of their environment, their folklore, and their cultural heritage.

Devi also illustrates how capitalism's invasion of these tribal areas disconnects them from their folk traditions. The industrial transformation of Singbhum into a "ghostly wasteland" where trees and crops wither under layers of dust violently ruptures the tribals' cultural landscape. Their folklore passed down through generations and deeply connected to their environment, begins to fade as their natural world is destroyed. The spiritual connections between land and people, integral to their belief systems and rituals, are severed by capitalist exploitation.

In "A Countryside Slowly Dying," Devi portrays how capitalist development policies disrupt rural folk life. The displacement of tribals due to industrial projects leads to the erosion of their oral traditions, which are transmitted through communal living and close proximity to nature. Instead, the Subarnarekha plan, intended to bring development, destroys the local ecology and folklife. Once-vibrant communal practices, such as storytelling, dance, and rituals connected to nature, are threatened as their connection to the land is severed.

In both "Witch Sabbath at Singbhum" and "A Countryside Slowly Dying," Mahasweta Devi critically examines how capitalist expansion obliterates the folklife of tribal communities in Jharkhand, India. Folklife, deeply enmeshed with nature and community in these societies, is endangered as industrial forces disrupt their ecological and cultural systems. These stories powerfully illustrate how capitalist ventures, masked as development, initiate a disintegration of Indigenous cultural landscapes, rituals, and oral traditions, contributing to what can be seen as the slow death of folklife.

In "Witch Sabbath at Singbhum," Devi emphasizes the destruction brought by Alliance Cement Company (ACC), which blankets the land with cement dust, symbolizing the suppression of indigenous life. This destruction is not merely environmental but also cultural. The land for the tribals holds "sacred ties" (Devi 106), infused with myths, spirits, and rituals that sustain their communal

identity. Scholar Vandana Shiva argues, "Ecological devastation in tribal lands is equivalent to cultural genocide" (Shiva 93), a view that resonates with Devi's portrayal of the ACC's destruction as not merely economic exploitation but a rupture in cultural continuity. The sacred dimension of the land, integral to the rituals for fertility and sustainable farming practices, is annihilated, making folklife – a system of knowledge rooted in environmental reciprocity – obsolete.

Devi directly connects this disintegration of folklore to capitalist encroachment, where land conversion into industrial space represents an erasure of identity. As ecofeminist scholars like Maria Mies and Shiva highlight, the capitalist exploitation of natural resources leads to "a metaphysical separation between people and the land" (Mies and Shiva 234), paralleling the spiritual disconnection that Devi portrays. In Singbhum, the dust-ridden landscape represents a cultural wasteland where stories no longer circulate, rituals connect people to their environment, and folk practices dissolve into oblivion. The land, once an active participant in their cultural life, now serves as a silent witness to its destruction.

In "A Countryside Slowly Dying," Mahasweta Devi extends her critique to the broader capitalist policies affecting rural India, illustrating how industrial projects displace tribals and destroy their oral traditions. The Subarnarekha plan is emblematic of how development projects, celebrated for their promise of economic progress, precipitate the erosion of folklife. As anthropologist James C. Scott asserts, "State-led development projects often prioritize economic efficiency over indigenous cultural systems" (Scott 79). Devi vividly captures this tension by portraying the dying communal practices, such as storytelling, dancing, and nature-based rituals integral to rural life. Folklorist Richard M. Dorson identifies these activities as "oral traditions that thrive in the intimate, nature-embedded lives of tribal communities" (Dorson 46). The disappearance of these practices highlights how the displacement of people leads to a rupture in the social fabric.

Both stories depict a form of 'slow violence' (Nixon 2), a term coined by Rob Nixon to describe the gradual, invisible processes by which marginalized communities are dispossessed of their cultural and environmental heritage. This slow disintegration of folklife is

part of a broader pattern in which capitalist development policies serve as vehicles of cultural destruction. Devi's works show that the violence of capitalism is not only economic but also epistemic and cultural, as it seeks to sever the connection between indigenous peoples and their traditions.

Folklife, Ecology, and Resistance:

The traditional ecological knowledge that underpins tribal folklife is far from a mere vestige of the past; rather, it represents a form of active resistance against capitalist encroachment and environmental degradation. This knowledge, manifested in rituals, myths, and practices, is rooted in sustainable interactions with nature, reflecting an ethos of reciprocity and stewardship. For tribal communities, the natural world is sacred, and their cultural practices are deeply intertwined with the environment. Carolyn Merchant explains, "Indigenous knowledge systems often incorporate an ecological ethic that emphasizes respect for nature and sustainable resource use, countering the extractive logic of capitalist economies" (Merchant 89). This ecological ethic forms the foundation of tribal resistance to the forces of industrialization that seek to commodify and exploit natural resources.

Tribal folklife emphasizes balance and sustainability, directly contrasting with capitalist production. In capitalist systems, nature is viewed primarily as a resource to be exploited for profit, with little regard for ecological limits or long-term sustainability. In contrast, tribal communities practice what anthropologist Fikret Berkes terms 'traditional ecological knowledge' (TEK), which is "a cumulative body of knowledge, practice, and belief, evolving by adaptive processes and handed down through generations by cultural transmission, about the relationship of living beings (including humans) with one another and with their environment" (Berkes 3). This knowledge is embodied in tribal rituals and festivals, such as *sarhul* and *karma*, which celebrate the cycles of nature and reaffirm the community's connection to the land.

The *Sarhul* festival, for example, is a ritual celebration of the flowering of the Sal tree, an essential symbol in the tribal worldview. During this festival, tribals offer prayers to the Earth and its deities, seeking blessings for the land's fertility and the community's well-

being. Similarly, the *karma* festival celebrates the harvest and honours the gods for the bounty of the Earth. These festivals are religious or cultural expressions and ecological acts reaffirming the community's responsibility to care for the environment. As Bauman notes, "Folklore, through its rituals and narratives, encodes ecological knowledge and reinforces sustainable practices within the community" (Bauman 57). By participating in these festivals, tribals sustain a worldview that values harmony with nature, starkly contrasting capitalist ideologies prioritising growth and exploitation.

Mahasweta Devi's works capture how these folk traditions are not merely passive cultural relics but are active forms of resistance to capitalist exploitation. As industrialization encroaches on tribal lands, displacing communities and destroying ecosystems, these rituals and practices take on new significance as acts of defiance. In *Dust on the Road*, Devi documents how the displacement of tribal communities due to mining and deforestation leads to the erosion of their cultural and ecological practices. However, even in the face of such destruction, these communities continue to perform their rituals, asserting their cultural autonomy and resisting the forces that seek to erase their identities (Devi 91).

For instance, the persistence of the *Sarhul* festival, despite the encroachment of industries like mining and logging, is a form of resistance that reaffirms the tribal connection to the land. The festival becomes a symbolic reclamation of space and identity as the tribals continue to honour their relationship with the environment even as their land is being taken from them. As environmental historian Ramachandra Guha argues, "Indigenous movements that centre on the defence of land and ecological practices are not only environmental struggles but also cultural struggles, aimed at protecting a way of life that is inseparable from the land" (Guha 78). In continuing to celebrate *Sarhul* and *Karma*, tribal communities resist the capitalist commodification of nature and assert their right to maintain their ecological and cultural practices.

Moreover, these acts of cultural resistance extend beyond the performance of rituals. Tribal folklore, in the form of songs, stories, and oral histories, encodes ecological knowledge and serves as a form of intergenerational transmission of sustainable practices. Through

their folklore, tribals pass down knowledge about farming techniques, the medicinal properties of plants, and the importance of biodiversity. Fikret Berkes notes, "Oral traditions and folklore are key components of traditional ecological knowledge, providing not only a cultural repository of environmental information but also a means of reinforcing social norms around resource use and conservation" (Berkes 9). The destruction of ecosystems due to industrialization threatens this cultural transmission, as the landscapes that sustain these knowledge systems are destroyed.

However, as Devi's works highlight, folklore becomes a resistance tool. By continuing to tell their stories, sing their songs, and perform their rituals, tribal communities assert their presence and refuse to be erased by capitalist forces. In *A Countryside Slowly Dying*, Devi documents how the erosion of oral traditions and cultural practices accompanies the erosion of rural and tribal life due to industrial development. However, even as their land is being taken from them, the tribals continue to practice their folklore, using it as a means of survival and resistance (Devi 102).

Scholars have noted that the persistence of folklore in the face of environmental and cultural destruction represents what James C. Scott calls "everyday forms of resistance" – small, everyday actions that challenge the dominant power structures (Scott 34). By continuing to celebrate their folklore, tribal communities resist the forces of erasure and assert their cultural autonomy. As historian Dipesh Chakrabarty argues, "Indigenous resistance is not only a struggle for land but also a struggle for the preservation of cultural memory and identity, which are deeply tied to the natural environment" (Chakrabarty 29). The survival of tribal folklore, despite the pressures of industrialization and capitalism, is a testament to these communities' resilience and refusal to be subsumed by the forces of exploitation.

In conclusion, tribal folklife, rooted in sustainable ecological practices and a deep respect for the Earth, represents a powerful resistance to capitalist encroachment. Through their rituals, festivals, and oral traditions, tribal communities assert their connection to the land and resist the forces that seek to exploit and commodify nature. As Mahasweta Devi's works illustrate, the persistence of these folk

practices in the face of environmental destruction is an act of cultural survival and a form of defiance against the capitalist systems that threaten their environment and way of life.

The Politics of Capitalist Development and the Destruction of Folklife

The destructive impact of capitalist development on the environment is often framed as a necessary sacrifice to pursue economic growth and progress. However, this narrative conceals the devastating consequences that capitalist development imposes on marginalized communities, particularly indigenous and tribal groups whose livelihoods and cultural identities are intimately tied to the land. In *Dust on the Road*, Mahasweta Devi critiques the so-called 'development' policies that displace tribal communities, disrupt their traditional lifeways, and gradually erode their folklife. As capitalist ventures encroach on tribal lands, the cultural practices, rituals, and oral traditions that define these communities are systematically dismantled. Capitalist development, therefore, is not just an economic or environmental issue – it is also a cultural one, leading to the destruction of the rich folklife that has sustained tribal communities for generations.

In postcolonial nations like India, capitalist development is often presented as a means of modernizing the nation and integrating marginalized groups into the global economy. However, as Ramachandra Guha and Madhav Gadgil argue, this model of development is fundamentally incompatible with the lifestyles of tribal and rural communities, which are based on sustainable resource use and a deep connection to the land (Guha and Gadgil 45). Industrial projects, such as mining, deforestation, and dam construction, displace these communities from their ancestral lands and disrupt the ecosystems that sustain their folklife. The process of displacement is not merely a physical one but a cultural rupture, severing the tribal people from the landscapes central to their cultural identity and traditional knowledge systems.

Mahasweta Devi's *Dust on the Road* offers a scathing critique of the politics behind this capitalist development model. In her essays, she illustrates how capitalist development projects, backed by both government and corporate interests, are framed as necessary for

national progress but disproportionately affect the most vulnerable populations. These development policies often ignore the environmental and cultural costs borne by tribal communities, who are forced to sacrifice their homes, livelihoods, and cultural practices in the name of progress. For instance, the Subarnarekha plan, a large-scale industrial development project, led to the displacement of numerous tribal communities and the destruction of their natural environment. Devi documents how the construction of factories, roads, and other infrastructure resulted in the loss of forests, rivers, and fields that had sustained these communities for generations (Devi 93).

The displacement caused by capitalist development is not only an economic and ecological crisis but also a cultural one. As anthropologist Arjun Appadurai has pointed out, displacement leads to a "cultural dislocation" process, in which communities lose the spaces where their cultural practices and traditions are performed and transmitted (Appadurai 28). In the case of India's tribal communities, capitalist development disrupts the cultural ecosystems that support their folklore, rituals, and oral traditions. Folklife, which includes communal practices such as storytelling, singing, dancing, and ritual ceremonies, depends on the continuity of the natural environment. When forests are cleared, rivers are dammed, and villages are destroyed, the communal spaces that once fostered these cultural practices disappear.

The loss of folklife is not an incidental outcome of capitalist development but a deliberate consequence of the way these projects are designed. The state and corporate powers that drive capitalist development prioritize economic growth over the preservation of cultural heritage, particularly when it comes to marginalized communities like tribals. Scholar Arturo Escobar has argued that the "development discourse" is inherently colonial in nature, as it seeks to impose a homogenized, Western model of progress on diverse cultures and communities, erasing their unique ways of life (Escobar 53). In India, this development discourse has often framed tribal people as "backward" or "primitive," in need of integration into the modern, capitalist economy. This framing justifies the displacement of tribals from their lands and the destruction of their cultural practices, which are seen as obstacles to economic progress.

Devi's work also reveals the political mechanisms behind this process. Capitalist development in India is often supported by state policies prioritising industrial growth over environmental conservation and cultural preservation. In *"Witch Sabbath at Singbhum*," Devi illustrates how the Alliance Cement Company (ACC) received governmental support for its operations in Jhikpani even though the project devastated the local environment and displaced tribal communities. The state's complicity in these projects reflects the broader political and economic interests that drive capitalist development in India. The destruction of tribal lands and cultural heritage is justified through a rhetoric of national development, while the voices and needs of tribal communities are systematically marginalized.

Furthermore, the destruction of folklife is not just a cultural loss but a form of epistemicide – the erasure of traditional knowledge systems passed down through oral traditions and communal practices. Tribal folklore is not simply a set of stories or rituals; it is a repository of ecological knowledge, social norms, and survival strategies that have sustained these communities for centuries. As Carolyn Merchant notes, the destruction of indigenous ecosystems through capitalist development also leads to the destruction of the cultural and ecological knowledge embedded in these landscapes (Merchant 67). In losing their lands, tribal communities also lose the knowledge systems transmitted through their folklore, erasing valuable ecological wisdom that could contribute to sustainable living.

In conclusion, the politics of capitalist development, as depicted in Mahasweta Devi's works, reveals how industrial projects not only displace tribal communities but also dismantle their folk life. The loss of land and natural resources leads to the erosion of cultural practices, rituals, and oral traditions central to tribal identity. Capitalist development, therefore, is not just an economic or environmental issue but a cultural one, leading to the destruction of the rich folklife that has sustained tribal communities for generations. Devi's critique calls for rethinking development models that prioritize economic growth at the expense of cultural and environmental sustainability. In doing so, she underscores the importance of preserving both the land and the cultural heritage of

tribal communities, whose folklife represents a valuable source of ecological wisdom and resistance to the forces of capitalist exploitation.

Genocidal War Turns into Ecocide

Alternative human histories reveal that whenever capitalist cultures, often enforced by state power, seek to damage the biodiversity of tribal lands, these oppressed communities have historically risen in defence of their environment. In such scenarios, state forces act to preserve the interests of capitalists. At the same time, tribal communities fight to safeguard their homes, reclaim their lands, and protect their cultural identities from the destructive encroachments of corporate industrialization. The poorest tribals, intimately connected to nature, find themselves caught in a dire conflict between state violence and resistance.

Mahasweta Devi poignantly illustrates this struggle in her narrative, recounting a massacre perpetrated by state forces against tribal people at Gua in Singbhum on September 8, 1980. Devi cites an old tribal's anguish: "Yes, yes, 11 in the hospital. But so many rounds of firing, can it really be that no one was killed? It was a big crowd. Why did the trucks come? What did they take away? Why was the place kept cordoned off?" (Devi 71). This anecdote encapsulates the tragic intersection of violence and ecological destruction faced by tribal communities. Eco-socialists argue that such oppression is not only a violation of human rights but also an assault on the natural world itself. Herbert Marcuse posits that "the genocidal war against people is also 'ecocide' insofar as it attacks the sources and resources of life itself" (Merchant 67). As capitalist aggression continues, leading to the dispossession and annihilation of tribal peoples, we risk losing not only these communities but also their invaluable knowledge of sustainable living practices. The destruction of tribal lands and the ensuing loss of folklore represent a profound ecological and cultural catastrophe, threatening the extinction of both people and their environmental wisdom.

Sustainable Living and the Tribals

Mahasweta Devi's depiction of the capitalist impact on the Roro, Jhikpani, and Chaibasa regions of Singbhum illustrates a stark

contrast between the sustainable practices of tribal communities and the destructive nature of capitalist projects. The Adivasi people in these areas, who rely on forest logs, tree honey, and river water for their survival, demonstrate a deep respect for nature, treating it as sacred. Their way of life is characterised by a harmonious relationship with the environment, reflecting what can be considered a model of sustainable living.

In sharp contrast, capitalist enterprises, such as mining for cement, asbestos, and aluminium, prioritize profit over environmental stewardship. These projects lead to "need-satisfaction (commodity production) in which there is no limit to the demands placed on the natural environment by humans" (Gandhi 44). This capitalist approach to resource extraction disrupts the ecological balance and threatens the very essence of the sustainable practices upheld by tribal communities. Karl Marx's notion of "metabolism, or interaction, of society with nature" highlights the fundamental and ongoing relationship between human societies and their environments (Harvey 145). Capitalist exploitation undermines this interaction, leading to the degradation of natural habitats and the erosion of sustainable tribal practices. The encroachment of capitalist projects on tribal lands signifies a profound threat to both the environment and the sustainable lifestyles that have existed for generations.

Conclusion: Preserving Folklife in the Eocene

Mahasweta Devi's nonfiction powerfully critiques the Capitalocene and the destructive forces it unleashes on the environment and tribal folklife. Her essays highlight the resilience of tribal communities, who continue to practice their folklore in defiance of capitalist encroachment. However, as industrialization accelerates, the survival of these folk traditions becomes ever more precarious. Devi's writings compel us to reevaluate our relationship with the natural world and draw lessons from the sustainable practices embedded within tribal folklore. The knowledge enshrined in tribal traditions – principles of living in harmony with nature and respecting ecological limits – offers invaluable insights as we confront the environmental crises of the Anthropocene. These practices reflect a deep understanding of sustainable living and embody a model for how humanity might

achieve balance with the environment. The transition from the Anthropocene to the Ecocene – a period characterized by a harmonious coexistence between humans and nature – requires acknowledgment and preservation of tribal communities' folklife. This folklife, rich with wisdom and sustainability, is critical to addressing contemporary ecological challenges. By honouring and integrating this traditional knowledge, we can envision and work towards a future where human and natural systems thrive in equilibrium. In reimagining our environmental future, it is imperative to recognize the profound and enduring contributions of tribal cultures. Their folklore offers a window into sustainable living and a blueprint for navigating the complex ecological issues of our time. Embracing and preserving this wisdom is essential for a more balanced and sustainable relationship with the Earth.

Works Cited

Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

Berkes, Fikret. *Sacred Ecology*. Routledge, 2008.

Bauman, Richard. *Verbal Art as Performance*. Waveland Press, 1984.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*. University of Chicago Press, 2021.

Devi, Mahasweta. *Dust on the Road: The Activist Writings of Mahasweta Devi*. Edited by Maitreya Ghatak, Seagull Books, 1997.

-----. *Imaginary Maps: Three Stories*. Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Routledge, 1995.

Dorson, Richard M. *Folklore and Folklife: An Introduction*. University of Chicago Press, 1972.

Escobar, Arturo. *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton University Press, 1995.

Gandhi, Devadatta. "The Limits and Promise of Environmental Ethics: Eco-Socialist Thought and Anthropocentrism's Virtue." *Environs,* vol. 31, no. 1, 2002, pp. 35-58.

Guha, Ramachandra. "Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique." *Environmental Ethics: Divergence and Convergence,* vol. 11, 1989, pp. 71–83.

Harvey, David. *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference*. Blackwell Publishers, 1996.

Goody, Jack. *The Power of the Written Tradition*. Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000.

Guha, Ramachandra, and Madhav Gadgil. *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India*. University of California Press, 1992.

Guha, Ramachandra. *The Unquiet Woods: Ecological Change and Peasant Resistance in the Himalaya*s. University of California Press, 2000.

Merchant, Carolyn. *Ecology*. Humanity Books, 2008.

-----. *Ecological Revolutions: Nature, Gender, and Science in New England*. University of North Carolina Press, 1989.

-----. *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*. HarperOne, 1989.

Mies, Maria, and Vandana Shiva. *Ecofeminism*. Zed Books, 1993.

Nixon, Rob. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Harvard University Press, 2011.

Scott, James C. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*. Yale University Press, 1998.

Scott, James C. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. Yale University Press, 1985.

Shiva, Vandana. *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development*. Zed Books, 1989.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, University of Illinois Press, 1988, pp. 66–111.

6.

Gender Politics and Patriarchal Oppression: A Critical Study of Female Desire in Pratibha Ray's 'The Stigma' and 'The Curse'

Deepak Pati[*] and Dr Ashapurna Dash[**]

[*] *Deepak Pati, Lecturer in English at Dadhibaman College, Bhatli, Odisha, India*

[**] *Asst Professor, Veer Surendra Sai University of Technology, Odisha India.*

Abstract

The study endeavours to inspire change in the social thought process constructed against women, highlighting the ordeals of two married women in the book *Transgression and Other Stories* by Pratibha Ray. The reading of two short stories, 'The Stigma' and 'The Curse,' bring out a female perspective to see the world cursed by patriarchy. Further, the analysis of the doomed fate of Sarami and Pari helps expose and denormalize the subtle, often overlooked suffering of women. With the help of Freudian findings, the study reveals that hysteria, as a disease, is largely misunderstood by people and is not even considered a problem for women who suffer from it. On the contrary, their bouts attract social ridicule, and even fellow women join hands in blaming. The need for a broader approach towards female sexuality, focusing on the dire consequences of repression of sexual desire, is realised through the study. Ray's narrative is a critique of a minutely constructed social framework. It instills empathy in our hearts against agents of patriarchy that see the female gender as an object of victimization.

Keywords: Gender Politics, Hysteria, Psychoanalysis, Patriarchal Oppression, Female Sexuality, Victimization

Introduction

Judith Butler, in her seminal essay, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," opines that gender is continually constructed and reconstructed through a set of repetitive performative acts, behaviour, norms, and

historical forces and is not biologically determined. (Butler 519). Her statement seems true in the context of women's lives in India, particularly women living in remote villages. The nuances of social construction and facets of patriarchy have been truthfully presented in the stories of Pratibha Ray, a prominent Odia novelist, short story writer, and critic. In her stories "The Stigma" and "The Curse" from the book *Transgression and Other Stories*, we meet two women who are victims of a minutely crafted social system that traps helpless women. Ray is quite brilliant at narrating the lives of such victims. The condition of women after marriage, particularly when they find their husbands incapable or unworthy after going into the in-laws' house, has been brought to the fore by Ray. We see two women in these stories who find themselves in a labyrinth of despair and loneliness. In the social reality presented in the stories, being a woman, one is forced to live with whoever she gets and has no option of a divorce.

Moreover, society victimizes them on false grounds. In the given context, the concept of a happy housewife is wrongly adjudged with a severe lack of a female perspective. What makes a woman happy after marriage is not wealth or jewellery but a good, empathetic husband who can care for her emotional and bodily needs. However, the social narrative works otherwise. The narrator in "The Stigma" raises the problem by saying – "A woman's good fortune was judged by the social standing of her husband, the amount of jewellery she could laden herself with, the quality of food she ate, the weave of the clothes she wore – her state of her mind, happiness, emotional fulfilment, wishes all counted for nothing." (Ray 55).

Moreover, the satisfaction of libido is equivalent to the fulfillment of basic physical hunger, which led us to forge a system, the institution of marriage, to regulate the members of civilized society. Both men and women must have the right to address bodily needs. However, after marriage, women do not have any space to demand their sexual urges to be addressed if it is left alone, owing to various reasons, as happens in the above-mentioned stories of Pratibha Ray. The finely constructed social orders and the devised concept of morality prevent women from doing something to keep the demons inside them calm. As a result, they suffer. Through the heart-wrenching stories of Sarami from "The Stigma" and Pari from

"The Curse," Ray criticizes a patriarchal system that makes women go through a lot of emotional hardships.

A Freudian Reading into the Repression of Desire and Patriarchal Subjugation

"The Stigma" follows the emotional and bodily suffering of Sarami, who has been married to a deformed man, Raghu Tiadi. Despite losing his erect gait and an eye, he gets into his third marriage with Sarami. On the contrary, Sarami is extremely beautiful and young. She has an appealing look that certainly attracts the opposite gender. Her father is too poor to satisfy the demands of good-looking young men like Divakar and Sudam, so they reject her. Through her marriage to Raghu Tiadi, they later became her brother-in-law and nephew-in-law. The two men seek her voluptuous figure and beauty but have dismissed her for marriage as her father failed to meet their monetary demands. Thus, she is cursed into this barren marriage. Raghu undoubtedly fails to address his wife's bodily desire, and her suffering increases with every passing day till she reaches the point of getting bouts of hysteria, which is a result of her repressed sexual desire. She could have found a solution in a Divakar or a Sudam but chooses not to yield their advances to save her reputation before society and her morale before God. Pratibha Ray criticizes a patriarchal society through "Stigma" and lays open various subtle dynamics of oppression of women. In the story, Sarami's doomed fate is a classic example of how social norms can demolish a woman's inner self. Her bouts of hysteria can be explained through the Freudian concepts and findings in his book *Studies on Hysteria*. In the book, Joseph Breuer and Sigmund Freud analyze various causes, mechanisms, and treatments of hysteria and reach certain conclusions through five detailed case studies of patients with hysteria. The findings of the book indicate that the condition of hysteria originates from a repressed sexual desire. The act of suppression never ceases the intensity of the desire. Instead, it exists subconsciously and continues influencing the patient's physical health. Treating such a condition involves bringing out those repressed feelings and making the patient acknowledge them. In the curious case study of a governess named Lucy R., who has repressed her feelings towards her employer, develops symptoms such as loss

of smell and depression. While describing her case study Freud says, "Now I already knew from the analysis of similar cases that before hysteria can be acquired for the first time one essential condition must be fulfilled: an idea must be intentionally repressed from consciousness and excluded from associative modification. In my view this intentional repression is also the basis for the conversion, whether total or partial, of the sum of excitation." (Freud and Breuer 67). Sarami's repression of sexual desire led to the dire consequences of bouts of hysteria. Ray's narrative provides a vivid portrayal of her helpless condition. Under ideal circumstances, she would not have to repress the urges that ultimately lead to the inception of the disease, but Raghu does not turn out to be a capable husband. Moreover, she does not choose a cure that would lead her to an extramarital affair, which is immoral for her. Hence, the inevitable happens.

The result of repressed sexual urges can be seen in Sarami's unusual acts when bouts of hysteria frequently start attacking her. The story begins with these lines that conclude her struggle: "Sarami was seized with a shameful about of hysteria yet again. She clenched her fists, flung her legs obscenely about, rolled her head and yanked out her hair, shook her body and, stuck out her tongue, brushed her sari off her breasts. One moment she laid limp, exhausted, her eyes closed and the next she was up, fiercely rolling her eyes, hissing like a snake and frothing at the mouth...."(Ray 51). She craves for a man to address her urges and, at the same time, resists herself from doing immoral activities. Her hidden desires are evident in the lines – "She did feel giddy and desirous at the touch, her face aflame, her heart pounding away like a husking paddle."(56) Sudam tries to touch her hand when she serves him food, which she shows that she does not like but secretly craves a male touch. Had she found a way to satisfy her needs, she might not have become a patient of hysteria, but the social conditioning of immorality kept her from taking that aid of healing. She cannot keep people's mouths shut; consequently, her bouts are labelled immorality by the people of her village.

People like Dibakar and Sudam are severely criticised by the writer, who would not marry a beautiful girl like Sarami but have no problem initiating a sexual relationship with her. What makes matters more complicated is that Sudam becomes her nephew-in-law but still doesn't hesitate to make advances towards her. Whenever she

suffers from hysteria, even all the women of the village together find themselves incapable of controlling her fit; however, she is cured by the grab of five to six men. The narrative suggests, "It took five to six stout, strong-bodied hunks to pin her to the ground, their eager hands groping, probing, squeezing, caressing and assuaging her body."(Ray 61) The fact is spicy enough for an unhealthy gossip to incubate and spread across the filthy mouths of people. Society is too keen to judge her bouts and transform them into an act of immoral conduct. A hateful narrative is spread questioning her intentions, "The girl is shamming! Can't you see how quickly her pain vanishes once four or six young men hold her down? What does that mean? She's dying for you-know-what, the bitch, the immoral bitch." (62), in such words of abuse. This process of victimization is an emotional torment for a woman who does not have any control over her disease. In describing various facets of patriarchy, Ray beautifully identifies its real flag bearers. Sadly, women themselves are involved in framing an oppressively toxic patriarchal social environment where breathing freely becomes a dream for certain women.

Reimagining Chastity and Infidelity in the Wake of Forced Choices

"The Curse" revolves around Pari, the beautiful wife of 'city man' Jadunath, who gets her to marry him with this qualification of his respectable job in the city. However, he is forced to leave her in the village to maintain his pride as a city job holder. Initially, the inevitable separation is meant to last for a year, with Jadua returning to his eagerly waiting wife for fifteen days each year. However, Jadua gradually values money over Pari's happiness, and to cut the expense of traveling, he visits only once every three years, ignoring his wife's growing hunger and loneliness in the village. Pari's misery continues. As directed by her mother-in-law, she learns to kill her physical hunger by chewing paan, which gives the illusion of having eaten, but this does not satisfy the deeper hunger that grows with each passing day. Only Jadua, who chooses to be with her once every three years, could quench that thirst. Eventually, a hide-and-seek game begins between Pari and her elder brother-in-law, Kunja. Despite their family quarrel, Kunja, who deserves respect, sends a special paan to Pari (although they do not speak directly), and she savours

the paan as it addresses the hunger lurking within her. Kunja admires Pari's beauty, and fate allows them to be together. Despite her meticulous efforts to keep her virtue intact, Pari gives in, and they consummate their relationship near the pond behind their house.

Speculations and gossip soon reach the city man, who rushes back, demanding the truth from Pari. She begs for forgiveness, but he beats her mercilessly. Finally, Pari, along with her mother-in-law, blames the 'paan' for her infidelity, concluding that Kunja had put something in it that made her fall for him. Patriarchy is a broad concept, and there are various subtle, often ignored dimensions to the oppression of women. Pratibha Ray captures these taken-for-granted realities in her vivid portrayal of village life and people's thought processes, highlighting how innocent women are considered property and destined to be treated like objects. Women are reduced to their bodies, with little recognition of their emotions, intellectuality, or individuality. As her story "Stigma" illustrates, the writer famously expresses through her protagonist Sarami, "Don't women have minds? Are they all body, no mind?". (Ray 63) Women's intellectual and emotional needs are ignored because social behaviour is designed in a way that inherently oppresses them.

Pari is pushed into marrying a man whose only qualification is that he works in the city and does not engage in agricultural work like the other villagers. But what about his position? Will he be able to keep Pari with him in the city? These questions become irrelevant, partly because the people involved in the process are not aware enough to ask those, and more importantly because no one from her maternal side cares; they see her as a 'burden' they need to free themselves from. However, how can a girl live without her husband for months and years? Pari's love for Jadua is natural, as is her longing to be with him. However, how dare she express her physical desire? The pity is that women like Pari are brought up so that they are not fully aware of the wrongdoings happening to them. From childhood, Pari is trained to obey everything her in-laws decide. The root cause is that every household with a girl child desperately wants to get rid of her. Therefore, she is trained to bear all sorts of emotional and physical torture. Unfortunately, she internalizes these things and calls them "virtue" and "chastity" while terming all forms of protest as "sin" and "infidelity." If a girl sees her mother or sister-in-law

being mistreated in her own family, she will naturally think that receiving similar treatment in her in-laws' house is absolutely fine and normal.

Pari doesn't find enough food to satisfy her hunger, so she is told to chew paan to compensate. Similarly, because of Jadua's prolonged absence, she fails to address her emotional and bodily needs. Naturally, Kunja becomes that paan, partially fulfilling Pari's hunger and addressing her loneliness. The story's narrative suggests that Pari's indulgence with Kunja is not a choice but a compulsion. Had she forcefully suppressed her desire as Sarami does, she could have developed a psychological disorder similar to Sarami's bouts of hysteria and would have suffered the jeers of people. No one questions why Jadua remains away, leaving his wife alone for years. Whether his absence is mere negligence or some suspicious activities are forcing him to remain away from his wife is never discussed by the flagbearers of morality. Whatever the reason, leaving his young wife alone for years is a sin, and society's paralysed intellect prevents it from thinking from the perspective of Pari. On the contrary, they keep the activities of a woman like Pari under surveillance and constantly look for a chance to oppress her. The story moulds the definition of 'chastity' and 'infidelity', making their use context-driven. Pari's infidelity is 'chaste' as Jadua's negligence is infidel from the victim's perspective.

A Comparative Study of the Inevitable Victimisation of Women in The Curse and The Stigma

We are presented a piece of the life of two women in 'The Stigma' and 'The Curse' by Pratibha Ray; the one common plight in Sarami and Pari is that both suffer from unhappy marriages. More specifically, their bodily needs remain unaddressed by their respective husbands. In Pari's case, she finds solace, but that only adds more chaos to her already doomed fate. In the other story, Sarami's rock-solid willpower prevents her from crossing the line, and unfortunately, that self-resistance becomes the cause of her illness. Ultimately, her bouts become a spicy gossip, questioning her intentions. The visible conclusion is that whether you are a Pari or a Sarami, it doesn't matter; you cannot stop the passage of victimisation of a fully conditioned society. What should make one unsettled is that they are

cursed into a helpless condition after marriage, and any choice of them is going to put them in a hellish condition. Unfortunately, the melancholic lives of such women are mostly overlooked. People are quick to pass comments and pronounce judgments on women like Sarami instead of being empathetic to their uncontrollable conditions. These subtle dynamics of the suffering of women are often ignored, but in Ray's fiction, the victims raise their hands and force our intellect to give them a thought.

Both the protagonists' fates end on a shameful note, and people wrongly consider them immoral, contrary to their behaviours described at the beginning of the story. Sarami is shy and, throughout her life, takes great care of her conduct. She is described thus – "She was so gentle, so serene, so unruffled that she often resembled a sculpted image. It was of course quite another matter that despite her damnedest efforts to smother her youthful figure under layers of clothes, her voluptuousness was apparent" (51). Similarly, Pari's faithfulness towards her husband can never be questioned. Her unwillingness to send her husband off is described when Jadunath sets to go to the city. The narration complements her faithfulness – "As for Pari, her devotion to her husband was absolute. No one had ever seen her with her head uncovered or behaving disrespectfully. Like a busy bird, she was constantly at work." (Ray 120). Pari's indulgence with Kunja and Sarami's bouts of hysteria never sprout out of the conscious will. Rather, they are the consequence of their helpless conditions prolonged to the point of inevitability. After meeting a similar fate, the two protagonists take two different steps but face the jeers of others regardless of that. It is less about the nature of their choices and more about the result. In these two stories, Pratibha Rai strongly points out that the social framework is crafted so brilliantly against women that society denies them empathy and makes fun of their characters. Moreover, everybody participates in the process of victimization and torment.

The socio-cultural realities presented in these stories are hostile towards women in many subtle aspects: Sarami is teased by Sudam while she serves him food, and, unfortunately, she cannot complain to anyone of that improper act, as a brother-in-law teasing his sister-in-law is deemed usual in the given social context. However, people judge her bouts of hysteria and shame her activities, and ironically

call her immoral. Sadly, other women of the village join hands in the process of victimization. Both Pari and Sarami are judged wrongfully because of their problems of not having a husband with them who could quench their bodily thirst. Their emotional sufferings are not considered a problem by the people around them. A woman's sexual needs and fulfillment are never given thought and are often ignored. This is how a society, constructed against women and their needs, behaves towards them.

Conclusion

Ray attempts to draw intellectual attention by highlighting the problems of Sarami and Pari and presenting a hypocritical society before us. She criticizes the culture of silencing female desire and challenges us to consider how such narratives can bring change in both thought and action. The story of these two women and their inevitable aspect of suffering makes us more empathetic towards them. Seeing the realities from their perspectives is the first step towards creating a society that will be kinder towards women. Moreover, the study makes us realize that causing a dent in the oppressively patriarchal framework that has been conditioned against women is a need of the hour. The systematic subjugation and normalization of different forms of oppression are a result of the age-old efforts of patriarchy. Hence, changing people's perspectives and making them empathize with women by highlighting their struggles, as in these two stories, require serious intellectual endeavours. Ultimately, these two stories not only foreshadow the depth of female suffering but also illuminate the path to a positive social transformation.

Works Cited

Bayes, Jane H. "Gender and Politics: Mapping the Terrain in the Age of Empire." *Gender and Politics: The State of the Discipline*, edited by Jane H. Bayes, 1st ed., Verlag Barbara Budrich, 2012, pp. 135–74. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvddzq1d.10. Accessed 14 Dec. 2024.

Cavarero, Adriana, and Anne Tordi. "Judith Butler and the Belligerent Subject." *Annali d'Italianistica*, vol. 29, 2011, pp. 163–70. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/24016419. Accessed 14 Dec. 2024.

Ray, Pratibha. "The Stigma." *Transgression and Other Stories*, edited by Adyasa Das, translated by K.K Mohanty et al., Black Eagle Books, 2020, pp. 51–65.

---. "The Curse." *Transgression and Other Stories*, edited by Adyasa Das, translated by Sachidananda Mohanty, Black Eagle Books, 2020, pp. 117–32.

Butler, Judith. "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory." *Theatre Journal*, vol. 40, no. 4, 1988, pp. 519–31. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/3207893. Accessed 29 June 2024.

Breuer, Josef, and Sigmund Freud. *Studies on Hysteria*. 1895. *SigmundFreud.net*, www.sigmundfreud.net/studies_on_hysteria.pdf. Accessed 05 July 2024.

Freud, Sigmund. "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality and Other Works." *The Pelican Freud Library*, edited by Angela Richards and James Strachey, vol. 7, Penguin Books, 1977.

Vasu Reddy, and Judith Butler. "Troubling Genders, Subverting Identities: Interview with Judith Butler." *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*, no. 62, 2004, pp. 115–23. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4066688. Accessed 14 Dec. 2024.

7.

Queering of the Popular: Exploring the Integration of the Queer Expressions in Media and Fashion by Revisiting Stuart Hall's "Notes on Deconstructing 'The Popular'"

Farhin Rahman[*] and Roohi Andalib Huda[**]

[*] *Alumni, Department of English and Humanities, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, BRAC University, Bangladesh*

[**] *Roohi Andalib Huda, Assistant Professor, Department of English and Humanities, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, BRAC University, Bangladesh.*

Abstract

In his essay "Notes on Deconstructing 'The Popular'" (1981), Stuart Hall shares insights on the popular that has seen its share of support and criticism. This essay is revisited to navigate the tension amongst social forces that negotiate to determine the content and cultural products of the masses. By revisiting Hall's essay, this article aims to explore the workings of the popular, which is perhaps both a site of manipulation and resistance. A specific focus of the article is to look into queer expressions, especially in terms of fashion, which serves as an example through which this article navigates the space of popular culture production in light of Stuart Hall's understanding of 'the popular'. The main argument examines how much of the popular today aligns with Stuart Hall's ideas and if the essentialist homogenisation of the popular is an effective mode of analysis. By referring to the work of Stuart Hall, the aim is to establish that his ideas from 1981 can be revisited to problematise the popular today.

Keywords: Fashion, queer, popular culture, identity, culture industry

Over the past decade, queer fashion has slowly made its way into the popular culture. At present, queer fashion stands as one of the most common signifiers of the popular. With popular culture on the one hand, a look at high culture, on the other hand, can lead to confusion – whereas once high culture stood in contrast to the culture of the masses, it now blurs its boundary with the popular. High culture essentially has been considered a subculture that contains the

interests of the elites in the society. The politics of high culture is such that it gate-keeps a part of the culture as the more sophisticated and tasteful. This is why the presence of queer expressions, which historically have not been on good terms with high culture in the fashion of the global elites, is a phenomenon that needs attention. How are we understanding and consuming this evolution, and under what terms? Are we appropriating queer fashion in the name of representation? What does this sudden fluidity in the boundary between high culture and popular culture tell us?

These are questions that one might find themselves asking, and if not, one should ask. More often than not, the popular has been looked at from a place of monolithic subjectivity. Thus, popular culture has acted as a blanket term with a homogenising effect on the interests of the mass. It is easy, and quite understandably so, possible to look at culture and the culture industry that generates popular culture as a capitalist tool. Capitalism works not to feed the consumers what they desire but to manipulate consumer behavior in desiring what best suits the agenda of capitalism. However, in saying so, it is essential not to negate the possibility of negotiation between the masses and the culture industry (controlled by the elite). At present, this asks us to problematise the popular and look deeper into its workings to explain the culture industry. This directs the discussion to Stuart Hall, who, in his essay "Notes on Deconstructing 'The Popular'" (1981) shares insights on the popular that has seen its share of both support and criticism. This essay can be brought to light to revisit the ground of tension amongst social forces that negotiate to determine the content and cultural products of the masses. By revisiting Hall's essay, this article aims to explore the workings of the popular, which is perhaps both a site of manipulation and resistance. In the discussion that is to follow, queer expressions, especially in terms of fashion, will be an example through which this article will try and navigate the space of popular culture production in light of Stuart Hall's understanding of the popular. The main argument is to examine how much of the popular today aligns with Stuart Hall's ideas and if the essentialist homogenisation of the popular is an effective mode of analysis. It must be made clear that the article speaks from a non-queer perspective. Any shortcoming in analysis that may arise due to this article not coming from a queer perspective

is not intended to offend or hurt and requests constructive criticism. Through this article's discussion, which will heavily refer to the work of Stuart Hall, the aim is to establish that his ideas from 1981 can be revisited in problematising the popular today.

Cultural theorists have offered many definitions of popular culture over the years. It is important first to clarify which particular definition of popular culture fits the purpose of this article. Popular culture will mainly be explored in light of Stuart Hall later in this article, but establishing what "popular" means would be a wise way to position this article in the existing scholarship. One can look back at John Storey, who discusses popular culture in his book *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction* in reference to several available definitions. As one of the working definitions of popular culture, Storey says, "A second way of defining popular culture is to suggest that it is the culture that is left over after we have decided what is high culture. Popular culture, in this definition, is a residual category, there to accommodate texts and practices that fail to meet the required standards to qualify as high culture. In other words, it is a definition of popular culture as inferior culture" (Storey 6). He also adds, "This definition of popular culture is often supported by claims that popular culture is mass-produced commercial culture, whereas high culture is the result of an individual act of creation. The latter, therefore, deserves only a moral and aesthetic response; the former requires only a fleeting sociological inspection to unlock what little it has to offer" (Storey 6). This articulation of popular culture is quite fascinating, for it helps one to understand what "popular" really stands for – simple, inferior, mass-produced and commercial. This stands in contrast to what is considered "high" about high culture – its complex aesthetics and the artistic uniqueness of its production. This definition fits the purpose of this article because, as Storey also mentions, such rigidity in terms of categorisation calls for a clear division between the two, a division that stays unchanged through time. However, this boundary between the two can be difficult to maintain, as historically, cultural traffic seems to shift between the two, something that Stuart Hall also emphasises. Nevertheless, this definition of the "popular" has sustained itself in the sense that it is one of the most common articulations of the popular. As mentioned

earlier, a part of this article's aim is to problematise this notion through Stuart Hall's discussion.

A look back at queer fashion can be a good starting point to attempt and problematise the aforementioned idea of the popular. Since the Stonewall Riots in 1969, LGBTQ resistance against the oppressive and systematically imposed gender binary has gained momentum. Queer identity expression, through clothes and makeup, became more than ever a part of that resistance – it was an act of reclaiming the "queer". Over the years since then, a slow amalgamation has been seen between the queer and the popular. However, it is in the past decade that queer fashion has taken over popular fashion. What is interesting is that high culture, which has always maintained its distance from the popular culture or the culture of the common people, has started incorporating style and attire commonly thought of as queer into itself. On one hand, while brand labels and designers like Christian Dior, Cristobal Balenciaga, and many more are known to have been gay, it previously did not help reconstruct the heterosexual binary in the fashion of the high culture. On the other hand, within the popular media, more and more inclusion of queer identities is being seen. Thus, the diversity emerging in fashion can be credited to the popular media; however, even in this sector, questions remain to be posed. An example is *Netflix*'s hit series *Sex Education*, which is widely applauded for its queer representation and the showcasing of critical issues like sexual orientation, mental health, and sexual health. While it can be considered a small step in the right direction, it also falls short in many ways. Granted that it is another fascinating discussion, this article's concern is to highlight that the increasing queer representation in popular culture has commodified the queer experience more than it has broken heteronormative media. Vázquez-Rodríguez et al. write in their article titled "The Role of Popular Culture for Queer Teen Identities' Formation in Netflix's *Sex Education*" that "the increasing visibility of LGBTIQ+ people in popular culture (particularly within video-on-demand platforms) may respond to commercial interests (the multiplication of LGBTIQ+ and teen audiences, for instance) rather than reflecting an actual change in the values of the status quo" (199). This is mentioned to highlight two things – firstly, the need for queer representation in the

media has been responded to, albeit in ways that mostly benefit the capitalist culture industry. However, the possibility of this representation, as a result of the resistance that came from people to an extent, cannot be overlooked. Lastly, this representation has also led to appropriation, stereotyping and commodification of the queer experience and culture.

In light of appropriation, another prominent example is pop icon and former member of "One Direction" Harry Styles' donning of androgynous fashion. In the December 2020 issue of Vogue, Harry Styles made it to the cover wearing a gown that made a statement. While staying true to one's sense of style and expressing it is admirable, what was strikingly confusing is that it was considered nearly ground-breaking in its attempt and execution. For decades, queer people have faced violence for simply existing as they are. As Rachel Askinasi mentions in her article, "so many marginalized people have been mocked, ostracized, beaten, and even killed for doing the same thing he's done"(n.p.). She also adds, that many trans people have been at the forefront of queer/gender non-conforming fashion and have been subjected to violence for it, especially those who belonged to marginalised groups. Marsha P. Johnson, a frontrunner of gay liberation activism in America and one of the revolutionary figures of the Stonewall Riots is popularly known for her statement-making fashion that accompanied her drag queen persona. She is one amongst the many names that come to mind who have fought with their lives to sustain queer expressions, be it in fashion and lifestyle or in simply living a day at a time. However, when Harry Styles is deemed revolutionary in his act of wearing a dress on the cover picture of a magazine that caters to consumers of both popular and high culture, one may not see a revolution taking place. What is visible is a White, privileged, and famous man wearing a dress because he perhaps feels good in it. However, the media and Popular culture orient it entirely to this man's generosity in breaking gender stereotypes. One sees appropriation of fashion and culture that people have been ostracised for. What is happening here is that a whole community is fading away in the background as this man becomes the stunning face of gender non-conforming fashion.

Another example is *RuPaul's Drag Race*, a reality TV competition featuring drag culture that has very cleverly put up drag culture for

grabs by popular media. It has nearly gentrified drag/gay culture, commercialising its content to be consumed by mainstream media. There have been numerous instances of racism and more often than not, the show has repackaged stereotypes about drag queens and trans people in general in a manner that allowed drag culture to seep into the popular without effectively bringing any positive change towards the perception of trans or queer people. These are a few examples out of the many where we can see the incorporation of queer and trans culture into mainstream media. While *RuPaul's* show is essentially a popular media element, Harry Styles, as a gender non-conforming icon, stands to be celebrated both by popular culture and high culture.

What can be taken away from this? That queer representation, or queer culture in the mainstream media, has its way of serving the commercial interests of the capitalist culture industry behind the façade of representation. Nevertheless, the focus will now be shifted on to its presence and meaning in high culture, as mentioned in the example of Harry Styles, to build the foundation of further discussion that problematises the notion of the homogenised popular culture. It is a matter of curiosity as to why high culture has suddenly donned itself in queer culture, to the point where many cis-hetero individuals, some of whom have always been more aligned with the high culture, now integrate previously known queer expressions into their fashion. The notion that the integration of queer culture means that there is more inclusion or that it means that we are pacing towards a utopian world where fashion and culture have no label does not hold its ground anymore because it is not entirely true, as has been expressed already, this inclusion is more often than not done in the interests of capitalists. That being said, it is not wise to completely negate the resistance and demand generated by the common people, many of whom are active consumers of popular culture.

This leads us to the problem of making sense of the overlap between high culture and popular culture. One of the approaches would be to say that we are made to consume what the exploitative capitalism wants us to for the sake of its own benefits. Another approach that takes popular culture as something generated by the common people, which many usually do not support, would suggest

that what we have in popular culture results from the needs of the working class. While the first approach seems the most befitting, some alterations still need to be made. This calls for the much-needed revisitation of Stuart Hall's "Notes on Deconstructing 'The Popular'" as promised.

Before delving into further discussion, a quick summary of Hall's argument can be done, as his essay is quite saturated with some very substantial points. Hall starts by saying that the struggle over the culture of the common people is a point at which all discussions on popular culture should start. He recognises, "The changing balance and relations of social forces throughout that history reveal themselves, time and again, in struggles over the forms of the culture, traditions and ways of life of the popular classes" (Hall 227). Hall also adds, "Capital had a stake in the culture of the popular classes because the constitution of a whole new social order around capital required a more or less continuous, if intermittent, process of re-education, in the broadest sense" (227). What can be understood from this is that Hall indicates that it is not only the changing social forces that influence how popular culture is constructed but also that capital has a stake in popular culture. This is because it is through the mobilisation of popular culture that the capital can influence consumer behaviour on a large scale. Hall is more curious about the tension between the social forces, and he refuses to see the common people either as docile or as the only source of the popular. He does not want to consider capital as the sole force that shapes the dimensions of what is understood to be popular culture. Hall's approach is more dynamic – it takes into account that social relations form a complex web within which cultural content and products are formed. Thus, pointing to the tension of power relations, he suggests that it is impossible to draw distinctions between the popular and the high culture in a purely descriptive way as cultures transform over time. While the categories stay still, the content does not. To him, "there is no fixed content to the category of 'popular culture', so there is no fixed subject to attach to it – 'the people'" (Hall 239). Hall also denounces the idea of a pure category that represents "the people". Additionally, Hall mentions, "Struggle and resistance – but also, of course, appropriation and ex-propriation" – this is the part from Hall's essay that resonates thoughts on the question about the

presence of the queer in the popular (Hall 227). Hall argues that the popular struggles between the capital and the ordinary people. Although it reflects a Gramscian approach, through this, Hall encourages the readers of the essay to look at the popular as a transitioning phenomenon where although a large space affirms the capital power, whatever little space is left is a space of opposition and resistance. This is the site of negotiation, as has been previously mentioned.

"Notes on Deconstructing 'The Popular'" still stands as an important read because of the rich insights Hall shares and the dimensions of problematising the popular that it opens up. Through this perspective, the queering of the popular and the queer can be looked at as the site where high culture meets popular culture. If the hypothesis can be considered that increasing queer representation and the presence of its fashion, makeup, and style in both popular and high culture is a marker of resistance or demand of the common, and the commodification of the queer is a result of the capitalist agenda; then, we can find ourselves agreeing with Hall's ideas. To what extent is the hypothesis aligned with what this article will be exploring now? To address the hypothesis that has been suggested, it can be pointed out why Hall refuses the either/or model of approaching the popular. Hall argues that if the relations through which the popular culture is constituted are thus manipulative and exploitative, it should render the consumers as a group of people either as "debased" or as people "living in a permanent state of false consciousness" (Hall 232). The rendering of this group of people as "cultural dopes" may make us feel satisfied with the way we denounce the capitalist culture industry, but it also leaves people as compliant in their own exploitation wholly, which is a very "unsocialist" perspective, according to him (Hall 232). Hall's thoughts can be agreed upon, as it is not realistic to assume that the people who consume media and fashion that come at the cost of exploitation of the queer culture are passive. We, as people, demand inclusion and the acknowledgment of the intersectional spaces the queer population holds. This is why there is a presence of it which has made its way to the popular. However, the capital is still present in the arena of the popular, and it must dominate, which is why the queering of the popular has been shaped the way it has been shaped

– the mechanism has come into work due to the tension between dominance and resistance.

Moving on, as indicated, the power relations that occupy popular culture space and the tension amongst them forces cultural contents to position themselves either in the centre (elite) or the periphery (common) (Hall 234). This leads one to understand that there is no inherent distinction between high culture and popular culture. Contents that constitute these categories change with time – "Popular forms become enhanced in cultural value, go up the cultural escalator – and find themselves on the opposite side" (Hall 234). It can be argued that this point of view assists in our understanding of the overlap between high culture and popular culture as it is seen in fashion. The tension emanating from different social groups that force content to take a position, as Hall suggests, is an explanation that can, by extension, account for the overlap. Dominance and resulting resistance as a cultural force can explain the positionality of queer fashion, style, makeup, language, etc., in both the popular and high culture. This ties up the discussion, as the article has attempted to explore the site of negotiation as promised and, in doing so, has also pointed out why we need to problematise the popular. There are, of course, reasons why one may want to side with the either/or model – where one either takes it for granted that the popular is a manifestation of the capital that solely exploits the passive people or that the popular is the making of the lives and the politics of the ordinary people. However, this model will not entirely account for the unprecedented explosion of popularity in our lives, as it cannot be the result of our docile existence.

Before concluding, some more thoughts can be added to the complexities present in cultures – to further problematise the usual perception of culture through a homogenising gaze. To do so, it is essential that we also look into what this shifting of cultural traffic, as discussed in this article, means in terms of identity. This is more of an additional note to support the aforementioned comments about the appropriation of queer culture, as understanding the hierarchies of identities that constitute a culture can be one of the ways to resist its homogenization. In the book chapter titled "'Not Yet Queer Enough' Constructing Identity through Culture", author Konstantinos Eleftheriadis demonstrates that "the collective identity is not only

built at the rational-critical, but also at the practical and the cultural level" (Eleftheriadis 99). He looks into culture as a mode of shaping collective identities, which, by extension, helps to further problematise culture. As Eleftheriadis portrays in this chapter:

> In contrast to the subculture logic of homogenous oppositional entities against dominant cultures, Bourdieu's cultural capital allows for the examination of cultural hierarchy as a 'useful conceptual lens with which to understand the dynamics of symbolic appropriation of popular culture' […]. This view allows us to deconstruct the idea of queer festivals as 'egalitarian safe havens from hierarchy and power' and rather acknowledge them as scenes 'structured around multidimensional axes of differentiation and distinction' (497). Habitus and cultural capital are, therefore, useful to examine the hierarchies developing inside the queer festivals. (101)

As already mentioned, the reason to refer to Eleftheriadis is because it allows one to look at how popular anything is but a homogenous entity. There is no us versus them, no high culture versus popular culture, and no heteronormative culture versus a queer culture that does not, within itself, contain hierarchies that shape itself and the collective identities that form. In reference to Stuart Hall, this again showcases that power relations are constantly intertwined. This, in turn, results in the complex dynamics present in any culture or category that either maintains the boundary or blurs it in contact with another. Thus, the identities that come out of it are a result of the complex power relations. Therefore, a homogenising explanation of culture and the popular falls short of explaining the rich diversity that is not merely within but results in constructing both the internal and the external.

The aim of this article was to revisit Stuart Hall's "Notes on Deconstructing 'The Popular'" in the context of the changing dimensions of the popular. While it has attempted to do so, there is still immense potential in this area that can be explored when more broadly discussed in reference to other cultural theories. This article aspires to act as a call for more ideas that problematise the notion of the popular, especially in reference to queer culture, fashion, and expressions. Queering of the popular is a phenomenon that can be looked at and visited from a great number of diverse perspectives, and it is quite interesting how power relations act to maintain it. While Hall's essay is one of the many to understand the dynamics of

culture, it is still unique in the fascinating manner through which it problematises our understanding of the popular. It helps us explore the popular not as a singular narrative in its discourse but as a construction of fragmented power dynamics interwoven in their struggle to dominate and resist. Our attempts at simplifying popular culture would limit the scope of knowledge that can be pursued by examining these fragments. By problematising, we do not unravel the delicate weaving; we make sense of our lives in a dominantly hetero-capitalist society where hierarchies are building blocks of each category we know. This article can be concluded with the hopes that in understanding these hierarchies, we will be able to acknowledge the more intersectional spaces of the popular, and that starts with leaving behind the homogenising blanket.

Works Cited

Askinasi, Rachel. "Why are people acting like Harry Styles is the first man to wear a dress?" *Insider*, 15 December 2020. *Insider*, https://www.insider.com/harry-styles-vogue-cover-controversy-style-icon-non-binary-fashion-2020-12.

---. "The Queer Food Foundation Is Feeding More than Bellies – It's Nourishing a Community." *TODAY.Com*, 30 June 2024, www.today.com/food/queer-food-foundation-rcna157252.

Boomer, Lee. "Life Story: Marsha P. Johnson." *Women & the American Story*, 25 Nov. 2024, wams.nyhistory.org/growth-and-turmoil/growing-tensions/marsha-p-johnson/.

Born, Tyler. "Marsha 'Pay It No Mind' Johnson Challenging Gender Boundaries: A Trans Biography Project by Students of Catherine Jacquet Outhistory." *Outhistory.Org*, outhistory.org/exhibits/show/tgi-bios/marsha-p-johnson. Accessed 4 Dec. 2024.

Eleftheriadis, Konstantinos. "'Not Yet Queer Enough Constructing Identity through Culture." *Queer Festivals*, Amsterdam University Press, 2018, pp. 99–142. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv5nph43.8.

Hall, Stuart. "Notes on Deconstructing 'The Popular.'" *People's History and Socialist Theory*, edited by Raphael Samuel, 2nd ed., Routledge, 2016, pp. 227-240.

Storey, John. "What is Popular Culture?" *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: An Introduction*, 5th ed., Pearson, 2009, p. 6.

Vázquez-Rodríguez, Lucía-Gloria, et al. "The Role of Popular Culture for Queer Teen Identities' Formation in Netflix's *Sex Education*." *Media and Communication*, no. 3, vol. 9, 2021, p. 199. *DOAJ*, https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v9i3.4115.

8.

A Feminine-Coded Future: Representations of the Feminist Sublime and Technological Embodiment in Select Indian Dystopian Fiction

Meera Vinod

PhD Scholar , Department of English Literature, The English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU), Hyderabad, India

Abstract

The research surrounding Indian dystopias has revealed a preoccupation with their correspondence to real-world societal challenges. *Escape* (2015) by Manjula Padmanabhan and *Machinehood* (2021) by S. B. Divya is no different – the settings of both texts provide the key to deciphering systemic issues such as climate change, female foeticide, and wage exploitation. This article explores the evolution of the sublime as represented in the narratives to account for the emergence of a feminist version of the sublime. In *Escape*, the fascist State apparatus has conducted a systematic femicide of its population. While Meiji owes her survival to her uncles who dosed her with hormonal suppressants to arrest her development, she also internalises certain problematic ideas of what it means to be a woman. She reclaims her subjecthood when she realises the power that she wields over the transgressive desires of her uncles. Hence, the presence of the sexed and forbidden female body in *Escape* is significant in its subversion of the traditionally masculinist-coded sublime. This article also uncovers the biotechnological sublime as an event wherein biological materiality is negated to various ends. In the wake of cyborg technology, Welga's refusal to be tethered to biological destiny in *Machinehood* forces the reader to grapple with alternative reconceptualisations of womanhood that do not hinge on the body and its functions. Further, this article also asserts that the neocolonial settings of both *Escape* and *Machinehood* affect subjecthood and its ability to evoke the feeling of the sublime in specific ways.

Keywords: Indian Dystopian Fiction, Sublime, Feminist Sublime, Biotechnological Sublime, Postcolonialism

Introduction

Escape (2008) by Manjula Padmanabhan and *Machinehood* (2021) by S.B Divya are Indian science fiction texts with widely varying interpretations of futuristic technological interventions. Both novels are dystopian in nature, with a distinctly Indian setting sans any other overt commonality. While *Escape* is an explicitly feminist text that speculates an apocalyptic and misogynist world with a lone female survivor, *Machinehood* depicts everything from body transmogrification to AI takeovers. This article seeks to close the gap between the two by teasing out a subcurrent of corporeal anxieties about gender that inform the two texts. *Escape's* prepubescent protagonist, Meiji, reels with the knowledge that her body is what primarily sets her apart from everyone else. In contrast, *Machinehood's* protagonist, Welga, deals with the fact that "she had more electronics in her body than anybody else in the world" (Divya 8).

Most of the scholarly work surrounding the texts has been centred on how Indian dystopian fiction acts as a conduit for social transformation. As a sub-genre of science fiction, dystopian fiction is far removed from the characteristic escapist tendencies of its parent genre. Instead, dystopias offer an alternative re-imagining of social order and human transformation in a dire fashion. This also serves as a warning by exaggerating present social concerns. Moylan argues that dystopia favours the marginalised in portraying destructive cultural and ecological systems by charting a pathway for revolt and self-determination (189). In the context of *Escape*, a fair amount of work has been done to recognise that the dystopian landscape Padmanabhan created is an allegory of real concerns faced by Indian women. While Chakraborty has linked the femicide in *Escape* as a reaction to real-world ramifications of India's sex ratio and female foeticide problem (84), Basu and Tripathi have looked at Meiji's guardians' attitude towards her female body as a reflection of society's distaste for open dialogue of women's issues such as menstruation (47). Basu and Tripathi extend this idea in their assertion that Meiji's being dosed with hormonal suppressants suggests "epistemological distancing," an act of erasure of the category of womanhood (47). This article focuses on the erasure of female subjectivity in Meiji's socialisation and contends that Meiji's journey towards womanhood (or even personhood) resembles a

transformation from object to subject. This transformation results from the sublime experience that both Meiji and her uncles experience in her growth toward self-reassertion.

Similarly, the literature surrounding S.B. Divya's *Machinehood* discusses the ethical dilemmas surrounding technological enmeshment. Mittal studies *Machinehood*'s juxtaposition of 'dakinis' (a Buddhist term for a female goddess used by the vigilante group in the novel to designate a class of exclusive female androids) alongside cyborgs as a commentary on morality versus technology (626). In an age of technological body modifications, science fiction as a genre provides tools for feminist reformulations of the gendered body as a means of transcending the limitations set on the female form (Mitchel 110). However, with these modifications often come new contested meanings surrounding gender and power. This article argues that the biotechnological interventions on the female body evoke the sublime, a mixture of awe and horror, at how the gendered body now defies biology and assorted gender roles in unpredictable ways. This rendering of the sublime is further complicated by the networks of power inherently present in a postcolonial dystopian setting such as India.

The sexed body in the two texts are reconfigured in disparate ways within their divergent world-building but converge in a strikingly similar manner in subverting the masculinist notion of the 'sublime'. *Escape* narrates a dystopian society that has successfully carried out a genocide of the human female race alongside archival erasure of all mentions of women – mockingly called 'the Vermin tribe' (Padmanabhan, ch.9) in their world. However, they are unsuccessful in censoring people's memories. The older males surviving in the land remember traces of what it meant to be a woman. In contrast, the younger ones envision an archetypal woman figure, often pieced together by the stories narrated by the elders. The mythology of the woman is always centred around the female body and its ability for childbirth, resulting in a primordial fear of its otherness. This primordial horror is accompanied by curiosity and longing that threaten 'the Generals,' the cloned rulers of this dystopia. The added component of desire underlies the subversion of the sublime. This subversion leads to a refashioning of the masculinist nature of the sublime to what critics have termed "the

feminine sublime." After establishing the notion of the feminine sublime in this manner, this article examines Welga's cyborg body, gendered explicitly in the text, as a class of exclusive female androids. The notion of the sublime and the feminine sublime is extended to the biotechnological sublime represented through the depiction of a gendered body mediated and enmeshed with technology. The significance of such depictions in science fiction produced in a postcolonial setting opens up discussions on the various loci of power that act upon the sublime concept.

Sexing the Sublime: *Escape*, No Woman's Land

The concept of the sublime, an integral terminology in aesthetic criticism, was reintroduced by Nicolas Boileau in his translation of an ancient Greek text, *On the Sublime* by Longinus, written in the first century AD. Longinus differentiates the sublime from rhetoric as the capability of the speaker or writer to transport the reader rather than just persuade through rhetoric (Abrams 388). However, in the eighteenth century, the sublime concept shifted from being restricted to linguistic discourse to an aesthetic quality inherent in external sources found in the natural world. This shift transpired due to two critical works, Immanuel Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790) and Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). The distinction between the two theorisations lies in asserting that "the sublime is a quality inherent in an external object" (Abrams 388). Kant contends that the sublime cannot be found within the object of nature: "We can say no more than that the object serves for the presentation of a sublimity that can be found in the mind; for what is properly sublime cannot be contained in any sensible form, but concerns only ideas of reason.…"(Kant 129). The mention of reason indicates that Kant's conceptualisation of the sublime is restricted to the "judging Subject" (Kant 80).

Now, in Padmanabhan's dreary dystopian landscape, women are all but an extinct species. Apart from Meiji, the lone woman survivor in such a world, all perspectives are male. Meiji's body is frozen in its prepubescent form with the aid of hormone suppressants for purported reasons of safety. Meiji is kept ignorant of the state of affairs and does not escape the male socialisation that informs her

upbringing by her uncles. Meiji is both an object and a subject in the novel. Her subjectivity is borne in her refusal to be an object of derision and fear that her existence evokes in those around her, including the uncles who ostentatiously claim to love her: "'I want to address the issue of which port she will take her cargo of carnal destiny to – assuming that she is capable of even beginning to float. You speak about nature and biology, little brother – what do you think nature does to a female in heat?'" (Padmanabhan, ch.3). The casual dehumanization and crude depiction of female sexuality by no less than her uncle indicates the misogyny inspired by his fear of the female body. This is reflected in Meiji's confusion and terror at the changes that adolescence brings forth when the hormonal suppressants are stopped. Filled with half-baked information and misogynistic ideas of what it means to be female, Meiji lacks the vocabulary to comprehend the bodily changes that take place and thus deems her own shift to adolescence as monstrous: "'Uncle Two has been saying, for some time now, that I'm going to turn into a monster.'" (Padmanabhan, ch.34). This Othering was instilled into Meiji through a conspicuous absence of any discussion of the feminine. Richard White contends that the power of the sublime is its capacity to confront one with "the immeasurable otherness" (129) immediately. Further, White asserts that the sublime aids in opening up a perspective external to oneself: "... she does not experience herself as a 'subject' who projects her interests, concerns, and categories onto the world, but paradoxically enough, as an 'object' in so far as she is addressed and even invaded by that which lies beyond the circle of her own concern" (129). This is addressed when Meiji recognizes that the mysterious "monstrosity" is somewhere within her; more housed explicitly within her genitals. In confiding to her imaginary friend, Mister Frog, she says,

> 'Extremely. It is like a monster inside a monster – it's so frightening that no-one dares to even talk about it.'
>
> 'If it's uncontrollable how could you see pictures of the thing?'
>
> 'There aren't pictures of the uncontrollable thing. It can't be seen. The wrigglies are only…outside it. Or something. I don't really understand.
>
> 'But if it's so dangerous how can it be sitting quietly inside of you all this while – and you didn't even know it? '(Padmanabhan, ch.34)

This exchange is guided as inconsequential; however, it marks the first moment of Meiji's realization of the hypocrisy surrounding her. Using her imaginary friend as a shield, she indirectly questions why her body suddenly poses so much harm when she has been living in it all this while. The projection of the male subjects' fear of the uncontrollable Other that is embedded within her sexed body influences Meiji's self-image. No amount of legislation, cloning technology or official erasure can deny the primal fear that the female figure conjures in the minds of the male subject in such a society. Therefore, even though he hears his traumatized niece call herself a monster repeatedly, Younger [uncle] makes no move to divest her of such notions. Indeed, at some moments in the narrative, he reinforces this self-hatred because of his own fear of what she represents. When she sobs at all the tumultuous changes taking place within her, Younger feels ashamed at the hatred that such "weakness" (Padmanabhan, ch.22) inspires in him.

The physical and archival erasure of women coupled with the revised definitions of womanhood to suit the State narrative ensures that the judging subject is an overwhelmingly male subject. Meiji's voice is coloured by her perceptions of the world around her and the intentional ignorance that her uncles kept her in – therefore, her subjectivity is aligned accordingly. She objectifies herself as she does not know any better – the lack of female voice and subjectivity is loud in its absence. Sircello interprets the oft-quoted "wordlessness" that the sublime evokes as a form of epistemological transcendence, that is, "an experience of the sublime presents the object of the experience…as epistemologically inaccessible" (545). *Escape* is the manifestation of such epistemological inaccessibility because Meiji's position as the only surviving woman ensures that the dominant male subjectivity overtakes her subjecthood. Christine Battersby examines the "aberrant" nature of the female as juxtaposed to the concession given for male selfhood to develop organically: "the female subject has to negotiate the "monstrous, the inconsistent, and the anomalous, especially with regard to freedom, flesh and the self-other boundary" (135). Thus, in the myriad testimonies and annals that the Generals produce, they furnish the narrative of female subjectivity to suit their own needs: "They were weak. They were unfit. They were different" (Padmanabhan, ch. 33). The erasure of the

category of womanhood also raises present-day concerns about Spivak's call for the strategic essentialism of women's identities as a means of political struggle (Spivak 27). In the context of *Escape*, Basu and Tripathi posit that Meiji's intersectional identity as a non-white woman in a third-world country places her in an especially precarious position (43). They underline the concerted efforts of her uncles in distancing herself from her own body as another form of epistemological distancing (47).

What sets apart Edmund Burke's analysis of the sublime is the assertion that the delightful horror of the sublime can only be truly felt when the onlooker is at a safe metaphorical distance away. The sublime object cannot directly harm the subject but can only induce a thrill: "terror is a passion which always produces delight when it does not press too close" (46). The sublimity that the archetypal female figure produces in the minds of the male subject is precisely only a thrilling pleasure because they know that there is no honest woman to threaten them. This is not the case with Meiji, as her body is no longer mythical. The femaleness of her developing body both terrifies and delights her younger uncle, especially as he knows that she is still contained within the narrative that he chooses for her. Battersby's feminist analysis of the sublime reveals that Kant's sublime is innately gendered and restricted to certain demographics of the male population (45). However, an aspect of the sublime goes unfulfilled when it comes to such an encounter between the archetypal female and the male subject. This unfulfilled facet is key to the disillusionment of the general male populace of *Escape*. Battersby demonstrates that Kant's idea of the sublime experience is crucial in aiding the individual to reassert himself in recognising his "superiority" (45) in the face of physical nature's danger. However, Burke makes no mention of such an experience of self-reassertion – the sublime, for him, in fact, causes the individual to realize his own helplessness and impotence (Battersby 45). We see that the scope of such a self-reassertion is wholly missing in the emotional landscape of the men in *Escape*. This absence is due to the added component of sexual desire for the female figure that forms a strong undercurrent in the minds of the male subject – they feel weak at their uncontrollable desire. It is this weakness that Younger and Middle detest in themselves when they detect the incestuous feelings that

Meiji's developing body evoke in them. The feeling of the sublime that they experience in Meiji's body is incomplete as they are aware of their treacherous and transgressive desire for her. Meiji instrumentalises Younger's feeling of shame in taking ownership of her body, and her transformation from object to judging subject is complete. Thus, Meiji experiences true sublimity in her ability to self-reassert her subjecthood in the face of the opposing male subjectivities 'incapacity at self-reassertion.

The Feminine Sublime in *Escape*

The realisation of Meiji's subjecthood results from the shift from her awareness of her body as her own, not as an Other object. This realisation is also additionally contingent upon her knowledge that the male subject cannot reassert his selfhood in the face of the desire that her body evokes in him. Patrick D. Murphy maintains that the history of the sublime, from Longinus through Burke and Kant, has been a masculine-coded phenomenon that prioritises the hierarchy and domination of man over nature (79). In contrast, several theorists have conceptualized a 'feminist sublime,' with varying labels being assigned for this aesthetic experience, including the 'maternal sublime' to the 'Victorian female sublime' In rejecting Freud's and Lacan's perception of women as 'lack, 'Cixous draws attention to the fact that the female body is marked by a value of "plenitude." She states, "labyrinths, the ladders, the trampled spaces, the bevies…We're stormy, and that which is ours breaks loose from us without our fearing any debilitation" (878). Of course, Cixous is speaking about the "linguistically dispossessed woman" (Zlyinska 33) and the need to seize the power of language in tune with the power of the ebbs and flows of the female body. However, considering the memories that the older men in *Escape* have of "The Time Before" in referring to the times when the genocide against the women was being actively waged:

> 'But this grown female was beyond my wildest imagining. I see her now as clearly in my memory as she was then. A huge figure, broad at the shoulders and broad at the hips with a rounded, generous belly. She had black hair straight to the ground. Her skin was the colour of palm sugar – golden brown – and she held up the globes of her udders in either hand, as she stood before the General with her legs planted wide. In this position, she opened her throat and howled with such

> fury, I remember the ground shook. When the soldiers held her with her arms pinned back she raised up her lower body with a demonic energy and spread her slit wide for all to see – and I see it now in my mind's eye as a great scarlet gorge, ringed with writhing black serpents, flames shooting from it, blinding all who looked within – as she screamed, "Fools! Fools!" even as they ran her through with their blades. She was still roaring and triumphant as she died. (Padmanabhan, ch.29)

After this grotesque account from his boyhood, the man also shamefully confesses that his first ejaculation was a result of this very encounter. Thus, we see how the fear of the female body, despite his descriptions of it in an animalistic manner, is also marred by the male subject's desire for it. Joanna Zlyinska argues that the feminine sublime does not require Burke's "safe distance" or Kant's "secure position" but is a confrontational drive (34). Zylinska also maintains that in the feminine sublime, fear is eroticized by desire (76). The representation of the feminine in *Escape* is also continually associated with the irreducible fact that the woman has the power to give birth. Indeed, it is this power that the Generals first tried to outlaw by deeming it as "animalistic, "grotesque" and irrelevant in the face of the cloning technology. They reduced the fact of human birth to mere breeding and called women "breeders" (Padmanabhan, ch.26) who are "uncontrolled in their biological imperative" (Padmanabhan, ch.30). The mentions of pregnancy are seen as an affront to decorum, and the power of giving birth decried to be a disgusting anomaly. Patricia Yaegar defines a "maternal sublime" wherein women see their body as a "dynamic" part of the natural world (15). Thus, it is not a lack that defines the female body but an excess that the male subject cannot comprehend or control, and so he seeks to demonize. In *The Feminine Sublime: Gender and Excess in Women's Fiction* (1995), Barbara Freeman makes note of this fear of excess. She traces the earlier theorists 'formulation of the sublime and the wariness with which they approached what was "excessive" and therefore, threatening the subject's stability (11). In *Escape*, the encounters with the female figures are always inscribed by an excess that the male subject cannot comprehend or even think of subduing. Meiji recognizes this in her uncle: "I think he's scared of me, just like he says everyone else is scared. I took my clothes off yesterday and he could hardly bear to look at me!" (Padmanabhan, ch.37). She uses this

very desire and fear against him in a manner wherein he cannot intimidate her or control her anymore. He no longer sets the tone of the narrative of her changing body. Meiji takes ownership: '"No, 'said Meiji. 'I won't promise. It's my body'" (Padmanabhan, ch.38). With this simple statement, Meiji initiates a change to the dynamic by ushering in the feminine sublime for both of them. For her, it is a realization of her subjecthood. However, for him, it is a realisation of his helplessness, powerlessness, and the awareness that he does not hold dominion over everything.

Thus, Meiji's fulfilment of her subjectivity and the surrounding male inability to overwhelm her subjectivity ushers in the feminine sublime. Additionally, it must be noted that the Generals proudly admit that they allowed foreign governments to dump nuclear wastes within their domestic soil in exchange for huge sums of money. It is this unethically acquired money that helped them procure the technology for cloning, which they consequently used for propaganda to eradicate the female population. Thus, the setting in *Escape* is barren in its absence of both women and nature. Padmanabhan describes a nuclear wasteland with various diseases infecting the citizens because of illnesses from radiation. The Generals 'action of destroying the environment runs parallel to their intention of destroying women's bodies. Thus, Padmanabhan's dystopia is also remarkable for its postcolonial and ecofeminist understanding of the exploitation of third-world nations.

The Biotechnological Sublime in *Machinehood*

While *Escape* is an iteration of a postcolonial dystopia that ties questions of ecological destruction and feminist thought concomitantly, *Machinehood* concerns itself entirely with technology and how such permutations of technologies can reconfigure our bodies. *Machinehood* is a transhumanist narrative through and through – its central problem is distinguishing where the human starts and where the machine ends. Further, S.B. Divya genders the discussion by depicting a race of sentient androids who are exclusively female. The technology inscribed into the bodies of these female android beings extends the idea of the sublime to what critics have termed the biotechnological sublime. Jos de Mul theorises that in seeking to cultivate nature, humankind has caused the rising of a

"next nature which is wild and unpredictable as ever" (33). This is embodied in *Machinehood*'s protagonist, Welga, who, by self-admission, "has more electronics in her body than anybody else on the planet" (Divya 8) and yet suffers from uncontrollable seizures and muscle spasms that turn out to be life-threatening. Jos de Mul argues that over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the experience of the sublime has gradually shifted from nature to technology, with "God retreating from nature and nature becoming 'disenchanted'" (35). The existence of the biotechnological sublime indicates that man cannot be overpowered by nature. In fact, he takes on the role of nature himself. David Nye in *American Technological Sublime* (1994) demonstrates that modern Americans have embraced the technological sublime with the same enthusiasm as the natural sublime (xiii). Thus, in the postmodern world, nature no longer reigns supreme in its ability to call forth the sublime.

On the contrary, that particular power has been divested by technology. Yves Michaud does not believe in such a separation but theorises that the sublime now belongs to all three domains: nature, art, and technology. This indicates that biotechnology creates not just new objects but also new subjects (387). This article showcases the creation of a new subjecthood and a newly coded sublime in *Machinehood.* The biotechnological sublime can be understood as the refashioning of the feeling of the sublime evoked by organisms mediated by technology. The infusion of technology into the bio-organic creates a subjecthood that is not only new and alien but also housed within the subject's corporeal form. In *Machinehood*, this notion is reconfigured even further to include a body mediated by technology and gendered in a specific manner. Haraway describes the cyborg as a "hybrid of machine and organism" (1) while pointing out its existence in dual realities – science fiction and social medical reality. However, Haraway's conceptualisation of the cyborg is that it is a creature in a "postgender" world (8). Asberg counters this with her reading of cyborgs in contemporary popular fiction as "a highly gendered incarnation of either the sexy femmebot or the hard-boiled masculine terminator" (25). Divya takes this route in fashioning her protagonist, Welga, who already starts out as a human with several nanobots embedded inside her, along with permanent body modification. This is regarded as standard and at par with Welga's

defensive line of profession. However, her transformation into 'dakini 'causes her to question the nature of her being. Thus, she straddles the lines of three core identities – first, a human being; second, a cyborg with enhanced power and strength; and third, a woman. These three identities lay the foundation for understanding how Welga's gendered cyborg body invokes the biotechnological sublime.

A cornerstone of feminist studies is its discourse around the juxtaposition of the gendered expectations surrounding women's bodies and nature. Feminists counter the deterministic notion that "anatomy is destiny" with regard to female nature as the reason for their oppression. Thus, Shulamith Firestone, in *The Dialectic of Sex* (1971), declares that the emancipation of women lies in medical and reproductive technologies that would free women from biological oppression. Further, as Asberg maintains, such technologies would ensure that the thinking mind is disembodied from the constraints of the body (32). Thus, the cyborg woman would no longer be defined by the constraints of her biological body, thereby allowing her to attain subjecthood independent of the limitations of her corporeality. Welga realises this when she transforms into a dakini herself and experiences the hive mind of the sentient android beings. The feeling she describes of her having access and awareness everywhere is akin to enlightenment: "This is the culmination of our vision. We don't seek to bring the physicality of dakini bodies to humans as much as the state of being. Awareness." (Divya 366). Thus, this excerpt can be contextualised within Asberg's assertion that the cyborg is now a "recalibrated thinking tool" that can now be "deployed for feminist objectives" (32). Haraway argues that the cyborg collapses the nature/culture division as it dismantles the dichotomies it once built upon (198). It is also imperative to consider the kind of society that Welga is situated in – *Machinehood* depicts a dystopia of gig economies with no scope for stable work. The exploitation of wage labours drives people to enhance their bodies with modifications and pills in order to compensate and compete with the machines in their midst. *Machinehood's* central dilemma is the dichotomy between machines and humans. The entire premise of the narrative rests on the precarious balance between the two. Anne Balsamo further highlights this distinction by asserting that cyborgs "disrupt notions

of otherness" (147). The cyborg is a facet of the technological sublime that forces one to confront the other and the alien housed within one's own body. However, the cyborg bodies of Welga and her ilk have thrown this dichotomy astray. She states, "…I'll always be an American, just like I'll always be human. It doesn't matter where I live or what body parts I change" (Divya 391).

Further, the fact that Divya highlights that the race of cyborgs are exclusively female points to an extended destabilisation of the entrenched notions of women/body/nature. Balsamo cites the example of Rachel from *Bladerunner* (Ridley Scott, 1982) as a female cyborg who contradicts the myth of natural female identity (147). Indeed, with biotechnological otherness inscribed into the very body space of an individual, the subject's confrontation with the self and the other evokes a strange emotion. The biotechnological sublime described here in the context of such gendered cyborgs is not an extension of the sublime or the feminine sublime but rather one that arrests the subject into a confrontation with the fragmented nature of their body. The subject is forced into awareness of the fragmentation and how the technological and corporeal forms interact in unpredictable ways. The subject no longer has a safe spot to contemplate the sublime when the sublime is inscribed into the body via biotechnological interventions. In a setting where wage exploitation forces one to modify one's bodies, evoking the biotechnological sublime offers an opportunity to reassert identity and subjecthood in a location where identities, rights, and labour converge in unstable and unfamiliar ways.

Conclusion

This article has looked at the aesthetic evolution of the sublime in two representative Indian feminist dystopian texts, from a masculinist exclusionary one to a fluid and feminist event. Finally, it has culminated in the biotechnological sublime. These events of the sublime have served as a lens to reconceptualise womanhood in dystopian narratives generated from a postcolonial nation. It is imperative to note that the assertion of subjecthood by the characters in these texts occurs despite their disadvantaged location as postcolonial subjects. *Escape* describes a land where neocolonial nations dump their nuclear waste in exchange for exorbitant sums of

money, which is then used to carry out genocide against women. Divya's *Machinehood* narrates postcolonial anxieties vis-à-vis wage exploitation and body mutilation as a result of competition with almost-sentient machines. However, the recourse to such a situation finds itself in the race of female cyborgs that offer a hopeful design of society where humans and machines can coexist peacefully without mutual exploitation. This article has evoked the differing aspects of the sublime, from the feminine sublime to the biotechnological sublime, to capture how this concept can interact with changing ideas of gender, body, and subjectivity in the backdrop of severe oppression and marginalisation. Thus, the characters' circumstances were never forgotten, even in hyper-focusing on the minutiae of their relationships – instead, the article sought to understand the experience of subjecthood and the sublime in such inhospitable conditions.

Works Cited

Abrams, M.H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. 11th ed., Cengage Learning, 2015.

Asberg, Cecelia. "The Arena of the Body: The Cyborg and Feminist Views on Biology." *Doing Gender in Media, Art, and Culture,* edited by Rosemarie Buikema and Iris van der Tuin. Routledge, 2007.

Balsamo, Anne. "Reading Cyborgs Writing Feminism." *Cybersexualities,* edited by Jenny Volmark, 1999.

Basu, Argha, and Priyanka Tripathi. "Beyond Reproduction: An Epistemological Search for a "Woman" in Manjula Padmanabhan's *Escape* and *The Island of Lost Girls*." *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica,* vol.15, no.1, 2023, pp.37-53, doi: 10.2478/ausp-2023-0003.

Battersby, Christine. *The Sublime, Terror and Human Difference.* Routledge, 2007.

Blade Runner. Directed by Ridley Scott, Warner Bros., 1982.

Burke, Edmund. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*. Edited by Adam Phillips, Oxford UP, 1998.

Chakraborty, Basundhara. "No Woman's Land: Women, Nation and Dystopia in Manjula Padmanabhan's *Escape*." *postScriptum*, vol.5, no.1, Jan. 2020, pp.81-87.

Cixous, Hélène, et al. "The Laugh of the Medusa." *Signs*, vol. 1, no. 4, 1976, pp. 875–93. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3173239. Accessed 11 Aug. 2024.

De Mul, Jos. "The (Bio)Technological Sublime." *Diogenes*, vol.58, no.1-2, 2012, pp.32-40. doi:10.1177/0392192112469162.

Freeman, Barbara Claire. *The Feminine Sublime: Gender and Excess in Women's Fiction*. U of California P, 1995.

Firestone, Shulamith. *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for the Feminist Revolution*. Bantam Books, 1971.

Haraway, Donna. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century." *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. Routledge, 1991, pp. 149-181.

Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Translated by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews, Cambridge UP, 2000.

Longinus. *On the Sublime*. Translated by Nicholas Boileau, edited by J.W. Hauer, Dutton, 1906.

Moylan, T. *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia.* Routledge, 2000.

Michaud, Yves. "Art and Biotechnology." *Signs of Life: Bio Art and Beyond*, edited by Eduardo Kac. MIT P, 2007.

Mitchel, K. "Bodies that Matter: Science Fiction, Technoculture, and the Gendered Body." *Science Fiction Studies,* 33(1), 2006, pp.109-128.

Mittal, Simran. "From Other to Posthuman: Meiji's Journey in Manjula Padmanabhan's *Escape* and *The Island of Lost Girls*." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, vol.65, no.4, 2023, pp.626-635, https://doi.org/10.1080/00111619.2023.2226853.

Murphy, Patrick D. "An Ecological Feminist Revisioning of the Masculinist Sublime." *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses* (Spain), vol. 64, Apr. 2012, pp. 79-94.

Nye, David E. "Introduction." *American Technological Sublime*. MIT P, 1994, pp. 1-8.

Padmanabhan, Manjula. *Escape*. E-book ed., Hachette, 2015.

S.B, Divya. *Machinehood.* E-book ed., Saga Press, 2021.

Sircello, Guy. "How Is a Theory of the Sublime Possible?" *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, vol. 51, no. 4, 1993, pp. 541–50. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/431887. Accessed 12 Aug. 2024.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, U of Illinois P, 1988, pp. 271-313.

White, Richard. "The Sublime and the Other." *The Heythrop Journal*, vol.38, 1997, pp.125-143. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2265.00040

Yaeger. Patricia. 'The 'Language of Blood': Toward a Maternal Sublime." *Genre 25*, 1992, pp.5-24.

Zlyinska, Joanna. *On Spiders, Cyborgs and Being Scared: The Feminine and the Sublime*. Manchester UP, 2001.

9.

Envisioning the Apocalypse: An Eco-critical Reading of Margaret Atwood's Poetry

Naba Kumar Chanda[*] and Shruti Das[**]

[*] *Research Scholar, PG Department of English, Berhampur University*

[**] *Professor, PG Department of English, Berhampur University, Odisha, India*

Abstract

The doomsday narrative and apocalyptic imagination have significantly shaped environmental literature over the past few decades, offering visionary depictions of a world transformed by large-scale ecological disasters. Greta Gaard, a prominent contemporary critic of environmental literature, emphasizes the centrality of apocalyptic rhetoric within environmental discourse. While Margaret Atwood's novels are widely recognized for their engagement with environmental concerns and post-human ecological crises, her poetry remains underexplored in this context. This article examines selected poems from Atwood's *Eating Fire: Selected Poetry 1965–1995*, focusing on how her poetic imagination reflects apocalyptic visions. It investigates how Atwood embeds the themes and musings of apocalypse within her poetic language, revealing her nuanced engagement with ecological anxieties and the creative possibilities of environmental catastrophe.

Keywords: Apocalyptic vision, Environmental disaster, Imagination, Nature, Doomsday, Flood

The doomsday narrative and apocalyptic imagination have dominated much of the environmental literature during the past twenty years. The most extreme warning offered by such literature is that we are provided with an unsettling premonition about, in the words of Bill McKibben, "the end of nature" (3). The allegory of the apocalypse is drawing a lot of interest among writers of creative imagination. As Laurence Buell said, "Apocalypse is the most potent master metaphor available to the current environmental imagination" (285). While commenting on the pervasive impact of global warming

and other related environmental crises the present world is going to struggle with, Bill McKibben, a famous American environmentalist and the author of the much-acclaimed book *The End of Nature* (1989), strongly argued that a fundamental, philosophical transformation in how we view nature is necessary for the sustainability of the planet and is now more important than ever (5).

Within a single century, the world has already witnessed two colossal world wars that used hugely destructive atomic power, leading to enormous killing and ravaging that are not only limited to the purview of human habitation but also widely extended to the broader ecological world. The future of the world is now thought to be based upon the activities related to nuclear testing, bomb shelters, and the continual threat of nuclear war, as well as the environmental depletion on a large scale. With the publication of Rachel Carson's unsettling environmental warnings in *Silent Spring* (1962), the book that opened the eyes of the world to the shocking revelation of environmental poisoning, it is now thought that the end of the world is approaching. Literature and the other forms of creative writing that put their imaginations around the end of the world conjure up a fictitious planet that is purposefully positioned in opposition to the present's experiential world. Particularly in times of crisis, apocalypticism thrives, and it accomplishes this by providing an imaginative and spiritual answer to the current situation. However, apocalyptic thinking is so deeply ingrained in Judeo-Christian thought that even poets who are dubious of its effectiveness or aware of its limitations continue to be drawn to it in this era of growing awareness of global warming, mass extinction, and widespread environmental pollution.

There has been much discussion throughout the years on how to categorise the genre of apocalyptic texts. Particularly in the 1970s, apocalyptic literature was extensively researched, and numerous definitions were introduced by critics, academics, and thinkers from different sections. The well-known definition and concept were given forth in 1979 by John Collins, a professor of biblical studies at Yale University. He asserts that apocalyptic writings include:

> a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it

> envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial, insofar as it involves another, supernatural world. (8)

In the last forty years, more research on apocalyptic literature has been done than in the previous three hundred years combined. This is especially true when it comes to apocalyptic literature and biblical prophecy. The reassertion of apocalyptic musings in poetic and fictional writings may be positioned for some specific purpose. As Ken Hall points out, "The act of prophesying was undertaken with the intention of addressing individuals who were in a state of repentance. Apocalyptic literature was composed with the intention of providing solace and consolation to individuals experiencing distressing circumstances" (75). From roughly 200 B.C. until 300 A.D., apocalyptic literature was a popular writing style or genre. It was a format typically used to convey the details of a prophetic dream or vision. As Aune and Collins put it, "an autobiographical prose narrative recounting revelatory visions experienced by the author is in the form of an apocalyptic, and it is organised to stress the primary revelatory message" (543). Apocalypse is a term used to describe end-of-the-world prophecies, whether they are found in the Bible, apocryphal writings, or secular sources. It comes from the Greek word *apokalupsis*, which means to "reveal" or "uncover" something that has been concealed ("Online Etymology Dictionary").

The type of apocalyptic imagination in modern-day literature is relatively unique when compared to the majority of works in the body of biblical literature. Because of this, it necessitates extra thought and effort in order to accurately understand its meaning. As D.S. Russell observes, "Bible students quickly recognise that things are considerably different from what one finds in most other sections of the Bible when they first approach the Old Testament books of Daniel or the New Testament books of Revelation" (13). The literary imagination has now entered another realm where the sights and sounds may not be quite similar to those found in the Scriptures. The landscape seemed unfamiliar. Visions and dreams often depict scenarios that are not immediately obvious or intelligible. These writings feature "apparently impenetrable puzzles, intriguing symbolism, stunning prophecies, and gloomy announcements. It appears as though a cloak of mystery covers the language. Such is the apocalyptic literary realm" (Taylor 23). Some people imagined

"apocalyptic literature as coming from a strange land where the people spoke a weird language and had strange methods of thinking and expressing themselves" (24). Even though apocalyptic thoughts and descriptions have their origin largely in the literature as found in the Old Testament, it will be important in this process to think about apocalyptic writing within a larger context of the present state of the world and the application of this genre in extrabiblical literature.

In terms of topics, issues, themes, and purposes, non-biblical apocalyptic works and their biblical equivalents share a lot in common. Those who are primarily interested in apocalyptic literature like the book of Daniel shouldn't disregard these extrabiblical apocalyptic writings. They offer a helpful framework for considering the function of apocalyptic language and how this genre should be interpreted. It will be feasible to draw conclusions about the parallels and contrasts between these two categories of works by placing modern-day literary writings within such a framework.

The literature of environmentalism is often rife with doomsday imagery. Instances of storms, fires, droughts, melting ice, and cold snaps are so common all around the world that literary imaginations are found to be associated with imagined forebodings of calamities. Furthermore, projections regarding the future ramifications of global climate change possess a prophetic quality, as they imply that the human worldview will be held responsible for its mindless exploitation of the natural world and a deficiency in religious, ethical, and spiritual adherence to the natural environment. Since the release of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962, apocalypticism has dominated environmental discourse. The short chapter 'A Fable for Tomorrow' in the opening of Rachel Carson's book, which is frequently credited with sparking the contemporary environmental movement, is set in what Carson describes as a former pastoral idyll in a "town in the heart of America" (21). The use of pesticides is shown to have a devastating impact on the cattle before "sudden and unexplained deaths" in humans start to occur (21). Over time, the region undergoes a transformation, evolving into a desolate and eerily quiet landscape reminiscent of a post-apocalyptic scenario:

> There was a strange stillness. The birds, for example – where had they gone? Many people spoke of them, puzzled and disturbed. The feeding stations in the backyards were deserted. The few birds seen anywhere

> were moribund; they trembled violently and could not fly. It was a spring without voices. On the mornings that had once throbbed with the dawn chorus of robins, catbirds, doves, jays, wrens, and scores of other bird voices there was now no sound; only silence lay over the fields and woods and marsh. Hens fail to hatch chickens, pig litters die shortly after birth, there are no bees left to pollinate fruit trees, and vegetation and fish die off. Yet, no witchcraft, no enemy action had silenced the rebirth of new life in this stricken world. The people had done it themselves. (Carson 22)

Bringing apocalyptic ideas into the literary imagination is deemed necessary for conveying urgent environmentalist messages on a creative platform. This framework allows a scope for evaluating the present behaviours in a collective form and predicting a grim future that can still be averted. Additionally, it envisions global transformation, thereby aligning with Ursula K. Heise's assertion that "apocalypticism represents a distinct mode of envisioning global phenomena" (268). According to Stefan Skrimshire, "the concept of apocalypse can be seen as an intellectual exercise in contemplating the nature of time" (173). Similarly, Lawrence Buell asserts that "apocalypse holds a preeminent position as the most influential and potent metaphor within the modern environmental imagination" (287). According to Greg Garrard, "the inclusion of apocalyptic rhetoric is deemed essential in environmental discourse" (113). Stephen Daniels and Georgina H. Endfield argue that "climate change possesses a millennial quality, both culturally and chronologically, with its moral obligations assuming an evangelical urgency" (215). Additionally, Mike Hulme identifies "presaging apocalypse as one of the primary narrative modes employed to conceptualise climate change" (345). The notion of urgency is also evident in the cautionary discourse surrounding anthropogenic climate change. This is exemplified by the influential concept of "planetary boundaries which delineates a safe operating space for humanity" (Rockström et al. 492). The transgression of these boundaries could result in "The potential ramifications of such events can be highly harmful or even disastrous for significant portions of the global population" (492). The concept of apocalypticism is considered advantageous from an environmentalist perspective due to its ability to instill a "heightened awareness of peril, apprehension, and immediacy" (Hulme 44).

A large number of creative writers today, according to acclaimed Canadian poet and novelist Margaret Atwood, are trying to warn the world about destroying ecological relationships to the point that it would cause life to vanish off the face of the globe. She frequently expresses in her literary and non-literary writings how terrified she is of such a result. Indeed, there exists a substantial body of critically insightful writing pertaining to the science fiction of Margaret Atwood that deals with the post-apocalyptic imaginary world. Scholars have gone back to books like *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2009), and *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) to talk about the tragedies they depict in terms of the environment and people, as well as the lessons these dystopian visions might teach us. Despite being productive, this emphasis on Atwood's science fiction has mostly ignored her apocalyptic poetry. The present critical essay is supposed to examine a selection of poems that appeared in Margaret Atwood's volume of poetry entitled *Eating Fire: Selected Poetry 1965-1995* with the objectives of exploring and critically describing sustained apocalyptic vision in Atwood's body of poetry. Many of Atwood's poems make allusions to predictive scenarios of the end of the-world involving social, environmental, and metaphysical ties. The poems under critical evaluation in the present article emphasise the potential and probability of significant calamity in diverse situations. They not only underscore the peril of complete annihilation but also depict the prospects for rejuvenation, renewal, and transformation that can be attained if the extent of devastation remains within certain limits, drawing parallels to the cyclical patterns observed in the natural world. The concept of apocalypse in Margaret Atwood's poetry encompasses various connotations that pertain to the culmination of a civilization, people, world, period, relationship, or individual existence. The poet herself vividly portrays the post-apocalyptic world in *The Tent* (2006), a compilation that comprises a selection of poetic works, concise prose poetry, and fictional essays:

> You remember this. No, you dreamed it. Your dream was of choking, and sinking down, and blankness. You woke from your nightmare and it had already happened. Everything was gone. Everything, and everyone – fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, the cousins, the tables and chairs and toys and beds – all swept away. Nothing is left of them. Nothing remains but the erased beach and the silence. (149)

The "nightmare" that Margaret Atwood describes here makes extensive use of the Freudian *Unheimliche*, often known as "the uncanny", to evoke the speaker's deepest secret anxieties of an unexpected, unexplained "loss of home and the familiar" (Freud 5). The uncanny turns the familiar into the strangely unfamiliar and encompasses intellectual ambiguity. The feeling of dread is not derived from external or unfamiliar sources, but rather from something oddly recognisable that resists one's efforts to detach oneself from it. This nightmare agony denotes confusion, something unsettling and creepy, and it suggests a situation in which someone is haunted by both the past and the present. As Kathryn Van Spanckeren notes, "Home, ownership, identity, even one's work... are revealed as the mind's trick, empty constructs over which the self has no final control" (108).

In *The Circle Game* (1964), one of Margaret Atwood's initial published collections of poetry, the first two poems address the subject of the apocalyptic destiny of the future world. The narrator of the poem 'This is a Photograph of Me' is in a post-apocalyptic landscape that is both queer and creepy. The speaker, who is also an observer of an apocalyptic event, is possibly drowned yet is still alert enough to describe the experience. A woman who is tragically drowned in a lake close to her "small frame house" is shown in the fuzzy image in the poem (Atwood, *Eating Fire* 2). The speaker then discloses that they are deceased and that this photograph was captured on the subsequent day following the occurrence of their drowning. This is typically expressed in the words at the end of the poem in a heartbreaking parenthesis:

> (The photograph was taken
> the day after I drowned.
>
> I am in the lake, in the center
> of the picture, just under the surface.) (2).

Although they can't be seen well in the photo, they drowned in the lake in the backdrop of the image, just below the water's surface. A closer look at the photograph, as the speaker claims, would enable the viewer to see them underneath the lake's surface. The poet describes the state of existence following a catastrophic flood using the extended metaphor of a drowned woman. The poem's concluding

stanza goes more deeply into the photograph and serves as the basis for the poem. Although the speaker claims that it is challenging to pinpoint her exact location inside the lake, if readers pay close attention, they can see the image that brings into the mind the real state of crisis on the planet and the lives of those who dwell in it:

> It is difficult to say where
> precisely, or to say
> how large or small I am:
> the effect of water
> on light is a distortion
>
> but if you look long enough,
> eventually
> you will be able to see me.(2)

Thus the much-praised poem 'This is a Photograph of Me' establishes the mood of apocalypse in a typical way that reveals Atwood's deep-rooted concern for the environmental crisis, creatively expressed through apocalyptic vision and imagination. In fact, most of the poems in *The Circle Game* (1964) are organised around two different worlds: one in which reality is disguised and made distant by romantic or mythic notions, and another in which reality is presented as it actually is. The visual beauty of the Canadian landscape enhances the tension between these two worlds. Atwood frequently contrasts society with the savagery from whence it emerged, as well as human settlement with the environment that surrounds it. These conflicts are among the guiding principles of Canadian writing, especially for Atwood. She makes an effort to represent the harsh elements of Canadian existence. Additionally, they start to represent the divisions within the human personality. The untamed forest symbolises the inherent irrational, instinctual, and animalistic tendencies found within all organisms, while society, civilization, and culture embody the rational and controlled aspects of human nature. The casual way in which the poems transition from a sober description to a horrible realization – that the poetry is being spoken from beyond the grave – makes them deeply apocalyptic poems.

The poet's apocalyptic vision becomes quite stronger in the next poem, 'After the Flood, We', which is included in the same volume of poetry. Here she portrays a protagonist heading towards higher

ground and wondering if anyone else survived there apart from herself and the other things in the place within the visible limit. The speaker made it through the flood, which has "fish swimming down in the forest beneath us" (3). The poet conjures up the idea of an observer standing in the park's ruin, attentively monitoring what is happening, putting into words what he sees, and contrasting it with what it was like before the flood:

> You saunter beside me, talking
> Of the beauty of the morning,
> Not even knowing
> That there has been a flood. (3)

The poet's prophetic imagination creates a grim visionary picture of an apocalyptic flood that washed away and drowned almost everything on earth except the speaker and her companions, who mounted up to the "safety of high ground" (3) to save and survive themselves. The mist prevailed all around the atmosphere, and the entire world became so hostile that it became uninhabitable. The consequence of environmental disaster is so creatively put into words of imagination:

> We must be the only ones
> Left, in the mist that has risen
> Everywhere as well
> As in these woods. (3)

The condition of the post-apocalyptic world is imagined to be so horrible and shocking that it evokes in the mind a picture of a prospective world that is far from the normal picture of the present world. The environmental disaster would inevitably turn almost every part of the world desolate and uninhabitable. *The Uninhabitable Earth: Life after Warming* (2019), a nonfiction book about climate change by David Wallace-Wells, presents a thorough and in-depth debate on the many surrounding scenarios that are likely to be seen in the future of Earth over a spectrum of anticipated future temperature fluctuations. According to Wallace-Wells, despite proactive intervention, the consequences of climate change will result in severe ramifications across multiple domains. These include, but are not limited to, the escalation of sea levels, occurrences of extreme weather events, biodiversity loss, outbreaks of diseases, wildfires, prolonged periods of water scarcity, food shortages, seismic activities,

volcanic eruptions, inundations, and an upsurge in regional conflicts. Wallace-Wells sums up the horrible situation that is about to occur by saying,

> That so many feel already acclimated to the prospect of a near-future world with dramatically higher oceans should be as dispiriting and disconcerting as if we'd already come to accept the inevitability of extended nuclear war – because that is the scale of devastation the rising oceans will bring. It's easy to overlook how bad things have gotten, to accept the floods, wildfires, and hurricanes as the nature of things. (8)

This is so vividly portrayed in the mind when Atwood's creative power of imagination finds a place in all her apocalyptic poems. The poem 'After the Flood, We', too, paints an odd and peculiar image of strange occurrences in the flooded environment:

> *Fish must be swimming*
> *Down in the forest beneath us,*
> *Like birds from tree to tree*
> *And a mile away*
> *The city, wide and silent,*
> *Is lying lost, far undersea. (Atwood, Eating Fire 3)*

The poem's speaker strolls about while extolling the virtues of the morning but remaining unaware of the flood: "the beauty of the morning,/not even knowing / that there has been a flood" (3). The natural world once again seems to be working against humans. In addition to being a destructive force, it has since developed a sinister, almost human quality. The poet accomplishes the opposite process when she says that "the almost-human/brutal faces forming/ (slowly)/out of stone" (3). Humanity now exhibits some of the wilderness' oppressive, sterile qualities. This transference makes the relationship between the internal and external worlds – the subjective, individual self and the objective, physical, actual world – more obvious. As a result, the poet internalises the vague tension between herself and nature to the point that the wilderness becomes the external counterpart of some inner state. In this context, the schizophrenia-related theme that appears in a number of poems is not only explicable but also entirely warranted.

In the language that the poet employs in her work, the presentation of the apocalyptic theme occupies a strong position. The

poet's capacity to orchestrate the ultimate potential calamity is one of the crucial elements relating to its inevitability. Margaret Atwood uses poetry as a vehicle to investigate the ways in which language may be utilised to evoke people's ideas and feelings about environmental catastrophe and the dystopian future she envisions. Atwood gives us a clear glimpse into her understanding of the linguistic form in poetic art in the preface to her most recent collection of poetry *Dearly* (2020). She says, "Poetry deals with the core of human existence: life, death, renewal, and change, as well as fairness and unfairness, injustice, and sometimes justice. The world in all its variety" (2). Unlike in novels, where the writer has the constraints of a novel's plot, characters, and world-building, Atwood's mind in poetry appears to have no boundaries. But throughout this book of poetry, Atwood often returns to a few topics of concern including the process of ageing, the issue of violence against women, and, notably, the pressing concerns of climate change and environmental degradation.

Although Atwood's poems don't explicitly address personal sadness, we can nonetheless sense its echoes as part of a broader mourning for the world's environmental crisis and the ensuing disaster. The poems repeatedly remind us of how transient and fragile life is in the world of natural hazards. The poems reflect the treasured plants and animals of Atwood's native Canada and pay a profound, poetic attention to nature: "The leaves in the garden are crisp / like antique taffeta" (Atwood, *Dearly* 24). However, they also constantly call attention to the danger we currently face, namely the impending environmental catastrophe, which we have an extremely limited amount of opportunity to stop. The poem 'Aflame', in which Atwood explores our past environmental disasters, effectively describes aromas, textures, and sights that portray a vision of natural destruction and powerfully captures this sense of imminent peril and potential apocalypse:

> The world's burning up. It always did.
> Lightning would strike, the resin
> in the conifers explode, the black peat smoulder,
> greying bones glow slowly, and the fallen leaves
> turn brown and writhe, like paper
> held to candle. (Atwood, *Dearly* 30)

The destruction and chaos that are portrayed here are profoundly real. It is evident that Atwood's noble desire to force her readers to confront the effects of climate change that are captured in her poems in this book relies much more on the power of language. It almost seems as though Atwood persuades us to understand and visualise the impending peril with the help of the linguistic power of her poetry.

The idea that people have earned control over their environment is reflected by Atwood in her poem 'The Moment' which appears in the 1995 volume *Morning in the Burned House*. The human makes use of their natural environment and firmly declares that they "own this" after "many years of hard work" (Atwood, *Eating Fire* 357). This sense of entitlement is not just found in homes and other cultural institutions. The list avariciously extends beyond "room" and "house" to include "half-acre, square mile, island, country" and the entirety of the natural universe (357). The person here imagines oneself as always standing in the "centre," whether it is only in a single "room" or an entire "country" (357). However, it is a mistake of human perception to have the arrogance to think that the world revolves around ourselves. The second stanza describes how the earth's inhabitants – plants, animals, and other living things – react negatively to the human's assertion of ownership:

> …the same moment when the trees unloose
> their soft arms from around you,
> the birds take back their language,
> the cliffs fissure and collapse,
> the air moves back from you like a wave
> and you can't breathe. (357)

This withdrawal of nature's protective shelter from the human world demonstrates how intimate the connection with the surrounding environment once was. People are depicted in this scene as being completely enmeshed in their surroundings, embraced gently and protectively in the "soft arms" of the trees. In keeping with this connectivity, only one lengthy, fluid sentence is present in each of the first two stanzas. According to Atwood, our attitude of entitlement has caused us to give up this atmosphere of close, protective relationships, consequently making us vulnerable. The inability to breathe emphasises the need for nature's protection.

In the final stanza, nature uses brief, snappy phrases that sound authoritative and firm. Speaking collectively and adamantly, nature declares, "You own nothing" (Atwood, *Eating Fire* 357). In fact, nature goes much further, which is so striking:

> You were a visitor, time after time
> climbing the hill, planting the flag, proclaiming.
> We never belonged to you.
> You never found us.
> It was always the other way round. (357)

Atwood challenges the idea of human dominion over the environment by fundamentally redefining the relationship between humans and nature in these poetic lines. The natural world continues to be essential to human survival. The word "you" is used to refer to all people in the world. But "you" is also an indication of a human-nature relationship that is incredibly intimate. In this approach, Atwood brings up the idea that each person needs to re-evaluate their own attitudes and positions with regard to their surrounding environment and the greater world.

The apocalypse and the post-apocalyptic imagination are therefore pervasive in the poems of Atwood. This continues to be one of Margaret Atwood's key moods in her poetry. The way the vision of the apocalypse is treated gives rise to the thought of a broader and deeper connection between the creative imagination and the language the poet used to show how the apocalypse is perceived.

The poem entitled 'Spring Poem' from the 1974 book *You Are Happy* is one that poses similar issues. 'Spring Poem' focuses very specifically on the connection between language and apocalypse while simultaneously using a seasonal cliché to communicate the possibilities for rebirth linked with disaster. The speaker introduces the choice to start "burning / last year's weeds" in the opening few lines of the poem and informs us that "the earth / ferments like rising bread / or refuse" (3). The opening line of the poem implies that the damage brought on by burning can result in a metamorphosis that produces either nourishment or waste by referring to the fermentation as either "rising bread" or "refuse" (3). Through its unusual use of punctuation, the first stanza's twenty lines as a whole call attention to the ways that language itself both indicates and brings about change.

The poem's structure mirroring its substance is significant because it highlights the poem's ultimate subject matter: the power of words. The speaker struggles to find the right word to express the "apocalypse coiled in [her] tongue," but settles on "finished," which she then repeats, further obscuring its meaning (Atwood, *You Are Happy* 2). There would be no need to repeat "finished" if it truly meant that anything was finished. She claims that this word, against all logic, enables her to "begin over / again" (2). However, she continues, "Some year / I will take this word too far" (2), joining these thoughts with just a comma. As a result, the apocalypse is connected to an unfinished task that might lead to a fresh start or – if she uses the term too broadly – could spell the end of the world. It's as though the potential for the actual end, which the word "apocalypse" denotes, contributes to the creation of these transient ends, which finally give birth to new life (2). The writer moves on to the next topic after finishing the previous one, much like the figure that burned the weeds from the previous year and made a way. This alteration to the terrain is evident in the "charred / roadbed", but despite this, some people manage to live and go on (3). Some of these people have "living jelly / eyes," meaning they have witnessed the devastation that altered their worlds but may not be able to bear witness to it (3). That is the role of the artist, who may forewarn of the harm brought about by destructive human activities by the mere utterance of the word "apocalypse". 'Spring Poem', thus, contemplates broken interpersonal bonds with lines like "I dream of reconciliations / with those I have hurt / unbearably" (3). The poem's conclusion, however, focuses more intently on words because it implies that words have the ability to bring about events with their coiled doomsday. We are aware of the words' ability to wound or terrorise even though we cannot witness the words doing so. We are left to speculate as to what it would mean for the speaker to "take this word too far" given that "apocalypse [is] coiled" in her "tongue," but we are nonetheless reminded of the importance of words (2).

To conclude, Atwood's apocalyptic poetry has garnered critical attention from readers as well as critics, and it is in her poetry that she becomes profoundly speculative about forecasting social, environmental, and scientific tendencies. However, as this critical insight into her poems illustrates, it is realised that, from the very

beginning of her work, a substantial proportion of her poems have expressed her care for the world and the creatures that live on it. The majority of people are now aware that human activities are the primary cause of the damage that is being done to the environment and ecology. The growth of tremendous power comes with a significant responsibility, which man has purposefully chosen to ignore despite the fact that it gives him the potential to impact the fate of less developed humans as well as environmental and ecological factors. The anthropocentric style of life that currently exists on the globe will eventually lead to the destruction of the environment on a scale comparable to that of the apocalypse as envisioned by Atwood in her poetic imagination. Hence, the poetry of Atwood has a tone that is extraordinarily vivid and manages to express the imaginative picture of the post-apocalyptic world.

Works Cited

Atwood, Margaret Eleanor. *Dearly: Poems*. Penguin Random House, 2020.

--- . *Eating fire: Selected poetry 1965-1995*. Virago, 1998.

--- .*The tent*. Bloomsbury, 2006.

--- .*You are happy*. Oxford University Press, 1974.

Aune, David E., and Adela Yarbro Collins. "Crisis and Catharsis: The Power of the Apocalypse." *Journal of Biblical Literature*, vol. 105, no. 3, Sep. 1986, p. 543, https://doi.org/10.2307/3260539.

Ballard, J. G. *The Drowned World*. Penguin Books, 1965.

Buell, Lawrence. *Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*. Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, John, 2009.

--- . *The Environmental Imagination*. Harvard University Press, 1996, https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674262423.

Collins, John J. "What Is Apocalyptic Literature?" *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature*, Oxford University Press, 2014, https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199856497.013.001.

Daniels, Stephen, and Georgina H. Endfield. "Narratives of climate change: Introduction." *Journal of Historical Geography*, vol. 35, no. 2, Apr. 2009, pp. 215–22, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhg.2008.09.005.

Freud, Sigmund. *The uncanny*. Penguin Books, 2003.

Garrard, Greg. "Apocalypse." *Ecocriticism*, 3rd ed., Routledge, 2023, pp. 94–122, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003174011-5.

Hall, Ken. "Millennium and Apocalyptic Symbolism." *Film International*, vol. 20, no. 3, Sep. 2022, pp. 75–90, https://doi.org/10.1386/fint_00175_1.

Heise, Ursula K. "Environmentalisms and Posthumanisms." *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Posthumanism*, Bloomsbury Academic, 2020, https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350090507.ch-009.

--- ."Introduction." *Imagining Extinction*, University of Chicago Press, 2016, pp. 1–18, https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226358338.003.0001.

Heise, Ursula K. "The Planetary Futures of Eco-Apocalypse." *Apocalypse in American Literature and Culture*, Cambridge University Press, 2020, pp. 268–80, https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108663557.021.

Hulme, Mike. *Contemporary Climate Change Debates*. Edited by Mike Hulme, Routledge, 2019, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429446252.

McKibben, Bill. *The End of Nature*. Penguin Books, Limited, 2022.

Rockström, Johan, et al. ""A Safe Operating Space for Humanity" (2009)." *The Future of Nature*, Yale University Press, 2017, pp. 491–505, https://doi.org/10.12987/9780300188479-042.

Russell, D. S. *Apocalyptic, Ancient and Modern*. Fortress Press, 1978.

Skrimshire, Stefan. "Apocalyptic Time and the Ethics of Human Extinction." *The Environmental Apocalypse*, Routledge, 2022, pp. 172–86, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003189190-14.

Taylor, Richard. *Interpreting Apocalyptic Literature: An Exegetical Handbook*. Kregel Academic, 2016.

--- ."What Is Apocalyptic Literature?" *Interpreting Apocalyptic Literature: An Exegetical Handbook*, Kregel Publications, 2016, pp. 21–40.

Van Spanckeren, Kathryn. "Humanizing the Fox: Atwood's Poetic Tricksters and Morning in the Burned House." *Margaret Atwood: Textual Assassinations*, edited by Sharon Wilson, Ohio University Press, 2003.

Wallace-Wells, David. *The Uninhabitable Earth.* Allen Lane, 2019.

Weisman, Alan. *World Without Us*. Penguin Random House, 2008.

"Online Etymology Dictionary." *Etymonline – Online Etymology Dictionary*, www.etymonline.com/word/apocalypse. Accessed 28 Aug. 2023.

10.

To Light from Darkness: Exploring Poverty, Education, and Inequality in *The White Tiger*

Sabin Kumar Pandey

Sikkim University, Sikkim, India

Abstract

Poverty, education, and inequality are all interrelated. While inequality is the cause of poverty, education emancipates it. However, the problem is that those caged by poverty have no access to quality education, hence no emancipation for them. However, there are rare instances where a poor person from a low-class family breaks free from the cage of poverty and rises to the upper class. Others from the lower class either keep getting exploited and remain servants or use unethical means to reach the higher upper class. This article examines the sufferings and hardships a person from a low-class society has to go through while rising to the upper class with reference to the novel *The White Tiger* by Aravind Adiga. Employing ethnographic methods and thematic analysis, this article attempts to understand inequality and poverty through the different characters and methods they use to get out of the 'rooster coop'.

Keywords: Structural Inequality, Education Disparity, Exploitation, Class Struggle, *The White Tiger*

Introduction

As per the report by New World Wealth, India is the second-most unequal country globally after South Africa. According to the report published by Oxfam International, "the top 10% of the Indian population holds 77% of the total national wealth. 73% of the wealth generated in 2017 went to the richest 1%, while 67 million Indians who comprise the poorest half of the population saw only a 1% increase in their wealth. There are 119 billionaires in India. Their number has increased from only 9 in 2000 to 101 in 2017. Between 2018 and 2022, India is estimated to produce 70 new millionaires every day. It would take 941 years for a minimum wage worker in

rural India to earn what the top paid executive at a leading Indian garment company earns in a year" (Oxfam).

Discrimination against specific groups of society since ancient times has been the primary cause of inequality. This has impacted their opportunities, chances, and access to health, employment, and education. Although laws like reservations have been in place since India's independence, they mainly failed to improve society. They were only effective for a small group of individuals in the economic and political spheres. Thereafter, India has succumbed to inequalities of all kinds. Several scholars have drawn clear connections between inequality, poverty, and education. Low levels of educational success are associated with high levels of poverty and inequality, particularly in less developed nations. The difference in educational achievement between disadvantaged and rich children is widely acknowledged. Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* ignites scholarly debate on modern India's socio-cultural landscape. Durga K. (2016) dissects the "psychic traumas" individuals face due to poverty and a rigid class system. A.J. Sebastian (2009) dissects the vast economic divide, arguing that Balram's story exposes the underbelly of social unrest and challenges the stereotype of contented servants. Caste discrimination takes centre stage in Wardhani's analysis. Through Balram, she exposes limitations in education, occupation, and freedom for lower castes. Narsiman and Chhavi (2014; 2016) echo the theme of caste. They view Balram's ambition as an anomaly, highlighting the system's stifling nature. Both emphasize education as a potential escape route. These studies collectively position *The White Tiger* as a scathing critique of contemporary India, laying bare the harsh realities of poverty, caste, and the struggle for social mobility.

Written in a rural and urban setting, the novel shows us two different sides of India. The story revolves around Balram's struggle to reach the higher class while beautifully showing us the two different sides of India. Adiga aimed to humorously but grimly depict the existence of India's class struggle. The novel's protagonist, Balram, develops a Marxist viewpoint by criticizing different societies.

Marxism, as a social, political, and economic theory, was developed by Karl Marx and is named after him. Marx advocated for

a classless society, and in London, atop his grave, the tombstone reads, "Workers of all lands Unite." At a time when capitalism dominated the Western world, Marx wrote enormous books and articles, sometimes with his friend Friedrich Engels.

Like Karl Marx's advocacy in his Marxist theory, which calls for the proletariat to rise against the bourgeoisie to secure their liberation, Aravind Adiga implores the impoverished in India to assert their rights through resistance. Marx's framework underscores the notion that human societies progress through ongoing class struggles, with one class perpetually exploiting another. This exploitation is particularly prominent in modern industrial capitalism, where the bourgeoisie, as the ruling class, owns and controls the means of production. In contrast, the proletariat, or working class, sustains this system by selling their labor for wages. This socioeconomic structure fosters an inherent imbalance, manifesting in the subjugation and commodification of workers, who are rendered as mere instruments of production. Consequently, in exchanging their labor for wages, they experience a form of contemporary servitude, ultimately leading to profound alienation.

The novel's protagonist, Balram Halwai, originates from the Gaya district in Bihar, a state widely recognized for its severe poverty and systemic oppression. Bihar notably has one of the lowest literacy rates in India, underscoring its socioeconomic challenges relative to other regions. Dhanbad, located in the neighbouring state of Jharkhand, is depicted as a grim, industrialized district where coal mining reigns. The narrative centres on Balram's arduous journey and numerous obstacles in pursuing social mobility. Through Balram's story, the novel poignantly portrays the bleak realities of rural India, particularly in Laxmangarh-a village marked by inadequate educational resources, limited access to fundamental health and sanitation services, and pervasive poverty and social inequity.

This study analyzes social class representation in *The White Tiger*, with particular attention to themes of poverty, education, and inequality. The characters' ambitions to ascend to a higher social echelon and their strategies to pursue this goal illustrate this. The research adopts a Marxist theoretical framework, which provides a

compelling lens for examining the novel's exploration of social class dynamics and the systemic struggles encountered by the protagonist. This article is divided into two sections, followed by the conclusion. The first section seeks to find out how inequality is the main cause of poverty and discusses the role of education while studying the relationship between the three. The second section of the article shall explore various methods available and used by the people of the lower class to reach the higher upper class and assess these methods.

Poverty, Education, and Inequality in Adiga's *The White Tiger*

Human societies differ in the degree to which social groups and individuals have unequal access to various advantages. Rousseau distinguished between two types of inequality: natural and social. Natural inequality stems from differences in physical and mental abilities among individuals within a society. In contrast, social inequality arises from unequal wealth, political power, and status distribution, often unrelated to individuals' abilities. Societies' economic resources vary based on their level of development and structural characteristics, and different groups typically have unequal access to these resources. The power particular social groups hold also varies, offering additional social benefits. Likewise, conventions, rules, customs, and laws often give particular groups and occupations higher prestige and status. Concepts such as hierarchy, stratification, and class divisions are commonly used by anthropologists, sociologists, and political scientists to describe social inequality.

At the outset of the novel, readers are introduced to an educated and ostensibly successful entrepreneur, a character who embodies initiative and ambition. Balram proclaims, "I don't want to swear and curse. I'm a man of action and change" (Adiga 5). He further asserts his unique insight into the realities of India, claiming that no one understands the country's true nature better than he does. His correspondence with the Premier of China exposes the readers to a darker India – an India marked by poverty, systemic inequality, and pervasive socioeconomic shadows. Readers unfamiliar with India's underbelly may be startled to discover that there are regions where families, mired in poverty and hardship, cannot afford the time or resources to name their newborns-illustrated in Balram's case, where

he is merely referred to as "Munna," meaning "boy." In stark contrast, within what Adiga terms the "India of light," affluent families often approach naming with significant enthusiasm, sometimes purchasing specialized books or even hiring consultants for the task well in advance of the child's birth. This disparity starkly exemplifies the deep-seated inequality in Indian society, which manifests before a child even enters the world.

One might argue that the leading cause of inequality is the caste system, where a person needs to take up a profession according to his caste. But that does not seem so in the present reality. 'Halwais,' who were supposed to be sweet makers, were coal breakers and rikshaw pullers. As Balram says:

> That's my caste – my destiny. Everyone in the Darkness who hears that name knows all about me at once. That's why Kishan and I kept getting jobs at sweetshops wherever we went. The owner thought, Ah, they're Halwais, making sweets and tea is in their blood. But if we were Halwais, then why was my father not making sweets but pulling a rickshaw? Why did I grow up breaking coals and wiping tables, instead of eating gulab jamuns and sweet pastries when and where I chose to? Why was I lean and dark and cunning, and not fat and creamy-skinned and smiling, like a boy raised on sweets would be? (Adiga 63)

The underlying causes of socioeconomic inequality extend beyond the traditional caste system, which historically allowed for social mobility through concepts of purity and pollution. In ancient times, caste was not a rigid determinant of one's social standing; upward mobility was feasible, and exploitation was relatively uncommon. Society highly valued spirituality, and greed was considered a vice. This ethos fostered a harmonious coexistence among all social strata.

In his analysis, Adiga redirects the discourse on inequality from the caste system to the prevailing state of lawlessness. He suggests that the societal shift towards "might makes right" has enabled those who are deceitful, corrupt, and driven by greed to seize resources, consolidating them within an exclusive domain of control. The legacy of foreign rule and the experience of subjugation appears to have transformed the previously content and principled populace into a society marked by harshness and acquisitiveness. Exploitative practices, once introduced by colonial powers, have permeated the

ethos of the elite, enabling the few powerful individuals to appropriate resources at the expense of the disenfranchised. Consequently, caste has ceased to serve as the primary indicator of class. Instead, a stark division has emerged between "Men with Big Bellies" and "Men with Small Bellies."

The disparity in resource ownership is profound, with the "big bellies" controlling fertile lands, mineral-rich mines, and even rivers. The notion that a single individual could claim ownership of a river illustrates the extremity of this inequality. Although rivers, like other natural resources, are legally the government's property, such laws appear absent in the "India of darkness." Those exploited by the powerful are not only obligated to pay government taxes but are also forced to submit payments to their oppressors. These elites possess all means of production and monopolize essential resources, perpetuating the cycle of exploitation. Adiga vividly captures the reality of rural India, where power and resources are concentrated among a select few, sustaining a legacy of socioeconomic division. Despite occasional examples of individuals, termed "White Tigers," who break free from the "rooster coop" and ascend the social hierarchy, this entrenched inequality persists in rural communities.

When power, wealth, and resources remain confined to a single family, poverty becomes a structural fate. Regardless of their efforts, those trapped in poverty face insurmountable barriers to social mobility. While future generations of the affluent, symbolized by the "stork," inherit abundant resources without exertion, successive generations of the marginalized remain ensnared in a cycle of poverty and inequality. It is within this persistent inequality that poverty finds its roots, trapping individuals in a struggle for survival that leaves little room for aspirations of breaking free from the "rooster coop" to achieve upward mobility.

> "Injustice and inequality have always been around us and we get used to it. How long can it go on? Social discontent and violence have been on the rise. What Adiga highlights is the ever-widening gap between the rich and the poor and the economic system that lets a small minority prosper at the expense of the majority" (Sebastian 230).

The novel vividly portrays the poverty born of systemic injustice and entrenched inequality. Balram's family resides in Laxmangarh, an area rich in fertile land; however, a handful of powerful individuals

who reside outside the village control the most productive agricultural plots. Consequently, Laxmangarh fails to meet the three basic human necessities-food, clothing, and shelter. The narrative reveals that family members receive minimal nourishment, with the family's buffalo standing as the healthiest and best-fed member of the household. Despite being the primary breadwinner, even Balram's father is served last in the family hierarchy.

This depiction underscores the pervasive deprivation and the severe imbalance in resource distribution, where those engaged in labor remain impoverished while resources are diverted to the privileged few.

> A rich man's body is like a premium cotton pillow, white and soft and blank. Ours are different. My father's spine was a knotted rope, the kind that women use in villages to pull water from wells; the clavicle curved around his neck in high relief, like a dog's collar; cuts and nicks and scars, like little whip marks in his flesh, ran down his chest and waist, reaching down below his hip bones into his buttocks. The story of a poor man's life is written on his body, in a sharp pen (Adiga 26-27).

The lines above make the deficiency of nutrients in his body clear. He has not been able to get proper food and nutrients because there are so many members in the family, and the family's income is insufficient to feed them all in the desired way. Further, there are so many members in a single family that it becomes almost impossible to feed everyone adequately, with only a few male members toiling hard day and night for a meager salary. They don't have proper clothing either.

> "You're so filthy! Look at you, look at your teeth, look at your clothes! There's red paan all over your teeth, and there are red spots on your shirt. It's disgusting! Get out – clean up the mess you've made in the kitchen and get out" (Adiga 146).

These lines starkly reveal that despite the significant improvement in his standard of living as a driver, Balram's clothing remains inadequate, inviting readers to ponder what his attire must have been like in his childhood. When visualizing poverty in India, one often imagines emaciated children, barefoot and barely clothed, running through villages or slums – a scene frequently depicted in documentaries and films. Sadly, this portrayal is not far from reality. For the poor, garments are often worn until they are threadbare, and

for many families, purchasing a new sari for the women remains a distant and seemingly unreachable aspiration.

In the "India of darkness," shelter conditions are even more deplorable. Through evocative passages in the novel, readers are granted a vivid insight into the precarious and insufficient housing that defines life for those living under these harsh socioeconomic conditions:

> At night they sleep together, their legs falling one over the other, like one creature, a millipede. Men and boys sleep in another corner of the house. Early morning. The roosters are going mad throughout the village. A hand stirs me awake…I shake my brother Kishan's legs off my tummy, move my cousin Pappu's palm out of my hair, and extricate myself from the sleepers. (Adiga 21)

If the condition of necessities of life, i.e., food, clothing, and shelter, is such, then we can imagine what the state of health and water facilities might be. The same is well depicted in the novel:

> He had been ill for some time, but there is no hospital in Laxmangarh, although there are three different foundation stones for a hospital, laid by three different politicians before three different elections. When he began spitting blood that morning, Kishan and I took him by boat across the river. We kept washing his mouth with water from the river, but the water was so polluted that it made him spit more blood. (Adiga, 47)

The impoverished village population is systematically denied access to fundamental healthcare services. Lacking the financial resources to afford private clinics, villagers typically only seek medical attention in cases of critical illness, making the absence of a nearby hospital a life-threatening gap. Yet, this dire situation often goes unaddressed. Even if a hospital structure is eventually built, it frequently lacks essential personnel, with doctors rarely present. Expecting modern equipment or dignified care remains a distant hope in the "India of darkness."

This lack of healthcare exemplifies the broader connection between inequality and poverty, highlighting the relentless injustices that define the lives of the poor, who endure constant struggles and marginalization. They are often denied basic human dignity. While the wealthy engage in widespread corruption, appropriating national resources without consequence, it is the poor who disproportionately

face incarceration for minor infractions. The judicial system itself reflects these inequities: the wealthy can afford skilled legal defense and evade punishment for serious crimes, while the poor often endure extended prison sentences for minor offenses simply because they lack the means to secure effective representation. This deeply entrenched disparity naturally fosters a sense of frustration, leading many marginalized individuals, like Balram, to adopt ideologies rooted in Marxist thought, seeking to challenge the structures that perpetuate their oppression:

> "Poor people are rated as uncivilized monkeys and human spiders. They are 'half baked' people as they do not get opportunities to continue their studies. They are exploited by the rich for their own benefits. The poor are subjugated and suppressed. They are denied equal rights and opportunities. So, they fail to gain what they want or what they deserve. The attitude of the rich suffocates them, as a result they deviate from morality and break the shackles of moral values to get freedom." (Chhavi 111).

Poverty, in turn, makes quality education inaccessible for lower-class individuals. Many parents, unable to meet basic living expenses, are forced to send their children to work rather than school, as they cannot afford the cost of education. This creates a cycle of disadvantage, where lack of education perpetuates poverty. Lower-class people are, therefore, left behind since they are unable to obtain education in schools due to poverty. They leave the school because they need to work to support their family financially. This again leads the children from low-income families to take up small jobs and remain slaves to their masters, who exploit them to the fullest, and the cycle of poverty continues.

If they are sent to schools by chance, their education is below ordinary. We all know about the quality of education in government schools, which hasn't improved much even at present. There are shortages of teachers, desks, benches, and even books.

> "There is no duster in this class; there are no chairs; there are no uniforms for the boys. How much money have you stolen from the school funds, you sister-fucker?" (Adiga 34).

All those in power send their children to good private schools and are least bothered about the quality of education in these rural village schools. Even the inspector of the education department is fully

aware that the schools in the dark do not provide even the basic education and that the schools built there are not real but a hoax:

> Before he left, the inspector said, "I'll write to Patna asking them to send you a scholarship. You need to go to a real school – somewhere far away from here. You need a real uniform, and a real education" (Adiga 35).

While affluent families send their children to prestigious private schools, the children of the poor are often left to attend under-resourced public schools that lack qualified staff and even basic facilities or are forced to work in tea shops and other menial jobs from a young age. Such conditions fundamentally impede their ability to compete academically with peers from privileged educational backgrounds, impacting their access to higher education opportunities. This disadvantage becomes particularly pronounced during job interviews and placement opportunities, where candidates from well-established educational institutions are often preferred. As a result, individuals from low-income backgrounds face limited employment prospects, frequently returning to subservient roles that reinforce the cycle of poverty and inequality.

This analysis highlights the profound interconnectedness of inequality, poverty, and education. While inequality serves as a root cause of poverty, limited access to quality education exacerbates these disparities, perpetuating social immobility. Whether this cycle can be disrupted depends on various approaches to empowerment, both ethical and otherwise, which will be explored in subsequent discussions. However, one clear conclusion emerges: despite the efforts of a child from a disadvantaged background, countless barriers remain that hinder their ability to escape poverty and ascend to a higher socioeconomic class.

To Light from Darkness

Humans are progressive by nature. We keep striving for a better life and greater comfort. On the one hand, our desires sometimes cause our unhappiness, but we must dream better and live a dignified life. *The White Tiger* depicts the progress of a boy from a low-income family background who makes it 'To light from Darkness.' However, what does it take for a man to rise up to the upper class in present-

day India? What are the available ways that a man subjugated to poverty and inequality can opt to climb the ladder of economic class?

Education is the only tool to transform society from total gloom to beacons of hope. Education brings consciousness; with consciousness comes realisation, and one can distinguish between right and wrong. According to the renowned statement made by Sir Mandela, the best and most effective weapon against all types of malignancies-poverty being the worst among them all – is education. According to UNESCO, "if all students in low-income countries had just basic reading skills (nothing else), an estimated 171 million people could escape extreme poverty. If all adults completed secondary education, we could cut the global poverty rate by more than half. This is why the United Nations named quality education one of its Sustainable Development Goals to achieve by 2030." (UNESCO Report)

Balram's father firmly believed education would lift them from hard poverty. "One day he lost his temper at home and began yelling at the women. This was the day they told him that I had not been going to class. He did something he had never dared do before – he yelled at Kusum,"

> "How many times have I told you: Munna must read and write!" (Adiga 28).

However, in a developing nation like India, where hunger and poverty seem to have deep, broad roots and where affluence is still seen as a distant dream by many people and is linked to inequality, social taboos, and rigid rules, the relationship between education and its role in eradicating poverty appears to be rather complicated. The same complications are reflected in the novel. The economic condition of Balram's family compels him to drop out of school at a very early age. Even if he hadn't dropped out, it is clear from the novel that the quality of education is such that it won't help him get anywhere in life. Even the government inspector knows that Balram, the 'White Tiger,' needs to get out of the village school and go to the city for 'real education':

> Before he left, the inspector said, "I'll write to Patna asking them to send you a scholarship. You need to go to a real school – somewhere

> far away from here. You need a real uniform, and a real education." (Adiga 35)

Even if Balram had gone to school and secured a decent job, he wouldn't really be able to live a lavish life like Ashok. This is broadly explained in the movie Serious Men, based on the book of the same name by Manu Joseph and directed by Sudhir Mishra:

> The father from the first generation never went to school. The son of the second generation went to school and did some basic schooling too, but he couldn't get anywhere in life and realised the importance of education too late. He will but do his best to give his children the best education and send them to the best schools. This son of the third generation will become successful and work in MNCs or get a high-profile job in the government sector. And by the time his kids are adults, they will have everything. They won't have to work at all. They can just sit, ride and enjoy it takes four generations to do nothing at all. (Serious Men)

The above quote stands true in present-day India and fits perfectly in the novel as well. Balram's father, Vikram, the first of his generation, never went to school. Balram went to school but couldn't complete his education due to his circumstances, so he had to drop out very early. Like many other Indians, he is half-baked:

> The thing is, he probably has…what, two, three years of schooling in him? He can read and write, but he doesn't get what he's read. He's half-baked. The country is full of people like him, I'll tell you that. And we entrust our glorious parliamentary democracy" – he pointed at me – "to characters like these. That's the whole tragedy of this country. (Adiga 10)

But Balram would send his children to the best school and give them the best education. They can then get high-paying jobs in MNCs or become high-ranking bureaucrats. They will ethically be able to find a good job and rise up to the higher class. When their children become adults, they will have everything like Ashok and can live a lavish life doing nothing. So, it indeed takes four generations to do nothing.

It is only because Balram chose a different path, he instantly rose to the higher class and Dharam, his cousin, whom he treats like his son will have to do nothing when he becomes an adult. Under normal circumstances, Balram will have earned enough for him. But would it be really possible for him to rise up to the higher class if he

had not murdered Ashok and stolen his money? Would he or anyone like him rise up to a higher class without using unethical means? What would happen to the servant Balram had he not been Ashok Sharma, the founder of 'White Tiger Drivers'. *The White Tiger* explores a driver's future through two possibilities: saving for a modest home and a child's education (best-case), or facing illness, termination, or accidents (worst-case). (Adiga 202)

Such would happen to Balram and many other servants after some years. However, Balram is different in this case because he is self-educated. He educates himself and yearns for knowledge. He is the 'White Tiger' after all. "Tomorrow, Mr. Jiabao, starting again at midnight I'll tell you how I gave myself a better education at the tea shop than I could have got at any school" (Adiga 38). It is true that education may take any form. It is not necessary that only those enrolled in college or graduates succeed in life. In fact, history witnesses thousands of people who became successful because they educated themselves and learned from their surroundings. Balram did the same, and that is what distinguishes him from other drivers.

> Instead of wiping out spots from tables and crushing coals for the oven, I used my time at the tea shop in Laxmangarh to spy on every customer at every table, and overhear everything they said. I decided that this was how I would keep my education going forward – that's the one good thing I'll say for myself. I've always been a big believer in education – especially my own. (Adiga 52)

Balram believed in self-education. Be it at the tea shop or in the company of his masters, he listened to what others were talking about and observed what was happening around him. He was a good listener and an avid observer. This way, Balram educated himself about the rich ways of life. He understands how rich people get their work done. He learned about bribes and corruption and applied his knowledge later to get favour from the police in Bangalore and to eliminate his competition. His way of education is what takes a man to be successful. The elites claim that education is the key to success, but in desperate times, the uncertain and lengthy journey of education seems far out of reach for many. Not every poor person is born to stand out like a white tiger.

Could Balram become an entrepreneur had he not stolen the money? Who would provide him with the loan or invest money in

the ideas of a servant? Though there are rare cases where people from the lowest class rise up to become millionaires or even billionaires, there are far more instances where, despite having a good degree or new ideas and aptitude for entrepreneurship, people from the lower class are not able to find investors or get loans due to which they succumb to their fate of remaining poor. Therefore, though entrepreneurship or business is one way to rise up to the higher class, this option does not suit poor servants like Kishan.

The two other apparent options, which the novel demonstrates as proven methods to rise to a higher social class, are crime and politics. The reality Balram observes leads him to believe that the only way to become a wealthy "fat-bellied" man is through these two paths. While his perspective may seem extreme, it has a certain degree of truth. "All I wanted was the chance to be a man – and for that, one murder was enough" (Adiga 318). Many crimes happen in the working class, and it is worth noting the argument of American sociologist Robert Merton who says, "Crime is higher among the working classes because they have fewer opportunities to achieve material success through legitimate means and were thus more likely to adopt innovative cultural responses in order to achieve material success through criminal means." We see in the novel how Balram feels when he cheats on his master:

> The strangest thing was that each time I looked at the cash I had made by cheating him, instead of guilt, what did I feel? Rage. The more I stole from him, the more I realized how much he had stolen from me. (Adiga 230-231)

He feels that his deeds have been justified because the Stork family avoided the taxes and stole the money that belonged to them. Politics is another option through which one can get out of the darkness. This is the path that Vijay chooses in the novel. This is the same path thousands of people who resist their fate of poverty take up to get out of darkness:

> The two men slapped him on the back; he bowed, and opened the doors for them himself. If he was kissing arse like this, they had to be politicians. The two men got in. My heart began to pound. The man on the right was my childhood hero – Vijay, the pigherd's son turned bus conductor turned politician from Laxmangarh. He had changed

> uniforms again: now, he was wearing the polished suit and tie of a modern Indian businessman. (Adiga 270)

Numerous examples of individuals who have chosen politics as a path to liberate themselves and others from poverty can be cited. Lal Bahadur Shastri, Narendra Modi, Ram Nath Kovind, and countless others were born into poverty but rose to prominence through political leadership. Lalu Prasad Yadav, for instance, was born into a low-income family, living with his brother in a government clerk's quarters before eventually becoming the Chief Minister of Bihar and serving as the Union Railway Minister. However, he was later convicted of the fodder scam. While some rise to power through unethical means and continue to exploit people with low incomes even after gaining political influence, many politicians have dedicated their careers to advocating for people experiencing poverty. The key difference lies in how one enters politics and the choices one makes while in power:

> This city has its share of thugs and politicians. It's just that here, if a man wants to be good, he can be good. In Laxmangarh, he doesn't even have this choice. That is the difference between this India and that India: the choice. (Adiga 306)

The above lines from the novel suggest that though one may not have much choice to rise up to the light from darkness, once one does, one always has the choice. There is always a choice to be good or to be bad. This is one that people in darkness do not have, due to which they have to take up unethical means to rise to the light from the darkness:

> The novel is an intelligent and ruthless portrait of India in which downtrodden people like Balram suffers under the rich. Here the author shows the true picture of Indian society. He also educates the masses about the criminals who are born due to inequality, corruption and injustice in the society. But the Indian people should not overlook the bloody acts, opportunism, entrepreneurial success of people like Balram and emergence of Socialists in India, and it is the duty of each and every citizen that they should try their level best not to indulge in corruption activities (taking and giving) which may give birth to so many Balram which is very very dangerous to the society. (Narsiman 9)

In the discussion, we saw what it takes for poor people to reach the higher class. Education is the most ethical way to bring hope and light to low-income groups. It can only emancipate them if it is

standard and of good quality. However, due to the poor quality of education imparted in rural government schools, we saw how formal education can't bring people with low incomes out of the darkness. The following options are entrepreneurship and ethical politics. However, considering the class and caste barrier, it would also be challenging for the poor to lift themselves from the darkness through this method.

The only option remains unethical politics and crime like Vijay and Balram chose. This is a very dangerous method that creates chaos in the society. Adiga has shown that because the rich exploit and loot the poor people's money and resources, they are compelled to take up this method. In a way, he has held the upper class responsible for it and has warned them that there could be more people like Balram and somebody from their own family could be a victim like Ashok. All in all, the message goes for everyone that if no quality education and equal opportunities are provided, then there is a high chance that the people from the lower class will find other ways and means to rise to the light from darkness, not because it is justified but because they will barely have any other choice.

Conclusion

No nation embodies a utopian ideal, and no society achieves absolute perfection. Throughout history, civilizations have contended with persistent social challenges, with issues such as inequality and injustice shaping societies from their earliest origins. Each generation has sought to build a more just and equitable community, striving toward social harmony and fairness ideals. However, the increasing complexity of the modern world has compounded these challenges, making issues like poverty, inequality, and unemployment appear intractable. Nevertheless, humanity remains resilient, continuously endeavoring to mitigate these deep-rooted problems and achieving notable progress in many areas. Despite these advancements, a significant portion of the global population still lives in extreme poverty, facing barriers such as limited educational access and restricted opportunities for socioeconomic advancement.

As previously discussed, unequal access to resources and opportunities lies at the heart of poverty. Our analysis shows that, given the same opportunities as his wealthy employer, Balram would

likely excel. With resources, he might emerge as a successful entrepreneur, dedicated bureaucrat, or skilled doctor, serving his country with dignity. Access to opportunities could have allowed him to explore artistic pursuits – perhaps as a writer, poet, musician, or artist, achieving fulfillment without resorting to unethical means to attain the dignity he sought. In contrast, the affluent, as exemplified by Ashok's lifestyle, possess the freedom to pursue their passions without the burden of financial constraints. This inequality perpetuates a cycle of poverty, further widening the socioeconomic gap and trapping the lower classes-a cycle that only a few, the metaphorical "White Tigers," manage to break.

Karl Marx famously posited that unity among the working class could catalyze societal transformation by dismantling class hierarchies and toppling the bourgeoisie. He argued that collective action was essential for the working class to escape the dominance of the upper classes. However, Adiga's novel interrogates Marx's vision of class solidarity, suggesting that the extreme hardships endured by the poor make unity a formidable challenge. In *The White Tiger*, those confined to the "rooster coop" often compete to curry favor with their masters for marginal rewards, undermining any collective resistance. As in Balram's case, this competitive survival instinct drives individuals to pursue solitary paths out of hardship rather than fostering solidarity.

Moreover, while it is theoretically possible for the impoverished to escape poverty and "break the coop," access to ethical means of education is often restricted. The poor state of rural education in India compounds this problem, as the dreams of the marginalized are held hostage by their financial realities. Deprived of fair access to quality education, many are compelled to consider unethical paths such as crime, violence, and political manipulation to transcend poverty. If systemic exploitation continues to deny resources and opportunities to people with low incomes, the only available avenues for advancement may become unethical ones, risking societal instability. Promoting a balanced society, therefore, necessitates equal access to opportunities. Providing scholarships to economically disadvantaged individuals and enhancing rural education could foster ethical avenues for upward mobility. Through *The White Tiger*, Adiga delivers a critical message to both the impoverished and the

affluent. For low-income groups, the novel serves as a call to awareness, exposing the exploitation they endure and encouraging them to aspire and strive for betterment. For the wealthy, it acts as a cautionary note: continued exploitation and denial of resources to the poor may lead to desperate responses that threaten both the elite and societal stability. Balram's and Vijay's stories warn that if systemic inequalities persist, those marginalized may pursue alternative, potentially destabilizing paths to claim their rightful share.

Works Cited

Aravind, Adiga. *The White Tiger*. New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2008. Print.

Barry, Peter. *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. New Delhi: Viva Books Private Limited, 2018. Print.

K, Durga. "Reading India as Represented in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*: A Socio-cultural Analysis." 2016. Christ University, MPhil dissertation.

Narasiman, R. Renuka and Vinita Singh Chowdhry. "Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger*: Injustice and Poverty in the Present Scenario." *The Criterion*, vol. 5, no. 3, June 2014. Accessed 21 June 2022.

Oxfam International. "India: Extreme Inequality in Numbers.". Accessed 15 June 2022.

Robert S. Agnew. "Social Class and Success Goals: An Examination of Relative and Absolute Aspirations." *The Sociological Quarterly*, vol. 24, no. 3, 1983, pp. 435–52. JSTOR. Link. Accessed 15 Jul. 2022.

Sebastian, A.J. "Poor-Rich Divide in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*." *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2009. Accessed 17 Jul. 2022.

Sharma, Chhavi. "Class Struggle in Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger* – A Study." *Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science*, vol. 4, no. 7, 2016.

Siddiqui, Nawazuddin. *Serious Men*. Netflix, 2020.

Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.

11.

Imagination and Fancy: Unveiling the Creative Faculty of the Mind in Coleridge's "Kubla Khan"

Sabindra Raj Bhandari

PhD, Prithvi Narayan Campus, Tribhuvan University, Nepal.

Abstract

The main objective of this article is to unveil the power of imagination and fancy in Coleridge's poem "Kubla Khan". The poem charms the readers with the use of fancy while presenting the graphic scene of Xanadu, where the Chinese emperor, Kubla Khan, built his majestic palace. The article interprets the power of fancy as an arbitrary process that conjoins the ideas about Kubla Khan's palace together that remain in distance and unite them to create something fanciful. The tapestry of the poem looks appealing when the play of fancy is in the first stanza. The real transformation with the awe and sublimity springs when the poem makes the show of primary and secondary imagination by fusing the diverse concepts of holy and savage, enchanted and fearful, sunny dome and caves of ice to create something new and innovative that is beyond the ordinary level of mind. In its extremity, the poem frenzies the reader with its poetic spirituality by supplying the milk germinating from paradise. This article implements qualitative methods and interpretive strategies to unravel these ideations of fancy and imagination in the poem. The purposive sampling method has been applied to collect concepts related to fancy and imagination in the poem. Close reading helps to interpret the instances of fancy and imagination applied in the poetry. This interpretation also opens a new perspective to unravel the poetic imagination in poetry in general.

Keywords: Dream vision, fancy, imagination, poetic spirituality, transformation

Introduction

S.T. Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" remains the perfect exemplification that mirrors the nuances of imagination and fancy in creating poetry. Induced by the opium dream, the poem vividly captures the graphic

picture of the grand palace of Kubla Khan, the Chinese emperor, by the charm of fancy. Besides, the poet creates a fanciful description of the palace with a choice of words, modifying with will and memory. Likewise, in the poem, with the perfect intertwining of ideas, images, and historical context, the poet creates something new by blending and fusing convergent and divergent ideas. In the act of shaping something innovative, there is the maximization of primary and secondary imagination to create an enigmatic piece of poetic art. A reader is sensationalized with awe and wonder with the marvel of both forms of imagination. In this regard, the poem needs a fresh analysis and interpretation to unravel the profound insight of fancy and imagination while crafting this piece of art. Thus, the main objective of this article is to investigate the nuances of fancy and imagination in the poem because this aspect provides a new insight into the poem.

Since its publication in 1816 A.D., the poem never failed to attract new interpretations from critics who judged and analysed the poem differently. Calvert opines on the power of imagination in the poem, which allows for the reconstruction of something new. He states, "Of this masterpiece, the chief beauty is not the noted music of the versification, but the range and quality of the imaginings embodied in this music" (210). That is why the nuances of imagination and fancy in the poem are essential to investigate and interpret with a new point of view. Bloom also supports Coleridge as the poet of imagination. For him, Coleridge was undoubtedly a poet of fragments who theorized "English romantic imagination" (xi). Coleridge theorised and maximized the power of imagination and fancy in his poems. "Kubla Khan" is one of them, and the new interpretation of the poem from the perspective of fancy and imagination is justifiable. Nonetheless, Newlan also sheds light on the association of imagination while composing "Kubla Khan". She opines, "When he labelled 'Kubla Khan' a 'fragment', and described its original inspiration as irretrievable, he was acknowledging the centrality of evanescence to his creative imagination" (8). The creative imagination dissipates its play in the poem, and unveiling it with new insights is essential. Drzakowski contends that "Kubla Khan" exposes the perfection of poetic genius that originated from the "internal senses" (30). Most critics and authors praise the show of

fancy and imagination in Coleridge's poem; however, critics like Nagarajan hold a different view and blame Coleridge as a plagiarist because his concepts on fancy and imagination echo German philosopher Schelling. His intellectual sincerity cannot be acknowledged as his ideas "in his metaphysics are derivatives from German thought" (86). If so, it is the blame, then the interpretations of fancy and imagination in the poem radiate out a touch of novelty to unravel Coleridge's creativity in the process of crafting a great piece of art. No critics have systematically unraveled the poem's ideation of fancy and imagination. Thus, this study was justifiable.

Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" creates a vivid landscape and an alluring world with the creative power of fancy and imagination. It moulds, shapes and recreates its principle beyond the temporality of the normal mind. There is not only the graphic picture of Xanadu, but the poem also carries a reader into an elevated realm, creating its own principles and normative value. Thus, it is imperative and significant to uncover the nuances of fancy and imagination that integrate the themes with the aesthetic quality, nature, and creativity in the overall pattern of the poem. In this regard, this article justifies its claim by answering the following research questions:

a) What are the nuances of imagination and fancy as implied in "Kubla Khan"?

b) How does the poet exemplify the allure of imagination and fancy in the poem?

In this regard, the main objective of this poem is to unravel the nuances of fancy and imagination. It also explores how the allures of poetic imagination and fancy integrate the thematic depth of the poem.

The present study implements the domain of qualitative research because its main aim was to capture, in Habermas's words, the "new obscurity" (qtd. in Flick 12) in "Kubla Khan" by Coleridge. Qualitative research seeks to analyze the subjective meaning "by collecting non-standardized data and analyzing texts and images rather than numbers and statistics" (Flick 542). The article also seeks to unveil the creative faculty of the poetic mind in the poem through the theoretical lens of imagination and fancy with the interpretive

strategy. The purposive sampling method was used to categorise the concepts because according to Croucher and Cronn-Mills (2015), this method focuses on the essential concepts while excluding the nonessential ones (95). The article only interprets the concepts from the poem that need revisiting from the perspective of fancy and imagination. The poem "Kubla Khan" has become the source of primary concepts, and related books, criticisms, and reviews have been considered as the source of secondary concepts that establish logical arguments. A close reading of the poem and its critical review identifies and interprets the concepts of fancy and imagination in the poem.

The following sections provide in-depth interpretations, exposing the nuances of fancy and imagination in the poem:

Wonders of Imagination and Fancy

S. T. Coleridge's major impacts on literary criticism rely on the minute distinction between "talent" and "Poetic genius". His seminal work in literary criticism, *Biographia Literaria* (1817), postulates the variegated ideas regarding the concepts of literary criticism. In this book, he creates a hierarchy between poetic genius and talent. He focuses on four qualities that form the base of poetic imagination and power. The first is the sense of musical delight that a man of talent may receive as the source of combining imagery. Unlike it, a man of genius possesses the quality to produce this sense. It is the power of imagination and created by a poetic genius. The second is the choice of subject, which marks a level of thought. The third is the imagination, which is the proof of original genius. When imagination is modified by passion, it colours every circumstance, event and thought. Imagination unites and moulds such diverse aspects beyond the normal mind's grasp. Even the ungraspable becomes the graspable one. Finally, the intensity of energy and thought creates a poet. It is the poetry that is the blossom of human knowledge, thoughts, language, and emotion. Coleridge (1990), in his *Biographia Literaria* (chapter 4), says:

> ... this is the character and privilege of genius, and one of the marks which distinguish genius from talents. And therefore it is the prime merit of genius and its most unequivocal mode of manifestation, so to represent the familiar objects as to awaken in the minds of others a

> kindred feeling concerning them and that freshness of sensation which is the constant accompaniment of mental, no less than of bodily, convalescence. (Selden 142)

Only a person with insight and inborn intuition has the potential to create art because art is a blossom of human knowledge, passion, and intellectuality that finds its perfection in the vibes of language. This is the boundary line for discussing why one needs imagination for artistic creations. So, the distinction between imagination and fancy is crucial.

Imagination

The terms "fancy and imagination" were used interchangeably during the seventeenth century. They had been often used to refer to the domain of fairy tales. Over time, both the terms found their proper definitions. Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks defined that "the term "imagination" had tended to distinguish itself from " fancy" and settled toward a meaning centred in the sober literalism of sense impression and the survival of these in memory" (385). During the phase of discussion, "fancy" received its definition, and "imagination" attained its height in the field of "sensationalist aesthetics" (Wimsatt and Brooks 385). The proper distinction of these terms was well established in the discussion of Wordsworth and Coleridge when romantic criticism found its proper zenith. In the revised *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*, published in 1802, Wordsworth provided the higher functions for both of them. For Wordsworth, both are the product of creative faculty, not the reproductive and imitative ones. It was Coleridge who took both of these terms seriously and made systematic distinctions between the two. However, in chapter IV of the *Biographia Literaria*, he did not hesitate to give credit for the inspiration of defining "fancy" and "imagination".

Chapter thirteen of *Biographia Literaria* is a seminal work that discusses the basic fundamental distinction between "fancy" and "imagination." In the beginning of this chapter, Coleridge (1992) writes about the imagination:

> The imagination then, I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the

> eternal act of creation in the infinite *I am*. The secondary imagination I consider as an echo of the former, coexisting with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the *kind* of its agency, and differing only in *degree*, and in the *mode* of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially *vital*, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead. (Adams 478)

Coleridge's distinction between the primary and secondary imagination is significant not in its kind but in the level of intensity and degree. They also differ in their expression and operation. Likewise, primary imagination is an overflow of impressions and an unconscious process. It involuntarily accumulates the perceptions and impressions. It is a crude process, just like an act of mining. No refinement is there. It is an intermediary. It is the way our mind understands something. It is a by-birth quality that everyone possesses. Secondary imagination, on the other hand, refines and separates the husk from the grain. Unlike primary imagination, it is a voluntary and conscious process. At this point, an artist differs from others because everyone possesses the primary form of imagination. However, the power of selection lies in the conscious combination of impressions by using secondary imagination to build something new and innovative accumulated from the primary imagination. The use of secondary is the process of transformation. A new way of metamorphosis remains there.

An artist with a secondary imagination does not require and follow any principles because s\he creates his\ her parameters, principles, rules, and regulations. An insight and intuition formulates a world that is created from within. It is like an organic unity. It is just like a chemical mixture. Hydrogen and oxygen mix and form water, which is something new. The chemical mixing of sulfuric acid, a hard acid, is odorless without colour and pungent. This acid consists of two hydrogen atoms, four oxygen atoms, and one sulfur atom. The process of secondary imagination is just like this. Various and diverse perceptions are combined to create something new and innovative. This is powerful and helps the artist to break the hitherto existing rules and principles by creating something new and extraordinary, just like the postmodernists break the previous principles and establish their methods and principles. Moreover, secondary

imagination is a shaping spirit that shapes and provides new forms to the objects supplied by primary imagination. In this sense, it is regarded as a more active and creative agent than the primary one. It fuses the mind with matter, transforms the internal into the external, and vice versa. When Coleridge (1992) says, "It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate" (Adams 478), it has the vigour of fusing the diverse elements. So, it is the root of any artistic creation and holds a genius capacity to reveal the concordance of balance between the heterogeneous elements.

Since the secondary imagination echoes the primary imagination, there is no basic difference in the kind between the two. Both possess similar functions of blending, fusing, unifying, collaborating, blending, uniting, and reconciling the diverse and contrastive dimension, changing it into a single whole. The difference between the two lies in the degree. The primary imagination is feeble and unconscious, while the secondary is a conscious act with force, power, and system.

The discussion between the primary and secondary imagination brought a paradigmatic shift in the theory of criticism. It introduced a new form called the expressive theory that M. H. Abram has categorized in his book *Mirror and the Lamp*. Andrew Bennett clarifies:

> There has been an extraordinary amount of discussion of Coleridge's definition of imagination since the publication of *Biographia Literaria* almost two centuries ago. The definition is elusive, obscure, paradoxical, and fragmentary. What is clear, however, is that Coleridge is suggesting that perception itself is a form of imagination in its 'primary' or foundational sense..., and that a secondary form of imagination involves the work of artistic creation as it acts on perception. Coleridge valorizes the 'organic' and 'vital' power of imagination, figuring it even as a version of the creativity of God. (56)

Poetry is the play of imagination to create something new. A poet is a creator who carries a reader from this world to a new and wonderful state, providing sublime effects to the readers. A poet is somebody like a god. Poetry is his divine mechanism for rebuilding a world of uniqueness loaded with splendor and artistry.

Fancy

Coleridge's concept of fancy also occurs in chapter thirteen of *Biographia Literaria*. His distinction between fancy and imagination inaugurated a new discussion in the field of literary criticism. Unlike imagination, Coleridge (1992) gives an inferior rank to fancy because it is not a creative power. He defines:

> Fancy, on the contrary, has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites. The fancy is indeed no other than a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space; while it is blended with, and modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word *choice*. But equally with the ordinary memory the fancy must receive all its material ready-made from the law of association. (Adams 478)

For Coleridge, Fancy is a mechanical thing that is fixed and finite. Unlike imagination, it only joins different things and does not have de plus ultra to create something innovative and new. Thus, it is just like a memory. As an arbitrary process of conjoining the thing together, it creates a unity of things that remain remote and distant. In this regard, it is not like a chemical mixture, the quality of imagination; rather, it is a compound mixture. Since it can be acquired, it is related to the talent domain.

Fancy, in a way, is a drapery, while imagination is the inner depth or soul of any artistic creation. It is a readymade mode of association and so can be expressed with multiple-choice words. So, there is a combination and association involved in fancy. Its role is to select and connect the ideas, perceptions, and images. It provides some perceptions for the secondary imagination. Though it has also the capacity to create something new, it is not like an organic whole like that of imagination. As imagination is just like a chemical mixture, fancy, on the other hand, is like a compound mixture, just like changing the water in ice or a mixture of cement. Thus, fancy just accumulates, juxtaposes, and conjoins the concepts and images without modifying and transforming them into something unique and new. John Ruskin writes, "The fancy sees the outside and can give a portrait of the outside, clear, brilliant, and full of detail. The imagination sees the heart and inner nature, and makes them felt, but is often obscure, mysterious, and interrupted, in its giving of outer detail" (qtd. in Nagarajan 87). This distinction creates a clear

demarcation between the strength and essence of fancy and imagination. Fancy provides just the reflection of things and objects' situations; it has no power to create new principles and rules. So, it just follows the parameters.

Fancy brings images together, but it looks like they have no natural and moral connections, but the artist yokes them because of some mere coincidences. This happens with the domination of memory because memory has a crucial role in fancy. Bennett says, "Coleridge suggests, 'fancy' is a form of memory, a selection by the writer of previously experienced perceptions that are mechanically combined using the association of ideas: the fancy has 'no others counters to play with, but fixities and definites'" (56). That's why Coleridge provides an inferior role to fancy: it cannot create anything new and innovative; instead, it just accumulates and assembles the images.

Unraveling the Imagination and Fancy in "Kubla Khan"

a) How is "Kubla Khan" a Dream Vision?

"Kubla Khan" by Coleridge unravels fancy and imagination. Since the poem is a dream vision, it synthesizes the memorization recalled by fancy, giving it a new shape with the power of imagination. In 1797, the poet read Samuel Purchas's book *Purchas His Pilgrimage* (1613) and got information about Kubla Khan, a Chinese emperor. In Purchas' book, the poet received the information about Kubla Khan's palace: "Here the Khan Kubla commanded a palace to be built, and a stately garden thereunto. Thus, ten miles of fertile ground were enclosed with a wall" (qtd in Abrams 353). After that, Coleridge memorized a lot about Kubla Khan's palace. Notably, his fancy captured information regarding Kubla Khan's palace. While reading it, Coleridge gave a swing to his imagination. He imagined much about the emperor and the palace. Then, he fell asleep after receiving the information. After that, the poet fell asleep for three hours with the power of some drugs to soothe "at least of external senses" (Abrams 353). His inner soul was kindled with the power of imagination. He saw a dream where he visualized the events that he had read in Purchas' book. He fused the perceptions with the power of imagination. This vividness might have given the power to

compose more than a few hundred lines about the palace of Kubla Khan because "all the images rose before him as *things*, with a parallel production of the correspondent expressions, without any sensation or consciousness of effort" (Abrams 353). After his dream, he instantly recollected his perception and composed a few lines about Kubla Khan's palace with the power of secondary imagination. However, he was interrupted by a person on business. After the meeting, he wanted to continue it; all the images and perceptions he had created, blended, fused, amalgamated, harmonized, and yoked vanished. The rest of the vision was never restored. It remained a fragment, and that remained the crux of this poem. T.S Eliot, one of the greatest poets and critics, hails it as the key feature of romanticism when he says, "Romanticism is the fragmentary, immature and chaotic" (qtd. in Goodman 66). This fragment of a vision adds a unique flavour to the domain of English literature.

This poem has become a mystery, and that feature gives a unique taste to it. The most crucial aspect of Coleridge's notion of the fragment was Friedrich Schlegel's influence upon him. Schlegel (2020) was quite passionate about his fragmentary writings, as he says in *Lectures on the History of Literature, Ancient, and Modern*: "My work [thus far] in the fields of literature, literary art history, and literary criticism, as it has involved excessively diverse and various matters, has remained entirely fragmentary" (as cited in Dita 130). The foundational thinking about this creation might be the idea of the fragment because, for the romanticist, a part constitutes the whole, representing the totality. Likewise, according to T. W. Adorno (2002), a fragment represents that part of the totality which opposes the totality (45). It also presupposes Schlegel's and German thought that there lies the totality before and after the fragment. It means there is a perception of the whole past and future that precedes the fragment. That's why, without its whole, a fragment cannot exist. In this sense, the fragment gives a sense of wonder and mystery. So Walter Pater's dictum "strangeness added to beauty" (qtd. in Goodman 63) finds its better exposition in this poem.

b) Fancy in "Kubla Khan"

The poem unravels the play of "fancy" from the very beginning. "Fancy" is the capacity to form mental images, often decoratively and

systematically. It too is the process of memorization. So the first stanza of the poem reiterates the exposition of "fancy":

> In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
> A stately pleasure dome decree:
> Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
> Through caverns, measureless to man
> Down to a sunless sea.
> So twice five miles of fertile ground
> With walls and towers were girdled round:
> And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills,
> Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;
> And here were forests ancient as the hills,
> Enfolding sunny spots of greenery. (lines 1-11; 354)

These lines create a mental image of the landscape related to Kubla Khan's palace and its surroundings. The vivid picture of "Where Alph, the sacred river, ran\ Through caverns, measureless to man\ Down to a sunless sea" (lines 3-5; 354) describes the scenery of Kubla Khan's palace. Fancy just assembles perceptions and recalls and rejoins those stored in the mind. The accumulated perceptions like "five miles of fertile ground" (line 6; 354) in walls and towers describe the surroundings. Could we get anything beyond the mental picture in the above lines? So, simply, it is the use of fancy. The poet does not create his world or carry the reader into the world he has created. That is why only the empirical sensations and perceptions have been modified and crafted. K. Drzakowski rightly notes that the first stanza is just arranging and organising the materials because "the emphasis is on the material work that comes into being" (30). It is just the involvement of fancy that modifies the source with the word choice. So, it is a unique arrangement of its own.

In the first stanza, little blends and fuses the information from the poet's sleep. It simply extends them with new colours and vibes. However, the extension does not constitute the intention of the source. They "merely serve to paint a fuller, more recognizable picture of the object that the poet is to reconstruct into poetry" (Drzakowski 30). The poet recalls that a king's command to build a dome was a usual practice, and the poet simply narrates it in poetic form. This is the difference that the force of fancy makes in the work of creation. There were" "many an incense-bearing tree", and the "forest ancient as the hills" (lines 9-10; Kubla Khan 354) in Xanadu.

This scenic description is quite noteworthy. The poet, with his power, in the first stanza, presents a graphic picture of Xanadu with the power of fancy, which is related to association and mechanical aspects. He envisions the palace because the power of fancy enables him to relocate the Xanadu in a new and innovative way, which is very simple for a poetic genius like Coleridge. P. D. Dita rightly confirms about the essence of fancy:

> Thus, all the processes it involves are just a mix of similar and contrasting images and impressions without blending them into a single entity, merely constructing superficial decorations, which for a talented man is very possible if he simply understands how to make combinations out of his perceptions and memories. (128)

That's why the first stanza displays the initial step of the poet's creative process. There is only a focus on the description of the landscape, so no poetic genius is present, and the power of creativity and imagination has been downplayed.

c) Imagination in "Kubla Khan"

The power of imagination vividly colours the poem. There is the implementation of both forms of imagination – primary and secondary. The second stanza of the poem activates the power of primary imagination. Imagination has a "vital and shaping function" (Selden 127). Primary imagination is a power that enables one to decipher, arrange, and maintain order and control by using the rational process of mind. Thus, it creates an awareness of one's position in the external world. In a sense, with its perception, a human bridges himself with the phenomenal world. With the power of primary imagination, the poet creates new images like "But oh! That deep romantic chasm which slanted\Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!" (lines 12-13; 354). This creates a broader thought process and sublimely affects the readers. This is the activation of primary imagination. Likewise, primary imagination is unconscious and involuntary. In the second stanza of the poem, its use creates some unfamiliar and unique situations to some extent like:

> A savage palace! As holy and enchanted
> As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
> By woman wailing for her demon lover!
> And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,
> As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing. (lines 14-18; 354)

The poet creates a broader horizon of the creative world from the scenic description. The surroundings of Xanadu now cross tits physical limit and include the metaphorical and symbolic dimensions. Besides, the involvement of primary imagination germinates a plethora of complex ideas in the first stanza. It is because, for Coleridge, the power of primary imagination is "the living power' of God, in the eternal act of creation" (Leitch 670). That is why the image of a "savage place" (line 14) is the raw, untamed, and primal beat of nature that has not been human materialistic civilization.

A savage place is chaotic and gets a new form with the unifying force of primary imagination. The powerful description of the palace carries when the reader encounters other symbolic and metaphorical stratification of "holy and enchanted" (line 14; 354). What a juxtaposition of "holy, savage, and enchanted"! This is the power of secondary imagination because it blends two dissimilar forces and modifies something unpredictable. Despite its savage nature, the place is pure and holy, where a demon visits his beloved. This fusion and dissipation create a mystical and profound hierarchy of Xanadu. The sublimity unknowingly touches a reader because the simple landscape described in the first stanza changes into a place with a mystical aspect that transcends the rational aspect of the phenomenal world. It is possible because the "extraordinary development of imaginative sensibility, a total enfranchisement of imagination, lends it aesthetic value and helps in a newer coordination and synthesis" (Goodman 68). The poet dissolves and synthesizes to give a new form to his perceptions accumulated and assembled with the power of fancy. Imagination is enlarged and intensified at this juncture.

The poet further intensifies the extension of perceptions by providing images and metaphors like "mighty fountain", "dancing rocks", "Ancestral voice prophesying war", and "A sunny pleasure dome with caves of ice!" (lines 19, 23, 30, 36; 355) are the perceptions empowered through the power of primary imagination. "Sunny pleasure dome" and "caves of ice" are combined now in the same palace. Only the secondary imagination generates this fusion. These intensifications provide the solid ground for the optimal use of secondary imagination in the final stanza because "secondary imagination echoes the primary" (Leitch 670), harmonizing and

synthesizing the diverse perceptions that the poet has assembled to recreate something splendid with the brilliant touch as described by William Blake (2004) in the first stanza of his poem "Auguries of Innocence":

> To see a World in a Grain of Sand
> And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
> Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
> And Eternity in an hour. (lines 1-4; 18)

Every line of demarcation is blurred in this stage when the poet is in the crux of secondary imagination. Even the insignificant thing possesses grandeur significance. Even the finite and transitory can have the potential to attain infinitude when there is the play of secondary imagination. The crux of this play is in the final stanza of "Kubla Khan".

The last stanza displays a new vision of Coleridge in its optimum level of secondary imagination. Secondary imagination harmonizes "the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities" (Black et.al. 451). It blends sameness with the discordant, concrete with abstract, etc. Coleridge blurs the boundary of temporality and extends his power of imagination when he says that he has seen "a damsel with a dulcimer" who was "Singing of Mount Abora" (lines 37,41; 355). He is frenzied that if he revives that song again, he "would build that dome in air" (lines 46; 355). This reconciliation of discordant dynamics charges the creative frenzy to the poem. The poet even centralizes the earth and air. The distance is gone now; the difference merges and solidifies in a single totality. At the peak of his secondary imagination, the poet says in the third stanza:

> And all who heard should see them there,
> And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
> His flashing eyes, his flashing hair!
> Weave a circle round him thrice,
> And close your eyes with holy dread,
> For he on honeydew hath fed,
> And drunk the milk of paradise. (lines 48-54; 355)

The poet here visions that his dome is eternal, unlike the dome of the Chinese emperor. The poet's castle has the foundational ground of poetry and aesthetic power, which never goes into peril. Thus, Dita

views this as the "expression of Coleridge's aesthetic doctrine in general, and, in particular, of his concern with poetic imagination, the supernatural and the fragmentary" (139). The invocations of "Beware! Beware!" (line 49; Coleridge 355) radiate the touch of the supernatural and mysterious inspiration. Having the intensity of secondary imagination, the poet creates his world, principles where everything that is confined by logic is ruled out. So G. Calvert views, "The poetical is ever an appeal to the deepest in the human mind, and a great burst of poetic light like this lays bare, for the imagination to roam in, a vast indefinite domain" (211). The "indefinite domain" is the metamorphosis of the images and concepts accumulated with the charm of fancy. Finally, the poem mesmerizes the readers with awe and wonder, which has a profound impact. The expression "honeydew" and "milk of paradise" (lines 53-54; 355) enchants the situation with divine ecstasy.

Conclusion

Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" ruminates on the play of fancy and imagination. From the first stanza, the poem graphically presents the assembled perceptions in fanciful ways with the use of fancy. Purchas's Pilgrimage extends and enlarges the perceptions Coleridge received in the dream. The landscape of Xanadu, like the Alph River, girdled tower, sinuous rills, and the dome, is beautified when images are assembled with fancy. There is no modification and transformation because fancy just mechanically produces and enlarges the images and perceptions. The dance of synthesis, modification, transformation, and the juxtaposition of images and ideas find their *plus ultra* in the second stanza when the poet juxtaposes the ideas of holy and savage, enchanted and forlorn, to create a new whole. All perceptions are fused and blended for the recreation of something new. The artistic dome of the first stanza transforms into a place consisting of a sunny dome and caves with ice. The secondary imagination and its play in the final stanza break the normal rules and principles of temporality and build a world of its own. With a mystical vision, the dome is built is constructed in the air. The milk of paradise becomes the be-all and end-all for this optimal recreation. Thus, while reading a poem, a close reader is directed to the domain of spiritual revelation from this phenomenal

world after climbing the steps of fancy, primary and secondary imagination where there is only awakening with the grace of poetic spirituality. The ideations of fancy and imagination can be applied in the other poems to get enthralled with the touch of poetic spirituality. It opens with a new perspective to perceive the intense sublimity underlying poetry's essence.

Works Cited

Abrams, M. H., editor. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Vol. 2, W. W. Norton & Company, 1986.

Adams, Hazard, editor. *Critical Theory Since Plato*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, 1992.

Adorno, Theodor W. *Aesthetic Theory*. Continuum International Publishing Group, 2002.

Bennett, Andrew. "Expressivity: The Romantic Theory of Authorship." *An Oxford Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*, edited by Patricia Waugh, Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 48-57.

Black, Joseph, et al., editors. *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature: The Age of Romanticism*. Broadview Press, 2017.

Blake, William. "Auguries of Innocence." *William Blake Poems*, Poem Hunter.Com, 2004, pp. 18-20.

Bloom, Harold, editor. *Bloom's Classic Critical Views: Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Infobase Publishing, 2009.

Calvert, George H. "Coleridge, Shelley, Goethe: Biographic Aesthetic Studies." *Bloom's Classic Critical Views: Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, edited by Harold Bloom, Infobase Publishing, 2009, pp. 209-12.

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. "Kubla Khan." *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, edited by M. H. Abrams, vol. 2, W. W. Norton & Company, 1986, pp. 354-55.

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Biographia Literaria (1817). The Theory of Criticism from Plato to the Present*, edited by R. Selden, Longman, 1990, pp. 142-46.

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Biographia Literaria*. *Critical Theory Since Plato*, edited by Hazard Adams, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers, 1992, pp. 470-80.

Croucher, Stephen M., and Daniel Cronn-Mills. *Understanding Communication Research Methods*. Routledge, 2015.

Dita, Paul Dan. "Poetic Imagination Shaping the Romantic Fragment: The Case of *Kubla Khan*." *Humanitas*, vol. 8, no. 16, 2020, pp. 125-41. DOI: 10.20304/humanitas.756344. *Dergipark*, http://dergipark.gov.tr/humanitas. Accessed 7 Feb. 2024.

Drzakowski, Keri. "Finding the 'I' in Imagination: 'Kubla Khan' as the Solution to the Problem of the Individual in Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*." *The Hilltop Review: A Journal of Western Michigan Graduate Research*, vol. 2, 2006, pp. 26-33, http://www.wmich.edu/gsac/hilltop. Accessed 7 Feb. 2024.

Flick, Uwe. *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*. Sage, 2021.

Goodman, W. R. *Quintessence of Literary Essays*. Doaba House, 2002.

Leitch, Vincent B., editor. *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. W. W. Norton & Company, 2001.

Nagarajan, M. S. *English Literary Criticism and Theory*. Orient Longman, 2006.

Newlyn, Lucy, editor. *The Cambridge Companion to Coleridge*. Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Selden, R., editor. *The Theory of Criticism from Plato to the Present*. Longman, 1990.

Wimsatt, William K., and Cleanth Brooks. *Literary Criticism: A Short History*. Oxford and IBH Publishing, 1957.

12.

Tracing Modernist Poetics: 'Tradition' and the 'Individual Talent' in the Poetry of Agha Shahid Ali

Mohd Siddique Khan

PhD Candidate, Department of English & Modern European Languages, University of Lucknow, Lucknow, India.

Abstract

While being a representative poet of Postcolonial and Diaspora politics, Agha Shahid Ali employed the patterns of both the Modernist as well as the Transnational Poetics. Modernist, here, is being referred to the style and literary criticism of T. S. Eliot, which Ali appreciated and adopted for his own understanding of poetry. Ali's reading of Eliot's poetry and criticism equipped him to use the idea of 'tradition' and have flair in placing his own poetry in the Eliotic sense of 'tradition'. On the other hand, he learned to articulate individual style by adhering to the postmodern aesthetics of transnational poetry. The paper explores the poems from Ali's A Country Without a Post Office and The Half-Inch Himalayas, and analyses his artistic choices, stylistic and literary strategies as inspired from both the currents.

Keywords: Emotions, Form, Language, T.S. Eliot, Agha Shahid Ali.

Introduction

From his earliest days in College, Agha Shahid Ali grew to be a literature student and poet, reading the essays and poems by T. S. Eliot. Ali first read about Eliot in his bachelor's at Sri Pratap College in 1965. His fascination began when he came across Eliot as a critic; he read and perceived "The Tradition and the Individual Talent", forming a general yet nuanced opinion on poetry. He read and wrote poetry afterwards, aligning the perspectives he developed from the essay. In 1968, Ali shifted to Delhi to pursue his Masters at Hindu College, where his interest in Eliot grew tremendously. Here, he read all the major poems, from "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" to

Four Quartets, and developed his early ideas on poetry based on Eliot's poetics. After an introduction in his Bachelor and Master to what can be called 'Eliot as a poet' and then 'Eliot as a critic', Ali's pursuit of Eliot didn't stop there, and he went on to find 'Eliot as Editor' in his PhD thesis at Pennsylvania State University, The USA. His work on *T.S. Eliot as an Editor: Studies in Modern Literature* further deepened his understanding of Eliot's poetics. Eliot was also among the essential poets in the syllabus of the course he taught at Hamilton College, New York. Ali's meticulous editing of his and his students' poems during his teaching years indicates his following of Eliot's ideas on the compactness of form.

Ali's understanding of the essay "The Tradition and Individual Talent" was profound. His rejection of Romanticism, his obsession with formalism, and a strict metrical structure come from Eliot only. He adopted the basic premises Eliot developed for a poet and reacted to and countered Eliot's poems about the same. In this essay, Eliot endorses the idea of good literature, which, according to him, isn't entirely new and original but develops and evolves within a tradition of the past but is also modified by the 'individual' talent of a new writer. A writer and poet following this principle will be mindful of the collaboration of his writing within the already existing tradition. This makes poetry a task demanding erudite scholarship and wide reading. Eliot also mentions: "Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it, you must obtain it by great labour."(14). This also presumes his idea of becoming a poet, which lies in the poet's struggles to create poetry rather than writing merely the 'overflow of emotions.'

With a deep engagement with the Eliotic idea of 'tradition,' Ali began writing under the influence of the overarching Modernist poetics, its poetic techniques, and thematic concerns. By modernist poetics, especially modernist poetry, the article refers to the style of writing that broke away from the traditional style of Victorian and Georgian poetry of the past, which showed lyricism and a conservative attitude towards the world as its significant features. Modernist poetry emerged in the early twentieth century with poets like T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and W.B. Yeats, whose poetry used new literary techniques such as non-linear narrative, fragmentation, multiple points of view, scepticism towards the traditions of the past

and anti-romantic and anti-sentimental tone and imagery. However, Ali's poetry is rooted in the postcolonial period, where he also witnessed transatlantic poetry's currents. Transatlantic or Transnational poetry refers to poetry that is a result of the overlapping between Eurocentric/American-centric poetic models and models from third-world countries. It allows for an open and free exchange and challenges global modernity with the monopoly of English poetic conventions. Transatlantic poetics transcends national boundaries and finds its place usually in diasporic experiences where identities and sensibilities are mixed to create new poetic styles. The article foregrounds Ali's place in both poetic styles while deriving their parallels, interpreting and equating them with Eliot's idea of the 'tradition' and the 'individual talent.'

The idea of 'tradition' shaped Ali's mind when attempting to write poetry as a serious enterprise. Ali emerged as a poetry student trained in classical school; he stressed the importance of knowing the past and present of poets and poetry. As a classicist like Eliot, he stood up as a strong advocate of learning from the writers and poets from the past. Manan Kapoor, in his biography on Ali, quotes from an interview of Ali with Jason Schneiderman, an American poet and one of Ali's former students, where he mentions Ali's obsession with classical poets: "At his first lecture at NYU, Shahid was arguing for the importance of reading canonical texts alongside contemporary literature, and he kept insisting that we would be shocked by his insistence on the value of dead white male writers." (108). Also, in another vital interview, Ali retorted: "If people are serious about poetry, they should know their Shakespeare, they should know their Milton. They should always be devouring poetry, and some of the pleasure is in recognizing." (Benvenuto 266).

This belief in 'Tradition' is central to Ali's poetry and criticism: the use of allusions, borrowing of aesthetic principles from great poets, poetic traditions and genres, intertextuality, etc., are some of the first and most important criteria of his poems. The use of allusions is the most recognizable feature in Ali's poem. There are explicit references from past poets from the West, like William Shakespeare, T. S. Eliot, Emily Dickinson, W. H. Auden, Sylvia Plath, W. B. Yeats, Gerard Manly Hopkins, etc. Also, Ali refers to the greatest poets of the East, Mirza Ghalib, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, and Hafiz,

who are frequently referred to in his poems. His allusions are not limited to the world of poets and poetry only; instead, Ali brings cultural and political texts as well: references to the Koran and stories from *Karbala* and Gita are also mentioned in their respective contexts. Even the stories from oral literature like *Laila Majnun* are woven into his poetry, often in their original form and sometimes modified. However, unlike Eliot, who brought only the poets from the past like Dante, Shakespeare, Chaucer, etc., in his poetry, Ali modified the idea of 'tradition' and added his contemporary like James Merrill as well. Schneiderman mentions in one of his essays on Ali:

> Merrill had secured his place in the tradition by relating himself to his immediate predecessors in Sandover. At the end of his life, Ali makes the same move, anchoring himself to the tradition but also insisting on securing Merrill's place there. Merrill becomes his Virgil, and Ali makes himself his own Dante. (102)

Ali's idea of 'tradition' is further strengthened by the concept of 'historical forces.' Ali is conscious of past poets and literary movements, and his poetry also recounts historical events of great importance. His allusions cover the history of Kashmir, Karbala, Joseph Stalin's dictatorial regime in Russia, the massacre of Native Americans by Europeans, etc. Manan Kapoor writes: "It was here (in Kashmir after Ali's family returned from USA in 1964) that he understood that there was a benchmark set by his ancestors and that he was a product of historical forces." (33). Having developed this understanding of his past, he could also look towards other histories with the same sensitivity. He wrote about these historical forces while writing his poems. Poems like "Snowmen" and "A History of Paisley" refer to the history of Kashmir from ancient times. "The Blessed Word: a Prologue" talks about the history of conflict between King Akbar and the King of Kashmir, but this poem also mentions the poet Osip Mandelstam, who was killed during Stalin's Purge. "Farewell" and "The Country Without a Post Office" evoke the traumatic Kashmir insurgency. "Muharram in Srinagar" recalls the tragedy of Imam Hussain, the grandson of Prophet Muhammad. All these historical references evoke the trauma ordinary people went through in different historical eras. Ali's poems build a sense of timelessness, universality, and cross-cultural commonalities by invoking various traumatic histories. As an empathetic cosmopolitan, it is evident that

Ali developed "a proclivity to mourn the historical loss (which) was an inescapable part of his temperament" (Benevenuto 266), but as a disciple of Eliot, he would not give himself away in emotions; he would follow detachment; he would apply the literary tools of distancing, scepticism, to create a sense of impersonality.

Ali emerges as the loyal disciple of Eliot, and he follows the other tenet Eliot gave in "The Tradition and Individual Talent": "…the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates…" (18). Aligning with Eliot's modernist poetics, Ali shows how to approve the dictum of impersonality by using emotions without being sentimental. He does it by alluding to several post-colonial and post-modernist themes-related techniques, which help him to interpret the multicultural realities of the modern world. At the same time, he employs specific language techniques that manifest his obsession with the aesthetics of language, sound, syntax, etc. For Ali, the poem's experience is more important than the poem's subject; therefore, he is extra conscious of the self-reflexivity of language and the poem itself. In the poem "Postcard from Kashmir," he exposes his consciousness of being too emotional while talking about Kashmir.

> ……. My Love
> So overexposed.

In the middle, the poem seems to romanticize the nostalgia that the beauty of colours Kashmir brings:

> This is home. And this is the closest
> I'll ever be to home. When I return,
> the colors won't be so brilliant,
> the Jhelum's waters so clean,
> so ultramarine. (29)

However, after revealing his fear of being emotional, he ends the poem with words/phrases that intend to disrupt any emotional identification that may be deemed sentimental.

> And my memory will be a little
> Out of focus, in it
> A giant negative, black
> And white, still undeveloped. (29)

From the mentioned lines, it is clear that Ali ends his poem with an anti-climax where memory instead of reminiscing is "Out of focus", and all the vibrant colours of Kashmir turn into "black and white". Like his mentor, Ali follows an anti-romantic temperament in the given poem. Whether it is the lines in "The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock": "Let us go then, you and I, / When the evening is spread out against the sky" or the critical comments in "The Tradition and Individual Talent" like "we must believe that 'emotion recollected in tranquillity' is an inexact formula." (21), Eliot rejects romanticism with its core principles.

Ali rejects sentimentality, but that doesn't mean he rejects emotions altogether. Like Eliot, Ali uses emotions for purposes other than just making the poem and reader emotional. He projects them where required and in an appropriate form according to their specific context. To render emotions in variety and for various purposes, Ali not only uses multiple allusions, as mentioned already, but he also uses trickeries of language like 'stretches', 'contracts', and 'irregular rhythm'. In the poem, or what is famously called "The Blessed Word: A Prologue", Ali writes Kashmir in 18 different sounds and spellings to show a sphere where words turned into sounds, losing (or gaining?) all meaning. (Kapoor 134). In the poem "In Memory of Begum Akhtar", Ali uses 'contracts' and 'irregular rhythm' that make the news of the death of Begum Akhtar more contemplative than emotional.

> Your death in every paper,
> Boxed in black and white
> Of photographs, obituaries,
> the sky warm, blue, ordinary,
> no hint of calamity,
> no room for sobs, (contract)
> even between the lines
> I wish to talk of the end of the world. (53)

Here, we see a shadow of Auden's "In Memory of W.B. Yeats," an unusual elegy where the mourning is trivialized. Ali doesn't trivialize her death, yet he is sceptical about the mourning people and society manifest. Ali is a master of his craft. Not only irregular rhythm, but Ali has also used the regular metre and rhythm for his purpose, to show how it can be used to appropriate emotions. Nishat Zaidi, in

her monograph on Ali, mentions the poem "A Route to Evanescence", for which she claims that "(T)he controlled stanza structure of regular quatrains helps the poet control his elegiac sentiments. (53).

Another feature in Ali's approach to modernist poetics is his meticulous choice of words. For Ali, words are not just symbolic or metaphorical; they are equal to the literal; what is said for its verbal, syntactic, or semantic effects finds equal emphasis. There is always a balance between the message of the poem and the impact it creates through its language and form. Kapoor mentions: "He took language very seriously and was so attuned to the aesthetics of language that he had an emotional response to each word uttered in his presence." (67). Ali seems to endorse in his poems that a poet should respond emotionally to each word instead of being emotional about the idea. This principle makes the poet more conscious of language and its peculiarities than his subjective engagement with the poem's theme. In one way, this is nothing but achieving the 'impersonality' that Eliot suggests to a modern poet. About Ali's insistence on the emotional response to each word, poet and novelist Kamila Shamsie, who attended Ali's classes in creative writing at Hamilton College, writes:

> This world, I believe, was full of innocuous words over which I would never be able to summon an emotion. I was, of course, entirely wrong, and it didn't take Shahid long to make me see that. His awareness of language-its aesthetics, and its music-was so powerful that it was impossible not to be affected by it… The arrangement of vowels and consonants, the workings of rhythm, and assonance became just as important as the meaning conveyed by my sentences. (23-24)

Ali's understanding of modernist poetry became more complex with time, and as a teacher of creative writing, Ali employed rigorous experimentation in poetry writing.

The idea of 'tradition' in the Eliotic sense is incomplete without placing the work of individual poets within the tradition, adjusting and modifying the entire corpus of tradition. Ali's poetry is situated in many traditions, as the article studied in the previous section, but at the same time, it refashions these traditions by adopting newer modes of poetry. This part of the article discusses Ali's style while adopting transnational poetics' complex and hybrid features. I substantiate this with Jahan Ramzani's *A Transnational*

Poetics, where he gives an example of Ali's poetry in the view of local genres transcending international borders:

> Whether imposed or willingly adapted, meter, rhythm, stanza, and other leading prosodic Japanese elements have always travelled across cultural and territorial boundaries; consider, for example, the Japanese haiku, famously anglicized by the imagists, or the Arabic gazal, adopted for over a thousand years into Persian (taking its canonical form in that language), Turkish, Urdu, German, and English-most recently by Agha Shahid Ali" (16)

In the true sense, Ali's poetry is the bridge between Oriental and Western poetics as he incorporates the traits from both. This bridge is an essential development in transnational poetry as it not only registers the native resistance; it also refutes all the discursive models based on hostility between two cultures, such as one given by Samuel Huttington called "Clash of Civilizations". The mention of this clash is important here as Ali's poetry presents an individual category where the content and form in the poetic traditions from both civilizations overlap in the aesthetic paradigms without hostility and misrepresentation.

The individuality of Ali's art lies in merging two distinct polarities in post-colonial literature. The debate is still open whether a post-colonial writer from a post-colonial country should claim a 'Nativist Assertion or Resistance towards hegemonic modernity' or present a 'Transatlantic assimilation'. These are the terms used by Ramzani while describing the poetics of transnational poetry, and Ali's poetry hinges on both paradigms. Ali writes in English but speaks an Indian or Urdu idiom. Ali attempted to invoke and recall the themes that were once frequently taken up in Urdu poetry.

Regarding themes, Ali revives all the important contexts from Urdu poetry. For instance, Delhi was frequently used in Urdu poetry. Delhi was an important political and cultural centre. Poems like "Lost Memory of Delhi," "Chandni Chowk," "A Butcher," and "After Seeing Kozinlev's King Lear Ali" reminisce about the city in all its colors of the past. "A Butcher" traces the loss of tradition in the Urdu language when he writes:

> In this lane
> near Jama Masjid,
> where he wraps kilos of meat

in sheets of paper,
the ink of the news
stains his knuckles,
the script is wet
in his palms: Urdu,
bloody as this fingertip
is still fine on his lips, (47)

Ali's poems also directly cover two other essential contexts from Urdu poetry: an emphasis on syncretic culture and life in the Indian landscape and the *Marsiya* tradition.

Ali, as a transnational poet, offers both; he is local as well as cosmopolitan. He revisits local history, myths, customs, etc., but is open to assimilating foreign cultures. This technique never lets the poem become emotional propaganda for Nationalism. Thus, his poems stick to modernist poetics while adopting transnational modalities. Once, Amitav Ghosh called him "the closest that Kashmir had to a national poet", to which he replied, "A national poet, maybe. But not a nationalist poet, please note that." (Kapoor 135).

These transnational modalities produce poems forming out of fragmentation. Regarding structure, Ali's poems often appear as a collage of fragmented words and phrases or as a mosaic of words and lines from different cultures and poetic traditions. The poem's last section, "Last Saffron", ends with the famous line: "If there is a paradise on earth, /It is this, it is this, it is." It doesn't seem out of place as the poem is about Kashmir, and this famous line is attributed to King Jehangir, who praised Kashmir like this. However, concluding the poem with a quote from Persian translated into English affects the poem's form. It traces the postcolonial poet whose consciousness is fragmented by the impact of Kashmir's tragedy and glory.

All of these instances show that he is also a product of an age of translation; he is receptive to many histories and cultures through translation and creates a poem with a fragmented form like his consciousness. It seems to intend that Ali, like Eliot, is a victim and a master of making poems out of fragments. Stanley Sultan talks about "The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock" in one of the essays on Eliot and says: "By his own accurate account, it was conceived somewhere

in 1910, he took several fragments which were ultimately embodied in the poem." (42)

Conclusion

The article has attempted to show Ali's place in the 'tradition' of modernist poetics. His poems focus on the aesthetics of language and the interplay of words – a prominent feature in modernist poetry. His poems are experimental and meticulous regarding words' semantic and phonetic qualities. There is also the poetic manifestation of 'historical forces' when he depersonalizes his poems and distances them from his subjective self. He writes objectively on issues related to his identity and community and, thus, follows the dictum of impersonality. However, his mixed identity emerges in the individuality of his poems. His 'individual talent' incorporates strange, poetic idioms, and his transnational poetry celebrates his cosmopolitan bearing. His literary and poetic approaches cause new forms to emerge. As Eliot, the task of writing a poem becomes an exploration of not just the conflicted realities of the modern world but also the new, hybridized forms of poetry. These hybridized forms are an essential element of his poem. Without these, the expressions and manifestation of what Bhabha calls 'the third space' of the modernized transatlantic world would never be authentic to its ethos. Therefore, Ali's individuality as a poet is sustained even after his strong commitment to the tradition of modernist poetry.

Works Cited

Ali, Agha Shahid. *The Veiled Suite: The Collected Poems*. Penguin Books, 2009.

Benvenuto, Christine. "Agha Shahid Ali." *The Massachusetts Review*, vol. 43, no. 2, 2002, pp. 261–73. JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/stable/25091852.

Eliot, T. S. *Selected Essays*: 1917-1932. Faber and Faber Limited, 1939.

Kapoor, Manan. *A Map of Longings: The Life and Works of Agha Shahid Ali.* Vintage, 2021.

Moscaliuc, Mihaela. "Palimpsestic Intertextualities in "A Lost Memory of Delhi" and "The Last Saffron" Mad Heart Be Brave: Essays on the Poetry of Agha Shahid Ali. Edited by Kazim Ali. The University of Michigan Press, 2017, pp. 156-162.

Schneiderman, Jason. "The Loved One Always Leaves The Poetic Friendship of Agha Shahid Ali and James Merrill." M*ad Heart Be Brave Essays on the Poetry*

of Agha Shahid Ali. Edited by Kazim Ali. University of Michigan Press, 2017, pp. 99-103.

Shamsie, Kamila. "Agha Shahid Ali, Teacher" *The Annual of Urdu Studies*, vol. 17, 2002.

Sultan, Stanley. "Tradition and Prufrock" T.S. Eliot: *An Anthology of Recent Criticism*. Edited by Tapan Kumar Basu. Pencarft International, 1993.

Zaidi, Nishat. *Makers of Indian Literature: Agha Shahid Ali*. Sahitya Akademi, 2016.

13.

Intersectional Feminist Representation in Select Indian English Picturebooks for Children – A Critical Analysis

B. Sai Harshitha[*] and Sowmya Srinivasan[**]

[*] *Doctoral Research Scholar, Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh, India*

[**] *Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, Andhra Pradesh, India*

Abstract

Children's literature can potentially influence and shape the growing sensibilities of young minds. Hence, it must adapt to the evolving social and cultural conditions to teach young readers responsibility, sensitivity, and inclusivity. In this context, children's literature in India concerns the prevailing conversation about raising awareness of gender biases and promoting inclusive mindsets. Contemporary children's books, especially picturebooks, attempt to bring about change through positive and powerful narratives that break gender barriers. For this purpose, three picturebooks, namely Kamla Bhasin's *Girls Want Azadi,* Sowmya Rajendran's *Wings to Fly,* and *The Weightlifting Princess,* have been consciously chosen owing to their contemporariness and thematic semblance. The article reviews the female protagonists and their multiple identities constructed amid injustice and discrimination in the narratives. It uses textual analysis as the research method for unearthing the connotations and denotations present in the chosen picturebooks. By highlighting the Indian depictions of gender-based discrimination, these picturebooks create a space for dialogue among child readers that traverse beyond the boundaries of social and cultural taboos.

Keywords: Gender equality, empowered girl child, Indian Children's Literature in English, Picturebooks

Introduction

The focus on gender as "the social production and reproduction of male and female identities and behaviour" (Flanagan 26) is the basic premise of gender studies. Often, the two terms, sex and gender, are

confused with each other. To define the two, "The term "sex" is used to refer to a system of biological designations such as male, female, or intersexed (individuals born with both male and female anatomical components) based on genetic and anatomical features; the term "gender" refers to the system of culturally and historically specific characteristics and behavior sets such as masculinity, femininity, manhood, and womanhood" (Hintz and Tribunella). This gendered system perpetuates inequality as, through ages, there has been a prioritisation of the masculine over the feminine, which has resulted in the patriarchal oppression of women. A paradigm shift from the idea of a domesticated "Second Sex" (Beauvoir) to a liberal and radical self in modern society has rattled the fulcrum of gender stereotypes primarily engendered by culture. However, gender-based discrimination against women still prevails in many parts of the world. Historically, children's literature has been widely associated with women, who have had immense influence in this field as maternal figures and storytellers. M.O. Grenby notes that mothers were predecessors of the commercial child-book makers, preparing educational aids and employing new pedagogical tools to prepare children for formal education (10). Consequently, women writers for children have always outnumbered men, with classics by Beatrix Potter, Louisa May Alcott, L.M. Montgomery, and Enid Blyton standing testament to their impact in the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries.

Modern children's literature came under the influence of feminism in the 1970s with a surge in books that delineated strong female protagonists who broke stereotypes and exhibited subversive attitudes. Victoria Flanagan, a senior lecturer who has been researching on the representation of gender in children's literature and film, points out that:

> From retellings of popular fairy tales that redress the conventional marginalization and passivity of feminine characters by portraying active, self-determining heroines to works of historical fiction for younger readers that re-imagine various historical periods from a feminine viewpoint, writing for children and adolescents has enjoyed, and continues to enjoy, a longstanding engagement with feminist ideals and agendas. (27)

Notably, conscious de-gendered representations aid in shaping social perspectives and fostering inclusive mindsets among its readers. In particular, picturebooks, primarily utilised as a pedagogical tool, also hold immense potential to kindle young minds to read, understand and ponder over issues beyond the representation visible in the texts. These books also serve as a means to educate a new generation of readers about the social and cultural norms of the nation alongside the diverse realities of daily existence. As a wholesome package, picturebooks can be used to seed ideas of gender equality and sensitivity effectively. Research has pointed out that if these books propagate gender bias and stereotypes, it can negatively affect the growth of child readers. Hamilton, on exploring gender stereotyping and under-representation of female characters in two hundred 21st century award-winning picturebooks, has delineated that "stereotyped portrayals of the sexes and underrepresentation of female characters contribute negatively to children's development, limit their career aspirations, frame their attitudes about their future roles as parents, and even influence their personality characteristics" (757). Therefore, it is important that children read, reflect, and respond to picturebooks that project a progressive outlook with empowered female characters.

Indian Children's Literature and the Feminist Zeal:

While the Western world of children's literature had caught up with feminist ideals, Indian children's literature, for a large part of its early days wherein it continued to retell traditional narratives, perpetuated the hegemonic perception towards women as "sacrificing mothers, obedient daughters, supporting sisters, cunning and nagging wives and even as a seductress" (Shinde 26). The stock of stories narrated to children did not attempt to diverge from this idea; however, it glorified the traditional roles diligently played by women as indispensable to the family and society at large. However, the representations of women have improved considerably in twenty-first-century Indian children's Literature. Bold and strong female characters, infused with feminist ideals, are being created by contemporary authors and illustrators, driving the much-needed change in the depiction of the female. Superle rightly states, "In contemporary Indian children's literature, feminist ideology is

demonstrated through the widespread presence of girl characters and the pursuit of gender equality" (38). Character identities are critically carved at the intersections of caste, class, and gender to highlight the injustice and marginalisation of underprivileged characters. This is in tandem with the UN's goal for sustainable development, which aims to eradicate gender-based discrimination and empower women and girls.

The scenario in Indian children's literature is changing and picturebook authors are adapting to the evolving demands. Indian picturebooks in English have matured to the point that they actively address complicated themes such as gender, caste, class, and ability – tags that add to the personality of a character. Indigenous publishing companies, including Tulika, Tara, Pratham, and Karadi Tales, have changed the landscape of picture books in India. In the last five years, there has been a steady increase in the picturebooks that actively engage with a feminist vision.

Children's books in India such as *The Why-Why Girl*, *The Mayil series*, *Jamlo Walks,* and *Chooo...mantar* clash with conventional expectations from girl children through different subversive strategies such as representing subalternity, intersectionality and revisioning. These books form a corpus that actively questions and tries to redress generational stereotyping based on gender. However, there seems to be a lacuna in critically viewing these books and evaluating their literary impact. In this view, this article attempts to use the feminist methodological lens to study the various depictions of women in three Indian picturebooks, namely, *Girls Want Azadi*, *Wings to Fly* and *The Weightlifting Princess.*

The rationale for choosing these three books from a larger group is their position as representative texts that directly engage with the empowering ideology of intersectional feminism. While Bhasin's *Girls Want Azadi* intentionally undertakes a radical feminist tone and explicitly confronts society for its discriminatory practices against girls, Rajendran's *Wings to Fly* and *The Weightlifting Princess* subtly embody this feminist zeal by incorporating experiences of being a woman facing multilayered oppression in a patriarchal society.

As a comprehensive and critical feminist theoretical lens, intersectional feminism aptly "emphasizes the interlocking effects of

race, class, gender, and sexuality, highlighting the ways in which categories of identity and structures of inequality are mutually constituted and defy separation into discrete categories of analysis" (Dill and Kohlman 154). In the light of intersectionality, *Girls Want Azadi* presents an umbrella narrative that deals with the collective experience of injustice towards women owing to their intersectional identities. In the case of the other two texts, *Wings to Fly*, a biographical account, portrays the intersectional experience of disability and gender. At the same time, *The Weightlifting Princess* narrates a princess's attempts to break barriers imposed by her class-gender intersectional identity. The article resorts to textual analysis, dissecting the different available denotations and connotations in both the text and illustrations of the chosen books to understand how the 'New Girl,' who, I perceive as the younger clone of Sarah Grand's "New Woman," (271) inculcates sensitivity towards gender inequality imposed through conditioned gender roles.

Bhasin's Feminist Call for Azadi:

Kamla Bhasin's *Girls Want Azadi* directly connects to the second-wave feminist radical ideas. When investigated closely, the title highlights the female population of the society through the use of the subject, 'Girls'. The verb 'want' in the title assertively asks for the object 'Azadi', which translates to freedom. The idea of the need for freedom also foregrounds the fact that many restrictions have bound girls as a gendered group, and they intend to demand their rights. Also, the plurality of representations in the book is established by the plural subject 'Girls'. Bhasin's radical feminist thought that permeates the picturebook can be well surmised through her own words, "Women are what they are because of a social system and its definition which need to be changed to improve women's status" (61).

The cover page illustration shows a group of girls with raised hands and open mouths, signifying their protest against something. The banner has multiple icons that denote the arenas restricted for girls. It shows education through a book and a pencil, sports through a football and a bat, and entertainment through a mike and a musical note. The picturebook is a perfect catalyst to ignite young minds to engage in conversations about gender stereotypes, discrimination,

and equality. While the text of the picturebook introduces various aspects of women's rights, policies, and issues in the form of slogans or chants of protests to the child reader, the illustrations by Shrujana Niranjani Shridhar form an exclusive individual narrative providing deeper insights into the ideas visible in the text. For example, a full-page illustration shows the gathering of the varied intersectional categories that make up the identities of Indian women. The child reader can identify from the represented characters that disability, religion, age, appearance, and class are intertwined in the process of discrimination. This explicates Kimberlé Crenshaw's proposition on Intersectional Feminism that accounts for the "multiply-burdened" (140), overlapping and concurrent oppressive situations that girls and women face daily.

The illustrations in the picturebook speak louder than the text. Various depictions are utilised to metaphorically represent women's upliftment from restrictive environments. The illustrations show women making a concerted effort to pull another out of a ditch, moving out of a dark room to a bright space, and speaking through loudspeakers. All these metaphorical representations point to the dark, inferior, and silenced positions from which women struggle to find strength and free themselves from any bonds and boundaries that restrict them.

The picturebook promotes a message of sisterhood as a necessity for freedom. The picturebook visibly grips the child reader and, through the text, reinforces the pertinence of 'Azadi' in different sections of a woman's life. In the centre double spread of the book, the illustration is complementary to the text on the opposite page that states, "From being a "burden" AZADI / From being "less than a man" AZADI" (Bhasin). The child reader is brought to awareness of the existing binary of the man (powerful) vs. woman (powerless) through the attribution of 'being a burden' and 'being less than a man'. By insisting on freedom from these attributions, the picturebook fractures the binary, preventing the younger community from inculcating such biased schemata and sealing any further discrimination stemming from the comparison of women with men.

Another interesting motif in the picturebook is the portrayal of various skin tones, body shapes, attires, hairstyles and colours,

promoting a positive narrative around the beauty standard established by the patriarchal society. Regarding the constructed image of an ideal Indian beauty, Rebecca Gelles, in her dissertation notes:

> [t]he ideal Indian woman is fair or medium-complexioned, has a narrow waist but wider hips and breasts, and has large eyes, full red lips, and long black hair that is either straight or wavy. This image, or some form of it, has managed to endure for centuries, perhaps encouraged by the religious imagery of Hindu goddesses. It would be unexpected, then, for this vision of Indian beauty to change significantly. (11)

While comics such as the *Amar Chitra Katha* have followed and propagated the above-mentioned attributes of the ideal beauty, Shridhar's depiction of beauty grounded in reality makes use of the shades of brown and black skin tones which are pertinent markers of Indian skin, thus presenting a true portrait of Indian womanhood. The choice to omit the popular expectations of a curvaceous female body and replace it with a box-like figure thwarts any patriarchal notions of beauty attached to the desirability of a woman's body. This depiction may even be globalised to include women of all third-world countries, thus creating a universal cry for gender equality. The intersectional representations of gender discrimination in the book express the need for sensitisation and awareness among the young. It attempts to promote inclusivity and solidarity in the child readers' minds, thus impacting their perceptions and behaviour.

Disability Not a Barrier:

Sowmya Rajendran's *Wings to Fly* deals with the life of Malathi Holla, a para-athlete from India. The work, in light of double marginalisation based on disability and gender, is studied here, as a narrative of empowerment and representation. The cover page, illustrated by Arun Kaushik, shows a small girl setting flight with her pair of transformed wings, and the wheelchair's wheels. The story introduces Malathi as a young, inquisitive girl who wants to enjoy childhood privileges but cannot do so. The curiosity of the child reader as to why Malathi is unable to enjoy childhood is drawn out till the fact that Malathi is bound to a wheelchair is introduced a few pages into the book. Post the revelation, the narrative shows Malathi's aspirations to move beyond the hurdle of being stuck to the moving

machine. She understands she is good at maneuvering the wheelchair and aspires to compete in races and win medals. The picturebook presents a vignette of Malathi's experience as a girl disabled in the eyes of society. While the different models of disability question the 'normal' and adjudge the temporality of the able body, this picturebook draws attention to the undying spirit of the doubly oppressed protagonist.

Keeping in mind that gender bias is first felt at home, the picturebook introduces a fresh perspective on the role of family in bringing up a disabled child. Malathi's parents and siblings are seen to be positive, nurturing, and caring, and they treat her with no prejudice. The familial space provides the clarity, courage and confidence that she needs to face society. The depiction of Malathi's family echoes the perspective that for disabled children, "[f]amilies are not simply microcosms of society or community: they exist potentially as spaces through which dominant ideas associated with autonomy, choice, individuality and freedom are understood" (Goodley and McLaughlin 15). The seed of confidence and grit in Malathi has its roots in how her family paid no heed to her disability or gender and brought her up with love, care, and the right support. Aptly supported by the full-page illustration of a heart formed together by the family members around Malathi, the book reiterates society's progressively altered perspective towards disability. Social and religious reservations towards disability are erased in the light of love and empathy shown to disabled children.

The spread that discusses Malathi's medical treatment provides an alternative connotation where she is seen holding the doctors in two strong hands as though representing her strength in the upper body despite being physically challenged. It can be viewed as a critique of the medical model of disability that believes that "disability is…an impairment in a body system or function that is inherently pathological. From this perspective, the goal is to return the system or function to as close to "normal" as possible" (Olkin). The fact that Malathi goes on to work in a regular job instills the idea that disability is no hurdle to succeeding in life as deemed normal for able-bodied humans.

The story of Malathi, doubly marginalised as a disabled woman, is an intense depiction of reality to young readers. Malathi is singled out as the only woman athlete on the track competing against men at the Ahmedabad Sports Meet for the differently abled. The discrimination on the part of the organisers could be attributed to the gender hierarchy that positions men and women differently, all the more disabled men and disabled women. Malathi's confidence and courage to participate in the event breaks the gender-based barrier. The astounding win she achieves problematizes the popular discourse on ableism and dismantles the social stigma around the incapabilities of disabled women. The text on the final page, "Nobody could believe it. Including Malathi!" (Rajendran), echoes the social conditioning around the inability of a fractured body to perform 'normally' as perceived by the 'normal', hence privileged society. This subtly points to the rare occasions of talent exhibitions available to the underprivileged sections of society. Narratives such as *Wings to Fly* inspire temporarily able and differently abled young readers to rise beyond life's difficulties. Similarly, these books also help engender a metamorphosis in the younger generation's treatment of disability, not as a deviation but as a possibility of personhood.

Can a Princess become a Champion?

The Weightlifting Princess, also written by Sowmya Rajendran and illustrated by Debasmita Dasgupta, is a picturebook that engages with the class-gender intersection in the protagonist's identity. It also subverts hegemonic ideas about the feminine body and its physical capacity. The picturebook delineates the story of Princess Nila, who wants to win the Surya Championship, a weightlifting competition in her kingdom. Since the entry criterion mandates a certain weight limit, she works hard to reach the goal and eventually succeeds in realising her dream. The picturebook depicts a strong female protagonist who embodies determination, effort, and consistency ideals.

Indian mythological stories have had strong female characters with the strength of virtues rather than bodily strength. Physical prowess was always identified with men who were portrayed as warriors, rulers and fighters. Though the queens and princesses of

the elite society enjoyed luxury and privilege, they were still victims of social conditioning based on gender. They were expected to be dainty and docile. In many cases, they were seen as trophy wives and delicate possessions of the patriarchal master. *The Weightlifting Princess* replaces the conventional damsel in distress with a tough and strong heroine. The picturebook utilises the re-visionist technique as expressed by Adrienne Rich. Rich stressed how the act of re-vision and the subversion of established ideas about femininity "is more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival" (18). Following this re-visionist strategy, the narrative fictionally draws from available constructions of regal stories in Indian mythology yet subverts it by replacing the valorous hero with a valiant heroine. Through such a move, the picturebook transforms into a space of negotiation and a subtle retaliation to the existing ideas of inferior femininity. It retains the regality of the elite society but breaks free from the crippling patriarchal hold through Princess Nila's character.

The way Dasgupta has illustrated Princess Nila has a pertinent influence on the message the picturebook intends to convey to its audience. As a multimodal text, it is a fact that the picturebook conveys meanings through both its modes, each amplifying the effect of the other on the reader's understanding. While the text in this particular picturebook spells out the actions of the protagonist, the pictures add details to the character. She is seen attributed with traditional feminine features such as long, thick hair and big kohl-drawn eyes. Her accessories, such as the crown, nose pin, armlets, and anklets, lend to the feminine depiction of Princess Nila. At the same time, she is seen having brown skin, bushy eyebrows, well-muscled arms, and a strong body. These aspects of her characterisation break any stereotypical expectation of a princess and construct an alternate idea of femininity infused with both physical and mental strength and power.

The book depicts the closeness between the princess and her mother, the queen, as a symbol of solidarity among women. The encouragement by the queen promotes a positive outlook on how parents need to recognise and support their children's aspirations. Princess Nila wants to win the Surya championship not for the sake of becoming worthy of being the erstwhile champion Prince Vikram's

wife but rather to achieve her dream. The very fact that Princess Nila wishes to go to the best sports school in Taibar while her father wants her to marry Prince Vikram shows her passion for excelling against all odds. The final page plants Princess Nila as a woman with agency when she tackles the King's words. Though the King's initial comment on her becoming a worthy partner to Vikram shows how a woman's identity is never acknowledged independently but rather in connection with a man, Nila's immediate response, "No… Now, I am the Champion" (Rajendran), thwarts the King's attempt to chain her identity to a man as she proudly claims her championship. The child reader gains the perspective that femininity is not a shackle that will bind a girl but instead can be embraced in myriad ways, as shown by Princess Nila. The picturebook convinces the novice reader that if one decides to achieve, all that matters is hard work, dedication and determination, not that one's gender.

Conclusion

The three chosen picturebooks utilise different strategies to create awareness and empower young minds on issues pertaining to gender equality. Bhasin's picturebook repeatedly stresses the importance of 'Azadi' for girls and radically confronts arenas where girls and women are subjected to injustice and discrimination. The characters, Malathi Holla and Princess Nila can be viewed as counterparts in their steadfast desire to achieve their goals. They embody the radical nature of Bhasin's feminist thought, thus becoming powerful role models for young Indian girls. In conclusion, depicting such strong, positive characters in Indian picturebooks has the potential to reshape social attitudes, break stereotypes, and foster a balanced and inclusive society. By presenting female protagonists who subvert oppressive traditional ideologies, these picturebooks become a powerful tool to shape society's future. The recent embrace of the feminist principle and promotion of female agency among children's writers is a welcome effort, for it intends to drive a change that will ensure the social upliftment of the nation as a whole.

Works Cited

Beauvoir, Simone De. *The Second Sex*. Vintage Classic, 2015.

Bhasin, Kamla, and Shrujana Niranjani Shridhar. *Girls Want Azadi*. Pratham Books, 2023.

Bhasin, Kamla. *Understanding Gender*. Women Unlimited, 2003.

Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory, and antiracist politics [1989]." *The University of Chicago Legal Forum*, vol. 139, Feb. 1989, pp. 139–167, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429500480-5.

Dill, Bonnie Thornton, and Martha H Kohlman. "Intersectionality: A Transformative Paradigm in Feminist Theory and Social Justice." *Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis*, Sage, pp. 154–174, Accessed 2024.

Flanagan, Victoria. "Gender Studies." *The Routledge Companion to Children's Literature*, 1st ed., Routledge, NY, 2010, pp. 26–38.

Gelles, Rebecca. "Fair and Lovely: Standards of Beauty, Globalization, and the Modern Indian Woman". 2011. *Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection*. 1145. Carleton College. https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection/1145.

Goodley, Dan and Janice McLaughlin., "Theorising Parents, Professionals and Disabled Babies". *Families Raising Disabled Children: Enabling Care and Social Justice. United Kingdom*, Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2008.

Grand, Sarah. "The New Aspect of the Woman Question," *North American Review*, 158 1894, 270–276.

Grenby, M.O. "The Origins of Children's Literature." *The Cambridge Companion to Children's Literature*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, England, 2010, pp.3–18.

Hamilton, Mykol C., et al. "Gender stereotyping and under-representation of female characters in 200 popular children's picture books: A Twenty-First Century update." *Sex Roles*, vol. 55, no. 11–12, 6 Dec. 2006, pp. 757–765, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-006-9128-6.

Hintz, Carrie, and Eric L. Tribunella. "Defining Sex/Gender". *Reading Children's Literature: A Critical Introduction*. Broadview Press, 2020.

Olkin, R. "Conceptualizing disability: Three models of disability". *American Psychological Association*.29 March 2022. https://www.apa.org/ed/precollege/psychology-teacher-network/introductory-psychology/disability-models

Rajendran, Sowmya, and Arun Kaushik. *Wings to Fly*. Tulika Books, 2015.

Rajendran, Sowmya, and Debasmita Dasgupta. *The Weightlifting Princess*. Pratham Books, 2019.

Rich, Adrienne. "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision." *College English*, vol. 34, no. 1, 1972, pp. 18–30. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/375215.

Shinde, Sucheta Pramod. "The Depiction of Women in Children's Literature in India." *Shodhganga*, 2016, http://hdl.handle.net/10603/126120

Superle, Michelle. *Contemporary English-Language Indian Children's Literature: Representations of Nation, Culture, and the New Indian Girl*. Routledge, 2014.

14.

A Critical Exploration of Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha* through the Integrative Onto-theology of Shakta Tantra

Sudipta Chakraborty

Independent Researcher, India.

Abstract

Hermann Hesse's celebrated Novel *Siddhartha* (1922) explores the quest for enlightenment and spiritual salvation sought by the eponymous protagonist Siddhartha, a Brahmin turned into an ascetic after his passionate espousal of the Buddhist philosophy of *Nirvana*. However, Buddhism's insistence on spiritual salvation vehemently undermines and castigates the pulsating flow of life and materiality. The protagonist, Siddhartha, has realized the dissociative principle of Buddhism that eliminates the circumambient material dimension of life from the sphere of spirituality. Nevertheless, he embarks on a spiritual quest where the *samsara* and the *Nirvana*, the mundane and the supra terrestrial, seamlessly converge to ensure a holistic experiential dimension of eudaimonia of enlightenment. This essay aims to trace the vestiges of Shakta-tantric onto-theological assumptions on the world, which imbue the perception and spiritual quest of the protagonist Siddhartha. The essay also aims to interpret Siddhartha's subjective quest for spiritual eudaimonia as something informed and shaped by the profound Shakta-tantric epistemology of interconnectivity that blissfully hyphenates the principles of *samsara* with that of *Nirvana*.

Keywords: Shakta-tantric, spiritual-materialism, Matter, Spirit, Eudaimonia, Nirvana

Introduction

Hermann Hesse, the Nobel Laureate, is a German novelist and poet. He won the Nobel Prize in 1946 for his fictional oeuvres that unveil the saga of an individual's heroic struggle against the conformist societal mores and codes. In Hesse's fiction, this individual's strife to overcome the insurmountable ontological vis-à-vis existential burden

entails spiritual re-exploration for the characters. His eponymous protagonist of the Novel *Siddhartha* (1922), Goldmund in *Narcissus and Goldmund* (1930), and Joseph Knecht, the protagonist of his last and longest Novel *The Glass Bead Game* (1943) – all are incarcerated into this ontological precarity that obfuscates their subjective quest for the eudaimonic dimension of existence. The essay explores the protagonist Siddhartha's quest for self-exploration from Shakta-tantric epistemologies' theoretical and methodological frameworks.

Shakta Tantra: Theory and Praxis

Tantra is a divergent strand within Hinduism. Renowned Tantric Scholars like Rajmani Tigunait have focused on the scientific aspect of Tantra, and he considered Tantra as "a science as well as a spiritual path" (Tigunait 2) of Indic origin. Its root dates back to the Fifth Century CE (Harper and Brown 6). The word Tantra derives from the Sanskrit verb root "*tan,"* implying to weave, to expand, to spread" (Tigunait 1; Flood 9). As a philosophy, Tantra weaves the material aspect of the physical world with the spiritual sphere of non-materiality. Therefore, the tantric spiritual practices and epistemologies hyphenate the material with the spiritual realms, facilitating a "spiritual materialist" (Chakraborty and Mukhopadhyay, "*Spiritual Materialism"* 44) orientation to life. The seventh century is generally considered the developing phase of Tantra (Harper and Brown 6). By the end of the ninth century C.E., Tantra had established itself as a distinctive Hindu religious doctrine (Harper and Brown 6). Tantra has five streams within Hinduism: Saiva tantra, Sakta tantra, Vaisnava tantra, Saura tantra, and Ganapatya Tantra (Fields 30). Saiva tantra worships Lord Siva; Sakta tantra espouses the Great Goddess or Devi (The Divine Feminine Absolute) as the supreme creator of the cosmos. Vaisnava tantra worships lord Visnu as the supreme deity. Saura tantra accepts the supremacy of the Sun, and Lord Ganesha is venerated as the supreme deity in Ganapatya Tantra (Fields 30). Tantric enlightenment blossoms not from the assiduous readings of scriptures but from the tantric conceptualization of liberation and enlightenment, which is informed by its experiential dimension. Hermann Hesse's classic *Siddhartha* concentrates on this experiential dimension of self-knowledge leading to enlightenment and redemption of an

individual. The profound spiritual treasures of Eastern philosophy have influenced Hesse, like many other Nobel laureates such as T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats. The scholarly interpretations of *Siddhartha* have insisted on the Upanisadic resonance and Buddhist principles, the two distinctive spheres of Eastern philosophy that imbued the novel and its spiritual dimension. However, research has yet to be conducted on the masterpiece that seeks to reinterpret the classic from the perspectives of Shakta-tantric epistemology. This essay aims to bridge the gap in the existing scholarship on *Siddhartha*.

Thematic Overview of the Novel

The narrative hinges on the character of Siddhartha, a Brahmin from an affluent family who renunciates his comfortable life as a householder to embrace Lord Buddha's teachings. However, three years of his life as an ascetic made him realize the inanity of the teachings of a Guru like Lord Buddha. Therefore, he forsook the life of a renunciate and questioned the meaning of emptiness of existence postulated by the Buddhist doctrines. His skepticism urges him to enmesh into the materiality of life, where life is vibrant with the colors of worldly pleasures. He experiences carnal pleasures in the company of a beautiful courtesan named Kamala. He amassed wealth in his business with a wealthy merchant named Kamaswami. However, the wealth, the erotic pleasure, the engagement with the material dimension of life – all seem meaningless to him. His growing dissatisfaction with this material world made him despise and forsake everything. He again transformed into a seeker who seeks the meaning of existence and a perfect merger with the Divine Absolute. At this point, Siddhartha came across a river. The river assumes a very sacred connotation to his baffling heart, and it answers his questions about life's onto-theological complexities. Now, Siddhartha assumes the role of a ferryman to stay near the river. At this stage of his life, he gains the ultimate knowledge from the river as it assumes a sacred secular (Mani 174) form of Divinity for him. The river lulls his senses and offers him the spiritual knowledge needed for liberation.

Siddhartha's Journey from Buddhism to Shakta-Tantrism

The narrative in *Siddhartha* foregrounds the young Brahmin's ecstatic acceptance of the Buddhist principles that made him renounce the life of a householder. At this stage of life, the protagonist, Siddhartha, was baffled by the materiality of life vis-à-vis the world. His quest was the fundamental human quest for knowing one's true essence. After three years of his passionate espousal of Lord Buddha's enlightened teachings, he realized the inanity of this philosophical principle fostered by Buddhism. As an epistemology, Buddhism encompasses "four noble truths – the truth of suffering, the truth of its origin, the truth of its cessation, and the truth of the path leading to cessation" (Lama 1). In Hesse's narrative, the character of Gotama is modeled upon Lord Buddha, who taught his disciples the same spiritual essence of life. "Gotama taught the teachings of suffering, of the origin of suffering, of the way to relieve suffering. Suffering was life, full of suffering was the world, but salvation from suffering had been found: salvation was obtained by him who would walk the path of the Buddha" (Hesse 23). These four noble truths of Buddhism foreground the soteriological telos inherent within Buddhist doctrine that dissociates the material world from the domain of spirituality. The spiritual liberation can only be dawned upon an ascetic if he jettisons the world of materiality. In Buddhism, there are corpse-centric meditative practices. To instantiate, one can mention *Visuddhimagga* (Mukhopadhyay13), a corpse-centric Buddhist meditative practice. However, this meditation mandates a monk to sit on the corpse and meditate on it. This practice seeks to infuse a sense of emptiness in the monk's mind, as "this meditation is targeted at lessening the ontological gap between a living body and a dead body" (Mukhopadhyay 13). The corpse in this practice gives a haunting reminder of the emptiness of life that ultimately ended in nothingness. Therefore, Buddhist epistemologies of life are essentially featured by a gnawing awareness of void and emptiness (Mukhopadhyay 13). In this philosophy, life aims to eliminate this worldly life as it is a vicious circle ensnaring an individual into the karmic process, making his redemptive gesture futile. Buddhism is "an ethereal, disembodied, and wholly rational philosophy, preserved and conveyed primarily through doctrinal and philosophical texts" (Ohnuma 200). Therefore, Buddhism maintains a

disdainful attitude toward the body as it is the embodied form of materiality and "final deliverance from all bodily life, present and to come is the greatest of all boons, and the loftiest of all aims" (Bateson 758-760). However, the teleological aim of Buddhism is to find *Nirvana.*

Nirvana is based on an eliminative principle that forsakes the world of materiality or *samsara* to liberate a human soul from the bondage of rebirth and karma. *Nirvana* embraces *shunyata*, or nothingness, as the operative principle of life. This eliminative principle of Buddhism is operative in exclusionary politics. Here, *samsara* and *Nirvana* seem to be the incommensurable poles of a binary. Therefore, the eponymous protagonist of Hesse's novel, Siddhartha, willfully abandons *samsara* or his engagement with the world of materiality for the quest of *Nirvana*. However, the divorce between matter and spirit, *samsara* and *Nirvana*, makes Buddhist principles a partial philosophical path to liberation. Therefore, Siddhartha's quest for self-knowledge and liberation remained unfulfilled by his espousal of Buddhist epistemologies.

After spending three years as a Buddhist ascetic, Siddhartha realized that *samsara*, or the material world, is not a deception or creative illusion (Hesse 109). His realization is a foil to the teaching of Lord Buddha as the material world "was discovered by the exalted one to be a deception. He commands benevolence, clemency, sympathy, tolerance, but not love; he forbade us to tie our heart in love to earthly things" (Hesse 109). The conceptualization of the material realm or *samsara* as *maya* or creative illusion resides at the heart of Advaita Vedanta, Samkhya philosophy, and Buddhism. Contrary to these philosophies, Shakta tantra conjoins the material domain with the spiritual one. A Shakta ascetic never despises *samsara*. "Sakta Tantra is a principle of experientially acknowledging the presence of the Great Goddess in all beings and things that are essentially interconnected – from which acknowledgment a loving orientation to the "others" will flow spontaneously" (Chakraborty and Mukhopadhyay, "*The Healer's Dharma"* 2). Therefore, a Sakta adept embraces the so-called limiting dimension of materiality as an expression of the Infinite Absolute Divine Feminine worshipped as Devi in the Sakta-tantric worldview. The Great Goddess as Energy and matter remain immanent within the embodied world. Therefore,

the entire cosmos is believed to be Devi's sacred body. "The Sakta vision posits that the entire universe is the self of the Great Goddess" (Chakraborty and Mukhopadhyay, "*The Healer's Dharma*" 11). This co-configuration of the matter and the spirit facilitates a spiritually inflected ethos of materiality where the sacred presence of the Goddess inhabits the material domain. Shakta-tantric universe celebrates this interconnectivity where the material and the spiritual worlds bleed into one another to posit a sacredsecular (a la Mani) vision of Divinity. This existential interconnectivity is known as "isness" (Frankenberg and Mani 14) – the co-merging matrix of "beings and things" (Chakraborty and Mukhopadhyay, "*The Healer's Dharma*" 12) that celebrates the plurality of existence in a non-hierarchical manner. This integrative theorization of interconnectivity envisioned by Shakta-tantric philosophy informs a Shakta adept at embracing the world of materiality as the Goddess inhabits it. The Shakta yogi espouses the material realm as the materiality paves the path for his spiritual transcendence. The variegated beauty of the world and its sentient and insentient beings all provide the experiential dimension of Divinity through this façade of grounded materiality. Therefore, an awareness of the material domain and its inseparable ties with the Divinity make a Shakta-tantrically oriented adept belief that *samsara* is not an illusion. This Shakta-tantric realization dawns upon Hesse's protagonist, Siddhartha. It is relevant to quote from the novel:

> Slowly blossomed, slowly ripened in Siddhartha the realization, the knowledge, what wisdom was, what the goal of his long search was. It was nothing but a readiness of the soul, an ability, a secret art, to think every moment, while living his life, the thought of oneness, to be able to feel and inhale the oneness. (Hesse 97)

Siddhartha's realization about the presence of the Divine Feminine Absolute at the heart of every created being reflects the awareness of the same oneness, as pointed out by Deborah Willoughby. She writes,

> Accomplished tantrics see the world and everything in it as an indivisible whole – a tangible manifestation of the Divine Mother. This is neither a metaphor for them nor a philosophical premise; it is a living, breathing reality. The Divine Mother is not in the world; she is the world. Indeed, she is the entire universe, and to see any difference between the individual self and Her or between Her and any natural force or cosmic influence is misperception. (Willoughby x)

Siddhartha leaves behind his ascetic life and once again metamorphoses into a self enmeshed with life's material pleasures. His business with the reputed merchant Kamaswami and his erotic dalliance with the courtesan Kamla both serve as a gateway to his redemption. As an ascetic, he never experienced erotic pleasure. Kamala, as a city courtesan, taught her the lessons on eroticism. Here, Hesse recasts Kamala in the image of historic Diotima, who taught Socrates the lessons on eros. As a philosopher, Socrates was bereft of the knowledge of eros (Mukhopadhyay, "*Diotima and Ubhaya Bharati"* 87). In the holistic knowledge of life, eros is an inseparable element. In Madhava Vidyaranya's *Sankara Digvijaya*, a hagiography on the life of Shankaracharya, the philosopher and proponent of Advaita Vedanta, in Ninth Century India, "we come across Ubhaya Bharati, the wife of Mandana Mishra" (Mukhopadhyay, "*Diotima and Ubhaya Bharati"* 87) whom Shankaracharya defeated in a debate. Like Diotima, Ubhaya Bharati too implores the great mystic Shankaracharya to learn about eros. Here, Bharati insists on the experiential dimension of eros. At the bidding of Ubhaya Bharati, the great saint Shankaracharya experiences eros by inhabiting the corpse of King Amaruka. By alluding to the anecdotes of Diotima and Ubhaya Bharati, I would like to underscore that in Hesse's classic *Siddhartha*, the eponymous protagonist, Siddhartha, also learns lessons on eros from Kamala. This knowledge of eros is not an instinctive carnal pleasure; instead, it is essentially a spiritualized eros that enlightens the ascetic self of Siddhartha about the integrative vision of materiality and the sheer bliss immanent within it. This blissful materiality is the fundamental essence of the Great Goddess in the Shakta-tantric worldview. This lesson on spiritualized eros imparted to Siddhartha made him realize the nature of Divinity, an embodied form of material bliss and simultaneously the transcendent form of the cosmic force.

Nevertheless, this spiritualized eros is at the heart of the Shakta-tantric tradition that only binds an individual into the material realm to facilitate his liberation. Hesse's novel symbolizes this earthly tie of Siddhartha when he learns about his son from Kamala on her deathbed. After Kamala's death, Siddhartha shouldered the responsibility of his son. Despite his ascetic sensibility, he voluntarily took care of his son. Shakta-tantric epistemology embodies fullness or

purnata that starkly contrasts the Buddhist principle of nothingness or *shunyata.* Amidst the pleasing snares of the material life of a householder, self-knowledge dawns on Siddhartha. He has realized that the true essence of Divinity is not nascent within the sacred words of a teacher like Lord Buddha; instead, Divinity is both an immanent and a transcendent form of the cosmos. Therefore, instead of following the preachings of the exalted one known as Gotama in the narrative, he turns to the river as his spiritual teacher.

Sacred River and the Shakta-tantric episteme of Hydrology

In Indic religious traditions, water is sacred in various philosophical schools (Vatsayan xiii-xviii). "Water is a primordial mother, the manifester of sacred objects, and the bringer of sacred gifts to people who love and are loved by it" (Mukhopadhyay and Choudry 164). The sacrality of the water is underlined in Vedic literature when we come across the reference to the "Vedic Aditi who" (Mukhopadhyay and Choudry 163) "shares her maternal nature with the waters and the earth" (Pintchman 32-33). Pintchman observes, "Aditi, the water and earth may on some level be different aspects of one another, for they are homologized by being cited collectively as the mother of the gods" (Pintchman 32-33). The word Aditi derives from the root verb *da*, synonymous with the English verbs "bind" and "fetter" (Kinsley10). Therefore, Aditi, the name suggests the deity's "unbound, free" (Kinsley 10) nature. In the hymns dedicated to Aditi, she is urged to free her supplicants from life's obstacles. She is often worshipped to find a deliverance from the "sin and sickness" (Kinsley 10). Vedic cosmogony worships another deity associated with the water. Apart from Aditi, Sarasvati is also petitioned as she had been considered "a purifying presence" (Kinsley 11). Her water is believed to have therapeutic power that eliminates "poison from men" (Kinsley 11). "She cleanses her petitioners with holy oil and bears away defilements" (Kinsley 11). After his material prosperity, Hesse's protagonist, Siddhartha, felt the spiritual ignorance that had grasped his soul. He jettisoned his ties with the materiality and decided to take his life. At his moment of utmost despair, when he was on the verge of jumping on the river with the intention of self-annihilation, the rippling water of the river chants the sacred hymn, signifying completion (Hesse 65). "Om! He spoke to himself: Om!

And again he knew about Brahman, knew about the indestructibility of life, knew about all that is divine, which he had forgotten" (Hesse 66). This is an epiphanic moment for Siddhartha, who realizes the sacrality of the river. He venerates it as the embodied form of Divinity that protects him and guides him in his quest for spiritual illumination like an affectionate mother. Now, let me focus on the Shakta-tantric dimension of sacred hydrology to harp on the notion of the palpable presence of the Feminine Divine Absolute in Hesse's fictional oeuvre. I have already underscored that Shakta-Tantric cosmology is centered around the Great Goddess. She is the world's Mother. As Shakti or Energy, she is ever present in every single particle of the cosmos. Shaktism embraces this spiritual eudaimonia where Devi's sacred maternal love nurtures and preserves every created being.

Shakta-tantric epistemology of the sacred hydrology reinterprets water and its sacrality from a new perspective. Here, Mircea Eliade's notion of "hierophany" (Eliade 11) offers a theoretical framework to interpret the Shakta-tantric epistemology of the sacred water. By "Hierophany" (Eliade 11), Eliade implies, "Man becomes aware of the sacred because it manifests itself, shows itself, as something wholly different from the profane. To designate the *act of manifestation* of the sacred, we have proposed the term hierophany" (Eliade 11). Eliade's concept "of "hierophany" focuses on the self-manifestation of the sacred" (Mukhopadhyay and Choudry 163). The self-manifestation of the river triggers Siddhartha's awareness of the maternal divine presence in the river. It reveals its sacrality by teaching Siddhartha the knowledge of oneness that lovingly binds and connects all the sentient and insentient beings with the Great Goddess. Water has been considered the palpable, physical, and embodied form of the feminine divine in Shakta tantra. The mere touch of the sacred water implies touching the body of Devi in its hydrological form. In the context of the fifty-one holy Shakti piths in India, the sacrality of hydrology assumes a new connotation. Here, petrified forms of Devi's body remain submerged in the waters (Mukhopadhyay and Choudry 166).

For instance, in the Kamakhya temple, India's most powerful Shakti pith worships Devi in her sacred petrified form that remains submerged in the water. This shrine's sacred hydrology of tantric

theology blossoms as Devi's body is submerged in the water. The sacred water touching the petrified form of Devi Kamakhya is reverentially worshipped and preserved as a form of divine grace and blessing for her innumerable devotees. In the Shakta-tantric world, touch is mutual and reciprocal – "whatever you touch also touches you" (Mukhopadhyay and Choudry 166). Here, far from being a physical element, water is inflected with the sacred energy of Devi, and hence, it assumes a powerful dimension of the sacred manifestation of Devi. It is imbued with therapeutic power that heals the bewildered souls in the mundane world of conflict and obstacles. Hesse's protagonist, Siddhartha, was touched by this sacred water that enlightens him about his true essence. As touch is a reciprocal act in Shakta-tantric cosmotheology, the holy water touches Siddhartha, and its immanent divine essence eliminates his spiritual ignorance. Here, the sacred river heals him spiritually by bestowing him the knowledge of interconnected "isness" (a la Mani). The empathetic, loving engagement with the river transformed Siddhartha from a bewildered ascetic into an enlightened, calm seer who took up the task of a ferryman only to remain close to the river. The river has become a spiritual teacher who answers all the fundamental existential dilemmas and questions to Siddhartha. Another ferryman, Vasudeva, accepted the river as his spiritual teacher (Hesse78). He said, "The river has taught me to listen. It knows everything, everything can be learned from it. So you have already learned this from the water too, that it is good to strive downwards, to sink, to seek depth" (Hesse 78). The omniscience and the profound philosophical knowledge with which both Vasudeva and Siddhartha venerated the river made us recast the river in the image of a Maternal divine instructor. Through her teaching, she imparts the divine wisdom of the fullness of life.

Conclusion

Siddhartha's acceptance of the river as his spiritual teacher made him perceive the vibrant, tactile form of materially induced spirituality that never dissociates *samsara* from *Nirvana*. Instead, as the embodied form of the Divine Feminine, the river operates on an inclusivist approach where matter and spirit, *samsara*, and *Nirvana* bleed into one another to offer a holistic, integrative vision of Divinity. Shakta

tantra celebrates this wholeness of life that blissfully grants self-knowledge to a bewildered ascetic like Siddhartha while lovingly ensnaring him in the eudaimonia of being and enlightening him in the joyous world of the Devi.

Works Cited

Bateson, Joseph Harger. "Body(Buddhist)". *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, edited by James Hastings, vol. 2, Scribner's, 1908, pp. 758–760.

Chakraborty, Sudipta, and Anway Mukhopadhyay. "Spiritual Materialism/ Material Spiritualism: Shakta-tantric Approaches to Matter." *eTropic: Electronic Journal of Studies in the Tropics*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2022, pp. 43–64. http://dx.doi.org/10.25120/etropic.21.2.2022.3897

Chakraborty, Sudipta, and Anway Mukhopadhyay. "The Healer's *Dharma*: Interfacing *Dharma* and Healing from *Sakta*-tantric Perspectives". *Journal of Dharma Studies*, 2024, pp. 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1007/s42240-024-00163-2

Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane*: *The Nature of Religion*. Translated by Willard R Trask, Harcourt, Brace and World, 1959.

Fields, Gregory P. *Religious Therapeutics: Body and Health in Yoga, Ayurveda, and Tantra*. Motilal Banarsidass, 2002.

Flood, Gavin D. *The Tantric Body: The Secret Tradition of Hindu Religion*. I.B. Tauris, 2006.

Frankenberg, Ruth, and Mani, Lata. *The Tantra Chronicles: Originals Teachings from Devi, Shiva, Jesus, Mary, Moon.* 2013. Received and Compiled by Ruth Frankenberg and Lata Mani. https://www.latamani.com/the-tantra-chronicles-pdf.

Harper, Katherine Anne, and Robert L. Brown. *The Roots of Tantra*. State University of New York Press, 2002.

Hesse, Hermann. *Siddhartha*. ICON Group International, 2005.

Kinsley, David R. *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition.* Motilal Banrsidass Publishers, 1988.

Lama, Dalai. *An Introduction to Buddhism*. Translated by Geshe Thupten Jinpa. Shambhala Boulder, 2018.

Mani, Lata. *Sacredsecular: Contemplative Cultural Critique*. Routledge, 2009.

Mukhopadhyay, Anway. *The Goddess in Hindu-Tantric Traditions: Devi as Corpse*. Routledge. 2018.

---. "Diotima and Ubhaya Bharati: A Postcolonial Colloquy on Eros, Wisdom and Responsibility." *Sambalpur Studies in Literatures and Cultures*, series 5, 2019, pp. 83-93.

Mukhopadhyay, Anway, and Anuradha Choudry. "Revealed by Water, Hidden in Water: Indic Hydro-epistemologies of Sacred Things." *Ecology, Economy, and Society – the INSEE Journal*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2020, pp. 161–168.

Ohnuma, Reiko. *Head, Eyes, Flesh, and Blood: Giving Away the Body in Indian Buddhist Literature*. Columbia UP, 2007.

Pintchman, Tracy. *The Rise of the Goddess in the Hindu Tradition*. State University of New York Press, 1994.

Tigunait, Rajmani. *Tantra Unveiled: Seducing the Forces of Matter and Spirit*. Himalayan Institute Press, 1999.

Vatsayana, Kapila. "Introduction: The Ecology and Myth of Water". *Water, Culture, Politics, and Management* edited by India International Centre. Pearson Education, 2010, pp. ix-xxx.

Willoughby, Deborah. "Foreword". *Tantra Unveiled: Seducing the Forces of Matter and Spirit* by Rajmani Tigunait. Himalayan Institute Press, 1999, pp. ix-xii.

15.

Deconstructing the image of 'God': Re-visiting Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Vyasa's *Mahabharata*

Surabhi Jha

Independent Researcher, India.

Abstract

Currently, it has been 141 years since Friedrich Nietzsche announced the death of God in his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883) and 59 years after J. Hillis Miller declared God as an object of only 'thought' in his *The Disappearance of God* (1965). The deconstructive analysis of God will not negate the divinity; rather, it will aim to uncover the Almighty's diversity. In literature and philosophy, God has been represented in various ways. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the poet shows another side of God, who is kidnapping and raping the mortal girls. Arachne, a mortal weaver, has been challenged by the goddess of weaving, Minerva. Minerva seems hesitant to acknowledge any other weaver but Herself, dissecting God's 'kind' image. In Vyasa's *Mahabharata*, Draupadi always referred to Lord Krishna as her "Sakha," or loving friend, while Krishna called her "Sakhi." In order to defend Draupadi's honour during the trying time of the game of dice, Lord Krishna maintained his word and granted her an infinite saree that could never be taken off. This article will demonstrate that not only human beings are capable of committing the seven deadly sins, but also the gods are unable to escape from the sins, being confined to the 'Satanical Pride.' It will attempt to illustrate God's humanlike characteristics by deconstructing His 'Ideal' image.

Keywords: God, deconstruction, existentialism, superman

Introduction to the Gods and Mythology

> "Myths are an important, dynamic, and complex part of being human, revealing a great deal of global cultural diversity. Myths help to categorize fundamental properties of the cosmos, creating a sense of truth: proper and appropriate categories, questions, and meanings" (Thompson and Schrempp 6)

Mythology typically portrays gods in various forms that reflect the cultures and societies from which they emerge. Many mythologies depict gods with human characteristics, including emotions, physical forms, and behaviours. For example, Greek gods like Zeus and Hera have humanlike appearances and personal dramas. In many ancient mythologies, gods represent aspects of nature, such as the sun, moon, ocean, and earth. The Egyptian God Ra is associated with the sun, while Poseidon governs the sea in Greek mythology. In various mythologies, there is often a supreme God or creator figure. This being is typically seen as all-powerful and all-knowing. In Hindu mythology, Brahma is the creator, Vishnu the preserver, and Shiva the destroyer, all facets of a more significant divine principle. Some mythologies depict gods with animal forms or features. For example, in ancient Egyptian mythology, gods like Anubis have animal heads, symbolizing different aspects of life and death.

In some cases, gods are seen as the founders of civilizations, bestowing laws, culture, and knowledge upon humans. The Sumerian God Enki is known for his wisdom and contributions to civilization. For ages, religion and tradition have dominated humanity. Consequently, people become subservient to orthodox groups' doctrines and direct commands in almost all social contexts, both knowingly and unknowingly, consciously and unconsciously.

Indian philosophy encompasses a vast range of ideas and beliefs about the nature of God, reflecting the diversity of its religious and philosophical traditions. Adi Shankaracharya's *Advaita Vedanta* emphasizes the non-dual nature of reality. God (Brahman) is the ultimate, formless, and unchanging reality. The individual soul (Atman) is identical to Brahman. Liberation (moksha) is achieved through realizing the unity of Atman and Brahman. Nyaya philosophy accepts God's existence as the universe's creator and sustainer. God is considered an efficient cause who initiates the motion of eternal atoms and souls, creating the universe according to moral laws. The Vedas, notably the Rigveda, feature hymns dedicated to various deities like Agni (fire), Indra (thunder and rain), Varuna (cosmic order), and Surya (sun). These gods are often personifications of natural forces and are invoked for blessings, protection, and prosperity. The Vedic gods are seen as powerful, benevolent beings who maintain the cosmic order. There is also an

early notion of a supreme, abstract principle (Brahman) that underlies the universe. The *Mahabharata*, particularly through the Bhagavad Gita, presents Krishna as an incarnation of Vishnu. The *Ramayana* depicts Rama as an avatar of Vishnu, embodying righteousness, virtue, and kingly duty.

Divine Justice and Dharma in *Mahabharata*

In the *Mahabharata*, one of the two major Sanskrit epics of ancient India, the concept of God is multifaceted, reflecting the complex and rich tapestry of Hindu theology and philosophy. Krishna is one of the central figures in the *Mahabharata* and is considered an avatar of Vishnu, the preserver god in the Hindu trinity. He plays a crucial role as a charioteer, advisor, and friend to the Pandava prince, Arjuna. In the Bhagavad Gita, a part of the *Mahabharata*, Krishna reveals his divine nature and imparts spiritual wisdom, emphasizing concepts like dharma (duty), karma (action), and bhakti (devotion). Vishnu is worshipped as the supreme God who incarnates in various forms (avatars) to restore cosmic order.

Along with Vishnu, Brahma (the creator) and Shiva (the destroyer) form the Hindu trinity (Trimurti). The *Mahabharata* features numerous gods (devas) and demons (asuras) participating in the cosmic struggle between good and evil. The divine beings in the epic often represent the ultimate arbiters of dharma, guiding and testing the human characters to ensure they adhere to their moral and ethical obligations. Characters like Bhishma, Draupadi, and Arjuna exemplify deep faith and devotion to Krishna, which ultimately aids them in their trials and tribulations. The epic also delves into the concepts of karma (the law of cause and effect) and reincarnation. Divine justice is seen as operating through these principles, with gods ensuring that moral order is maintained over the cycles of life and death.

Krishna as the Strategist and Diplomat

Krishna plays a crucial role in the diplomacy preceding the war. He makes a final peace mission to the Kaurava court, attempting to avoid the conflict. He becomes a key strategist for the Pandavas when diplomacy fails, using his wisdom to guide them to victory. Throughout the epic, Krishna protects the Pandavas in numerous

ways. His divine interventions are instrumental in their survival and success, from providing sage advice to performing miraculous acts. Krishna's teachings and actions provide a moral framework for the characters in the epic. He often intervenes to uphold dharma (righteousness), even if it means using unconventional methods. In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna reveals his Vishvarupa, or Universal Form, to Arjuna. This form displays his divine nature and the interconnectedness of all existence, reinforcing his role as the supreme being. His bond with Arjuna represents friendship and mentorship, while his interactions with Draupadi show compassion and protectiveness. Krishna is traditionally revered as a divine hero and a god of righteousness in the *Mahabharata.* However, some interpretations and critiques have explored aspects of his actions and strategies that might be viewed as controversial or morally ambiguous.

A deconstructive study of Krishna involves analysing his character, actions, and the narratives surrounding him in the *Mahabharata* and other texts to uncover underlying contradictions, ambiguities, and multiple layers of meaning. Deconstruction, a term coined by philosopher Jacques Derrida, challenges binary oppositions and traditional interpretations, seeking to reveal the complexities and instabilities within a text. By applying this approach to Krishna's character, we can explore various facets and perspectives that may challenge conventional understandings. Krishna's actions in the *Mahabharata*, such as advising Arjuna to kill Karna when he is unarmed and deceiving Drona about Ashwatthama's death, raise ethical questions. These actions can be seen as morally ambiguous, conflicting with the traditional image of a dharmic hero. Traditional interpretations often place Krishna as the ultimate force of good. Deconstruction challenges this binary by highlighting the morally gray areas of his actions, suggesting that his character embodies both good and problematic elements. Krishna's use of deception destabilizes the notion of absolute truth and righteousness, revealing the epic's fluidity and contingency of moral principles. Krishna's teachings can be interpreted differently depending on the reader's context, beliefs, and needs.

"Krishna accepts the duality, the dialectics of life altogether and therefore transcends duality. What we call transcendence is not

possible so long as you are in conflict, so long as you choose one part and reject the other. Transcendence is only possible when you choicelessly accept both parts together, when you accept the whole" (Osho 5)

Deconstruction emphasizes this subjectivity, showing that meaning is not fixed but rather dynamic and context-dependent. Krishna's portrayal has evolved over time, from the warrior-strategist in the *Mahabharata* to the playful cowherd in the Bhagavata Purana and the divine lover in medieval Bhakti literature. Each context brings out different aspects of his character. Deconstruction reveals that Krishna's identity is not monolithic but fragmented and multifaceted, shaped by various narratives, interpretations, and cultural influences. While he is a divine hero guiding the Pandavas, he also employs cunning and trickery. This duality subverts the conventional hero archetype. Deconstruction challenges the binary opposition between hero and villain, suggesting that Krishna's character transcends such simplistic categorization. Deconstruction decanters the notion of fixed moral absolutes, suggesting that dharma is fluid and must be interpreted in light of specific circumstances. Emmanuel Levinas claims,

> "It is in [the] ethical perspective that God must be thought, and not in the ontological perspective of our being-there or of some supreme being and creator correlative to the world, as traditional metaphysics often held. God, as the God of alterity and transcendence, can only be understood in terms of that interhuman dimension." (Kearney 56)

Traditional metaphysical approaches to God often attempt to define and explain God as a supreme being or highest cause, which Levinas sees as limiting and missing the ethical dimension of divine transcendence. For Levinas, true religion is found in the ethical relationship with the Other rather than in dogmatic or metaphysical speculation about God's nature. The ethical demand to love and care for the Other is seen as a genuine religious experience, where one encounters the divine through acts of responsibility and compassion. This approach redefines the religious experience as fundamentally ethical, emphasizing the sanctity and primacy of human relationships as the locus of the divine.

Gods in Greek mythology

In Greek mythology, gods are powerful, often anthropomorphic beings who control various aspects of the cosmos, human life, and nature. They are central to numerous myths and stories exploring power, morality, love, revenge, and the human condition. King of the gods and ruler of Mount Olympus. He governs the sky, thunder, and justice. Zeus is known for his numerous affairs and his role in enforcing divine order and law. Hera is the Queen of the gods and goddess of marriage and childbirth. She is known for jealousy and vengefulness, particularly towards Zeus's lovers and their offspring. Poseidon is the God of the sea, earthquakes, and horses. Poseidon is known for his temper and his role in causing storms and shipwrecks. Demeter is the Goddess of agriculture, fertility, and the harvest. She is associated with the changing seasons and the cycle of life and death. Apollo is the God of the sun, music, prophecy, and healing. Apollo is associated with the Oracle of Delphi and is known for his artistic talents and healing powers. Like the above-mentioned, the gods of Greek mythology are richly depicted with humanlike attributes and complex personalities, reflecting a wide range of divine roles and functions. They are involved in numerous myths that explore the interplay between divine and mortal realms, and their actions often illustrate broader themes of power, morality, and the natural world. These deities provide a lens through which ancient Greeks understood and interpreted their world, and their stories continue to captivate and inspire interpretations to this day.

Deconstructive reading of Jupiter

In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, gods are depicted in diverse and often complex ways, reflecting their multifaceted roles and interactions with humans and the natural world. Ovid's portrayal of the divine includes themes of transformation, power, and humanlike behaviour, which serve to both elevate and humanize these deities. Gods in Ovid's work often wield their power to change forms, not just of themselves but also of mortals and the natural world. Ovid portrays the gods as engaged in complex relationships and conflicts with each other, reflecting a pantheon full of rivalries, alliances, and intrigues. Minerva's involvement in key myths, such as those of Arachne and Medusa, reveals her dual nature as both a jealous and a punisher.

This transformation manifests their divine power and an expression of their will. Jupiter (Zeus) is depicted as lustful and capricious, often using his power to seduce mortal women and punish those who thwart him. His actions highlight his humanlike traits and the consequences of his divine will.

A deconstructive reading of Jupiter (Zeus) in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* examines the ways in which his portrayal challenges and subverts traditional notions of divine authority, morality, and narrative coherence. Julia Dyson Hejduk comments on Jupiter that, "Jupiter attracts thoughts about politics, power, sex, fatherhood, religion, poetry – in short, pretty much everything that poets (and other human beings) care about" (Hejduk 2). Jupiter (Zeus in Greek mythology) is often depicted with both positive and negative attributes, reflecting his complex role as the king of the gods. At the same time, he is a central figure of divine authority and justice; several aspects of Jupiter's behaviour in the epic highlight his more problematic and negative qualities. Jupiter is notorious for his numerous romantic escapades with mortal women, often involving deception and manipulation. His desire to pursue these women frequently leads him to assume various disguises. Jupiter transforms into a bull to abduct Europa, a Phoenician princess. He carries her away to Crete, where he has his way with her. Jupiter assumes the form of a swan to seduce Leda, resulting in the birth of Helen of Troy and other significant mythological figures. Jupiter's use of disguise and trickery to fulfil his desires often causes suffering for the mortals involved and underscores his disregard for their autonomy and well-being. Jupiter's sense of justice is sometimes portrayed as arbitrary and inconsistent. He makes decisions based on his personal whims and desires rather than a consistent moral code. In response to the wickedness of humanity, Jupiter sends a great flood to destroy all life, sparing only Deucalion and Pyrrha. This act of divine retribution is portrayed as extreme and indiscriminate. Jupiter's decisions often result in collateral damage and the suffering of innocent people, reflecting a form of justice that can seem harsh and unmerited. Jupiter's relationships with other gods and mortals are often marked by jealousy, particularly concerning his consort Juno (Hera) and his numerous affairs. Jupiter's infidelity with Io leads Juno to transform Io into a cow and place her under the guard of Argus, leading to Io's

suffering and transformation. His anger can be destructive and excessive, leading to severe consequences for those who incur his displeasure. Jupiter transforms Lycaon into a wolf as punishment for his impiety and the attempt to trick God into eating human flesh. This drastic transformation reflects Jupiter's harsh approach to punishment. Jupiter's interactions with other gods and mortals are sometimes manipulative, as he uses his divine power to control or influence their actions to serve his own purposes. Jupiter manipulates the seer Tiresias into revealing hidden truths, demonstrating his willingness to use his power for personal gain and the advantage of the gods.

Deconstruction involves questioning, doubting, and possibly rejecting fundamental beliefs about God, the church, ourselves, and life. A. J. Swoboda captures this nicely when he says de-construction constitutes "the process of dismantling one's accepted beliefs (Oord and Fuller 14). What once seemed stable and secure now appears unstable and uncertain. The previously certain center no longer holds. In academic circles, particularly in the context of the French philosopher Jacques Derrida, deconstruction carries a different meaning. It highlights the inherent differences in language and the fact that words lack timeless, singular meanings. Texts can be 'deconstructed' to reveal ambiguous and contradictory meanings, even for significant words like 'authority,' 'truth,' 'morality,' and 'God.' Deconstructing in this academic sense is an ongoing process of destabilizing words and language previously considered stable.

Conclusion

> "The lines of connection between us and God have broken down, or God himself has slipped away from the places where he used to be. He no longer inheres in the world as the force binding together all men and all things." (Miller 2)

J. Hillis Miller, an influential literary critic and theorist, explores the "disappearance of God" concept in literature and its implications for modern and postmodern thought. His work examines how the retreat or absence of a divine presence affects narrative structures, character development, and thematic concerns in literature. J. Hillis Miller's concept of the disappearance of God highlights the profound impact of the loss of divine certainty on literature and culture. This

theme reflects broader existential, ethical, and philosophical questions about the nature of meaning, authority, and human experience in a world where traditional religious frameworks are no longer dominant. Through deconstructive readings and a focus on modernist and postmodernist literature, Miller reveals how the absence of God opens up new possibilities for narrative, interpretation, and the search for meaning. A deconstructive study of Krishna reveals the complexity, ambiguity, and multiplicity inherent in his character and narratives. By challenging traditional binaries and fixed interpretations, deconstruction uncovers the dynamic interplay of meanings that make Krishna a profoundly rich and multifaceted figure. This approach deepens our understanding of Krishna and invites us to embrace the complexities and contradictions that characterize human existence and spirituality. In *Metamorphoses*, Jupiter's negative traits – including his lustfulness, capricious justice, jealousy, and manipulation – illustrate the complexity of his character as both a powerful deity and a flawed ruler. These negative aspects of Jupiter's behaviour highlight the challenges of divine authority and the often-arbitrary nature of divine intervention in human affairs. Despite his role as the king of the gods, Jupiter's actions reflect the complexities and contradictions inherent in the divine realm, as depicted by Ovid. With its blend of power, imperfection, and manipulation, Jupiter's character underscores the intricate interplay between the divine and mortal realms and invites a nuanced interpretation of his role within the epic.

"God contradicts himself already...It is simultaneously true that things come into existence and lose existence by being named" (Derrida 71) – Derrida's concept of 'supplementarity' – the peculiar logic of the supplement or substitution – significantly challenges conventional understandings of God as the singular and unique entity. Robert R. Williams, in the Introduction to his book *Hegel on the Proofs and the Personhood of God: Studies in Hegel's Logic and Philosophy of Religion* (2017), argued, "Hegel expressed the emptiness of both philosophy and religion in his day as the doctrine that we can know nothing of God. That God cannot be cognitively apprehended has become a universally acknowledged 'truth,' a settled issue, a kind of intellectual prejudice" (1). This article aims to argue that, due to this

divine supplementarity, the presence and notable absence of God (s) in traditional notions of God suggests that 'God' functions as an aporia. Deconstruction doesn't have to imply destruction unless you choose to see it that way. Instead of leading to the demise of faith, deconstruction is a crucial part of the process of spiritual renewal. Like the seasons, this cycle necessitates the end of the old to allow something better to germinate, take root, and flourish in its place. Embracing faith deconstruction as essential for our spiritual development allows us to overcome fear and start delving into the profound mysteries of faith. Deconstructing any word, text, or concept allows us to explore various interpretations. Therefore, applying deconstruction to the concept of God in both Western and Indian mythology can reveal a diverse understanding of the Almighty.

Works Cited

Derrida, Jacques. *Writing and Difference*. Translated by Alan Bass, University of Chicago Press, 1978.

Hejduk, Julia Dyson. *The God of Rome: Jupiter in Augustan Poetry*. Oxford University Press, 2020.

Kearney, Richard. *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers: The Phenomenological Heritage*. Manchester University Press, 1984.

Oord, Thomas Jay, and Tripp Fuller. *God After Deconstruction*, Sacra Sage Press, 2024.

Osho. *Krishna: The Man and His Philosophy*. Fivestar, 2024.

Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. Translated by Rolfe Humphrie, Indiana University Press, 1983.

Miller., J. Hillis. *The Disappearance of God*, University of Illinois Press, 2000.

Sharma, Bharadvaja. *Vyasa's Mahabharatam*, Academic Publishers, 2008.

Thompson, Tok, and Gregory Schrempp. *The Truth of Myth: World Mythology in Theory and Everyday Life*. Oxford University Press, 2020.

Williams, Robert R. *Hegel on the Proofs and the Personhood of God: Studies in Hegel's Logic and Philosophy of Religion*. Oxford University Press, 2017.

16.

The Presentation and Criticism of Dualist Hierarchy in Frances Trollope's *Michael Armstrong: The Factory Boy* and Charles Dickens' *Hard Times*

Swagata Chowdhury

Assistant Professor, Dhanalakshmi Srinivasan University Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu, India.

Abstract

The article reads the presentation and criticism of the dualist hierarchy in Frances Trollope's *Michael Armstrong: The Factory Boy* and Charles Dickens' *Hard Times*. This article has used Val Plumwood's concept of dualist hierarchy in her book *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* as a theoretical tool to explore how they criticized the injustices and inequalities of England's dualist hierarchy. England in the Victorian era became prosperous with advanced industrialization and imperialism. However, the wealth remained in the hands of the rich people. The gap between the lifestyle of the rich and the poor became huge. The ordinary people suffered pollution, poverty, malnutrition, and various injustices. Frances Trollope and Charles Dickens consciously presented the social hierarchy and the two worlds of the rich and the poor, as well as how the poor people were dominated and exploited by the rich. In their presentation, the authors vehemently criticized the dualist hierarchy of English society.

Keywords: Dualism, Hierarchy, Victorian, Domination, Injustices.

Introduction

Victorian England witnessed the rise of England as a global power with its industrialization and imperialism. But there are dark sides to such glorious history. England paid a heavy price for aggressive industrialization and mechanization. The huge gap between the lives of the rich and the poor became a concern for thinkers like Benjamin Disraeli, who thought there were two nations within England: the

rich and the poor. As England moved from an agrarian economy to a capitalist, industrial economy, the working class emerged, becoming society's major, poor, exploited section. All the wealth and power remained in the hands of the rich. The lifestyle of common people was depleted, and they struggled hard with poverty, malnutrition, pollution, and exploitation to survive. The dualist hierarchy of England created a deep chasm in society. Victorian thinkers and writers like Thomas Carlyle, Frances Trollope, Charles Dickens, and Benjamin Disraeli were concerned about the social problems of poverty, mortality, exploitation, and overall depleted living conditions of the common English people. Frances Trollope was the first important name in her novel, and she presented the plight of people experiencing poverty, especially the working class. Her presentation in the novel *Michael Armstrong: The Factory Boy* can be seen as a vehement criticism against hierarchy. Charles Dickens in *Hard Times* also criticized social hierarchy. This article will try to explore the presentation and critique of hierarchy in Trollope's *Michael Armstrong: The Factory Boy* (1840) and Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* (1854) by using Val Plumwood's concept of dualist hierarchy and its features in her book named *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature* (1993).

Critics like Andrezej Diniejko considered Trollope, a maternal feminist criticising child exploitation in the novel *Michael Armstrong: The Factory Boy*. He argued that Trollope encouraged women to participate actively in the social sphere to bring about changes in society. In the book *In Common Cause*, Susan S Kissel described Trollope as a writer with feminist thinking. According to her, "Trollope's fictions' structural paradigm reveals a belief that the future of civilization rests on the shoulders of bright, young women, her worldly heroines" (77). Jessica S Boulard, in her dissertation, also regarded Trollope as a maternal feminist. She argued that Trollope challenged the idea of a 'True Woman' with four virtues: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. Trollope thought women must be educated and self-sufficient and leave their homes to participate actively in society.

However, in such a discussion, it is not clearly mentioned that Trollope presented and challenged the dualist hierarchy of society, which was the basis of the Victorian social structure that confined

women's sphere to home. In the novel Michael Armstrong, Susan Walton discussed how Trollope portrayed and criticized industrialization and its effect on society. Chaloner discussed Trollope's criticism of factory issues in *Michael Armstrong*. In her article "Reclaiming Mrs. Frances Trollope: British Abolitionist and Feminist," M. D. Button thought that Trollope's writings significantly contributed to the cause of social reformation in Victorian England. She thought that Trollope raised her voice against the inferior status of women in society. However, such literature did not overtly present that Trollope wanted a social reformation by breaking the dualist hierarchy of society. In her presentation of injustices, she presented the structure and nature of dualism that created the chasm in society. The above review evidently presents that the scope of my research exists. Trollope was regarded as a maternal feminist and a socially conscious writer by the researchers. The researchers pointed out that Trollope criticized the injustices of society; she wanted women to overcome the social barriers. However, no study particularly focuses on her presentation and criticism of the dualist hierarchy of Victorian society in the novel *Michael Armstrong: The Factory Boy*.

Charles Dickens' novels received ample attention from scholars who mainly discussed socio-political and moral issues in his novels. Later scholars also focused on ecological issues in his novels. According to Diniejko, Dickens was the most conscious critic of Victorian England who, in his writings, criticized the social injustices and was sympathetic towards the common people of England. Terry Eagleton observed that Dickens' *Hard Times* criticizes the harmful effects of industrialization. Gallagher also observed Dickens as a social commentator in *Hard Times*. Jonathan Bate, Lawrence Buell, and John Parham discussed environmental issues in *Hard Times*, taking an ecocritical approach. In the article "The Rhetoric of *Hard Times*," David Lodge observed that *Hard Times* is a polemical work criticizing materialistic industrial society and capitalist economy. In her dissertation, Pamela Makati used realism as a critical tool to study Dickens' novels. Lyn Pykett discussed social issues in *Hard Times* and *Bleak House*. The dissertation "The Depiction of Social Layers of 19th Century Britain in Charles Dickens' Novel "Hard Times"" by Bensaoula Farouk Abdelkader discussed Dickens' presentation of class division in *Hard Times* with Marxist literary

theory. According to the researcher, Dickens successfully exposed industrialised society's class divisions and poverty. Darcy Lewis discussed Dickens' concerns regarding the changing landscape in England due to industrialization. Patrick Brantlinger observed Dickens' presentation of industrial issues in his novels. Stephen J. Spector studied Dickens' portrayal of working-class characters. So, the researchers have explored many important issues in the novels of Charles Dickens, showing him as a social writer who raised his voice against the injustices of society. However, such work did not focus on the dualist hierarchy of society, which was the root cause of all injustices. The existing literature did not concentrate on the dualist hierarchy that Dickens presented and criticized in his novels like *Hard Times.* It is evident from the critical research review that no work has particularly emphasized these two authors' presentation and criticism of dualist hierarchy in their novels. This article will explore that by using Val Plumwood's concept and discussion of dualist hierarchy in her book *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*.

Val Plumwood, in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature,* discussed the nature and structure of hierarchy in Western society that, according to her, is based on a dualist thought pattern. She thought Western society was a dualist hierarchical society, which is the root of domination and exploitation. According to her, "dualism is the process by which contrasting concepts (for example, masculine and feminine gender identities) are formed by domination and subordination and constructed as oppositional and exclusive" (*Feminism* 31). She observed that the major features of such dualistic constructions are "Backgrounding" (*Feminism* 48), "Hyperseparation" (*Feminism* 49), "Incorporation" (*Feminism* 52), "Instrumentalism" (*Feminism* 53), and "Homogenisation" (*Feminism* 53). She observed,

> Dualism can also be seen as an alienated form of differentiation, in which power construes and constructs difference in terms of an inferior and alien realm. In random tyrannies, beings may be selected for oppression in arbitrary and random ways. But in systematised forms of power, power is normally institutionalised and 'naturalised' by latching on to existing forms of difference. Dualisms are not just freefloating systems of ideas; they are closely associated with domination and accumulation, and are their major cultural expressions and justifications. (*Feminism* 42).

In a dualist pattern, there is an upper side and a lower side, the self and the other. In a self and other relationship, the self (upper side) needs the other (underside) to establish its identity. Plumwood talks of the self as a master who uses the other and depends on the benefits of the other, yet the master denies any dependence and contribution of the other, thus backgrounding the other's role and identity. Plumwood thought that in dualism, two things are not just different, but one (the lower side) is always considered inferior to another (the upper side). So, the self and others are not just separated but hyperseparated. The self-ignores all the "shared qualities" (*Feminism* 49) with the other and tries to emphasize only differences, sometimes a single difference, thus excluding the other as separate inferior. The other (underside) is always defined in relation to the self as if it has no individuality, desire, or need. The other is denied any identity and "is defined in relation to the upperside as a lack, negativity" (*Feminism* 52). The other is defined only as a relation to the self or its needs and desires, which, according to Plumwood, is incorporation. As the other only serves the self, gaining its identity and fulfilling its needs, the other becomes a kind of instrument for the self. Plumwood thought such instrumentalism was a significant feature of the dualist hierarchy, where the lower side acts as an instrument for the upper side. All the "others" are considered only as the "other" with no individual identity, desire, or necessity. The individualities and differences are neglected; thus, they are homogenized. According to Plumwood, this homogenization uses tools like incorporation, instrumentalism, and radical exclusion to run the dualist hierarchy of Western society. This article will read Frances Trollope's *Michael Armstrong: The Factory Boy* and Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* by using Val Plumwood's concept of dualist hierarchy to explore the presentation and criticism of the dualist hierarchy of Victorian English society in these two novels.

Michael Armstrong

Frances Trollope's *Michael Armstrong: The Factory Boy* is the earliest novel that presents a realistic scenario of industrial England of the 1840s. The novel presents how the working class people, especially the child labourers, suffer at the hands of the rich, oppressive factory owners. The factory owner in this novel is presented as a greedy,

selfish, cruel oppressor who lacks minimum humanity and brutally tortures poor labourers to fulfill his greed. The author's portrayal reveals the huge difference between the lifestyle of the rich and the poor sections of society. The hierarchical division of society is portrayed clearly. The reader can see the novel's apparent presentation of the two sections (upper-dominant and lower-dominated). One section (upper) consists of the rich factory owners or masters and the ignorant aristocrats. The other section (lower) consists of poor people, including factory labourers. The author showed how the upper section dominated and exploited the lower section of society. Mr. Dowling is a cruel, snobbish, hypocritical factory owner. He is the master of poor child labourers in his factory. He does not consider them even as human beings. Dowling thinks of them as beastly figures who, according to him, share space with him in society. Dowling humiliates little Michael Armstrong, a sensitive, poor, innocent child, who works in his factory in all possible ways and thinks of him as "a bag of rags out of his own factory" (*Michael* 1: 22). Dowling also calls Michael "the dirty little dog" (*Michael* 1: 41). For him, poor child labourers are nothing but instruments in the process of production. Trollope was critical and aware of the misuse of power when she wrote:

> Great and very awful is the power of the wealth in a bad man's hands; for scarcely is there any barrier which the law can raise for the protection of those who have it not, sufficiently strong to save them at all times and seasons from the aggression of those who have it (*Michael* 1:191).

When the snobbish lady Clarissa Shrimpton insists that Matthew Dowling adopt little Michael Armstrong for the child's bravery of shooing away a cow in a comic scene, Dowling has no way but to adopt him unwillingly simply to maintain his image in front of Lady Clarissa. Dowling is very unhappy with the situation. However, he wants to take advantage of the situation and starts publicizing his adoption to get an image of a benevolent Englishman. He takes the boy with him to a visit around the neighbourhood. Then, he gives the news of adoption in a county newspaper. He even conducts a drama on the incident. The news and the drama highlighted Dowling, a generous Englishman, and the boy remained a mere poor creature without much importance. He has only hatred for the child labourers

in his factory. Soon, he humiliates Michael and publicly pretends to be very kind to him. So, Michael becomes an instrument he uses to gain the false image of a kind and generous man in society. He maltreats Michael out of hatred towards the poor sections, and it satisfies his ego of superiority and power over Michael. Ultimately, he apprentices Michael to a workhouse, betraying the child's unfortunate mother. Dowling does not consider Michael to be a human being. He just uses and throws him out of his way.

Deep Valley Mill is another horrible place where the suffering of the child workers could melt the heart of any reader. Half-starved children are forced to work and live in conditions unfit for habitation. They are tortured even for little mistakes. The supervisor usually comes with the horsewhip during their meagre supper time to tame the children. An old lady named Sally, who was once a worker of Deep Valley Mill, describes the cruelty of the apprentice master of that mill: "it was not a dog barking, nor it wasn't a wolf, nor it wasn't a tiger; but it was something ten million of times worse than either. It – was –the – 'prentice-master!" (*Michael* 2: 106).

For the masters like Mr. Dowling and those of Deep Valley Mill, the children are just like any other instruments of production from which they try to extract maximum use and profit with minimum expense. As Mr. Woodcomb of Deep Valley Mill assures, "we possess many advantages over you, sir. No parents here, you know, to come bothering us about bones and bruises. Here they all count at what they are worth, and no more" (*Michael* 1: 220). The labourers are not considered for any individuality, desire, or identity. The master-worker relationship and the master's treatment of his workers perceptibly present English society's dualistic, hierarchical system. The rich, powerful masters background the workers (others) and hyper-separate them as 'inferior others.' They are not considered individual human beings with personal needs and desires. They are just mere objects, instruments to fulfill masters' needs and greed, so they are homogenized and instrumentalized.

Trollope apparently presented the dualist structure of English hierarchy and, in her presentation, vehemently criticized it. She presented her heroine, Mary Brotherton, an aristocratic lady, as a compassionate human being who belongs to the dominant section

but criticizes such hierarchical exploitation of the poor. She feels guilty that she enjoys the luxury and wealth that comes from the sweat and toil of the poor workers, but she cannot do anything to improve their lives. She exclaims, "Alas! alas! is it thus my wealth has been accumulated?" (*Michael* 2: 19). She admits to their contribution and sees the workers as individual human beings. She is sympathetic towards their problems and tries to help at least a few. Trollope tried to go beyond the dualist hierarchical system by portraying the courageous, sympathetic heroine Mary Brotherton. As this article uses ecofeminist Val Plumwood's idea of dualism, it is important to discuss the differences in perspectives and behavior between Matthew Dowling and Mary Brotherton, which should not be attributed to gender. As a female author, Frances Trollope made Mary Brotherton sympathetic, energetic, and brave to help the poor family of Michael Armstrong. Trollope might have portrayed Brotherton in such a way to give importance to the role of women in society. Much research has shown Frances Trollope in the light of maternal feminism.

However, in the literary theory of dualism in *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*, Plumwood clearly pointed out that "not all women are empathic, nurturant and co-operative. And while many of these virtues have been real, they have been restricted to a small circle of close others. Women do not necessarily treat other women as sisters or the earth as a mother; women are capable of conflict, of domination and even, in the right circumstances, of violence" (*Feminism* Introduction 9). Both Dowling and Mary Brotherton belong to the aristocratic class with wealth and power. However, in the novel, they have completely different perspectives and approaches. Dowling is very selfish and cruel. Mary Brotherton is very compassionate, brave, and eager to help others. It is not because Dowling is a man and Mary Brotherton is a woman. Frances Trollope portrayed the male character, the parson George Bell, who is very sympathetic and helpful. He only enlightens Mary Brotherton about the actual scenario of the poor. On the other hand, Trollope portrayed women characters who are boastful of the factory system and want to enjoy luxury, unaware of any societal problems. Lady Dowling, Lady Clarissa, and Mrs. Gabberly are the characters the author portrays.

They are the flatterers of Mr. Dowling and remain ignorant and selfish.

Hard Times

Hard Times is an important novel in Victorian England, in which Dickens presented his grave concerns regarding utilitarianism, industrialism, pollution, and social injustices. He portrayed how the poor working class paid the price of aggressive industrialism. The novel presents the dominant factory owner, Mr. Bounderby, who claims himself to be a self-made man, denying even the contribution of his mother in his life and constantly neglecting his responsibilities as a son towards his mother. He is a selfish and greedy master who exploits others for his benefit. The reader cannot expect that a man who forsakes his mother would even admit the contribution, the labour of his workers in the prosperity of his factory. Mr. Bounderby often calls his workers "hands" (*Hard* 50). Dickens described,

> In the hardest working part of Coketown, in the innermost fortification of that ugly citadel, where nature was as strongly bricked out as killing airs and gases were bricked in, at the heart of the labyrinth of narrow courts upon courts, and close streets upon streets,…where the chimneys, for want of air to make a draught, were built in an immense variety of stunted and crooked shapes,…put out a sign of the kind of people who might be expected to be born in it; among the multitude of Coketown, generically called 'the hands,' – a race…only hands and stomachs… (*Hard* 51-52).

Bounderby does not see his workers as humans; they are just instruments for production. Val Plumwood argued that in homogenization, individualities are denied: "to the master all the rest are just that: 'the rest,' the others, the background to his achievements and the reasons for his needs" (*Feminism* 54). Mr. Bounderby can be considered an ideal example of a dominant master who backgrounds, instrumentalizes, and homogenizes his workers (Plumwood, Feminism 69-70). Dickens presented the differences in the living standards of wealthy industrialists like Mr. Bounderby and poor workers like Stephen Blackpool. The poor workers live in filthy, suffocating slums. Their working conditions are also very unhealthy, with poor sanitation and no proper ventilation. They have to handle unsafe materials that put their lives at great risk.

Stephen Blackpool, Bounderby's factory's calm, conscientious worker, dreams of living a peaceful life. He wants a divorce from his drunkard wife and a peaceful married life with another kind, a quiet lady named Martha. He wants help and suggestions from his master, Bounderby. However, Bounderby does not pay any attention to Blackpool's problems. He simply boasts his power in front of his worker informing him that divorce is impossible as it needs lots of money. Blackpool's helpless approach gives Bounderby a superior, boastful ego satisfaction. He does not leave a single chance to boast his superiority. When Blackpool fails to get a solution, and when he is about to die as he falls in the mouth of an open coal pit, he contemplates the huge gap in the lives of the poor and the rich. He is aware that he is a victim of the hierarchy. He thinks that the life of the poor man is in a "muddle" as he says, "see how we die an no need, one way an another – in a muddle – every day!" (*Hard* 203).

Mr. Gradgrind, a wealthy retired businessman of Coketown, runs a school of hardcore rationalism: "a man of realities. A man of facts and calculations" (*Hard* 6). He encourages all the children to be rational, practical, and calculative. Through his character, Dickens criticized utilitarianism. Mr. Gradgrind's education policy makes his students sometimes selfish and mechanical and sometimes emotionally barren and confused. His school becomes an instrument to run society's dualistic, hierarchical system smoothly as they learn that reason is superior to emotion and facts, and rationality is superior to spontaneous, humane qualities. His daughter Louisa suffers such emotional vacuity that gives her immense mental agony. She does not learn any natural, spontaneous, humane qualities. Her education inculcates in her a dualist thought pattern. Dickens described,

For the first time in her life, Louisa had come into one of the dwellings of the Coketown Hands; for the first time in her life, she was face to face with anything like individuality in connection with them. She knew of their existence by hundreds and by thousands. She knew what results in work a given number of them would produce, in a given space of time. She knew them in crowds passing to and from their nests, like ants or beetles. But she knew from her reading infinitely more of the ways of toiling insects than of these toiling men and women (*Hard* 120). From the above passage, it is

evident that Louisa also learns to see the working class as 'Hands': homogenous instruments of production. She knows their existence as ants or beetles, but she is surprised to find their individuality as human beings. Dickens' subtle irony strongly criticises the dualist thought pattern that creates the hierarchy. So, this novel's presentation of the master-worker relationship, the condition of the poor people, and their exploitation by the dominant section clearly portrays the oppressive dualist hierarchy and its major features.

Conclusion

These two novels have presented the injustices and inequalities in society. The authors were concerned about the plight of the poor people, who revealed deep chasms. In their presentation, the criticism of the dualist hierarchy of English society is evident. The authors consciously showed how the rich people backgrounded, radically excluded, and homogenized the poor ones as 'inferior others.' The rich section used the 'others' as instruments to fulfill their greed and always tried to dominate and control them selfishly. The authors in these two novels, *Michael Armstrong: The Factory Boy* and *Hard Times,* insightfully presented and criticized all the dominations and injustices of that period, resulting from the dualist hierarchical structure of society.

Works Cited

Abdelkader, Bensaoula Farouk. "The Depiction of Social Layers of 19th Century Britain in Charles Dickens'Novel "Hard Times."" *M.A Thesis*. Belhadj Bouchaib University Centre – Ain Temouchen. 2019

Bate, Jonathan. *The Song of the Earth.* Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2000.

Boulard, Jessica S. "Feminism in Frances Trollope's *Domestic Manners of the Americans, the Vicar of Wrexhill, The Life and Adventures of Jonathan Jefferson Whitlaw* and *Jessie Phillips*." M.A thesis. U of New Hampshire, 2003.

Brantlinger, Patrick. "Dickens and the Factories." Nineteenth-Century Fiction, vol. 26, no. 3, 1971, pp. 270–85. JSTOR, https://doi.org/10.2307/2933206. Accessed 4 Dec. 2024.

Buell, Lawrence. *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond.* Cambridge: Belknap of Harvard UP, 2001.

Button, Marilyn D. "Reclaiming Mrs. Frances Trollope: British Abolitionist And Feminist." *CLA Journal*, vol. 38, no. 1, 1994, pp. 69–86. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/44324948. Accessed 4 Dec. 2024.

Chaloner, W. H. "Mrs. Trollope and the Early Factory System." *Victorian Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2, 1960, pp. 159–66. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3825387. Accessed 14 Nov. 2024.

Dickens, Charles. *Hard Times*. New York: Norton, 2001.

Diniejko, Andrzei. "Charles Dickens as Social Commentator and Critic." *The Victorian Web*. 7 Feb. 2012. <www.victorianweb.org/authors/dickens/diniejko.html

---. "Frances Trollope: a Maternal Feminist and Social Reformer." *The Victorian Web*. 23 Oct. 2010. <www.victorianweb.org/authors/francestrollope/diniejko.html.>

Eagleton, Terry. *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory*. London: Lowe and Brydone, 1976. *Academia.edu*.

Gallagher, Catherine. *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction, Social Discourse and Narrative Form, 1832-1867*. Chicago: Chicago, 1985. *Internet Archive*.

Kissel, Susan S. *In Common Cause: The 'Conservative' Frances Trollope and the 'Radical' Frances Wright*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State U Popular P, 1993.

Lewis, Darcy. "Melancholia and Machinery: The Dystopian Landscape and Mindscape in *Hard Times*." *Dickens Quarterly* 31.1(2014): 17-31. *JSTOR*.https://www.jstor.org/stable/45292702

Lodge, David. "The Rhetoric of *Hard Times*." *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Hard Times: A Collection of Critical Essays.* Ed. Paul Edward Grey. Englewood Cliff, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969. 86-105.

Makati, Pamela. "A Critical Study of Charles Dickens, Representation of the Socially Disadvantaged." M.A thesis. U of Fort Hare, 2008.

Parham, John. "Dickens in the City: Science, Technology, ecology in the novels of Charles Dickens." *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, vol. 0, no. 10, 28 Apr. 2010, https://doi.org/10.16995/ntn.529.

Plumwood, Val. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature.* London and New York: Routledge, 1993.

Pykett, Lyn. *Critical Issues: Charles Dickens*. New York: Palgrave, 2002.

Spector, Stephen J. "Monsters of Metonymy: Hard Times and Knowing the Working Class." *ELH*, vol. 51, no. 2, 1984, pp. 365–84. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/2872950. Accessed 14 Nov. 2024.

Trollope, Frances. *Life and Adventures of Michael Armstrong: The Factory Boy*.2 Vols. New York: Harper Brothers, 1840.

Walton, Susan. "Industrial sightseeing and Frances Trollope's Michael Armstrong, the factory boy." Taylor and Francis Online, vol. 18, no. 2, 2011, pp. 273–292, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/09699082.2011.553321.

17.

Developing a Systematic Knowledge-Based Assessment of Vocabulary Learning Strategies

Swamy Bairi[*] and Bonala Kondal[**]

[*] *Assistant Professor, Dept. of English, Faculty of Science and Technology, ICFAI Tech, Hyderabad, India*

[**] *Assistant Professor, Dept. of English, Faculty of Science and Technology, ICFAI Tech, Hyderabad, India.*

Abstract

The study aimed to evaluate L2 vocabulary acquisition strategies used by the English and Foreign Languages University's tertiary-level EFL students and to classify the techniques employed by the stakeholders comprehensively. The study adopted a mixed method to analyse the data obtained using a questionnaire. Schmit (2000) distinguished five categories of vocabulary learning strategies: metacognitive, social, cognitive, memory, and determination. The utilisation of these five categories of methods was investigated and evaluated in the study. Furthermore, the frequency with which the vocabulary acquisition strategies were employed was quantified and categorised. This study also examined the target groups' vocabulary sizes in terms of their vocabulary learning techniques. This study investigates how students typically employ a variety of vocabulary acquisition tactics, none of which can be consistently as effective as the others.

Keywords: L2 Vocabulary, Assessment, Tertiary Level, EFL Learners, Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS), Frequency, Vocabulary Size, Lexical Competence

Introduction

Most L2 experts concur that expanding one's vocabulary is essential to learning a second language. Words are essential for every human activity involving language, regardless of how simple or sophisticated it is. According to a very pragmatic Layman, since

language is the means of communication and ideas and meanings are "enshrined" in words, it follows that having a limited vocabulary could lead to ineffective communication and misunderstandings. Vergheses, 1989: 84). It would be pointless to downplay the significance of having a strong vocabulary. Whether in language pedagogy, lexicography, or other related activities, "a systematic understanding of lexis" is also strongly felt from a linguistic or applied linguistic standpoint. Stern (1983: 132). Mastering the vocabulary and meanings of a language is the first step in learning any language. Lexical competency is seen as an essential component of communicative competence among learners. Laufer (1986: 69), who recognises the significance of lexical knowledge in language learning, states that "no language acquisition, whether first, second or foreign, child or adult, can take place without the acquisition of lexis."

Vocabulary is often emphasised as being more significant than other language components in terms of learning an L2. According to McCarthy (1990: viii), "Communication in an L2 just cannot happen in any meaningful way without words to express a wide range of meanings, no matter how well the student learns grammar." Wallace (1982), citing Phun (1986), also stated that a person may not be able to speak in a language even after familiarising themselves with its grammar principles. Nonetheless, communication can still occur even if one only knows the vocabulary required in a particular context. According to Saville-Troike (1984, cited by Richards, 1990), the most crucial component of a student's academic success is their vocabulary knowledge in English, while structural patterns and morphology are less helpful in addressing students' immediate academic demands.

Several studies showed how challenging it is to acquire vocabulary while speaking in an L2. Fox (1987: 308) has noted that learning a foreign language makes it extremely challenging to commit even a single word to memory. Comparably, one of the biggest issues faced by FL learners is "fixing the form of a new word in memory in conjunction with its meaning," according to Kelly (1986: 2). It has been observed that L2 learners have very deep-seated vocabulary issues that are a constant obstacle. Nevertheless, we carefully manage our teaching program using teaching methodologies and vocabulary acquisition strategies. In a summary

of multiple research, Hulstijn (2001: 258) states that the majority of second language learners (L2) are concerned about how they would manage the challenging task of memorising thousands of words. According to Kelly et al. (1996: 293), a significant portion of EFL students view vocabulary issues as "the most or second most serious obstacle to comprehension," making them extremely serious. Similarly, second or foreign-language teachers find it challenging to deal with the target language vocabulary in non-native language classrooms, particularly when the class size is large and involves many students (Verghese, 1989). There are many individual differences among learners, and each learner's vocabulary knowledge differs from that of others (James, 1994). In this situation, the teacher cannot address the problem of most of the students in the class.

Learners' problems in lexical knowledge are not limited to a particular level of learning or schooling. Learners must make "considerable demands" in terms of time and effort throughout the early phases of language acquisition (Thomas & Dieter, 1987, p. 249) to acquire vocabulary. Vocabulary problem is found to be the "source of many erroneous utterances" for beginning and intermediate-level EFL learners (Tahririan, 1988: 25). Whatever their level, even if learners' communication is free from grammatical errors, they tend to depend on limited lexical code"; and do not feel the need for using new words in creative ways, thus making no further progress beyond a fixed "lexical acquisition plateau" (Julian, 2000, p. 37). Even proficient speakers of a foreign language find it difficult to understand the lexicon's norms and are unable to use words in their "full range of functions," something that native speakers of the language can do with ease. (Pavlov and Kerim-Zade, 1989: 382).

It is not feasible for teachers to explicitly impart the meaning of each word they want their pupils to know. As a result, teachers must allot time in their vocabulary-building programs to teach independent word-learning skills. Inferring words from context and instructional strategies that help students remember the meanings of words they have encountered are important aspects of teaching language to learners. Nation (1990) argues that vocabulary teaching must be integrated throughout a language's reading, writing, speaking, and listening components. It also offers various strategies for heavily emphasising vocabulary in creating communicative

activities. When attempting to deduce word meanings on their own, students frequently turn to two primary resources: dictionary references and context-based guessing.

A few research looked at the advantages of vocabulary-learning techniques for EFL/ESL students at different stages of their vocabulary development. Fan N (2020) researched the relationships that Chinese EFL learners had with regard to competency, gender, discipline, and vocabulary knowledge (VK), as well as the vocabulary learnin g strategies (VLSs) they used. The researcher first built the structural equation models before proceeding with the study. Mediation analyses, multiple-group analyses, variance analyses, exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses (EFA and CFA), etc., were among the subsequently employed methods. The research examined the connections among several facets of vocabulary acquisition strategies, including significant learning factors, the EFL environment and culture, disciplinary effects, and gender traits. The study investigated the strategies employed by 419 undergraduate students using frequency analysis. Data was obtained from scores on the College English Test Band-4, the Word Associates Test (WAT), the Vocabulary Size Test (VST), and divisions based on gender and discipline. It was found that the predictive power of the socialising, guessing, and attentiveness methods indirectly affected the stakeholders' competency. Male students outperformed female students using strategies such as DictNote, socialising, and the predictive value of attention over VST. On the other hand, art students did higher on WAT and disciplined guessing. Girls also like taking notes while interacting with others and using dictionaries (DictNote). Note-taking was permitted for students pursuing art studies. Learning English is a continuous process. Finally, the study highlights the intricate connections between learner characteristics, VK, and VLS utilisation. Third-party components are taken into account to understand the connections between VLSs and VKs. It is advised that considering the significant moderating effects of proficiency, vocabulary study be purposefully integrated into the cumulative process of learning English.

Ghalebi, R., Sadighi, F., Mohammad, Bagheri, S., & Qian, M. (2020) conducted research to determine how important students' learning techniques are for producing high-quality work. The study's

subjects were 218 EFL students enrolled in BA, MA, and PhD programmes at an Iranian University. They tried to determine whether students with varying education degrees used distinct vocabulary acquisition methodologies in their final products. A questionnaire was administered to obtain information about the stakeholders' preferences, and the completed forms were subjected to quantitative and qualitative analysis. Data indicates that PhD and MA students employ distinct approaches to learning language. The findings also showed that pupils' individual approaches to learning L2 vocabulary differ. In conclusion, the study recommends that while creating and implementing the curriculum, EFL instructors and curriculum designers should consider the preferences of these EFL learners for learning the target vocabulary. Bai, Z. (2018) investigated the challenges students encountered when learning vocabulary and attempted to investigate the causes of such challenges and details regarding the vocabulary learning tactics that the students employed. The variables of individual learners and the environment that affect students' vocabulary acquisition were also covered in the research. The objective of the research was to find out how English language learners who were not majoring in the subject increased their vocabulary. Based on their responses, most students used cognitive techniques more often than meta-cognitive and social/affective ones. This study found that the autonomy methods were applied least frequently in metacognitive frameworks. According to the majority of students in this survey, reading English-language newspapers or magazines helps them expand their vocabulary, whereas a small number of subjects said they relied on certain vocabulary acquisition materials. It was also noted that some pupils continue to primarily acquire language through textbooks and the directions provided by their teachers in class. Additionally, the survey discovered that most students think memorising information and using deliberate methods – rather than accidental ones – is the only way to acquire vocabulary. Lastly, the study recommends that English teachers implement the most appropriate teaching practices to help students choose efficient learning strategies independently.

Yue Wu (2019) investigated how vocabulary learning techniques helped tertiary students who did not major in English learn L2 vocabulary. The study was based on previous frameworks used in

foreign language teaching and experimental successes. Additionally, the study looked into how these postsecondary students could acquire L2 vocabulary more successfully. The researcher used a mixed technique to gather data, as most Zao Zhuang Students at universities who do not major in English must take English for the first two years of their studies. The study's sample was divided into several English language classes. Each lesson has between 35 and 50 students. The participants range in age from 17 to 19. The study employed the T-test to evaluate independent samples and ascertain if the outcomes of the College Entrance Examination differed statistically significantly between the experimental and control groups. Both classes' levels of English competence were equal. The investigator utilised various research instruments, such as a survey, in-class observations, and interviews. The study's primary instruments were the experiment and the questionnaire; auxiliary tools, including classroom observations and interviews, were utilised to gather more information on the teachers' and students' vocabulary acquisition practices. The researcher gave the stakeholders a wealth of social, cognitive, and metacognitive skills. The data gathered from the respondents was analysed using a computer program known as the Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS), version 12.0. The number of vocabulary words and the methods used to acquire them are positively correlated. Social, metacognitive, and cognitive strategies successfully enhanced vocabulary performance. Furthermore, a high correlation was seen between the size of students' vocabulary and the metacognitive approach, which functioned as an executive and internal component of vocabulary performance. Conversely, students favoured using the cognitive approach over the metacognitive and social/affective techniques more frequently. Students develop a greater awareness of and propensity to employ the procedures they are taught. The outcomes provide evidence for the training's efficacy. It illustrates how cognitive, social, and metacognitive strategies and vocabulary-growth techniques may help students achieve better language competency. Additionally, the experiment shows that training vocabulary acquisition strategies benefit both the low-score and high-score groups. The study's findings, taken together, demonstrate that explicit vocabulary

learning strategies positively impact the development of lexical knowledge in EFL students.

Benedicta, M. C., and Shabdinb, A. A. (2021) explored vocabulary learning strategies to improve students' language proficiency. Their study examined the differences in vocabulary learning techniques between high and low-proficiency students to identify the most effective strategies for enhancing language skills. The researchers used Schmitt's (1997) Vocabulary Learning Techniques Questionnaire (VLS-Q), which groups strategies into five categories: Determination (DET), Social (SOC), Memory (MEM), Cognitive (COG), and Metacognitive (MET). A three-point Likert scale was also incorporated, where "Never" indicated that the behaviour was never observed, "Sometimes" indicated occasional use, and "Always" indicated consistent behaviour. The questionnaire was administered to 30 students. The study found that "English language media" was the most frequently used technique among highly proficient learners, while students with lower proficiency often relied on "asking classmates for meaning." Both high and low-proficiency students favoured Memory and Determination strategies. The implications of these findings are important for increasing vocabulary size and comprehension. The research highlights students' enthusiasm for learning a second language (L2) using a variety of strategies, with a focus on simpler methods. Additionally, the study reveals differences in vocabulary learning techniques used by students with varying proficiency levels, offering insights into the most effective methods. Interestingly, the top-performing students preferred Memory strategies, suggesting that further studies could be beneficial.

Vocabulary Learning Strategies

Learning strategies related to language and vocabulary are categorised as general learning strategies. Vocabulary acquisition techniques improve the effectiveness of acquiring and using vocabulary. Although there are several learning techniques, students must possess specific abilities to apply them. Acquiring new vocabulary in the target language is a complex process that calls for several subprocesses and methods, as was previously mentioned. Unknown terms in texts often impede ESL/EFL learners'

understanding (Nation, 1990, 1993, 2001). Students can use various strategies to solve problems when they come across new words, including consulting dictionaries, asking teachers or peers for clarification, or trying to infer the word's meaning from its context (Harley & Hart, 2000). Chamot (1987) found that high school students employed vocabulary acquisition strategies more frequently than other language learning tasks, such as oral presentations, listening comprehension, or social interactions. He suggested that because vocabulary learning is more specific and less integrated than tasks like oral presentations, it allows for more effective use of strategies. Similarly, a longitudinal study by Cohen and Aphek (1981) revealed that most students focused primarily on memorising unfamiliar words. Ahmed (1989) categorised students based on their strategies, noting that many made notes in the margins of their textbooks or recorded vocabulary elsewhere. In research conducted by Harley & Hart (2000) with 35 French learners in Canadian secondary schools, common second language vocabulary strategies included guessing word meanings from context, using bilingual dictionaries, and seeking help from teachers or peers. The study also revealed that only a small number of these students regularly referred to monolingual French dictionaries when encountering new words.

Williams (1985) lists five possible teachable techniques for deciphering the meaning of unknown words in written texts. William proposes that intentional, focused instruction centres around these tactics.

The strategies are:

- Inferring meaning from context
- Identifying familiar lexical terms
- Recognising fixed nominal compounds
- Looking for synonyms
- Breaking down and analysing words

Skehan (1989) noted that there is no exhaustive list or taxonomy of strategies for vocabulary acquisition, which has contributed to the lack of attention these techniques receive in classroom settings. Schmitt (1997) developed a detailed taxonomy of vocabulary learning

strategies to address this gap. This taxonomy incorporates Oxford's (1990) classifications, which include determination, social, memory, cognitive, and metacognitive strategies. Schmitt's taxonomy contains fifty-eight distinct techniques, each falling under one of these five categories. The taxonomy of vocabulary acquisition techniques mentioned above is divided into two groups. There are two methods to acquiring a new word: first, there are ways to acquire its meaning, and second, there are ways to reinforce a phrase once it has been used. Learning new word meanings and usages and how to recall them requires distinct approaches. These are the typical vocabulary acquisition methods that educators and students employ. This study evaluated the vocabulary acquisition techniques of EFL tertiary learners.

The study focuses on vocabulary development, one aspect of language learning, to ascertain possible implications for teaching L2. According to Johnson and Johnson (1998: 280), it seems improbable that educators will comprehend teaching fundamentals if they are not mindful of learning concepts simultaneously. Therefore, this study aims to assess the vocabulary acquisition strategies used by EFL students at the tertiary level, identify the most and least commonly utilised methods for acquiring L2 vocabulary, examine how frequently these strategies are employed, and determine their effectiveness in helping learners enhance both their L2 vocabulary and overall English proficiency.

The study aims to investigate the emotional factors that affect learning the stakeholders' target language. The following research questions are developed to direct this study. They are:

- What primary and secondary categories of vocabulary acquisition strategies do EFL tertiary-level students use?
- How often do the EFL tertiary-level students use these strategies for acquiring L2 vocabulary?
- How do these VLS affect the EFL tertiary students' L2 vocabulary knowledge?

The study adopted mixed methods to analyse the data obtained through the questionnaire. While the questionnaire likely provided

quantitative data, the analysis predominantly focused on descriptive or qualitative methods.

- *Sample:* The study sample comprised fifty-four postgraduate EFL students from Hyderabad's English and Foreign Languages University. These learners were chosen using purposive sampling and came from diverse countries with various native language backgrounds. All participants were enrolled in postgraduate programs at the university, and they had limited exposure to English, which is a foreign language for them.
- *Tool:* The researcher adopted Schmitt's (1997) Vocabulary Learning Strategies Questionnaire (VLS-Q) as a research tool for the present study. The VLSQ intends to evaluate various strategies EFL students adapt to learn new words. It covers a range of strategies, such as memorisation techniques, the use of context clues, dictionary use, and others. As these vocabulary learning strategies match the stakeholders' level of cognition and learning styles, the VLS-Q was adopted.
- *Procedure:* Initially, the researcher had an informal discussion with the stakeholders to understand their level of competency in English, their purpose for coming to the university from their country, and EFL learning difficulties, and its importance in their academics and professional life in their countries, to effectively convey their thoughts in writing and spoken communication, the researcher found that individuals require a larger vocabulary in their target language.

Then, it was decided that they should explore and understand the styles and strategies they prefer to learn a new word or to become acquainted with the unknown words and their meanings in their daily learning. As discussed above, the review of the literature and the proposed research helped identify the best-fitting vocabulary learning strategies to explore to what extent these EFL postgraduate students would utilise these strategies in their attempts to learn/acquire their target language by administering the adopted questionnaire. The researcher assisted the stakeholders in understanding the listed strategies and gave adequate time to complete the questionnaire. The data from the filled-in

questionnaires was coded and tabulated to identify the mean score and for the descriptive analysis.

Analysis: The data analysis incorporated both qualitative and quantitative methods, using Schmitt's (1997) Vocabulary Learning Strategies Questionnaire (VLS-Q). As noted earlier, this questionnaire categorises strategies into five types: *determination*, *social*, *memory*, *cognitive*, and *metacognitive*.

Table-1. a)

Strategy

Category Number of Students and Frequency of Use

Sometimes

Total No.(%) Often

Total No.(%) Never

Total No.(%)

Use monolingual dictionary Determination 5 83% 1 17% 0 0

Guess meaning from context Determination 2 33% 4 67% 0 0

Study new words many times Metacognitive 2 33% 4 67% 0 0

Connect the word to its synonyms and antonyms Memory 3 50% 2 33% 1 17%

Use new words in sentences Memory 4 67% 2 33% 0 0

Take notes and highlight Cognitive 2 33% 3 50% 1 17%

Study the sound of a word Memory 5 83% 1 17% 0 0

Use Eng. Language media Metacognitive 2 33% 4 67% 0 0

Total 25 78% 21 65% 2 6%

Table-1. b)

Strategy

Category Number of Students and Frequency of Use

Sometimes

Total No.(%) Often

Total No.(%) Never

Total No. (%)

Make lists of new words Cognitive 3 50% 1 17% 2 33%

Write paragraphs using several new words Memory 3 50% 1 17% 2 33%

Study the words with classmates Social 4 66% 1 17% 1 17%

Ask classmates for the meaning Social 3 50% 0 0 3 50%

Check for L1 cognate Determination 5 83% 0 0 1 17%

Use physical action when learning a word Memory 5 83% 1 17% 0 0

Talk with native speakers Social 5 83% 1 17% 0 0

As teachers to check the definition Social 1 17% 0 0 5 83

Total 29 90% 5 16% 14 44%

Average of Table-1. a) & Table-1. b): Sometimes = 84% Often = 41%, Never = 25%

Table-2

Strategy Mean Rank Strategy Use

Determination 3 2 Medium

Memory 5 1 High

Metacognitive 2 4 Medium

Cognitive – 2 5 Medium

Social – 3 3 Medium

Findings and Discussion

The data indicate that the majority of students frequently utilise several vocabulary learning strategies, including guessing word meanings from context (67%), engaging with English-language media (67%), and repeatedly reviewing new words (67%). On the other hand, students only occasionally employ other commonly used strategies, such as consulting a monolingual dictionary (83%), using new words in sentences (67%), and focusing on the pronunciation of words (83%). Additionally, 66% of students work with peers to study vocabulary, while 83% sometimes check the cognate of a word in their L1.

The data above show that some students hardly use the above-discussed VLS (Vocabulary Learning Strategies), such as asking the teacher to check definitions (83%) and asking their peers for the meaning (50%). Among the vocabulary learning strategy categories students use, memory strategy ranks first, followed by determination and social vocabulary learning strategy categories. The findings reveal that the students are frequent users of memory-related vocabulary learning strategies, while they demonstrate moderate use of the other VLS categories mentioned earlier. The data reveal that most tertiary-level EFL learners most frequently rely on memory-based vocabulary learning strategies, while cognitive and metacognitive strategies are used less often in their learning process. Additionally, stakeholders indicated that some vocabulary learning strategies are perceived as more effective and easier to use. For instance, one participant mentioned that activities like reading novels, watching English movies, and maintaining daily vocabulary lists are helpful for expanding vocabulary in the target language.

When asked if their vocabulary learning strategies contributed to their vocabulary growth, some respondents acknowledged that they felt their vocabulary was insufficient for various purposes in the target language. They also noted that they sometimes struggled to recall specific words they had studied in critical situations. This suggests that the size of a student's vocabulary is influenced by the effectiveness of their vocabulary learning strategies. In other words, learners who use effective strategies are likely to have a larger vocabulary, as these strategies help them acquire new words and reinforce existing knowledge. However, it is important to recognise that a strategy that works well for one student may not work for another, and certain strategies may be more effective in specific learning contexts. Thus, the effectiveness of vocabulary learning strategies varies for each individual.

Conclusion

This study reveals that students frequently use a variety of vocabulary learning strategies, but these strategies may not always be equally effective. The selection of a strategy is ultimately the student's choice, as they tend to choose methods that align with their individual purposes and learning objectives. The findings also show

that memory-based strategies are the most commonly employed among all other strategies. Recognising the individual differences in learning preferences and strategies enables teachers and material developers to understand their roles better. This understanding allows them to tailor their instruction to help students maximise their language learning potential while encouraging students to become more aware of their most effective learning techniques. Furthermore, this awareness helps students develop appropriate strategies, styles, and techniques to foster intrinsic motivation and autonomy in their learning. Being mindful of students' needs and beliefs regarding L2 vocabulary learning and strategies empowers educators and researchers to create more effective instructional materials, teaching methods, and language activities to improve students' vocabulary knowledge and overall language proficiency.

Works Cited

Ahmed, M. O. "Vocabulary Learning Strategies." *Beyond Words*, edited by P. Meara, CILT, 1989.

Bai, Z. "An Analysis of English Vocabulary Learning Strategies." *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, vol. 9, no. 4, 2018, pp. 849–855.

Benedicta, M. C., and A. A. Shabdinb. "A Comparison of the Vocabulary Learning Strategies Employed by High and Low Proficient Pre-University Students in Malaysia." *LEARN Journal: Language Education and Acquisition Research Network*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2021, pp. 1–15.

Chamot, A. U. "The Learning Strategies of ESL Students." *Learner Strategies in Language Learning*, edited by A. Wenden and J. Rubin, Prentice Hall, 1987.

Cohen, A. D., and E. Aphek. "Retention of Second Language Vocabulary Overtime: Investigating the Role of Mnemonic Association." *System*, vol. 8, no. 3, 1980, pp. 221–235. doi:10.17507/jltr.0904.24.

Fan, N. "Strategy Use in Second Language Vocabulary Learning and Its Relationships with the Breadth and Depth of Vocabulary Knowledge: A Structural Equation Modeling Study." *Frontiers in Psychology*, vol. 11, 2020, p. 752. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00752.

Fan, Y. M. "Frequency of Use, Perceived Usefulness, and Actual Usefulness of Second Language Vocabulary Strategies: A Study of Hong Kong Learners." *The Modern Language Journal*, vol. 87, 2003, pp. 222–241.

Fox, L. "On Acquiring an Adequate Second Language Vocabulary." *Methodology in TESOL*, edited by Michael H. Long and Jack C. Richards, Newbury House/Harper & Row, 1987, pp. 307–311.

Gairns, R., and S. Redman. *Working with Words: A Guide to Teaching and Learning Vocabulary*. Cambridge UP, 1986.

Ghalebi, R., et al. "Vocabulary Learning Strategies: A Comparative Study of EFL Learners." *Cogent Psychology*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2020. doi:10.1080/23311908.2020.1824306.

Harley, B., and D. Hart. "Vocabulary Learning in the Content-Oriented Second Language Classroom: Student Perceptions and Proficiency." *Language Awareness*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2000, pp. 78–96.

Hulstijn, J. H. "Intentional and Incidental Second Language Vocabulary Learning: A Reappraisal of Elaboration, Rehearsal, and Automaticity." *Cognition and Second Language Instruction*, edited by P. Robinson, Cambridge UP, 2001, pp. 258–286.

Johnson, K., and H. Johnson. *Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Applied Linguistics*. Blackwell, 1998.

Julian, P. "Creating Word Meaning Awareness." *ELT Journal*, vol. 54, no. 1, 2000, pp. 37–46.

Kelly, P., et al. "A Comparison of the Perceptions and Practices of Chinese – and French-Speaking Bulgarian University Students in the Learning of English: The Prelude to an Improved Programme of Lexical Expansion." *ITL Review of Applied Linguistics,* vol. 113–114, 1996, pp. 275–303.

Kerim-Zade, I., and V. Pavlov. "The Semantic-Functional Variability of Words and the Teaching of Vocabulary to Advanced EFL Students." *Applied Linguistics*, vol. 10, no. 4, 1989, pp. 382–391.

McCarthy, M. "A New Look at Vocabulary in EFL." *Applied Linguistics*, vol. 5, no. 1, 1984, pp. 12–22.

---. *Vocabulary and Language Teaching*. Longman, 1988.

---. *Vocabulary*. Oxford UP, 1990.

Nation, I. S. P., and D. Beglar. "A Vocabulary Size Test." *The Language Teacher*, vol. 31, no. 7, 2007, pp. 9–17.

Nation, I. S. P. *Teaching and Learning Vocabulary*. Newbury House, 1990.

---. "Effective Ways of Building Vocabulary Knowledge." *ESL Magazine*, vol. 6, no. 4, 2003, pp. 14–15.

---. "Teaching and Learning Vocabulary." *Handbook of Research in Second Language Teaching and Learning*, edited by E. Hinkel, Lawrence Erlbaum, 2005, pp. 581–595.

---. *Teaching Vocabulary Strategies and Techniques*. Heinle Cengage Learning, 2008.

Nation, I. S. P., and J. Coady. "Vocabulary and Reading." *Vocabulary and Language Teaching*, edited by R. Carter and M. McCarthy, Longman, 1988, pp. 97–110.

Nation, I. S. P., and A. Coxhead. "The Specialized Vocabulary of English for Academic Purposes." *Research Perspectives on English for Academic Purposes,* edited by J. Flowerdew and M. Peacock, Cambridge UP, 2001, pp. 252–267.

O'Malley, J., and A. Chamot. *Learning Strategies in Second Language Acquisition*. Cambridge UP, 1990.

Oxford, R., and M. Nyikos. "Variables Affecting Choice of Language Learning Strategies by University Students." *The Modern Language Journal*, vol. 73, no. 3, 1989, pp. 291–300.

Oxford, R. *Language Learning Strategies: What Every Teacher Should Know*. Newbury House, 1990.

Oxford, R. L., and R. C. Scarcella. "Second Language Vocabulary Learning Among Adults: State of the Art in Vocabulary Instruction." *System*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1994, pp. 231–243.

Rubin, J. "Study of Cognitive Processes in Second Language Learning." *Applied Linguistics,* vol. 11, no. 2, 1981, pp. 117–131.

Schmitt, N. "Vocabulary Learning Strategies." *Vocabulary: Description, Acquisition, and Pedagogy*, edited by N. Schmitt and M. McCarthy, Cambridge UP, 1997, pp. 199–227.

---. *Vocabulary in Language Teaching*. Cambridge UP, 2000.

Singleton, D. *Exploring the Second Language Mental Lexicon*. Cambridge UP, 1999.

Skehan, P. *Individual Differences in Second Language Learning*. Edward Arnold, 1989.

Sokmen, A. "Current Trends in Teaching Second Language Vocabulary." *Vocabulary: Description, Acquisition, and Pedagogy*, edited by N. Schmitt and M. McCarthy, Cambridge UP, 1997, pp. 237–257.

Stern, H. H. *Fundamental Concepts of Language Teaching*. Oxford UP, 1983.

Tahririan, M. H. "Language Improvement and Vocabulary Development." *Indian Journal of Applied Linguistics,* vol. 14, no. 1, 1988, pp. 15–27.

Thomas, M., and J. N. Dieter. "The Positive Effects of Writing Practice on Integration of Foreign Words in Memory." *Journal of Educational Psychology*, vol. 79, no. 3, 1987, pp. 249–253.

Verghese, C. P. *Teaching English as a Second Language*. Sterling Publications, 1989.

Williams, R. "Teaching Vocabulary Recognition Strategies in ESP Reading." *ESP Journal*, vol. 4, 1985, pp. 121–131.

Wu, Yue. "Effectiveness of the Vocabulary Learning Strategies on English Vocabulary Learning for Non-English Major College Students." *Advances in Social Science, Education, and Humanities Research*, vol. 310, 2019. 3rd International Conference on Culture, Education and Economic Development of Modern Society (ICCESE 2019).

18.

Cultural Crossroads in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*

Tara Prasad Adhikari

PhD, Assistant Professor, English, Tribhuvan University, Nepal.

Abstract

This article explores the theme of cultural crossroads in Mohsin Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Through an analysis of protagonist Changez's journey, the study examines the complexities of identity negotiation and cultural hybridity in the context of globalization. Drawing on literary reviews and critical analyses, the research highlights how Hamid portrays Changez's struggle with not being assimilated and his evolving sense of self amidst shifting socio-political landscapes. The findings reveal the novel's multifaceted depiction of cultural identity amidst post-9/11 tensions, shedding light on broader themes of alienation, marginalization, and the impact of Western imperialism. The study also raises questions about Changez's future, particularly whether his society in Pakistan will accept him back after his experiences abroad. Ultimately, this study highlights the significance of literature in fostering empathy and challenging societal prejudices in an increasingly globalized world.

Keywords: Hybridity, Muslim Minorities, oppressions, identity crisis

Introduction

In Mohsin Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, the journey of the protagonist, Changez, through the complex landscapes of identity and cultural hybridity, forms the heart of the narrative. If we get into the biographical details of Hamid, in one of his interviews, he calls himself a "mongrel". By which he refers to a hybrid. He had lived in Pakistan, America, and London and identified with each of these places. A part of each country lives in him; therefore, he cannot claim to be a Pakistani, American, or a citizen of London (PA 69). Changez's story is also more or less similar. As Changez leaves his homeland, Pakistan, to pursue education and career opportunities in the United

States, he negotiates between personal identity and the global socio-political stage. This novel explores how Changez's experiences in the United States shape his sense of self and illuminate the dynamics of his relationship with his homeland and the culture he carries with him. This article argues that Hamid uses the journey of the protagonist Changez in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* to examine the difficulties of cultural hybridity and identity negotiation in the setting of globalization. In this study, Hamid's difficulties of cultural identification in a globalized society will be highlighted in greater detail.

The story of Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* unfolds against the backdrop of a crossroads in culture, delving into the intricate relationships between globalization, identity, and the collision of civilizations. The novel's characters struggle with their identities in the face of evolving geopolitical environments, as shown by the critics' analysis of many aspects of the novel's depicted cultural crossings. The journey of cultural alienation and self-discovery taken by the protagonist Changez is crucial to the novel's exploration of cultural crossroads. As stated by Ahmed Kabel in "Identity Crisis in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*," Changez, a Paki circumnavigating the corporate world in the US, struggles with his sense of belonging and loyalty, torn between his Pakistani heritage and his aspirations for success in the West (Kabel 53). This inner conflict reflects the more prominent theme of cultural hybridity and the tests faced by people spanning multiple cultural personalities in a progressively globalized world.

In addition, academics like Sara Chaudhry explore the socio-political background of the book in her analysis, "Globalization and Identity Crisis in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*," looking at how Western imperialism and globalization interact with the development of cultural identities (Chaudhry 117). The novel engages with wider conversations about the clash of civilizations and the growth of religious fanaticism through its examination of America's post-9/11 fear and its effects on Muslim communities.

Furthermore, commentators have emphasized how characters' perspectives of their cultural identities are shaped by nostalgia and disappointment. The novel's narrative format, presented as a

discussion between Changez and an American stranger, highlights the tension between yearning for the past and coping with an uncertain future, as noted by David Rudrum in his essay "*The Reluctant Fundamentalist*: 'We Are All Migrants Now'" (72). Changez serves here as an emblematic character who depicts a larger stratum of society undergoing a similar plight. Some studies have been done on the novel, and the theme of hybridity has also been explored to some extent, but this research seems necessary as it attempts to examine the complex intersections of culture, identity, and globalization. The complexities of cross-cultural interactions demand a closer look. The dynamics of cross-cultural exchanges are to be explored. This study has added an in-depth understanding of cultural encounters in the context of the chosen novel.

Hamid examines American society's cultural and policy imperfections, pointing to fixity and intolerance, issues that are not exclusive to countries like Pakistan. This exploration extends to the neo-colonial behaviors of America, which, in Hamid's narrative, breed resentment and animosity around the world, ultimately working against its own interests. In this regard, Suhana writes:

> After the attack on the Twin Towers on 11 September 2001, there was a significant shift in the attitude of American society towards its immigrants, especially the Muslim Others. It revealed then cracks and fissures in the grand narrative of globalization. The ideas of nation and nationality were suddenly re-established with vigour and there was a general hostility towards the Muslim immigrant in the US. It also officially triggered the war against terror which went on to create massive destruction in Middle East and South West Asian Countries. (67)

One of the novel's central themes is the portrayal of Changez's hybrid identity and his stories of victimization in the new land. Hybridity results from the merger of two or more forms of identities that are more likely to emerge in a multifaceted global society with a free exchange of ideas and people. These new hybrid identities are flexible rather than set, and they are deliberately exploited to navigate life in diverse and multicultural communities (Marotta 3). Hamid masterfully unveils these hybrid realities through Changez's internal struggles and the fusion of cultural elements within his character.

A.K. and Rukmini write, "Changez is a proud American migrant Pakistani who works as a consultant at Underwood Samson. He describes his colorful American experience to an American who comes to chat with him at the story's beginning" (1). But he is not just an American in sensibilities. Changez embodies a unique blend of Pakistani and American traits, manifesting in a confluence of values, customs, and behaviors. Along with the core values of the American dream that he has newly acquired, he also carries the values of Pakistani society, such as respect for elders, helping the poor, etc. It is a kind of contradiction that has been carried along. It shows the activation of the process of hybridization on his part. His Pakistani-American identity has also been a sort of benefit for Changes as she can have a double vision. His stay at Princeton University also shaped his values and visions.

As Changez left his country, he had enthusiasm. He had hoped to improve his life by getting a better education and ample opportunities. He had thought that the new land people would accept him easily. However, his excitement was dented quite soon as he was exposed to the new land and the people. Prejudices were rampant there in the US for Muslims. They had been largely stereotyped (Hamid 30). Afifa Anjum also makes a similar interpretation to the one discussed above. Anjum highlights how the protagonist went through the tensions between his Pakistani heritage and his Americanized lifestyle. Anjum concludes that this new identity is a unique position and a matter of negotiations in a post-9/11 world (49-61). Changez's journey becomes a compelling lens through which to understand the complex identity formation process.

In this academic cauldron, he grapples with the delicate balance between assimilation and preserving his cultural roots, prompting him to question whether genuine belonging necessitates a compromise of his true self. Changez's experiences at Princeton help the author highlight the existence of hybridity and its role in identity construction. Within the university's diverse milieu, Changez encounters a spectrum of perspectives that challenge his cultural assumptions, ultimately contributing to his evolving self-perception and sense of his place in the world. In a similar line, James Lasdun comments about it as the voice of the hero who speaks of the

dichotomy between the East and West – "The novel is his monologue: is a quietly told, cleverly constructed fable of infatuation and disenchantment with America, set on the treacherous faultiness of current east/west relations, and finely tuned to the ironies of mutual – but especially American prejudice and misrepresentation" (para.2). These lines explores Changez's struggle with assimilation and preserving his cultural roots at Princeton, prompting questions about genuine belonging and identity compromise. It brings to the forefront the ideas of the encounter between the East and the West by scrutinizing concepts like identity formation and nationalities.

The corporate world is very cold and competitive. As Changez goes through his professional experiences, he realizes that there is cutthroat competition in the business world, and profit is the king of the business world. Things used to be different in Pakistan, where there was a space for communities and human values. People used to have a sense of social responsibility, but the pursuit of individual progress was not taken that seriously. When Changez started to struggle with these new corporate realities, he became more and more aware of his precarious condition. An acute sense of identity crisis hits him as he starts questioning the new value system of corporate America. He is forced to take a double look at his fundamental values and priorities. He starts to readjust himself to the new environment (Hamid 92). Using Changez as a stepping stone, Hamid illuminates the stark realities of immigrants in the US who often will have to go through different kinds of oddities as they explore the new land and the new identities.

Changez expects a smooth life in the new land, but he finds a contrast there as he finds cutthroat competition and the sense of profitability gaining prominence. The hybrid existence imposes certain limits on Changez as he cannot find a balance. This journey of Changez into the new world finally acts as a transformative space that provokes him to rethink his existing values, question the rudiments that he has inherited, and become something new. In this sense, the new environment acted as a catalyst for him in his transformative journey. Slowly, he realigns himself according to the new context, but this realignment itself is also not without problems.

How Changez goes through different kinds of segregation helps us to understand the broader socio-political environments that emerged in the US after the 9/11 attacks. These instances illustrate the theme of victimization and marginalization of Pakistani people living in the US, as it was a period marked by heightened fear and suspicion towards Muslims. After the September attack, Changez observes a stark contrast in the perception of American people towards Muslims and minorities. Government policies became more unfriendly to minorities. In the air itself, Changez perceives fear. There was increased surveillance in the streets of the Muslim people, and the so-called land of liberty became much more unlivable for the minorities (Hamid 109). Even the police treated Changez unfairly just because he was a Muslim or a Pakistani.

Hamid depicts Changez in a sympathetic light as he undergoes a series of unpleasant experiences in the new land. Since he does not properly belong to that land, he's made to feel like an alien. It was a kind of xenophobia that was rampant there. Fear of people from different cultures was a big problem after 9/11. Changez also finds this fear a problem in his attempt to find his love. Changez and Erica encounter significant difficulty in their attempt to go along due to the same fearful, xenophobic environment that was rampant there at that time. Erica has her past as she had been snatched away from her previous love, and she has not been able to forget him completely. It somehow deterred her from fully embracing Changez and empathizing with his experiences. Erica's behavior also further traumatized Changez. He somehow realizes that his Pakistani identity and cultural background are adding difficulties in his life because he had found love in an American woman.

Changez's story got complicated also because he was an outsider. His beloved and her American circle perceived him differently. Erica's friends and families had a kind of suspicion and, at the same time, hatred for Muslims as they viewed all Muslims as terrorists. That was the existing discourse of that time in the US. These stereotypical views contributed to a sense of isolation among Muslims and minorities, and that reinforced Changez's marginality. These complexities led to a complicated love story, adding more bitterness to Changez. All these variables, like race, culture, and power, create a compounding effect on his marginalization. His story

can serve as a glaring example of how social and individual prejudices can impact personal relationships.

Being affected by a Westernized lifestyle, Changez's journey turns into an acute journey of alienation. His family and Pakistani society are on the one hand, and his newfound love and the new realities are on the other. He welcomed some of the Western ideals and values during his stay at Princeton, which led to a profound transformation of his identity (Hamid 42). These new developments in Changez's life pushed him away from his family and Pakistani identity. He was slowly letting go of the traditional homegrown values that shaped him in his formative years.

Changez had been in a strange place. His new values made him uncomfortable in his Pakistani context, and in the American context, he was still treated as an outsider. He was set apart. There was a deep divide, and he grew increasingly alienated from the existing environments. He was dissociated from the traditions, customs, and communal bonds that are integral to Pakistan. In his family, everybody followed them without any question, and he also used to do that. As his family members got to know these new developments in Changes, they perceived it as his estrangement. He reached this point because of his corporate success, because of his new American girlfriend, and so on, but all these exacerbated his loneliness. As he becomes more successful and wealthier, he starts seeing a big gap between himself and Pakistani values. The gap expanded and it added to his sense of alienation later on (Hamid 79).

The author adroitly weaves the stories of Changez's estrangement from his culture and value system. He not only depicts this alienation but also shows its repercussions. Changez's Westernized lifestyle comes in stark contrast with his father's worldview, and it ignites a tussle between the father and the son. His father becomes very unhappy with his son as he declares that he has no son named Changez anymore. His father was a respected poet and an intellectual in Pakistani society. When these two, father and son, exchange their views on religion and culture, it becomes clear how the tension is arising and how the gap between these two worldviews is increasing (Hamid 93). The clash between tradition and modernity or Eastern and Western values ultimately led him to isolation. On the one hand, he

assimilated, to some extent, with the American culture, but on the other hand, he got alienated from what he already had. He finds himself suspended between these two value systems.

Changez's experiences of alienation, as depicted in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, and this acute loneliness and estrangement depict the complicated process of identity formation in an interconnected world. He chose Westernized values and lifestyle with a desire in his heart to live a more fulfilled life in the West. His pursuit of fulfillment leads him comes at the expense of his dislocation and alienation from his kin and kiths. Despite his attempts to reconcile with the new cultural value system, he feels marginalized due to his Muslim and Pakistani identity. This tension and sense of loss makes him constantly restless as he tries to make peace with the external environment in the new land.

Erica's struggle with her health in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* deeply affects Changez's mental well-being as he becomes more aware of his marginalization. Her friends and family pressure her so much that she reaches the point of mental collapse, and this newly emerged situation deeply hurts Changez. He loves her deeply, but her mental and emotional state prevents them from being one in the true sense. This powerlessness further weakens Changez. By highlighting her mental disturbances, this novel also digs into the issues of mental well-being and emotional stability, linking these variables with hybridity, marginalization, and the longing for roots.

As Changez returns to his hometown in search of lost connections and love, it underscores the complexities of the modern hybrid world. He undergoes uncomfortable situations and feelings as his past and present clash. He finds reconciliation very difficult. On his return, he becomes nostalgic. His homeland's familiar sights, sounds, and traditions deeply touch his heart and give him a sense of pain. A deep longing for the past surges throughout his mind, and a desire to reconnect with his cultural heritage hit him hard. Changez's emotional response is astounding, as he states, "I felt a thrill of pleasure run through me, such as I had not experienced in months" (Hamid 117).

His stay in the US affected his worldview and transformed him into a Cosmopolis personality. His outlook changed, and so did his

inner world. His condition of being apart between two worlds placed him in a unique position. Hamid states that this internal conflict manifests as a feeling of estrangement and a sense of not fully belonging in either cultural context (125). While revisiting Lahore after his stay in the United States for quite a long time, he becomes much more nostalgic because his ambivalent feeling toward his homeland and the new land is further compounded by the new changes that he observed in the city of Lahore, where he grew up. Societal changes in Lahore further compound Changez's conflicting feelings of nostalgia and alienation. The city is so different that he almost feels like it is a new place because Western influences are now so visible in Lahore. This was not the same Pakistan with traditional values and cultural integrity. Things had changed so significantly. The Pakistan of his memory is no longer there, and the US, where he is living now, does not accept him as an insider. He found himself in a very strange position (Hamid 136).

Changez's journey in Lahore highlights an individual's internal struggles arising due to his/her hybrid identities. Identity negotiation is going on all the time in such encounters. Negotiation between past and present, tradition and modernity, and old and new self-thwart their desire for a coherent and meaningful life. Changez's return to Lahore foregrounds the complexities of hybrid identity and signifies the more extensive negotiations that complicate identity formation processes. There is a need for reconciliation, but due to internal conflicts, this reconciliation is not an easy process.

In the beginning, initially, Changez tries his best to assimilate with the Western culture and values. He seeks the American dream, realising that America is for everybody and a land of opportunity based on meritocracy. He somehow manages to achieve material prosperity, succeeding in the corporate world. But after the September 9/11 attack on the Twin Towers, things change rapidly. People's perceptions of Muslims changed significantly. There is a rise in a xenophobic environment. Civil liberties were eroded, and sooner, Changez also had to face many harsh realities in America (Hamid 89).

Changez slowly becomes aware of his political space in the United States. Once he starts rethinking these deeper social and historical issues, his understanding of American society undergoes a

sea change. Underlying injustices and power imbalances become visible to his naked eyes in his dreamland. He comes to understand the contradictions between the US commitment to democracy and the rooted inequalities of the land. The complexities arise. As he becomes more and more aware of his position in that society, his desire to assimilate with the new culture finds a great roadblock in his path as he senses his marginal position in the land of plenty. This dichotomy confuses him to the extent that he becomes a different person.

Changez's story shows how an average individual becomes a puppet in front of the larger socio-political climate. His desire for acceptance was stifled by the new realities entrenched in unequal power dynamics (Hamid 156). Here, we can see the impact of globalization on hybrid identities. Through Changez's as a microcosm, the novel depicts the macrocosm by inviting readers to raise their voices against all kinds of discrimination based on caste, color, creed, and nationalities.

Conclusion

This article concludes that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* foregrounds the idea of hybridity and marginalization as a new world order after the demise of the active colonial era. Hamid's examination of the lives of certain characters in the novel sheds light on the concept of complicated identities – "People stuck between two worlds frequently wind up as aliens in both realms despite their greatest efforts to integrate into their surroundings" (Syed Faisal Sajjad Shah et al. 17). Hamid hints that Identity categories are not easy to understand and to be able to understand identity and nationalities, one must have a better grasp of the history. Hanif provokes us to critically examine concepts like identity and nationalities in connection with globalization and the new world order, especially after the 9/11 attack. The world is becoming more and more intolerant of minorities, especially Muslim minorities, after the 9/11 attack. There is a strong need to rescue individuals and communities from these inhuman treatments. Hanif attempts to address this issue through this novel, and he somehow encourages us to foster empathy by challenging the existing prejudices against Muslims and other minorities.

Works Cited

Ajeesh A. K. and S. Rukmini. "Transnational Voices in Contemporary Pakistani Literature: An Exploration of Fragmented Self and Hybrid Identity in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*." *Angles: New Perspectives on the Anglophone World*, Angles on Naya/New Pakistan, vol. 12, no. 2, 2022. https://journals.openedition.org/angles/5099.

Anjum, Afifa. "Negotiating Hybrid Identity in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*." *South Asian Review*, vol. 35, no. 3, 2014, pp. 49–61.

Chaudhry, Sara. "Globalization and Identity Crisis in *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, vol. 52, no. 1, 2016, pp. 115-129.

Hamid, Moshin. *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. Delhi: Penguin Random House, 2007.

Kabel, Ahmed. "Identity Crisis in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*." *Journal of English Language and Literature*, vol. 63, no. 1, 2017, pp. 51-64.

Lasdun, James. "The Empire Strikes Back", 3 March 2007. *The Guardian.* Retrieved 28 February 2016, from http://www.theguardian.com/ books/2007/mar/03/ Features reviews. guardianreview20

Malik, M. A., et al. *The Narrative of Hybrid Identity in the Third Space: A Postcolonial Critique of the Reluctant Fundamentalist*. no. 1, Apr. 2021, pp. 51–56. *Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, https://doi.org/10.46662/jass-vol8-iss1-2021(51-56).

Marotta, V. "Hybrid Identities in a Globalized World." *Public Sociology*: *An Introduction to Australian Society*, 2011, pp. 188-204.

PA, Suhana. "Resetting borders: Transnationalism, identity, and home in Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*". *International Journal of Applied Research*, vol. 4, no. 9, *2018, pp. 67-69.*

Rudrum, David. "*The Reluctant Fundamentalist*: 'We Are All Migrants Now.'" *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, vol. 59, no. 1, 2018, pp. 70-82.

Shah, Syed Faisal Sajjad, et al. "Traversing the Third Space: Hybridity, Alienation, and Non-Assimilation in Mohsin Hamid's The Reluctant Fundamentalist." *Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review*, vol. 8, no. 2, Apr-June 2024, pp. 11-18. https://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2024(8-II)02.

19.

Negotiating Cultural Borders: Gendered Perspectives on Migration and Assimilation in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Mrs. Sen* and *The Third and Final Continent*

Y.V. Sudha Devi

Assistant Professor, Dept of English, VNR VJIET, Hyderabad, India

Abstract

The literary work of Jhumpa Lahiri addresses topics of migration, cultural identity, and the difficulties encountered by people relocating between different cultural contexts. The experiences of Indian migrants struggling with the challenges of integrating into Western communities have received much attention within this paradigm. The gendered aspects of this phenomenon, especially the unique difficulties faced by women during the acculturation process. By comparing and contrasting *Mrs. Sen* and *The Third and Final Continent*, two of Jhumpa Lahiri's short tales, this essay aims to close this gendered divide by examining the subtle differences between gender in migration, assimilation, and identity development. This study discusses the gendered aspects of migration and assimilation in Lahiri's works by combining literary analysis, gender studies, and diaspora theory. We hope to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the intersections of gender, culture, and migration in forming personal identity and belonging in transnational situations by highlighting the experiences of female characters such as Mrs. Sen.

Keywords: Assimilation, cultural identity, diaspora, gender, identity crisis and migration.

Introduction

Jhumpa Lahiri's captivating stories provide profound insights into the complexities of migration, cultural identity, and the difficulties of adapting to new cultural environments. Within Lahiri's collection of work, the short stories *Mrs. Sen* and *The Third and Final Continent* stand out as moving studies of the migrant experience, each

providing a unique viewpoint on cultural adaptation problems. While previous research has exhaustively examined Lahiri's representation of migration and identity, there is still a significant gap in comprehending the gendered implications of these issues, notably the unique problems that women confront during the process of assimilation.

This article seeks to fill this vacuum by undertaking a comparative analysis of *Mrs. Sen* and *The Third and Final Continent*, particularly emphasising the gendered complexities of migration, acculturation, and identity development. This article examines the experiences of female and male protagonists negotiating cultural borders between India and the United States in order to shed light on the gendered dynamics inherent in the process of assimilation and cultural identity negotiation in transnational contexts by incorporating new scholarship to offer a more modern view of Lahiri's work by using transnational feminist ideas from Floya Anthias (2020) and recent migration and gender studies theories like those by Eleonore Kofman and Parvati Raghuram (2015).

The narrative arc of *Mrs. Sen* revolves around the ostensible character's steadfast commitment to preserving her Indian identity amidst her relocation to the United States. Through meticulous attention to detail, Lahiri portrays Mrs. Sen's adherence to traditional customs, attire, and cuisine, anchoring her cultural heritage. She prepares meals very traditionally with great attention to detail: "She ground her own spices, setting them out in a row like coloured powders for an art project" (Lahiri 41). However, as Mrs. Sen grapples with the isolation and loneliness of her new environment, her attempts at assimilation are thwarted by the enduring pull of her Indian roots. As Lahiri puts it: "She was a stranger in this country, invisible to everyone except herself." (Lahiri 40)

Ultimately, her inability to reconcile the conflicting demands of cultural preservation and adaptation culminates in a poignant emotional breakdown, highlighting the profound psychological toll of migration on individual identity. In contrast, *The Third and Final Continent* introduces readers to an unnamed narrator who embarks on a journey of assimilation, striving to embody the spirit of American culture while navigating the complexities of interpersonal

relationships. Despite his efforts to acclimate to his new surroundings, the narrator's understanding of American life remains superficial, leading to instances of cultural miscommunication and emotional detachment. Lahiri deftly juxtaposes the narrator's narrative with Mrs. Sen's, illuminating the divergent paths taken by individuals negotiating the boundaries of cultural identity and belonging.

Central to our analysis is the exploration of gender dynamics inherent in the process of assimilation. While both Mrs. Sen and the unnamed narrator grapple with the challenges of cultural adaptation, their experiences are mediated by gendered expectations and societal norms. Mrs. Sen's isolation and despair underscore the unique struggles faced by women in navigating the tensions between familial obligations, cultural expectations, and personal aspirations in the diasporic context.

Gender and the Migrant Experience

Jhumpa Lahiri's literature has received widespread appreciation for her sensitive depiction of the immigrant experience, particularly among the Indian diaspora. Researchers have praised Lahiri's subtle representation of cultural identity, displacement, and the problems of integration in works like *Interpreter of Maladies* and *The Namesake* (Gupta, 2014; Pandey, 2017). However, little attention has been paid to the gendered components of Lahiri's narratives, notably the experiences of female protagonists navigating migration and cultural assimilation.

Gender studies researchers have emphasised the necessity of examining the intersections of gender, ethnicity, and migration when studying the migrant experience (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1992; Kofman & Raghuram, 2006). Research in this field has highlighted how gender shapes migrants' experiences of belonging, cultural identity, and social integration, with women frequently facing unique challenges due to family dynamics, cultural expectations, and socioeconomic disparities (Basch et al., 1994; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001). This study does a qualitative comparative analysis of Jhumpa Lahiri's short stories, *Mrs. Sen* and *The Third and Final Continent*. Drawing on feminist literary theory and diaspora studies, this analysis tries to illuminate the gendered dynamics of migration and

assimilation depicted in Lahiri's writings. This study will use close textual analysis, theme coding, and comparative interpretation to explore how gender impacts the experiences of migrants negotiating cultural borders and navigating the challenges of identity creation in transnational situations.

In *Mrs. Sen*, Lahiri introduces readers to Mrs. Sen, a woman who struggles to fit in with American culture while maintaining a strong sense of her Indian identity. Lahiri emphasises Mrs. Sen's steadfast dedication to maintaining her cultural heritage right away, as seen by her observance of customs, dress, and food. Mrs. Sen uses her stress on preserving her Indian identity as a coping mechanism to provide her with a sense of continuity and belonging in a foreign place during the unsettling experience of migration. *Mrs. Sen* is the tale of an immigrant from India who is having difficulty integrating into American culture. After moving to the United States from India, Mrs. Sen feels alone and confused in her new surroundings. She makes an effort to maintain her Indian identity, but she finds it difficult to deal with the complexity of American society.

The story is told via the prism of Mrs. Sen's typical day, which centres on her responsibilities as a carer and housewife. Lahiri eloquently captures Mrs. Sen's devotion to conventions and traditions, from her dress sense to her taste in food, highlighting her enduring bond with her Indian roots. However, Mrs. Sen's weak English ability and difficulty adjusting to the strange rhythms of American society impede her attempts at integration. Lahiri skilfully captures Mrs. Sen's feelings of alienation and loneliness as she struggles with being away from home. The relationship between Mrs. Sen and Elliot, the small child she looks after, is a major plot point. Lahiri investigates the dynamics of intercultural communication and the ways that language may be a barrier to understanding via their exchanges.

Mrs. Sen's emotions of dislocation and yearning for her native land intensify throughout the story. Lahiri skilfully conveys the subtleties of Mrs. Sen's emotional journey, which leads to a moving realisation of migration's significant influence on a person's sense of self and place in the world. Even though Mrs. Sen tries to maintain her ethnic identity, she struggles to assimilate. The story narrates the

feelings of alienation and loneliness in her new surroundings, emphasised by her challenges acclimating to the complexity of American society. The language barrier and Mrs. Sen's limited social engagements make it difficult for her to completely integrate into American culture, which exacerbates her emotions of dislocation and loneliness.

Furthermore, Lahiri deftly captures the gendered aspects of Mrs. Sen's experience, emphasising women's particular difficulties while bridging cultural divides. Mrs. Sen struggles with the expectations of both Indian and American society, which makes her assimilation process more difficult. She adheres to traditional female roles, such as being a homemaker and carer. The way in which Lahiri captures Mrs. Sen's emotional distress and sense of alienation highlights the ways in which gender interacts with culture, identity, and belonging, shedding light on the gendered dynamics inherent in the migrant experience. Mrs. Sen's storyline centres on the title character's unwavering dedication to maintaining her Indian identity while relocating to the US. Lahiri depicts Mrs. Sen's devotion to traditional practices, dress, and food – all of which act as pillars of her cultural heritage – with painstaking attention to detail. "Whenever she cooked, she spared no effort, grinding spices by hand, and arranging them like an artist at work," for example, Lahiri writes (41). This artwork shows her strong ties to her heritage.

However, Mrs. Sen's attempts at assimilation are hindered by the persistent pull of her Indian roots as she struggles with the loneliness and isolation of her new environment. Her estrangement is painfully captured in the words, "She was a stranger in this country, invisible to everyone except herself" (40). She ultimately has a heartbreaking mental breakdown as a result of her incapacity to balance the competing demands of cultural preservation and assimilation, underscoring the significant psychological toll that migration has on personal identity. According to recent studies, immigrant women encounter greater difficulties in acculturation, especially when juggling their own goals with those of their families (Kofman & Raghuram, 2015). Neha Saini addresses how immigrant women's cultural preservation frequently places them as "custodians of heritage" in a 2022 study on South Asian migration, which further complicates Mrs. Sen's difficulties

In brief, *Mrs. Sen* Lahiri depicts the main character's unwavering will to retain her Indian identity while relocating to the US. Mrs. Sen's devotion to her cultural background may be seen in her adherence to traditional practices, clothing, and diet, but her attempts at assimilation are thwarted by the deep sense of alienation and dislocation she feels in her new surroundings. Lahiri draws attention to the gendered aspects of Mrs. Sen's struggle by illustrating the particular difficulties women encounter when balancing cultural preservation and adaptation. On the other hand, the Third and Final Continent presents readers with an anonymous narrator who sets out on an assimilation journey, attempting to capture the essence of American culture while negotiating the difficulties of interpersonal connections. "She was a relic from a forgotten era, yet I found myself respecting her more than any professor I had encountered," the narrator says of his landlady, Mrs. Croft, in an insightful comment (87). This dynamic demonstrates his willingness to overcome cultural differences.

The narrator's comprehension of American life is rudimentary despite his attempts to adapt, which results in episodes of emotional detachment and cultural misunderstanding. According to a 2021 study on South Asian diaspora literature by Wulandari, male migrants frequently exhibit "flexible assimilation," striking a balance between practicality and identity preservation. Unlike *Mrs. Sen*, the narrator of *The Third and Final Continent* is anonymous and sets out on an assimilation journey, trying to embrace American culture while negotiating the difficulties of interpersonal relationships. The narrator, who aims to close the gap between his Indian background and his new American identity, is more receptive to the cultural adaptation process than Mrs. Sen, who is unwavering in her Indian identity.

But in spite of his best attempts to blend in, the narrator's comprehension of American culture is still rudimentary and full of misinterpretations and cultural misunderstandings. As the narrator struggles to reconcile his Indian background with his desire to assimilate into American society, Lahiri masterfully conveys his sense of displacement and alienation. The narrator's experiences shed light on the difficulties associated with forming a cultural identity in cross-border settings and emphasise the manner in which migrants

negotiate the hazy boundaries between identity and belonging. Furthermore, Lahiri's depiction of the unidentified narrator's marriage to his spouse provides additional understanding of the gendered aspects of migration and absorption. Given that women frequently shoulder the brunt of cultural adaptation and integration within the family, the narrator's insensitivity to his wife's experiences as a migrant illustrates the gendered power dynamics inherent in the migrant experience. Lahiri highlights the interconnected layers of gender, culture, and migration by illuminating how gender affects migrants' experiences of navigating their identities and assimilating into new cultures through the narrator's story.

The Third and Final Continent combines narratives of migration, adaptation, and cultural assimilation to tell the account of an unidentified narrator's trip. The narrator, a young Indian man who comes to the US to pursue higher education and start a new chapter in his life, provides the narrative's point of view. When the narrator arrives in Boston, she stays in a boarding house with a wide range of people. One of them is Mrs. Croft, an old Englishwoman; the narrator is initially confused by her presence. As they work through the difficulties of coexisting and cultural barriers, the narrator and Mrs. Croft unexpectedly bond despite their age, nationality, and background disparities. The narrator struggles with cultural integration and adaptation as he adjusts to his new life in America. Lahiri depicts the narrator's attempts to balance his Indian ancestry with American society's expectations while he navigates the strange landscape of academic life and interpersonal interactions.

The narrator's developing romance with Mala, a person he meets through a familiar acquaintance, is at the centre of the story. As their courtship progresses, the narrator's battles with loneliness, homesickness, and the demands of her academic and professional goals are all present. Lahiri follows the narrator's life journey from his early years as a struggling immigrant to his eventual success and fulfilment in America through a series of vignettes that span several decades. The narrator struggles with identity, belonging, and the long-lasting effects of migration on his sense of self as he travels. The narrator considers the tremendous significance of his journey in the story's poignant climax, realising the transformational power of migration and the enduring bonds that transcend geographical

bounds. Lahiri delivers a complex tapestry of human experiences through the story of the narrator's trip, delving into themes of migration, identity, and the universal search for belonging in a constantly changing world.

To summarize, *The Third and Final Continent* depicts the experiences of an anonymous narrator who sets out on an assimilation journey, attempting to accept American culture while battling the difficulties of human connections. The narrator makes an effort to adjust to his new environment, but his grasp of American culture is still limited, which causes incidents of emotional detachment and cultural misunderstanding. Lahiri emphasises the gendered intricacies of migration and integration by contrasting the narrator's story with Mrs. Sen's. The moving tales *Mrs. Sen* and *The Third and Final Continent* can be found in Jhumpa Lahiri's collection of short stories, *Interpreter of Maladies*. Though they are separate stories, they share themes and highlight different facets of Lahiri's storytelling aptitude.

A comparison between *Mrs. Sen* and *The Third and Final Continent* illuminates the ways in which Lahiri's writings address gendered aspects of migration and assimilation. The study of Mrs. Sen's balancing of cultural and familial responsibilities gains resonance when contemporary social views on gender and diaspora from academics like Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo (2019) are incorporated. Hondagneu-Sotelo points out that caregiving responsibilities frequently influence women's migratory experiences, restricting their autonomy in unfamiliar settings. Similar to this, the narrator in The Third and Final Continent highlights gendered differences in navigating identity and belonging by viewing cultural adaptation through a different perspective.

The difficulties Mrs. Sen encountered in balancing the expectations of American culture with her Indian identity reflect the particular difficulties women encounter when traversing cultural boundaries and navigating the complexity of identity creation. On the other hand, the trip of the anonymous narrator emphasises how gender influences migrants' perceptions of assimilation and belonging in international settings. The central figure in *Mrs. Sen* is Mrs. Sen, an Indian immigrant coping with loneliness and cultural

dislocation in the United States. Conversely, *The Third and Final Continent chronicles the journey of an anonymous Indian immigrant navigating the challenges of establishing* a new life abroad.

The ages and stages of life of the two stories' protagonists are notable contrasts. Mrs. Sen is portrayed as a middle-aged woman married to an American who is having a hard time adjusting to life in a new nation. On the other hand, the narrator of *The Third and Final Continent* is a young man who recently moved to America to start over and establish a new life. This difference in age and life experience shapes the characters' viewpoints and the tone of the story. The stories also differ in how they examine cultural adaptability. In *Mrs. Sen*, Lahiri explores the challenges that immigrants encounter in maintaining their cultural identity as they integrate into a new community. Mrs. Sen's battle to uphold her Indian customs – especially in her food and rituals – highlights the conflict between accepting change and clinging to one's past. On the other hand, *The Third and Final Continent* depicts a smoother integration process in which the narrator embraces his Indian heritage while assimilating into American society. His ability to strike a balance between the two cultures suggests a more positive view of being an immigrant.

Moreover, each story's take on the themes of connection and solitude varies. In *Mrs. Sen*, the lead heroine struggles with extreme loneliness, which is made worse by her husband's frequent absences and her ignorance of American culture. She clearly feels alone, as evidenced by her yearning for the sea, which stands for both her native country and her feeling of community. In contrast, *The Third and Final Continent* highlights how the narrator eventually feels a sense of belonging to his neighbours and fellow immigrants and how he gradually integrates into American society. He finds comfort in human connection despite his early emotions of isolation, demonstrating the resiliency of the immigrant spirit. Both tales also provide moving insights into the passing of time and the resiliency of the human spirit. Time becomes a tangible force in *Mrs. Sen*, signifying the protagonist's slow adjustment to her new environment and increasing her sense of alienation from her native country. On the other hand, *The Third and Final Continent* covers several decades, following the narrator's transition from early anxiety to mature

acceptance. Lahiri examines in these stories the ability of time to change and people's ability to persevere and grow in the face of hardship.

Comparing *Mrs. Sen* and *The Third and Final Continent* reveals that gender is a major factor in mediating migrants' assimilation and identity formation experiences. Lahiri's subtle depiction of male and female protagonists traversing cultural boundaries illuminates the particular difficulties women encounter in balancing the demands of family, society standards, tradition, and modernity. Furthermore, Lahiri's stories highlight the ways in which gender, culture, and migration interact to influence people's feelings of displacement and belonging in international settings. *Mrs. Sen* and *The Third and Final Continent* are both immigrant stories with a similar theme, but they differ in how they depict solitude, cultural adjustment, and time passing. Lahiri celebrates the human spirit's adaptability to change while providing unique insights into the immigrant experience through complex characterizations and moving narratives.

Conclusion

Finally, Jhumpa Lahiri's works *Mrs. Sen* and *The Third and Final Continent* provide complex perspectives on the gendered aspects of assimilation, cultural identity, and migration. The idea that societal roles and gender intersect to impact migration experiences profoundly is supported by recent research by Anthias (2020) and Saini (2022). This study illustrates how gender affects migrants' experiences navigating the complexities of identity formation in cross-border settings by including these modern viewpoints. This enhances our comprehension of Lahiri's literary works and clarifies current discussions around migration in a globalized world, especially its gendered aspects. This study advances our knowledge of the intersections of gender, migration, and cultural identity in modern literature by highlighting the gendered complexities of Lahiri's writings.

Works Cited

Anthias, Floya, and Nira Yuval-Davis. *Racialized Boundaries: Race, Nation, Gender, Colour and Class and the Anti-racist Struggle*. Routledge, 2005.

Basch, Linda, Nina Glick Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc. *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments and Deterritorialized Nation-states*. Routledge, 2020.

Caspari, Martina. "Changing the Dominant Discourse and Culture, One Eater at a Time: Subversive Discourse and Productive Intervention in 'Mrs. Sen's' in Jhumpa Lahiri's Interpreter of Maladies." *Pacific Coast Philology*, vol. 49, no. 2, 2014, pp. 245–61. JSTOR, https://doi.org/10.5325/pacicoasphil.49.2.0245. Accessed 14 Dec. 2024.

Hondagneu-Sotelo, Pierrette. *Doméstica: Immigrant Workers Cleaning and Caring in the Shadows of Affluence*. University of California Press, 2007.

Kofman, Eleonore, and Parvati Raghuram. "Gender and skilled migration: into and beyond the workplace." *Geoforum* 36.2 (2010): 149-154.

Lahiri, Jhumpa. *Interpreter of Maladies*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1999.

Noor, Ronny. *World Literature Today*, vol. 74, no. 2, 2000, pp. 365–66. JSTOR, https://doi.org/10.2307/40155634. Accessed 14 Dec. 2024.

Saini, Neha. "Cultural Preservation and Gender in South Asian Diaspora Narratives." *Journal of Migration Studies*, 2022.

Williams, Laura Anh. "Foodways and Subjectivity in Jhumpa Lahiri's Interpreter of Maladies" *Melus* 32.4 (2007): 69-79.

Wulandari, Retno. "Negotiation in Diasporic Identity in Jhumpa Lahiri's The Third and Final Continent and This Blessed House." *Konferensi Internasional Kesusastraan* XXII UNY-HISKI buku 1: Sastra sebagai Identitas Naratif dan Upaya Sastra dalam Menghadapi Masalah Masyarakat dan Bangsa: 27-33.

20.

Interpreting Intertextuality in Select Titles of Literary Works in English

Pratap Kumar Dash

Associate Professor, Department of English, Rajendra University, Odisha, India

Abstract

It so happens that while giving titles to the literary works, either unconsciously or unconsciously, authors are greatly influenced by certain narrative accounts of the writings of earlier authors; and maybe such authors are impressed by particular episodes or some textual lines of the earlier writings as observed in poetry by Harold Bloom in his *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*. Some writers feel like giving proverbial titles to their writings too. Here, such events, words and expressions get protracted with different meanings in different contexts and thereby the interpretation of the texts gets rhetorically expanded. This could be one of the natural characteristics of language or more appropriately a creative process used in giving titles of literary texts of the precursor authors. Most often, the episodic echoes and cognitive and socio-cultural constructs make the writers choose titles from earlier writings. This intertextuality follows reconstructionary patterns, references of earlier works, allusions, eponyms or textual borrowings. In this context, a modest attempt has been made in this paper by defining the overarching discourse features of words and phrases of earlier writings in English and American literary writings which are purposefully used as titles obviously noticed in some later writings. They may also be titles with Biblical references; idiomatic titles; titles from well-known authors like William Shakespeare and so on.

Keywords: titles, earlier writings, proverbial, rhetorically, cognitive, intertextuality

Introduction

Titles of literary works transcend our understanding of the text from mundane world to the world of deeper emotions, feelings and artistic manifestations. At times, they turn to become highly inspiring; tend to be moral and philosophical; and echo a lot of artistry. Not only

this, they speak of history, culture and herald our mellifluousness. From William Shakespeare's *All is Well that's Ends Well* and *Much Ado about Nothing* to Thomas Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd,* Joseph Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness* and E.M.Forster's *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, titles of the literary works are of immense value. They are not only very artistic but also very often symbolic; personifying or idiomatically speak of universality; and sometimes, they are peculiar too. Titles brainstorm readers and start speaking a lot. John Donne's lyrics "Go and Catch a Falling Star'' or "No Man Is an Island" are simply unforgettable for their moral standpoints because such titles reflect the themes of the writings and turn to become universal. Milton's *The Paradise Lost* or T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* possess thematic importance whereas there are protagonist dominant titles such as *Ulysses, Macbeth, Hamlet* or *King Lear.* These titles do not need any explanation as such. It is noticed that poets do not take much risk of confusing the readers regarding the poetic types they adopt in their poems. Some such poems are: Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" or Keats' "Ode to a Nightingale." Some titles of travelogues and adventures are also clear in concepts like Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* or Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Some titles stand ironical like Arthur Miller's *All My Sons* or Orwell's *Animal Farm*. Some titles are very thought provoking and philosophical such as O'Henry's "The Last Leaf" or Tolstoy's "God Sees the Truth, but Waits". Most of the titles of the famous short story writers like Anthon Chekov, Somerset Maugham, O'Henry or R.N. Tagore and R.K.Narayan are ironical, nostalgic and/or greatly artistic. Togore's "Hungry Stones" is an example of this. G.K.Chesterton's often paradoxical and intelligent titles like "On No Longer Being Very Young" or J.B.Priestley's "On Doing Nothing" are equally unforgettable oxymorons.

Textual Phrases of Earlier Writings as Titles

In *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe (1930-2013), the title is a literary allusion. The phrase "things fall apart" is taken from the poem, "The Second Coming" by W.B Yeats (1865-1939), which Achebe quotes more extensively in the epigraph. Ernst Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, the phrase is taken from Donne's "No Man is an Island." He invokes the poetry of the seventeenth-century writer

John Donne (1572-1631) when he comes up with the title. The choice of title is pertinent politically since the novel of Hemingway centres around the Spanish Civil War in which socialist and fascist parties fought for dominance. The meaning of the title *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* is a metaphor, comparing the caged bird to Maya Angelou (1928-2014) as a child trapped in her victimhood of racism and sexism. The cage refers to the dynamics of victimization and overcoming victimization. The caged bird analysis is a metaphor for herself as a young African American girl in a racist society. This phrase has been taken from Paul Laurence Dunbar's "Sympathy," a poem that describes the terrible experience of being a bird stuck in a cage. The bird in this poem flaps its wings and sings, not because it is happy. It flaps its wings and sings because it is in great misery. *Dying of the Light* is a science fiction by George R.R. Martin (1948-) and this title is taken from Dylan Thomas' popular poem "Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night," which stands as a metaphor for the dying world of Worlorn, and the failed relationship between the two protagonists. The title *Nectar in a Sieve* by Kamala Markandaya (1924-2004) is taken from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem "Work without Hope." It is sometimes interpreted as looking at the hope in life when everything else drifts away. Set in rural India during a phase of urban development, it speaks of Rukmani, an elderly woman who reflects on the various hardships and triumphs of her lifetime. Now, relating to "Work without Hope" by S.T. Coleridge (1772-1834) describes the ways in which Nature works and the importance of goals, or hopes.

The other genres like science fiction also adopt the same strategy. *The Lathe of Heaven* by Ursula K. Le Guin (1929-2018) is taken from *Zhuangzi*, one of the two foundational texts of Taoism. *The Mirror Crack'd from Side to Side* (1962) by Agatha Christie takes its name from Tennyson's poem "The Lady of Shallot." Jane Marple falls while walking in St. Mary Mead. She is helped by Heather Badcock, who brings her into her own home to rest. The "Lady of Shalott" by Tennyson is a popular ballad that illustrates the isolation of a woman in a tower far from what she wants to live and experience. She lives a life imprisoned by a curse she knows no consequence for and so hesitates to live her life the way she would have liked.

The Doors of Perception is an autobiographical book written by Aldous Huxley (1894-1963). Published in 1954, it elaborates on his

psychedelic experience under the influence of mescaline in May 1953. Huxley recalls the insights he experienced, ranging from the "purely aesthetic" to "sacramental vision", and reflects on their philosophical and psychological implications. In 1956, he published "Heaven and Hell," another essay which elaborates these reflections further. The two works have since often been published together as one book; the title of both comes from William Blake's 1793 book *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. The metaphor was used to represent Blake's feelings about mankind's limited perception of the reality around them.

The Stars' Tennis Balls by Stephen Fry (1957-) is a psychological thriller. It is based on The Count of Monte Cristo, with its title taken from John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*, is a roller coaster ride of its own. In the United States, the title was changed to Revenge. The story is a modern adaptation of Alexandre Dumas's 1844 novel *The Count of Monte Cristo*. The original title comes from a quotation taken from John Webster's which reads: "We are merely the stars' tennis balls, struck and bandied which way please them."

Biblical Titles and Their Contextual Relevance

Absalom, Absalom! by William Faulkner (1897-1962) speaks of the rise and fall of Thomas Sutpen, a white man born into poverty in western Virginia who moves to Mississippi with the dual aims of gaining wealth and becoming a powerful family patriarch. This quotation for Faulkner's 1936 novel comes from the Books of Samuel – more specifically, 19:4 in 2 Samuel, which is in the Old Testament and relates some of the history of Israel that is Absalom, the third son of David, rebelled against his father and was killed in battle. *A Time to Kill* by John Grisham (1955-) is a 1989 legal thriller and debut novel by him. The story takes place in the fictional town of Clanton, in the equally fictional Ford County, Mississippi. Grisham's title is taken from the line: "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up." *The House of Mirth* (1905) by Edith Wharton (1862-1937) tells the story of Lily Bart, a well-born but impoverished woman belonging to New York City's high society around the end of the 19th century. *The House of Mirth* traces Lily's slow two-year social descent from privilege to a lonely existence on the margins of society. It is a quotation from line 7:4: "The heart of the

wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth." *East of Eden* by John Steinbeck (1902-1968) brings to life the intricate details of two families, the Trasks and the Hamiltons, and their interwoven stories. The Hamilton family in the novel is said to be based on the real-life family of Samuel Hamilton, Steinbeck's maternal grandfather. Taken from Genesis, the first book of the Old Testament, it refers to line 4:16: "And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden."

Vile Bodies by Evelyn Waugh (1903-1966) is a novel in which Adam describes his plans to marry Nina Blount. Waugh took the title for his 1930 novel from Philippians, full name Epistle to the Philippians, which is part of the New Testament and generally attributed to Paul the Apostle. *A Scanner Darkly* by Philip K. Dick (1928-1982), the protagonist is Bob Arctor, member of a household of drug users, who is also living a double life as an undercover police agent assigned to spy on Arctor's household. Arctor shields his identity from those in the drug subculture and from the police. Its title is taken from the First Epistle to the Corinthians. *Moab is My Washpot* (1997) is Stephen Fry's autobiography, covering the first 20 years of his life. In the book, Fry is candid about his past indiscretions, including stealing, cheating and lying. The title comes from line 60:8 of the Book of Psalms in the Old Testament, which reads in full Moab is my washpot. The context is that people would often use washpots to clean their feet of sand after roaming the desert, and Moab, a kingdom of Jordan which was often warring against the Israelites, needed to be overcome. *Number the Stars* by Lois Lowry (1937-) is a work of historical fiction by the American author Lois Lowry about the escape of a family of Jews from Copenhagen, Denmark, during World War II. The story revolves around ten-year-old Annemarie Johansen, who lives with her mother, father, and sister Kirsti in Copenhagen in 1943. In line 147:4, the Psalms declares that He [God] telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names. The quotation is also used for its connotations of the Star of David associated with Judaism. *Noli Me Tangere* by José Rizal is a novel by Filipino writer and activist José Rizal published during the Spanish colonial period of the Philippines. It explores perceived inequities in law and practice in terms of the

treatment by the ruling government and the Spanish Catholic friars of the resident peoples in the late-19th century.

Famous Titles Taken from William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

Many modern writers have used textual extracts in the forms of words and phrases from Shakespearean plays. *Rosemary and Rue* by Seanan McGuire (1978-) is a modern urban fantasy set in both San Francisco and the Faerie Kingdom of the Mists which overlays Northern California. Here, the title seems to be taken from Shakespeare to refer to herbs:

> "For you there's rosemary and rue …
> Grace and remembrance be to you both,"
>
> – *The Winter's Tale*, Act IV, Scene 3

In Cold Blood by Truman Capote takes the title from Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens*.

> "ALCIBIADES: …O my lords,
> As you are great, be pitifully good:
> Who cannot condemn rashness **in cold blood**?"
>
> (ACT III, SCENE V, Lines 54-55)

Brave New World by Aldous Huxley is a dystopian novel (1931) and published in 1932. Largely set in a futuristic World State, whose citizens are environmentally engineered into an intelligence-based social hierarchy, the novel anticipates huge scientific advancements in reproductive technology, sleep-learning, psychological manipulation and classical conditioning that are combined to make a dystopian society which is challenged by the story's protagonist. This is possibly the most famous book to take its title from a Shakespeare play – in this case, *The Tempest*. In Act V, Scene I, Miranda declares:

> "How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world
> That has such people in 't!" (Lines 217-18)

She says this when encountering new arrivals to her island for the first time in her life, and the 'savage' John repeats it when gazing at the corrupt, hedonistic society portrayed in Huxley's 1932 novel. Huxley was a big fan of Shakespeare and quoted him in two more famous book titles, namely *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow* (1956) and *Mortal Coils* (1921), from *Macbeth* and *Hamlet* respectively.

Both are part of famous soliloquies; Hamlet's in particular is the 'to be or not to be' speech.

> "Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
> Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
> To the last syllable of recorded time;
> And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
> The way to dusty death. – *Macbeth*, Act V Scene V" (Lines 22-26)
>
> For in that sleep of death, what dreams may come,
> When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
> Must give us pause. – *Hamlet*, Act III Scene I" (Lines 74-76)

Pale Fire by Vladimir Nabokov (1899-1977) is a 1962 novel. The title is taken from *Timon of Athens* (Act IV, Sc III).

> "The sun's a thief, and with his great attraction
> Robs the vast sea: the moon's an arrant thief
> And her pale fire she snatches from the sun
> The sea's a thief, whose liquid surge resolves
> The moon into salt tears…" (Lines 489-493)

Remembrance of Things Past by Marcel Proust (1871-1922) follows the narrator's recollections of childhood and experiences into adulthood in the late 19th-century and early 20th-century high-society France, while reflecting on the loss of time and lack of meaning in the world and he released his version in 1922 under a title taken from Shakespeare's "Sonnet 30."

> "When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
> I summon up remembrance of things past,
> I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,
> And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste…" (Lines 1-4)

The Fault in Our Stars by John Green (1977-) in which Hazel Grace Lancaster, a 16-year-old with thyroid cancer that has spread to her lungs, attends a cancer patient support group at her mother's behest. We have a quotation from Act I Scene II of *Julius Caesar*, specifically by the character Cassius. He's trying to persuade Brutus of the very real danger that Caesar wants to be king, and how dangerous that would be for Rome.

> "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars
> But in ourselves, that we are underlings." (Lines 147-48)

Cold Comfort Farm by Stella Gibbons (1902-1989) following the death of her parents, the book's heroine, Flora Poste, finds she is possessed "of every art and grace save that of earning her own living". Here, the title is taken from Act V Scene VII of *King John*, spoken by the titular character.

> "…I do not ask you much,
> I beg cold comfort; and you are so strait
> And so ingrateful, you deny me that." (Lines 44-46)

Behold, Here's Poison by Georgette Heyer (1902-1974) when Gregory Matthews, patriarch of the Poplars is found dead one morning, imperious Aunt Harriet blames it on the roast duck he ate for supper. After all, she had warned him about his blood pressure. But a post-mortem determines that the cause of death is much more sinister. The title comes from a speech by Antiochus in Act I Scene I of *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*.

> "Thaliard, behold, here's poison, and here's gold;
> We hate the Prince of Tyre, and thou must kill him:
> It fits thee not to ask the reason why…" (Lines 161-163)

Band of Brothers by Stephen E. Ambrose (1936-2002) rests upon interviews Ambrose conducted with former members of E Company, 2nd Battalion, 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment of the 101st Airborne Division. The quotation is taken from *Henry V*, Act IV, Scene III, in a speech delivered by Henry himself to rouse his troops on St Crispin's Day before the famed 1415 Battle of Agincourt.

> "We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
> For he to-day that sheds his blood with me
> Shall be my brother…" (Lines 62-64)

Mortal Engines by Philip Reeve (1966-) is a young-adult science fantasy novel published by Scholastic UK in 2001. The book focuses on a futuristic, steampunk version of London, now a giant machine striving to survive on a world that is running out of resources. Reeve's 2001 steampunk series has a name borrowed from Othello's speech in Act III Scene III of *Othello*. It's particularly apt since it references cities which are constantly on the move and eating other cities.

> "And O you mortal engines whose rude throats
> Th'immortal Jove's dread clamours counterfeit…" (Lines 407-8)

The Dark Tower by Stephen King (1947-) is taken from Act III Scene IV of *King Lear* by Gloucester's son Edgar. In his guise as Tom o' Bedlam, he speaks a lot of gibberish, and this particular piece of gibberish has even older roots as a Scottish ballad.

> "Child Rowland to the dark tower came,
> His word was still 'Fie, foh, and fum
> I smell the blood of a British man." (Lines 195-97)

The Sound and the Fury by William Faulkner (1897-1962) comes from Macbeth's famed soliloquy in Act V, Scene V, delivered as Scottish troops are approaching his castle. It's the ending of the aforementioned 'Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow' quotation.

> "… it is a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing." (Lines 29-31)

No Wind of Blame by Georgette Heyer (1902-1974) single as yet unrealized ambition was to introduce her daughter, Vicky, into the best county society come from the speech of Claudius in Act IV Scene VII of *Hamlet*.

> "…I will work him
> To an exploit, now ripe in my devise,
> Under which he shall not choose but fall.
> And for his death no wind of blame shall breathe…" (Lines 71-74)

Book Titles Taken from the Famous Poems

The 2006 fourth novel in the *Mortal Engines* quartet also has a literary title: it's called "A Darkling Plain," a quotation from Matthew Arnold's 1867 poem "Dover Beach." *Alone on a Wide, Wide Sea* by Michael Morpurgo (1943-) in which Hobhouse tells the story of his life. His earliest memory was that he was an orphan from Bermondsey, in London, and that, at the age of five, in 1947, he was transported to Australia to find a new home. The title comes from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's famous 1798 poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner." Though the poem is fairly long, it's narrated in short stanzas of four lines each.

> "Alone, alone, all, all alone,
> Alone on a wide wide sea!
> And never a saint took pity on
> My soul in agony." (Stanza-3, Part-III)

Dance Dance Dance by Haruki Murakami begins four and a half years after the events depicted in "A Wild Sheep Chase." The narrator briefly reminds the reader of that story, which saw his girlfriend disappear after they had stayed at a run-down hotel in Hokkaido called the Dolphin. The title comes from the final stanza of W.H. Auden's 1937 poem "Death's Echo."

> "Dance, dance for the figure is easy,
> The tune is catching and will not stop;
> Dance till the stars come down from the rafters;
> Dance, dance, dance till you drop." (Lines 61-65)

Gone with the Wind by Margaret Mitchell (1900-1945) is set in Clayton County and Atlanta, both in Georgia, during the American Civil War and Reconstruction Era. Dowson's title is itself taken from a poem – specifically, Book IV of the ancient Roman poet Horace's Odes. It translates into 'I am not as I was under the reign of the good Cynara' and is evocative of lost, haunting love, perfect for *Gone with the Wind*. *A Many-Splendoured Thing* by Han Suyin (1916-2012) portrays a married British foreign correspondent named Mark Elliot (Ian Morrison in real life, living in Singapore with his wife and children), who falls in love with a Eurasian doctor originally from Mainland China. Its title comes from the 1903 poem "The Kingdom of God" by Francis Thompson (1859-1907).

> "The angels keep their ancient places; –
> Turn but a stone, and start a wing!
> 'Tis ye, 'tis your estrangèd faces,
> That miss the many-splendoured thing." (Stanza 4)

As I Lay Dying by William Faulkner (1897-1962) is the story of the death of Addie Bundren and her poor, rural family's quest and motivations – noble or selfish – to honour her wish to be buried in her hometown of Jefferson, Mississippi. In its Book XI, the dead Agamemnon tells Odysseus that "As I lay dying, the woman with the dog's eyes would not close my eyes as I descended into Hades. He is here referring to his murderous, adulterous wife Clytemnestra. *Tender is the Night* by F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940), Dick and Nicole Diver are a glamorous couple who rent a villa in the South of France and surround themselves with a coterie of American expatriates. Rosemary Hoyt, a 17-year-old actress, and her mother are staying at a nearby resort. Rosemary becomes infatuated with Dick and becomes

close to Nicole. This particular quotation comes from 1819's "Ode to a Nightingale."

> "Away! Away! For I will fly to thee,
> Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
> But on the viewless wings of Poesy,
> Though the dull brain perplexes and retards:
> Already with thee! tender is the night…" (Stanza-5, Line 1-5)

The Grapes of Wrath by John Steinbeck's the narrative begins just after Tom Joad is paroled from McAlester prison, where he had been incarcerated after being convicted of homicide in self-defence. Like Faulkner, Steinbeck was a big believer in using quotations for his book titles. The one for 1939's *The Grapes of Wrath* comes from a stanza in "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," written in 1862 by the abolitionist and suffragist Julia Ward Howe.

> "Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord
> He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored
> He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword
> His truth is marching on." (Lines 1-4)

A Passage to India by E.M. Forster's story revolves around four characters: Dr. Aziz, his British friend Mr. Cyril Fielding, Mrs. Moore, and Miss Adela Quested. The title is a quotation from Walt Whitman's 1855 poetry collection Leaves of Grass. *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* by Dee Brown presents a brief history of the discovery and settlement of America, from 1492 to the Indian turmoil that began in 1860. He stresses the initially gentle and peaceable behaviour of Indians toward Europeans, especially their lack of resistance to early colonial efforts at Europeanization. Brown took his title from the poem "American Names" by Stephen Vincent Benet.

> "I shall not rest quiet in Montparnasse.
> I shall not lie easy at Winchelsea.
> You may bury my body in Sussex grass,
> You may bury my tongue at Champmedy."
> I shall not be there. I shall rise and pass.
> Bury my heart at Wounded Knee." (Stanza-7)

A Farewell to Arms by Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961) tells a tale while working with the Italian ambulance service during World War I (1914–18), the American lieutenant Frederic Henry meets the English nurse Catherine Barkley. This line is taken from the title of the poem

"A Farewell to Arms," written by Tudor poet George Peele to Elizabeth I. One of its themes is the swiftness of passing time. *In the Subtle Knife*, the story moves between our own world, the world of the first novel, and a third world containing the city of Cittàgazze. In *The Amber Spyglass*, several other worlds appear alongside those three. Naturally, John Milton's incredible 1667 epic *Paradise Lost* has spawned a lot of famous book titles. One of these is Pullman's beautiful and complex 1995 trilogy. From Book II:

> "Into this wilde Abyss,
> The Womb of nature and perhaps her Grave,
> Of neither Sea, nor Shore, nor Air, nor Fire,
> But all these in their pregnant causes mixt
> Confus'dly, and which thus must ever fight,
> Unless th' Almighty Maker them ordain
> His dark materials to create more Worlds,
> Into this wild Abyss the warie fiend
> Stood on the brink of Hell…." (Lines 122-130)

No Country for Old Men by Cormac McCarthy (1933-2023) follows the interweaving paths of the three central characters (Llewelyn Moss, Anton Chigurh, and Ed Tom Bell) set in motion by events related to a drug deal gone bad near the Mexican–American border in remote Terrell County in south-west Texas. This 2005 novel is another one borrowed from a W.B. Yeats' poem, specifically "Sailing to Byzantium," *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini is a 2007 novel by Afghan-American author Khaled Hosseini, following the huge success of his bestselling 2003 debut *The Kite Runner*. Mariam, an illegitimate teenager from Herat, is forced to marry a shoemaker from Kabul after a family tragedy. In a departure from the sources in the rest of this article, the poem "A Thousand Splendid Suns" is borrowed from Saeb Tabrizi (1592-1676), a 17th-century Persian poet. It is named "Kabul."

> "Every street of Kabul is enthralling to the eye
> Through the bazaars, caravans of Egypt pass
> One could not count the moons that shimmer on her roofs
> And the thousand splendid suns that hide behind her walls."
>
> (Stanza 4)

Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck (1902-1968) is about the Great Depression in California; two migrant field workers – George Milton, an intelligent but uneducated man, and Lennie Small, a bulky, strong

but mentally disabled man – are on their way from Soledad to another part of the state. They hope to one day attain the dream of settling down on their own piece of land. From the 1785 poem "To a Mouse" by Scottish poet Robert Burns (1959-1796) comes the title.

> "But Mousie, thou art no thy-lane,
> In proving foresight may be vain:
> The best laid schemes o' Mice an' Men
> Gang aft agley,
> An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain,
> For promis'd joy!" (Stanza 7)

This Side of Paradise by F. Scott Fitzgerald is a novel in which Amory Blaine, a young Midwesterner, is convinced that he has an exceptionally promising future. He attends a posh college-preparatory school and later Princeton University. Fitzgerald employs a poem on the World War I by Rupert Brooke, "Tiare Tahiti," to name this debut novel.

> "Dive and double and follow after,
> Snare in flowers, and kiss, and call,
> With lips that fade, and human laughter
> And faces individual,
> Well this side of Paradise! ….
> There's little comfort in the wise." (Lines 72-77)

Dying of the Light by George R.R. Martin (1948-), a novel that takes place on the planet of Worlorn,a world which is dying. It is a rogue planet whose erratic course is taking it irreversibly away from its neighbouring stars into a region of cold and dark space where no life will survive. The title is a line from Welsh poet Dylan Thomas's gorgeous "Do Not Go Gentle into that Good Night," written in 1947 about his dying father. The phrase is repeated throughout the poem, but here's the first stanza:

> "Do not go gentle into that good night,
> Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
> Rage, rage against the dying of the light." (Stanza 1)

Famous Book Titles Taken from Other Books

The Line of Beauty by Alan Hollinghurst (1954-) is set in Britain in three parts, taking place in 1983, 1986 and 1987. The story surrounds the young gay protagonist, Nick Guest who is a middle-class and from the fictional market town of Barwick in Northamptonshire. This

2004 novel's title refers to the 'line of beauty', a curved S-shaped line described by William Hogarth (1697-1764) in his 1753 book *The Analysis of Beauty*. *A Confederacy of Dunces* by John Kennedy Toole is a novel published in 1980, eleven years after Toole died by suicide. He had been suffering from depression linked to the book's constant rejections by publishers. The title is borrowed from Jonathan Swift's satirical essay "Thoughts on Various Subjects, Moral and Diverting." The quotation in question is when a true genius appears in the world you may know him by this sign; that the dunces are all in confederacy against him. *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* by Mark Haddon is a delightful 2003 novel about a boy investigating the death of a dog is named after Silver Blaze, an 1893 short mystery story by Arthur Conan Doyle featuring Sherlock Holmes. Here's an exchange between him and Watson featuring the quotation:

> "Is there any point to which you would wish to draw my attention?"
> "To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time."
> "The dog did nothing in the night-time."
> "That was the curious incident," remarked Sherlock Holmes. (p. 37)

The Waste Land by T.S. Eliot (1868-1965) is a 1922 poem widely hailed as one of the most important poems of the twentieth century and a key part of the modernist movement. But the title was inspired by *From Ritual to Romance* by Jessie L. Watson. The book, published in 1920, explores the origins of the King Arthur legends, particularly in terms of the Holy Grail and the Celtic trope of the Wasteland – a barren land whose curse must be lifted by the hero.

Vanity Fair by William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-1863) was first released as a serial of 19 volumes between 1847 and 1848, and it sometimes considered to be the progenitor of later Victorian 'domestic novels.' Vanity Fair is a location described in John Bunyan's 1678 allegory *Pilgrim's Progress*, where it represents man's attachment to temporal distractions. Along with being one of the most famous book titles, it's been the name for a large number of British and American fashion magazines. *Of Human Bondage* by W. Somerset Maugham (1874-1965) is a 1915 novel is widely considered to be his best. Its title comes from Ethics, Demonstrated in Geometrical Order, a treatise published in 1677 by the Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza. Part IV of Ethics is named Of Human Bondage, or the

Strength of the Emotions, and is a discussion of how inability to control one's emotions constitutes a form of bondage.

Titular Influences on Sylvia Plath

Poems of Sylvia Plath (1932-1963) seem to be greatly influenced by some titles of the famous authors of the past years although differ in context. Like Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, Plath has written a poem with same title.

> "On Boston Common a red star
> Gleams, wired to a tall Ulmus
> Americana. Magi near
> The domed State House. (Lines 1-4)
>
> The cordial strains
> Of bellringers and singers rouse
> Frost-bitten pigeons, eddy forth
> From Charles Street to the Custom House,
> From South Station to North." (Lines 12-16, p. 87)

"A Winter's Tale" is a poem of place, and that place is Boston, Massachusetts. Plath and Ted Hughes had been living in Beacon Hill at 9 Willow Street since September 1958, so she got to experience the Christmas season in the city in 1958 like never before. Plath worked briefly that autumn in the psychiatric ward at the Massachusetts General Hospital, likely in the same building and ward where she was a patient five years earlier in the late summer of 1953. She and Hughes familiarized themselves with their city by foot, often going on long walks along the wharves and through Scollay Square. They also took in museums and galleries and frequented the Boston Public Library at Copley Square.

A Tale of a Tub by Jonathan Swift comprises the tale itself, an allegory of the Reformation in the story of brothers Peter, Martin, and Jack as they attempt to make their way in the world, along with various digressions interspersed throughout. Each brother represents one of the primary branches of Christianity in the West. "Tale of a Tub" by Sylvia Plath however speaks something personal.

> "The photographic chamber of the eye
> records bare painted walls, while an electric light
> flays the chromium nerves of plumbing raw;
> such poverty assaults the ego; caught
> naked in the merely actual room,

the stranger in the lavatory mirror
puts on a public grin, repeats our name
but scrupulously reflects the usual terror. (Lines 1-8, p.24)

In this particular tub, two knees jut up
like icebergs, while minute brown hairs rise
on arms and legs in a fringe of kelp; green soap
navigates the tidal slosh of seas
breaking on legendary beaches; in faith
we shall board our imagined ship and wildly sail
among sacred islands of the mad till death
shatters the fabulous stars and makes us real." (Lines 12-19, p. 24)

Her persona poem, "Tale of a Tub," uses Jonathan Swift's eponymously titled story to convey a journey of mankind's universal improvement. Plath upends Swift's intended message and narrative quest by modernizing and exploiting the poem's voyage. In her version, the tub has a higher mission: to convey messages and also receive her visual attention. Plath might have used Swift's poem as a template to tackle her own personal issues which strayed from Swift's original content. Instead, the poet reconfigures the narrative and redirects the focus: a desire to comply with her eyes, her obsession with seeing, and owning. "Tale of a Tub" delivers clues to support her own object libido with a keen attention to items such as washbowl, towel, window, and tub (Plath, 24-25). Plath's "Tale of a Tub" conveys objects' varying influences and their ability to organize her feelings which may have neutralized her emotions. Further, the poet suggests that humans are rutted in imperfection. Plath conveys objects' blissful unawareness to imperfection and the human struggle to reconfigure the world. Plath sought to emotionally navigate through these realizations and confiding in objects might have alleviated her anxieties.

Similarly, *Wuthering Heights* is a Gothic novel featuring supernatural elements, ominous settings, and threats to young women, often involving imprisonment in an isolated mansion. Author Emily Brontë (1818-1848) incorporates supernatural elements, such as the possibility of ghosts, into her novel and presents Wuthering Heights as an archetypal Gothic building, full of dark and mysterious secrets. Sylvia Plath's "Wuthering Heights" is a poem of place and SP lived in Yorkshire with Ted Hughes (1930-1998) for a time and must have gone walking on the moors.

"The horizons ring me like faggots,
Tilted and disparate, and always unstable.
Touched by a match, they might warm me,
And their fine lines singe
The air to orange
Before the distances they pin evaporate,
Weighting the pale sky with a solider color. (Lines 12-18, p. 167)

Now, in valleys narrow
And black as purses, the house lights
Gleam like small change." (Line 22-24, p.168)

Mention the word 'wuthering' and you immediately think of blustery winds, Yorkshire moors and Emily Bronte. And the title takes the mind to that most well-known of books 'Wuthering Heights'. See this review.

In giving title of the literary works, Plath stands distinct because of her copious anxiety of taking the titles of earlier works and giving a new texture to the contents of the text which is more or less personal. Even, she changes the literary forms in doing so.

Critical Discussion and Conclusion

Very often, classrooms remain meditative or sometimes debating and full of diverse opinions among the students or scholars over the meaning of the title of literary works. Teachers say to have contextual guessing of the meaning or to give explanation of the titles for which students go on finding out lexical or idiomatic meaning or meaning related to the authorial background. Sometimes, they compare the title of a work of art with the title of another work of art of similar of different genre.

Giving an appropriate title to a literary work is like giving the best and last effort to accomplish a long-cherished work of a piece of art or a masonry or a craft that needs final touch or *fineness*. Authors become meditative; look for combinations; look around for suitable collocations; look here and there; read books by other authors; look for idiomatic expressions; and thus, spend much time to give a suitable title to their respective works. Very interestingly, the aesthetic notions of the literary authors of our time sometimes owe a lot to the earlier authors, basically to the classics those who have left the indelible imprint of the impressive words and expressions having

multiple meanings. Such well-known words and expressions develop critical and creative ideas both among the writers and the readers of our time. These can be called as echo effects in which the contemporary authors contextualize those words or expressions in the earlier works. What's more attractive is the interweaving of genres in titular selections which seem to be exclusively authorial decision based on his or her creative judgement of giving a suitable title to a work of art. Considering the art and science of this nomenclature is worthwhile.

Following Dijk's (2022) proposition of critical discourse analysis, such titles can be examined form three perspectives viz. discourse, cognitive and society because they constitute larger social phenomenon. In addition, titles can give rise to thematic as well as pragmatic argument and help describe the contexts better. The textual features of the titles can also be discussed in the light of language functions outlined by Roman Jacobson which entails the referential, poetic, and metalingual functions; and Halliday's model of language and discourse. Worth saying, all the titles of Shakespeare discussed in this article; Orwell's title "Animal Farm"; E. M. Foster's "Where Angels Fear to Tread"; Chinua Achebe's "Things Fall Apart"; and Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken," are not only used work metaphorically, but also give us a number of ideas connotatively as well as denotatively. The larger view of the socio-political conditions as well as human tendency has been greatly reflected in such titles. Same is the case with Swift's "The Spider and the Bee"; William Golding's "Lord of the Flies"; and all such writings popularly known as fables. These titles not only the intertextual or intersemiotic in nature, they would rather bear a panoptic effect in construing the meaning of the selected words and phrases of the earlier writings as a matter of cognitive, socio-cultural and contextual requirements.

Works Cited

Auden, W.H. "Death's Echo," https://allpoetry.com/Accessed on 10 Jan 2024.

Beneth, Stephen Vincent. "American Names," https://allpoetry.com/ Accessed on 10 Jan 2024.

Brooke, Rupert. "Tiare Tahiti," https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47234/Accessed on 10 Jan 2024.

Burns, Robert. "To a Mouse," https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43816/ Accessed on 12 Jan 2024.

Dijk, Van. "Critical Discourse Analysis," Discourses.org, https://discourses.org › uploads › 2022/07/ Accessed on 12 Jan 2024.

Howe, Julia Ward. "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," https://hymnary.org/ Accessed on 12 Jan 2024.

Milton, John, "Book-II," *The Paradise Lost*, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/ poems/Accessed on 12 Jan 2024.

Plath, Sylvia. *The Collected Poems*, Ed. Ted Hughes, New York: Harper and Row, 1981.

Poetry Foundation, www.poetryfoundation.org/ Accessed 10 Mar. 2024.

Shakespeare, William. *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* by William Shakespeare." *Project Gutenberg*, 18 Jan. 2024, www.gutenberg.org/ ebooks/100/

Shakespeare, William. "The Sonnets." *The Project Gutenberg eBook of The Sonnets, by William Shakespeare*, www.gutenberg.org/files/1041/1041-h/1041-h.htm. Accessed 10 Jan. 2024.

Tabrizi, Saib-e. "Kabul," https://beyondtheveil5208.weebly.com/ Accessed on 12 Jan 2024.

Thomas, Dylan. "Don't Go Gentle into that Good Night," https://poets.org/poem/ Accessed on 12 Jan 2024.

Thompson, Francis. "The Kingdom of God," https://www.stjames-cathedral.org Watt, Ian. *The Rise of Novel*, Berkley: UCP, 1990.

BOOK REVIEW

1

Rootless Realities: Exploring Displacement in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Roman Stories*

Samikshya Das

Lecturer in English, Indira Gandhi Women's College, Odisha, India

Lahiri, Jhumpa. *Roman Stories*. United States, Diversified Publishing, 2023. Rs 499/-

Jhumpa Lahiri's *Roman Stories*, originally published in Italian as *Racconti Romani* captures the essence of life in Rome through a series of interconnected tales. The stories focus on the experiences of expatriates and locals alike, exploring themes of displacement, identity, and the complexities of human relationships. Jhumpa Lahiri's *Roman Stories* offers a rich tapestry of narratives that delve into the lives of various characters navigating the complexities of identity, belonging, and the immigrant experience in contemporary Rome. A collection that brilliantly merges personal and cultural themes, Lahiri's stories provide an intimate portrait of the human condition, rendered with her signature lyrical prose and keen observational skills.

Roman Stories is structured as a cohesive oeuvre, with each story interwoven yet distinct, providing a multifaceted view of life in Rome. Lahiri employs a third-person narrative style, allowing for varied perspectives and exploring different characters' inner thoughts and emotions. This choice of narrative voice adds depth, as readers are invited to engage with the psychological complexities of each character, often feeling their isolation and longing. The collection

comprises nine interconnected stories, each revealing different facets of life in Rome. Lahiri's prose is elegant yet accessible, characterized by a subtlety that draws readers into the inner lives of her characters. The stories often blend mundane elements with the profound, creating a sense of intimacy that resonates deeply. Lahiri's decision to write these stories in Italian before translating them into English adds an intriguing layer to the collection. This bilingual approach allows her to capture the nuances of language and culture, highlighting the dislocation and adjustment experienced by those living in a foreign land. The interplay between the two languages enriches the text, inviting readers to appreciate the beauty of both Italian and English expressions.

The stories within this collection are a rich blend of the mundane and the profound, capturing the essence of Roman life through the eyes of both locals and expatriates. Each narrative unfolds like a delicate fresco, revealing the layers of human experience against the vibrant backdrop of the Eternal City. Lahiri's prose is both lyrical and evocative, inviting readers to savour the details – the aroma of Italian coffee, the sounds of bustling streets, and the quiet moments of introspection. One of the most striking features of *Roman Stories* is Lahiri's ability to convey the complexities of cultural identity. Characters navigate their connections to their heritage while grappling with the challenges of living in a foreign land. This exploration is particularly poignant in a globalised world where questions of belonging are ever more relevant. Lahiri's characters – whether seasoned residents or newcomers – embody the struggles and triumphs of finding one's place in a city steeped in history and culture.

Lahiri's prose beautifully conveys the city's sights, sounds, and emotions, reflecting her own experiences as a writer and learner of Italian. Each story presents a different facet of life in Rome, from encounters with love and loss to the challenges of navigating a foreign culture. At the heart of *Roman Stories* is a profound exploration of identity. Many characters grapple with the tension between their heritage and their new environment. Lahiri poignantly captures the struggle of maintaining cultural ties while attempting to assimilate into a new society. This theme of duality – of being both an insider and an outsider – recurs throughout the collection, inviting

readers to contemplate their own experiences of belonging. Lahiri also examines the notion of home in these stories. Characters often yearn for stability amidst the chaos of their lives. They encapsulate the idea that home is not just a physical place but also an emotional state. Lahiri's characters navigate their desires and disappointments, evoking a sense of longing that permeates their experiences.

Lahiri's acute observations about Roman life and culture enrich the narratives, providing a backdrop that feels both vibrant and oppressive. The city emerges as a character, with its historical weight and contemporary vibrancy influencing the lives of those inhabiting it. The stories also touch upon themes of isolation and connection, particularly in a city as bustling as Rome. Characters often find solace in unexpected relationships, illustrating the power of human connection to transcend cultural differences. Lahiri's deft characterizations make each individual relatable as they navigate their own struggles while finding common ground with others. One of Lahiri's greatest strengths is her ability to evoke deep emotional responses from readers. In *Roman Stories*, she crafts moments of profound intimacy and vulnerability, allowing readers to empathize with her characters' joys and sorrows.

The use of symbolism throughout the collection further enhances the emotional depth. For instance, recurring motifs such as food, language, and shared experiences serve as metaphors for connection and separation. Lahiri's attention to detail, from the descriptions of Roman landscapes to the nuances of interpersonal relationships, creates a rich sensory experience that resonates long after the stories conclude. In a world increasingly defined by displacement and the search for belonging, Lahiri's stories serve as a reminder of the universal nature of these experiences. *Roman Stories* is not just a reflection of life in Rome; it is a meditation on the complexities of the human spirit, making it an essential addition to contemporary literature. As readers close the final page, they are left with a deeper understanding of the intricate tapestry of life, threaded together by the shared experiences of love, loss, and the eternal quest for home.

The prose is characterised by its lyrical quality. Lahiri's language is both precise and evocative, painting vivid images of Rome's landscape while simultaneously immersing in the characters'

emotional landscapes. Descriptions of the city – from the ancient ruins to the bustling markets – create a sense of place that is palpable, making Rome not just a backdrop but a living, breathing entity that influences the lives of its inhabitants. A central theme in Roman Stories is the exploration of identity, particularly for those who straddle multiple cultures. Lahiri's characters often find themselves caught between their heritage and new realities, grappling with questions of selfhood in a foreign land. Lahiri poignantly illustrates how this tension can lead to a fragmented sense of self, as characters yearn to connect to their roots while seeking acceptance in their new surroundings.

Lahiri's keen observations of cultural nuances serve as a backdrop for the characters' narratives. Rome, with its historical richness and contemporary vibrancy, provides a fertile ground for exploring themes of cultural exchange. The collection also reflects on the challenges of communication in a foreign language. Characters grapple with feelings of inadequacy and frustration when they struggle to express themselves in Italian, illustrating the isolation that can accompany linguistic barriers. Lahiri's ability to create deeply relatable characters is one of the hallmarks of her writing. Each story introduces a distinct individual with their own struggles and desires, yet they all share a common thread of seeking connection and understanding.

The development of relationships is another crucial aspect of Lahiri's storytelling. Characters often find solace in unexpected connections through friendships, familial bonds, or romantic relationships. These interactions serve as a reminder of the importance of human connection in overcoming feelings of alienation. Lahiri skillfully navigates the complexities of these relationships, portraying both the warmth of companionship and the pain of separation. Language itself is another significant motif. The struggle to communicate effectively in a new language highlights the challenges of adaptation and the longing for understanding. Characters often find themselves lost in translation, both literally and metaphorically, which deepens their sense of alienation. This motif underscores the importance of language as a bridge between cultures and its potential to create divides.

Lahiri's stories remind us of the universal nature of our struggles for connection and understanding in an ever-changing world. They invite readers to reflect on their own experiences of belonging and the intricate tapestry of identities that shape who we are. In an era marked by displacement and cultural intersections, *Roman Stories* is a poignant and timely meditation on the human experience, making it a significant contribution to contemporary literature. *Roman Stories* is not just a collection of narratives but an exploration of the human condition, rendered with Lahiri's characteristic sensitivity and depth. Readers are left with a profound appreciation for the intricacies of life, love, and the pursuit of belonging in a world that often feels both familiar and foreign. It is a masterful collection that showcases Jhumpa Lahiri's exceptional talent for storytelling. Through her nuanced portrayals of identity, belonging, and the immigrant experience, Lahiri invites readers into a world that is both familiar and foreign. The collection's emotional depth, combined with its lyrical prose, makes it a compelling read that lingers in the mind.

Roman Stories is a testament to Jhumpa Lahiri's artistic growth and her profound connection to the themes of identity and belonging. This collection celebrates Rome and explores the universal human condition. It invites readers to reflect on their own experiences of place and identity, making it a resonant and enriching read. As Lahiri continues to evolve as a writer, Roman Stories is a compelling addition to her esteemed body of work, which both captivates and challenges its audience.

2

Floating Between Worlds: Nature, Memory, and Identity in Preetinicha Barman's *My Body Floating with Hyacinths*

Ranjit Mandal[*] and Shruti Das[**]

[*] *Lecturer in English, Rural Institute of Higher Studies, Bhograi, Odisha*
[**] *Professor, PG Department of English, Berhampur University, Odisha, India*

Preetinicha Barman's *My Body Floating with Hyacinths* (2024) is a poetic exploration of identity, heritage, and the natural world, marked by profound introspection and cultural resonance. Born in 1982, Barman is an educator, poet, writer, and translator who teaches English at North Eastern Hill University, Shillong. In her collection *My Body Floating with Hyacinths*, Barman draws from rich literary and cultural background, bringing the reader into lush landscapes and reflective inner worlds, where personal and universal histories intertwine. Each section of the book – "You May Not Believe My Story", "We had Emerged Out of Chaos", "Let the River Narrate Her Own Tale", and "My Body Floating with Hyacinths" – presents her ability to layer mythological and ecological themes with a powerful sense of place and belonging. Barman's poetic voice, deeply rooted in her cultural experiences, invites readers into an essential journey of discovery and self-reckoning.

In "You May Not Believe My Story", the first section of *My Body Floating with Hyacinths*, Preetinicha Barman roots her readers in a vivid, multigenerational narrative landscape, where ancestral memories and personal reflections entwine. Each poem within this section is a testament to the ways in which the past lingers, haunting and enriching the lives of its descendants. Barman's poetic voice reflects nostalgia and a yearning to preserve familial tales, describing a complex relationship with tradition, identity, and time. In "My Old Story," Barman crafts an image of a narrator both rooted in and

distanced from her heritage. The imagery of ancestral "ghosts" leaping up from an ancient well, paired with "evening prayers" and "thunderous drums" within a dilapidated temple, evokes a vivid sensory world where spiritual and familial bonds remain strong despite the passage of time. This interplay between past and present explores the tension between the narrator's sense of "novelty" and the fading physical remnants of her ancestors. As Barman writes,

> You may not believe my story,
> for you don't believe in ghosts,
> but if you visit the narrowing scraps of our yard,
> you'll see the marks of a vanished well. (lines 20-23)

Thus, the poem poignantly captures the pull between ancestral presence and contemporary disbelief, suggesting the fragility of memory in a world losing touch with its roots. Similarly, "The Storyteller's Tale" paints an intimate portrait of a woman who embodies her family's stories but is marginalized in her own time. Here, Barman emphasizes the resilience of oral storytelling: though the woman "never learnt to write," she remains "the storyteller of the dead, / of the living, of the past glories" (lines 20-21). The poem reverberates with a quiet melancholy, hinting at the loneliness of the storyteller and the fading role of oral traditions in a fast-paced world. Barman's line, "her evenings suffer / from a dearth of listeners," (lines 16-17) captures the ephemeral nature of memory and the struggle to keep past voices alive in a world preoccupied with the present.

In "Fizz," Barman shifts into a deeply personal reflection on inherited expectations. Through an unflinching self-portrait – "my rough, disheveled hair/ gives me the look of carelessness" (lines 7-8) – the narrator grapples with her own identity against the memory of her father's "concerned" gaze. She confesses, "Duty, patience, providence…are turning into fumes," (lines 19-21) portraying a slow erosion of patriarchal values imposed upon her. The poem's tone conveys both a sense of rebellion and sorrow, capturing the complexities of redefining oneself within – and sometimes against – a framework of familial duty. Poems such as "The Trail" and "The Tale of the Yard" explore a spiritual connection to land and home. In "The Trail," the earth itself remembers the narrator, marking their presence across four generations and offering a near-mythic reverence for the family lineage. The field "knows" each generation through its distinct

impressions, such as the "sturdy kharams" of the great-grandfather, symbolizing the cyclical nature of life and tradition. "The Tale of the Yard" takes a dreamlike journey through an intimate family space, where the yard teems with life, from diving ducks to quacking cows. Through phrases like, "the semi-dry cloths flutter in the wind," (line 16) Barman captures a visceral sense of home – yet the narrator is an outsider, relegated to sleep-walking through memories.

In "We had Emerged Out of Chaos," the second section of *My Body Floating with Hyacinths*, Preetinicha Barman examines the themes of intimacy, transformation, and identity through sensuous, reflective verses. This section explores the alchemical blending of self and other, nature and humanity, drawing readers into an intimate yet universal narrative of emotional evolution. The poems offer a visceral look at relationships, where the boundaries of individual identity blur and reform, embodying the complex emotions that bind people together. The poem, "We are Ancients," sets a reflective tone, evoking the primordial and cyclical nature of human existence. Here, the speaker claims, "We were more ancient than the caves / which sang of our bodies," (lines 8-9) connecting human experience to an eternal cycle of emergence and re-emergence. This line establishes a sense of timelessness, positioning the speaker and their beloved as enduring figures in the natural world, as well as relics of a shared past. In "Canvas," Barman artfully uses nature-based imagery to depict the fluidity of identity, portraying the speaker as a leaf, river, and mermaid, all transformed by the lover's "patterns." Through lines like, "I rise up shaped as a mermaid, / floating, basking, putting on garlands," (lines 10-11) the poem speaks to the lover's influence as a force of metamorphosis, representing how relationships sculpt and reshape identity in unpredictable ways. The imagery here reflects with a sense of ephemerality, as if each transformation is fleeting but significant, a brushstroke on the canvas of the speaker's soul.

The most powerful exploration of intimacy appears in "The Crumbled Bed," where the remnants of past love linger like "silhouettes in different shades" engraved on the walls. The poem hauntingly illustrates how memories of a relationship endure, transforming physical spaces into symbolic sites of emotional experience.

The yellow moonbeams are
crawling onto our old bed
the one which once crumbled under
the pressure of your heavy love.
My silhouettes in different shades
are still engraved on the walls
flat, coiled, curved, tossed. (Barman lines 2-8)

Here, Barman conveys how past intimacies leave a permanent imprint on the self, suggesting that love is both a physical and emotional force that shapes memory and identity alike. In "We Had Emerged Out of Chaos," Barman crafts a mosaic of moments where love serves as both a grounding and transformative force. The speaker and their partner's journeys are as layered and multifaceted as nature itself, filled with both serenity and turbulence. Through intimate, elemental imagery and powerful metaphor, Barman invites readers to witness love's potential to redefine and deepen one's sense of self, evoking a world where personal evolution is both an ancient and ongoing process.

The third section of the collection embodies a raw, unapologetic voice that explores themes of cultural estrangement, nature's resilience, and the anguish of lost heritage. The poems, grounded in an earthy cadence, challenge imposed identities and portray a profound connection to the land and its natural spirits. In "Demons", the speaker critiques religious subjugation, lamenting how indigenous deities were reshaped by dominant cultures: "You placed our God / beside your frightened God… / If we opposed, you called us demons" (lines 1-9). This narrative encapsulates a struggle for spiritual autonomy, where reverence turns into silent suffering as gods become both alienated and assimilated within foreign temples. It serves as an incisive commentary on cultural appropriation and religious colonization, questioning where divinity and humanity intersect in an altered spiritual landscape. Similarly, "Mashan God" mystically reflects resilience against abandonment, as the protagonist faces an estranged water deity – "the terrible Mashan God" – who mourns his own erasure from myth. This scene captures the persistence of indigenous myths – submerged yet present – echoing a quiet resistance against erasure. In "The Field", nature itself yearns for human presence, imbuing the earth with a feminine anticipation for the farmer's return: "I am washed and soaked, / ready for the

furrow / and to conceive the seeds" (lines 3-5). Here, the field becomes a character embodying fertility and interdependence, inviting readers to reconsider humanity's connection to the land as both sacred and personal. Thus, the section weaves together themes of displacement, yearning, and resistance, allowing the river and earth to "narrate their own tale", asserting an identity that defies marginalization and celebrates natural and cultural integrity.

The fourth section, "My Body Floating with Hyacinths", brings a haunting intimacy and surreal beauty to the forefront, exploring themes of self-identity, the elemental, and the sublime role of poetry in personal transformation. Here, Preetinicha Barman crafts an introspective odyssey, immersing readers in water, shadows, and fragments of unutterable thoughts, creating a world where each poem is a layered examination of self, memory, and time. The poem "Watery Water" presents water as both devouring and defining, capturing the transient and engulfing nature of identity. The recurring water imagery evokes a timeless, almost mythical existence, portraying the speaker as eternally intertwined with fluidity and change. "My Nights" and "Cycle" bring us into the repetitive rhythms of existence, where even daily rituals carry a weight of existential significance, portraying life's cyclical and enduring nature as both anchor and burden.

In "Birth", Barman presents a powerful rebirth metaphor, juxtaposing earthy imagery with a renewed connection to self, environment, and memory. This poetic rejuvenation hints at resilience, showing how roots remain, allowing one to reconnect with an "old self" while embracing life's continuous transformations. "Poetry Without Word" stands as a pivotal piece in this section, embodying the ineffable nature of poetic inspiration and the speaker's awe-filled humility before creation itself. The line "I was silenced by the dearth of words" (line 17) epitomizes the poet's reverence for the sublime, as if the ultimate poetry exists beyond expression, within feeling and experience alone. Barman's meditations on poetry's role in self-definition are best captured in the following lines,

> "I often ask myself, 'Am I a poet?' Perhaps that doesn't
> matter much. What matters is how I look at you,
> poetry. How I find you in my mirror looking at me
> with an all-knowing smile!" (lines 3-4)

Here, Barman presents poetry as both mirror and mystery, a relationship that is as much about self-reflection as it is about surrendering to something beyond the self. This balance between knowing and unknowing characterizes the entire section, grounding the collection in an ethos of poetic humility and reverence.

Like Mary Oliver's *Devotions* (2017), which brings forth the quiet profundity of nature and life's cyclical essence, Barman's *My Body Floating with Hyacinths* explores the intimate ties between self, landscape, and cultural memory. Both use nature as a reflective lens, examining personal and philosophical questions about identity, spirituality, and existence. However, while Oliver's work often embodies a universal, contemplative simplicity, Barman's collection infuses her poetry with a deeply regional voice, drawing on folklore and cultural heritage. Poems like "Demons" and "Watery Water" blend these cultural symbols with introspective musings, allowing Barman to explore continuity and transformation within her own lineage. While Oliver's meditations on nature evoke universal insights, Barman's poetry creates a unique resonance with readers by connecting nature to a specific cultural and ancestral background, adding an intricate layer of collective memory to her verse. For readers interested in contemporary poetry that blends lyrical beauty with cultural critique – particularly those who find resonance in themes of identity, ecology, and memory – *My Body Floating with Hyacinths* offers a rich, meditative experience. This collection would especially appeal to readers of postcolonial literature, environmental studies enthusiasts, and those who find inspiration in poetry that is both confessional and socially conscious.

Works Cited

Barman, Preetinicha. *My Body Floating with Hyacinths*. Red River, 2024.

Oliver, Mary. *Devotions: The Selected Poems of Mary Oliver*. Penguin Press, 2017.

List of Contributors

1. **Abhishek Das** is an Assistant Professor of English at Govt. General Degree College, Narayangarh, Paschim Medinipur, West Bengal, India.
2. **Aishwarya Banerjee** is a Junior Research Fellow at Department of English Literature, Language and Cultural Studies, Vidyasagar University, West Bengal, India.
3. **Ashapurna Dash,** PhD is an Assistant Professor of English at Veer Surendra Sai University of Technology, Burla, Odisha, India.
4. **Ashes Gupta**, PhD is a Professor of English at Tripura University, Agartala, India.
5. **Bhanu Bhakta Sharma Kandel**, PhD is an Associate Professor of English at PN Campus, Tribhuvan University, Nepal.
6. **B. Sai Harshitha** is a Doctoral Research Scholar, Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh, India.
7. **Bonala Kondal**, PhD is Assistant Professor of English, Faculty of Science and Technology, (IcfaiTech) ICFAI Foundation for Higher Education, Hyderabad, India.
8. **Dayal Chakrabortty** is a PhD Research Scholar at Dept. of Humanities (English), Veer Surendra Sai University of Technology, Burla, Odisha, India.
9. **Deepak Pati** is a Research Scholar at VVSUT Burla and Lecturer in English at Dadhibaman College, Bhatli, Odisha, India.
10. **Farhin Rahman** is an Alumni of Department of English and Humanities, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, BRAC University, Bangladesh.
11. **Meera Vinod** is a UGC-JRF Candidate at Department of English Literature, School of Literary Studies, The English and Foreign Languages University, (EFLU), Hyderabad, India
12. **Naba Kumar Chanda** is a Research Scholar, PG Department of English, Berhampur University.

13. **Roohi Andalib Huda**, PhD is an Assistant Professor of English at Department of English and Humanities, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, BRAC University, Bangladesh.
14. **Pratap Kumar Dash**, PhD is an Associate Professor of English at Rajendra University, Balangir, Odisha, India.
15. **Ranjit Mandal** is a Lecturer in English, Rural Institute of Higher Studies, Bhograi, Odisha, India
16. **Sabin Kumar Pandey** is an Assistant Professor of English at Sikkim University, Sikkim, India.
17. **Samikshya Das**, PhD is a Lecturer in English at Indira Gandhi Women's College, Cuttack, Odisha.
18. **Sabindra Raj Bhandari**, PhD is an Assistant Professor of English at Tribhuvan University, Nepal.
19. **Shruti Das,** PhD is a Professor of English at PG Department of English, Berhampur University, Odisha, India.
20. **Mohd Siddique Khan** is a PhD Candidate at Department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Lucknow, UP, India.
21. **Sowmya Srinivasan**, PhD is an Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Literature Sri Sathya Sai Institute of Higher Learning, Andhra Pradesh, India.
22. **Sudipta Chakraborty** is an Independent Researcher from India.
23. **Surabhi Jha** is an Independent Researcher from India.
24. **Swagata Chowdhury**, PhD is an Assistant Professor at Department of English, Dhanalakshmi Srinivasan University, Samayapuram, Tiruchirappalli, India.
25. **Swamy Bairi**, PhD is an Assistant Professor of English, Faculty of Science and Technology, (IcfaiTech) ICFAI Foundation for Higher Education, Hyderabad, India.
26. **Tara Prasad Adhikari**, PhD is an Assistant Professor of English at Tribhuvan University, Nepal.
27. Y.V. Sudha Devi, PhD is an Assistant Professor at Dept of English, VNR VJIET, Hyderabad, India.