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Predictability and Subjectivity in John Green's *An Abundance of Katherines*

Yassmine Boukhalkhal, Djamila Mehdaoui and Fewzia Benyelles Bedjaoui

Abstract

This study supplies a literary analysis of John Green's second novel, *An Abundance of Katherines* (2006). It examines the protagonist Colin's journey from essentialism to anti-essentialism, focusing on the nuanced shifts in his worldview. The process incorporates a variety of postmodern techniques, including pastiche, parody, Derrida's concept of différance, and Foucault's subjectivity. Through these elements, the analysis reveals that while the novel's plot structure may appear simplistic, its thematic depth and narrative strategies firmly position it within the realm of postmodern *Entwicklungsromane*.

Keywords: anti-essentialism, pastiche, parody, *différance*, subjectivity, *Entwicklungsromane*

An Abundance of Katherines (2006) is John Green's second literary work following his debut novel *Looking for Alaska* (2005). He is an award-winning author with more than 25 awards. He is the New York Times best-selling author of the fourth novel *The Fault in Our Stars* (2012). His works received wide criticism, especially as young adult (YA) fiction. Green's influence extends beyond literature, as he also plays an active role in education and social commentary. He is remarkably active on different online platforms, such as his podcast series named *The Anthropocene Reviewed* (2018–2021), the vlog hosted with his brother Hank, *Vlogbrothers* (2007–present), and the YouTube channel *Crash Course* (2012–present), to name but a few. John Green luxuriates in YA style of writing because he thinks that teenagers ask controversial life questions (Patrick) such as meaning, loss, and politics (Tamaki). The quest to fathom young people's approach to life, in its transcendence, is the quest to understand and dig deep into humanity's encounter and treatment of concepts as such vis-à-vis the

historical process and the society they live in. Within the context of the postmodern, it alludes to the possibility of growth as opposed to the Romantic, Victorian, or Modern maturity. Green's exploration of these themes invites readers to reconsider traditional notions of adulthood and personal development. Green's straightforward and modest plot structures are juxtaposed with the nuanced description and dialogue of the characters. They reflect an idealist epistemology akin to the German subjective Idealist George Berkley's "Esse est Percipi" (*Big Ideas Simply Explained* 139). In other words, he does not complicate the plot as an independent isolated reality that the characters keep referring to. He instead explores how the characters uniquely construct their own reality as regards the storyline. For that precise reason, numerous criticisms of his works centre around psychoanalysis such as Jebaselvi and Sivakumar's study *John Green's Turtles All the Way Down: A Review on Obsessive Compulsive Disorder in Adolescents* (2022).

Similarly, critics have approached *An Abundance of Katherines* from different interdisciplinary perspectives, including linguistics, psychology, identity, and mathematics. For example, *An Abundance of Katherines: The Game Theory of Baby Naming* (Blumer et al., 2024) and *Translation Strategies of Idiomatic Expressions in An Abundance of Katherines* (Wibowo and Supardi 2024). However, the novel has not been recognised for its postmodern elements and techniques. This study examines Green's shift from a conventional social and individual conception to a more pragmatic viewpoint. The debate centres around the idea of predictability versus subjectivity. If human behaviours are taken for granted, the pattern of social order is assumed to be ordered, methodical, and consistent. Much like science, human behaviours can be predictable and are expected to meet certain expectations that align with a particular social pattern. Conversely, the idea of subjectivity is drawn from Foucault's perception of identity as fluid and unforeseeable, where simultaneously society dictates what the individual should do and how individuality contributes to society. This article suggests that Green guides the readers from an orthodox viewpoint to a more moderate one by considering the use of postmodern techniques and styles, such as parody, pastiche, Jacques Derrida's concept of *difference*, and Michel Foucault's notion of subjectivity. It also

investigates how these techniques are employed in the postmodern *Entwicklungsroman* narrative genre, which reflects individuals' coping with capitalist society.

An Abundance of Katherines is a YA novel by John Green. It is a story that begins by identifying the protagonist as a child prodigy. The novel follows the tragedy of Colin Singleton, who has been dumped nineteen times by girls named Katherine. When the last of the Katherines abandons him, he embarks on a journey with his friend Hassan, during which they meet Lindsey, whose mother offers them a job and invites them to stay with her at her house. Colin has always dreamed of having his Eureka moment, just like any genius, grown-up, used-to-be child prodigy. The road trip brings a change after he falls and hits his forehead on the ground. His Eureka moment unfolds the possibility of anticipating future dumpings through the *Theorem of Underlying Katherine Predictability*. After multiple attempts to refine the theory, it proves unattainable since humans' behaviours are seldomly predictable. He eventually moves from an essentialist to an anti-essentialist philosophy of life, where he could be more open to possibilities manifested in his relationship with a non-Katherine; Lindsey.

When Green was asked about what inspired him to write the novel, he answered:

> I'm really interested in why we are all so obsessed with mattering–why people in our historical moment are so fixated on fame and notoriety and leaving a legacy…So that was part of it. Also, at some point in your adolescence you become aware that you are not quite so special as you've been led to believe, and this is a pretty difficult thing to reconcile, and I wanted to write about a young man who was experiencing that in the most extreme way possible. (Green)

While primarily inspired by the idea of mattering during adolescence, he focuses more on its causes and consequences in a capitalist society.

Green is careful in identifying Colin with a set of characteristics that will always define his actions or his future in general. He is a child prodigy, a nerd, and only attracted to girls named Katherine. This illogical attraction stems from his intent to dramatise 'human mattering'. Amid this rigid identification, Green ironically opens a

space for fluidity, represented in Colin's skill and fondness for anagramming. These attributes enslave the protagonist as he believes he should act and react accordingly, and violating any of these definitions would imply an identity crisis for him. For example, the significance of his identity is tightly bound to being a genius, and being a genius means doing something remarkable. He speculates, "What is the point of being alive if you don't at least try to do something remarkable?" (Green). John Green uses different postmodern techniques to shift from an essentialist to an anti-essentialist self-perception.

The author simultaneously capitalises on pastiche and adds to its meaning in an unprecedented way. Pastiche is a way to celebrate and honour classical and previous writing styles, techniques, and content. "The term can be used in a derogatory sense to indicate lack of originality, or more neutrally to refer to works that involve a deliberate and playfully imitative tribute to other writers" (Baldick 307). Frederich Jameson, however, condemns pastiche as it hampers the process of historicism (Constable 48). In the same way, Green ingeniously uses pastiche to both reverence other styles and rebuke the detachment of texts from their contexts. Through this, he challenges traditional boundaries of literary genres and allows for a more fluid interaction between past and present. By engaging with the works of others in this way, Green's writing becomes an ongoing conversation that transcends time and defies simple categorisation. The novel makes use of explanatory footnotes while paying tribute to academia, and Green experiments with them in various ways. Some footnotes provide real-world facts. For example, in a conversation with Lindsey, Colin informs her that he is reading a book on the invention of television to which Green refers in the footnote, "Television was invented by a kid. In 1920, the memorably named Philo T. Farnsworth conceived the cathode ray vacuum tube used in most all twentieth-century TV sets. He was fourteen. Farnsworth built the first one when he was just twenty-one" (Green 119). The factual footnotes accent the identity of the protagonist as an intellectual character.

Certain footnotes include word translation. One of the central themes of the novel is Colin's Eureka moment which is the first footnote in the novel translated as "Greek: 'I have found it'" (3).

Occasionally, the author also translates culturally specific items which is apparent when he translates the word Zakat to "Giving to the poor, one of the pillars of Islamic faith" (196). Referring to high culture languages like Greek or Latin is frequent in postmodern texts such as James Joyce *Ulysses* (1920). Moreover, due to the cultural hybridity and heterogeneity of postmodern society, the use of a multiplicity of languages reflects the inclusion ideology of the author. Green comfortably conveys the Islamic culture of the protagonist's best friend, Hassan, from whom Colin also learns. The last type of footnotes upholds the idea of metafictional narratives. Green intentionally follows the line of thought of Colin, making the narrative self-referential. It is challenging for Colin to socialise, and yet he creates a list of what may sound not interesting to other people so that he can manage everyday conversations; the footnote elaborates on the list that "among many, many others, the following things were definitely not interesting: the pupillary sphincter, mitosis, baroque architecture, jokes that have physics equations as punch lines, the British monarchy, Russian grammar, and the significant role that salt has played in human history" (26). The footnote also confirms the rigid identity of the protagonist as a nerd even during casual conversations. The nonlinearity of narratives is also made self-referential through footnotes. For example, he mentions an ambiguous event at the beginning of the novel and then refers to it in the footnote as "More on that late" (6), ensuring the circularity of narrativity.

Fiction writers customarily do not include footnotes because the readers are expected to interpret the meaning of narratives by themselves, considering that meaning is fluid and not fixed. Here comes John Green's plot twist. He uses footnotes throughout the novel except for chapter fourteen and the last chapter; chapter nineteen. When Green refers to the fixed identity of Colin that hinges on social and custom expectations, he uses footnotes that automatically direct the reader to other texts and expectations that Colin should meet, assuring the deferral nature of texts. Green makes the novel ingeniously conscious of its intertextuality using footnotes alluding to the idea of Derrida:

> There is no original meaning outside of signs, and signs do not possess clear and fixed meanings. Here the production of meaning in the

> process of signification is continually deferred and supplemented so that meaning slides down a chain of signifiers abolishing a stable signified. Words carry multiple meanings, including the echoes or traces of other meanings from other related words in other contexts. (Barker xviii)

However, when he touches on the unique experience of Colin and his transformation into a more flexible identity, he does not use footnotes because there is no outside text that can explain that unique experience. In this context, when juxtaposing chapters fourteen and nineteen with other chapters, pastiche reflects both the break from and necessity of traditions at the same time. It is indispensable for Colin to be self-conscious and to understand his place in the postmodern society. Moving away from traditions to construct his own conception of the world, on the other hand, secures the unique postmodern experience and ensures its historicity. Lindsey rethinks the relationship between the individual and traditions, she says to Colin in the cave,

> I was thinking about your mattering business. I feel like, like, how you matter is defined by the things that matter to you. You matter as much as the things that matter to you do. And I got so backwards…All this time, there were real things to care about…You just get caught in being something, being special or cool or whatever, to the point where you don't even know why you need it; you just think you do." (200-201)

Traditions should not define the individual; instead, the individual draws on history – symbolised in the things that matter to him – to serve his own needs. Contrary to pastiche, parody devalues other texts, styles, and techniques using irony and humour to ascertain the postmodern identity and subvert the authority of traditions (Constable 48). Colin aspires to develop a theorem to predict future dumpings using mathematical functions and formulas. The variables of the equation are the result of variations in his past relationships. The attempt proves promising in the beginning as the variables seem fairly predictable. Psychologically speaking, age, popularity, breakup initiator, and introvert/extrovert personality types all influence people's relationships with others (Corr and Matthews).

Unlike Adam Smith and Auguste Comte, who believe that societies are mimics of the predictable nature (Turner, Beeghley, and

Powers), the postmodern project is primarily intrigued by the individual as a product of language and discourse (Sheehan 22-25). This also explains the emotional bond between Colin and anagramming. Colin seeks refuge in language play whenever he experiences inner turmoil. For example, when Katherin XIX served ties with him, he read a letter she had written for him, where she says at the end "yrs forever" after that "He anagrammed 'yrs forever' until he found one he liked: sorry fever. And then he lay there in his fever of sorry and repeated the now memorised note in his head and wanted to cry" (7). Moreover, Green was conscious of the impact of this technique within the postmodern context as he remarks in the appendix section of Q & A with JOHN GREEN,

> anagrams say something about the malleability of language. We always think of language as an immovable object, as this set of codified and unbreakable rules. But when you consider that one can rearrange the letters in PRESBYTERIANS and spell BRITNEY SPEARS, it reminds us that language (and the stories we tell with language) can be twisted and molded. Words are not static. Language shapes our memories, and it is also shaped by our memories. Also, I can't think of a talent that is more simultaneously impressive and useless than anagramming. (234)

Within this idealist epistemology, society and human behaviour cannot be paralleled with nature. They cannot be measured or predicted, as language and meaning are in constant deferral (Barker 52). Green reveals that, although the variables may seem predictable, they are in constant flux and cannot be fully captured. One aspect that substantially alters any mathematical equation when applied to human behaviour is human memory, which proves to be flawed. When Colin fails to remember what happened with one of the Katherines; Katherin III, he realises that social predictability is unattainable due to memory imperfection for "The moral of the story is that you don't remember what happened. What you remember becomes what happened" (207-208). Green, therefore, mocks the impossibility of capturing the constant actualisation/ imperfection of human memory by scientifically static mathematical formulas, which creates a sense of frustration and futility for Colin and highlights the emotional weight of his quest.

Derrida's concept of *différance*, in addition to what has been mentioned earlier, means "both a difference and an act of deferring,

to characterise the way in which linguistic meaning is created rather than given" (Britannica). It presents itself by ridiculing the essentialists' strict definitions and classifications. Green foregrounds the irony of the intransigence of naming and Colin's thinking, contrasting it with the fluidity and flexibility of what those labels and viewpoints attempt to capture. Colin insists on having relationships only with girls named Katherine. On the other hand, his clinging to the name Katherine meant clinging to his identity as well, reflecting his desperate need to control his surroundings to prove his own, unique existence. The irony is despite the resemblance of the name, each Katherine emanates different attributes, reflecting an anti-essentialist ideology of Derrida that meaning is in constant flux. For example, Katherine III was a brunette and a child prodigy, just like Colin. Katherine IV was a redhead who was very skilled at playing the violin, unlike Colin. The concept of *différance* also resolves the contradiction between the teleological nature of coming-of-age novels and postmodern fluidity and fragmentation. The coming-of-age novel follows the protagonist to reach maturity. However, since postmodernism commits itself to undermining existing mainstream structures, it causes the term 'maturity' to slip. What does it mean to mature in this sense? Is it what society expects the individual to achieve at a certain age, or what Green uniquely conveys in the emotionally charged chapters fourteen and nineteen? Derrida's maturity is being aware that meaning can never be fixed, and this is precisely what Colin arrives at by the end of the novel translated into his relationship with Lindsey.

The analysis may lead to a slightly subtle stance by Roberta Seelinger Trites in her renowned book *Disturbing the Universe: Power and Repression in Adolescent Literature* (2000). Trites posits that postmodern YA fiction complies with the *Entwicklungsroman* (10). *Entwicklungsroman* is a novel that aims at reaching growth rather than the maturity of the Victorian or *Bildungsroman* novels (9). The growth stems from the protagonist's acceptance of society as being the product of Capitalism, where capitalism implies both interconnectedness with capital institutions and endless opportunities; she remarks "Institutions both empower and repress adolescents in the ways that they create new opportunities for teenagers while they simultaneously establish rules within which the

teenager must operate" (xii). Power and repression are also central to Michel Foucault's contribution to Postmodernism. Foucault invests in the notion of subjectivity as opposed to essentialists' rigid conception of identity. He believes that the individual is the product of different capitalist powers that may empower, or otherwise, repress him/her. Heyes explains his idea as "'The subject' (le sujet) is not simply a synonym for 'person'; instead the term captures the possibility of being a certain *kind* of person, which, for the theorists who tend to use it, is typically a contingent historical possibility rather than a universal or essential truth about human nature" (159). This is most clearly demonstrated in Colin's construction of his reality although being influenced by notions of truth. Before Colin's growth, he wanted to meet certain expectations while he himself was unconsciously having his own definition of the world. For example, the way he defines dumping is different from the common definition of the term, this mainly reveals how confused Colin was at the beginning of the novel, so much so that he relied on radical definitions as a way to compensate for the uncertain feelings that overwhelmed him.

Entwicklungsroman recapitalises the debate by positioning the novel within postmodernism. The protagonist, Colin Singleton, grows not by rejecting social norms and institutions towards transcending his separateness, but by being connected to them and accepting the possible opportunities they offer. The last sentence of the novel reads, "Colin's skin was alive with the feeling of connection to everyone in that car and everyone not in it. And he was feeling not-unique in the very best possible way" (Green 215). Colin finally realises that everything is connected, and he cannot take delight in his isolation. Nevertheless, there are best possibilities within this connection which make the individual different but not separate. This recognition signifies a postmodern shift from an essentialist identity to one that is fluid and shaped by interactions and discourse. By embracing interconnectedness, Colin finds a new understanding of self that resists fixed definitions and acknowledges the complexity of human relationships. He finally resolves his inner contradictions, making him comfortable in his own skin; something that allows him to take risks and seize opportunities within a capitalist society.

John Green's novel *An Abundance of Katherines* embodies the postmodern novel par excellence. Despite the simplicity of the plot structure, Green uses multiple techniques to erode essentialism. Pastiche, through the borrowing of academic footnoting, does not merely serve as blank imitation, as was widely accepted; rather, it supplements the text and, at the same time, invigorates the unique experience of the postmodern condition, proposing a semantic shift. Parody mocks the authority of traditional spaces by equating them with the exactitude of mathematics, which ineluctably fails to predict human behaviour. Colin's obsession with girls named Katherine to validate his identity alludes to Derrida's concept of *différance*, where Colin's attempt is vehemently contrasted by the diversified attributes of the different Katherines, denoting the impossibility of capturing meaning through definitions. The novel stands as a testament to the struggle between expectation and Foucault's subjectivity, where the unique experience of individuals can never be predicted because individuality does not epitomize traditions; it rather appropriates them. Finally, *Entwicklungsroman* proves to be the best genre representative of Colin's quest for subjectivity in a capitalist postmodern society.

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[1] To be is to be perceived.

2.

Awakening into the Absurd: Renegotiating with Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus* with Special Reference to Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*

Tejoswita Saikia and Nasmeem F. Akhtar

Abstract

Suicide is one of the most important and perplexing issues that condition the discussions on the value of a human life. *The Myth of Sisyphus* (2000) by Albert Camus is a monumental work of philosophical contextualisation of suicide, which is indispensable for understanding the issue beyond the statistical and impersonal approaches of psychiatry. The sociological imports derived from this work have profound implications in addressing the issue from multiple fronts. However, the masculine authorship of the text problematises the discussion embarked upon because the existential crisis of women in a world that is inimical to their agency is offhandedly disregarded. In fact, in his work, the phallogocentric predisposition of Camus renders it inadequate to understand the issue of women's suicide, which nevertheless has been sought to be negotiated by women writers remarkably. This article attempts to juxtapose the limited nature of Camus' work compared to the alternatives of exploration and comprehension facilitated by women's texts with special reference to Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* emphasising the diversity of contexts and implications of suicide for women.

Keywords: Suicide, Women, Albert Camus, Kate Chopin, Feminism

Suicide is one of the most shocking manifestations of the complex mire of emotions that a person is constantly battling against, trying to find a ground of respite but slipping deeper into a haze of incomprehensibility. While researchers have surrounded the issue with diverse projections of sociological, economic, political, psychological, cultural, moral and spiritual associations, a complete and inclusive understanding of that one overpowering impulse of motivation that pushes a person over the edge in defiance of the most

primeval of instincts of self-preservation, remains elusive. The question that resonates through the uneasy silence at the end of every exhaustive discussion on suicide is – what is this profound moment of "awakening" when one decides to commit to the act of absolute self-annihilation, whether as an escape, a sacrifice, or an ultimate assertion of selfhood and agency? Perhaps it might as well be so; the haunting silence leaves room for deliberations on alternatives, disallowing the imposition of a well-versed structure from the outside of which man has remained the self-proclaimed master. Notwithstanding the resistance of the act of suicide itself, scoffing at the voyeuristic witness(es) against the definitions within which the former is sought to be arrested by the latter, it is indispensable that the effort to answer the cardinal question regarding suicidal motivation continues. Taking a cue from what Camus insists on in his *The Myth of Sisyphus*, although in a testimony resolutely denying suicide as a choice to be exercised under any circumstance, continuing explorations through conflict-ridden areas under scrutiny would enrich our experiences. Revisiting suicide as a text shall enable us to arrive at multiple junctures of alternatives and understandings that will illuminate and enliven differential perspectives of which we have been unaware, even if our desired resolution eludes us. Camus' essay remains one of the seminal texts that explores the issue of suicide from a philosophical standpoint, which nevertheless has an irrefutable relevance to the sociological concerns regarding suicide. In the essay, while Camus affirms the absurdity that undeniably plagues the human condition, his main agenda is to answer whether this absurdity is to be escaped through hope or suicide. Camus locates the philosophical "man" in search of the "true purpose" underlying his existence within the absurd condition that denies him that fulfilment, whence he begins to question the veracity and rationale behind his existential condition leading to the ultimate crossroad where he must decide to either end his anguish through suicide or heroically continue to wrestle with the absurd condition despite his awareness of its futility.

According to Camus, absurdity begins with the realisation of the unfamiliarity of the world around men. Explaining the alienation that men feel from the world that they had tried to, albeit unsuccessfully, define and structure, Camus says that the moment the world rejects

men's anthropocentrically rooted comprehension of it, the world becomes "inhuman" seizing his power to superimpose the artifice of his "images and designs" (Camus 12) on the world that is external to him. Almost in a lament, Camus declares that as the world resumes its unique originality, it "evades" the understanding of men because men insist on familiarity by "reducing it to the human, stamping it with his seal" (Camus 15). This loss of comprehension of a world that resists any attempt at being arrested within a structure constructed by man is what instigates nihilism, leading to the ideation and/or the act of suicide in men. So, even before Camus arrives at his celebratory affirmation of a futile but persevering rebellious existence in constant conflict with the absurd condition in opposition to the defeatist surrender of suicidal attempt, he makes two assertions that potentially subject his implicit contextualisation of suicide as a gendered "intellectual malady" (Camus 3) to critical scrutiny. He admits to the hegemonic superimposition of the patriarchal anthropocentric discourse by men on a world that is externalised as the 'other'. Consequently, Camus declares that it is the desperate need to escape the agonising internalisation of the sterile conflict between the desire to dominate and the recognition of its futility that sprouts the ideation of suicide in men afflicted thus.

As one of the most influential philosophical texts on suicide that has significant sociological ramifications, *The Myth of Sisyphus* nevertheless raises serious doubts regarding Camus' understanding of women's existential crisis and the contexts and conditions of their suicide. It is evident that when meditating on the "one truly serious philosophical problem" (Camus 5) of suicide, Camus chauvinistically refuses to consider women as the subject of his philosophical discussion, insinuating that women are devoid of the intellectual potential that could make them susceptible to the philosophical conundrum of dealing with the contemplation of suicide. In this, Camus echoes the fallacious assertions of Durkheim, who condemns women to an intellectually subhuman category that largely "protects" them from the afflictions of the mind that lead to suicides in men. Given this blatant disregard, the foundation of Camus' thesis – the cause and the resolution to the problem of suicide, belies an intellectual and philosophical perspective that is deeply entrenched in the phallocentric discourse of the supremacy of masculine

constructs. Reflected in Camus' oblivion to women's suicide is the fact that silence pervades women's texts - their lives and their deaths. Even when something as profound to humanity as suicide is sought to be understood, mystified, or demystified, women's suicide remains an obscure deviation of the deviant gender. While men's suicide is gloriously philosophised as an intense outburst or silent surrender of an overburdened soul, a woman is judged to be capable of only hysteria borne out of her "lack", her envy of the phallus. For instance, in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1994), the family physician of the Pontelliers, Doctor Mandelet, initially suspects Edna Pontellier's "peculiar" (Chopin 63) behaviour to be the result of a hereditary psychiatric condition warranting the intervention of a psychologist because it is only "neurotic" women who are insubordinate (Gilbert and Gubar 61). The alternative rationale that is more plausible as per the misogynistic indoctrination of society has the doctor mock the change as a passing whim common among women who are predisposed to be whimsical and peculiar due to their gender, which the man must not pay much attention to. The stereotypical dismissal of the philosophical/intellectual potential of women evident in this example not only prefigures Camus' apathy towards women's suicide but also conditions the pernicious transformation of such stereotypes into archetypal paradigms, especially when decreed by an authoritative representative figure of masculine rationality and reason. It is therefore critical that the "submerged plots" (Gilbert & Gubar, xxiii) of women's texts like Chopin's *The Awakening*, which recuperate the woman as subject from the abuses of the disparaging masculine hegemonic discourses, be retrieved and reclaimed for their nuanced exploration of a woman's existential condition and the rich incongruities entailed by her desire to seek, even if through self-inflicted death, an agency beyond the life exacted from her by the society. *The Awakening* is an important text that offers a potent counter-narrative to Camus' gendered notion of suicide and facilitates an enquiry into the complex human/nature relationship, which for men is the cause of the absurd condition, as well as of the connotative dynamism that suicide implies from the feminist perspective.

In order to embark on a critical scrutiny of Camus' ideas on suicide as enunciated in *The Myth of Sisyphus* from a feminist

perspective, it is important to stop at all the moments of declarations made by the philosopher and highlight at each point of these crucial junctures the limitations of his assertions vis-à-vis a woman's experience of her existential condition/crisis and her cognisance of suicide with its multiple possibilities. Although Camus acknowledges the critically flawed and illusory nature of the power derived by men from their phallocentric anthropocentrism, his attempt to present the non-human world as something that actively withdraws itself from the cognitive potential of men reinforces the xenophobic discourse of binary opposites, which the bedrock of patriarchal hegemony. It is important to highlight here that the statement – "All thought is anthropomorphic" (Camus 15) underlines Camus' reinforcing of the specifically "natural" world as clearly disparate from and external to that of humans, more so because while human relations are controlled by patriarchal hegemonic discourse, the natural world constantly challenges such assertion of masculine authority. Thus, the premise of Camus' delineation of the absurd condition predicated on the construction of the non-human world as antithetical to men and thereby forcing men into a vortex of alienation and disillusionment is problematic in so far as it refuses to recognise any other form of manifestation of meaning and, by extension, of existence, that the phallocentric discourse cannot comprehend. The apparent disjuncture between the natural world and the world of man and the absurd as a condition of the perpetual conflict between them overlooks the existential condition of women enriched by their acknowledgment that being human does not place them outside and in opposition to nature. On the contrary, the feminine consciousness recognises that the two are organically connected to each other, their plenitude and diversity resonating in each other. The feminist perspective revels in the mysteries inherent in nature of which the human world is inseparable (Gaard 134). This, nonetheless, does not refer to an essentialising equation of women with nature. They are allies in their resistance against masculine exploitation. Chopin engages in a complex narration of the relationship between women and nature, both their own entities with agency, alluring each other with the creative potential inherent in each. At Grand Isle, the "sonorous murmur" of the sea inviting Edna, with "a loving but imperative entreaty", into its close, "sensuous"

embrace (Chopin 3), is a call to Edna's awakening that only she can hear.

Contrary to regressively equating femininity and nature and essentialising the former as an embodiment of the latter's obligatory nurturing propensity, Chopin witnesses Edna hear, loud and clear, the urgent whispers of the sea because she has ceased to pay attention to the clamour of the society that confine women within the perniciously deified notion of the "mother-woman" (Chopin 9). The "seductive" sea "enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace" (Chopin 14) allows Edna to experience her body with a passion that she had never felt before and as she dives into "abysses of solitude" concealed in the cavernous depths of the sea, where her soul loses itself in "mazes of inward contemplation" (Chopin 14), does Edna awaken to her "self". The sea is an accomplice of Edna's, abetting her escape from "her" absurd existence shackled within the society structured by masculine rationality and hegemony. Such an understanding of the existential question means that women do not seek to arrest the relationship between themselves and nature within the "master-slave" narrative, defining the non-human world within fixed meanings that ensure homogeneity and unilaterally structured ideas that, on the other hand, enable men to create the illusion of their power and dominance. So, while, as highlighted by Camus, suicide becomes a possibility for the man when he fails to rationalise the world with reason, becoming conscious of the absurd condition, women find in the inscrutability of the nature-world the possibility for multiplicity and celebration.

Since the premise of the absurd condition, which foregrounds any thought of suicide as defined by Camus, is flawed from a feminist point of view, the resolution that Camus provides – the resolve to live as a revolt against this absurd condition is problematic as well. Having admitted to the fact that the absurd is the confrontation between the irrational desire of man to know the world in terms of his constructions and thereby be its master and an indecipherable world that defies any such imposition of power, leaving a man with hopeless anguish, Camus refers to the moment when a man resolves to participate in the absurd by being in a constant state of conflict with it, as one of sudden and extreme consciousness. Once this consciousness is achieved, a man cannot

escape the truth that his existence is marked by hopelessness and anguish that we cannot reject but must suffer through. It is this moment that brings forth the ultimate question of suicide for a man thus afflicted. Attempting to answer this question with what seems to be an almost didactical renunciation of escape by suicide, rejecting any attempt to rationalise the irrational condition of the absurd, Camus glorifies the unyielding resolve to continue to exist, without hope, as one of revolt borne out of the ultimate awakening. Notwithstanding the grandiose rhetoric of rebellion that exalts the tenacity to continue to exist in revolt against all futility, it is a reassertion of the masculine construct of an antithetically structured world. The analogy of the conqueror used by Camus to glorify the resolve to provoke fate despite his lucid awareness of the certainty of meaningless death justifies the self-centric imperialistic mindset that destroys anything that seems alien and uncontrollable by patriarchal hegemony. Camus' conqueror stands arrogantly tall at the height of his grandeur, crushing the earthly revolts of the other mortals. In other words, the women in the conqueror's absurd world find themselves oppressed by the absurdity of another kind – their surrender to the violence of their mortal conqueror against which they are forbidden to revolt. When the masculine conqueror reigns in the "realm of mind" (Camus 67), it is made possible by slaughtering the minds of those who threaten him. It must be reiterated that the problem with the analogy of the conqueror lies in the use of a chauvinist, violence-vindicating, masculine code that might be understood to imply that women must acquiesce to their hopeless fate, their rebellion being their continued survival in servility, if we take the creative liberty to assume that Camus had indeed considered women worthy of his philosophical meditations.

Having conquered the mind, the absurd man, according to Camus, must insist on the defiant act of "most living" (Camus 45), referring to quantitatively experiencing life as much as possible as opposed to the quality of life being lived and comprehensively refusing suicide as a way to escape the absurd condition of human existence. He uses the analogies of Don Juan and the life of an actor, who constantly shifts from one guise to another, to stress the necessity of the absurd man to mount his rebellion against his condition by living through multiple experiences, all the while

knowing that the search for any qualitative fulfilment is futile. Don Juan resorts to the ephemeral comforts provided by different women without desiring the permanency of true love, an endeavour which for him is hopeless. On the other hand, the actor lives as many lives as possible through his multiple roles, not fixating on any of them as his shot at eternal fame, absolving himself of any responsibility that his roles mandate from him. In using these analogies, Camus suggests the subversion of any spiritual and/or ethical rationalisation of the condition of human existence, merely proposing that "[O]ne can be virtuous through a whim" (Camus 50). Such indifference to ethical duty necessitates the questioning of Camus' urging the absurd man to revolt against his condition by living in the constant state of conflict, anguish, and hopelessness, but with an attitude of self-aggrandisement which excludes the woman from this privilege. The masculine grandiosity that Camus ascribes to the dignity of the absurd man continuing his struggle of life in the face of definite defeat is evident from his disinvestment of any consideration of the woman residing in the same absurd universe but, doubly alienated by "her" absurd condition and, also by the absurd man who is not obliged to empathise with her. It may be argued that the stress that Camus puts on the resilience of the human will to strive for meaning in a world that offers none echoes of a righteous emphasis on the dignity of human life. However, this noble vision of prioritising the individual will with all judgments of morality being suspended for non-existent posteriority, which for the absurd man is meaningless, is perverted by the insolent reification of the toxic apathy of phallocentric egocentrism that it irrefutably instigates. This vicious cause-and-effect relationship is corroborated by the understanding that the amassing of quantitative experiences by the absurd man as the source of the resilience required to continue his rebellion, although futile, against his condition, is pervaded by capitalist overtones that encourage vicious exploitation of the marginalised through the systemic implementation of hegemonic patriarchal dominance on the socio-economic space. In this space of power politics, both within and outside the house, the "nature-woman" is enslaved as the "giver" of the resources that men need to fuel their pursuit of dominance. She is sub-human/non-human; she is the labourer on whose back the superstructure of the man's "absurd

world" stands, wherein he consummates his entitlement to ponder over deep philosophical questions.

Representation of women's suicide in literature such as Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, Momoni Raisom Goswami's *Neelakanthi Braja* (2011), among others like Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (2018) et.al. has testified that the anthropocentrically deterministic impositions of patriarchy force women to escape into the absurd universe in search of possibilities incomprehensible and hence forbidden in the masculine world. From a feminist perspective, one cannot accede to Camus' idea of suicide as an escape from the hopeless anguish of the absurd condition. *The Awakening* provides an insight into the absurd conditions of both the "conqueror" and his female counterpart, which allows the juxtaposition of the experience of the absurd by a man with that of a woman so that the multiple nuances that the act of self-inflicted death carries can be opened up for a dialogue. Edna Pontellier's "suicide" is often offered to be symptomatic of her guilt regarding the transgression she commits against her conqueror/husband and the society – an argument sought to be vindicated by Robert Lebrun's dissociating himself from Edna because the Creole society is disdainful of married women involved in illicit affairs with men. Aware that his desire for eternal love with Edna is doomed, Robert Lebrun might conform to Camus in continuing his journey for love in the company of other women, as implied by his move to Mexico. He silences his suffering to honour the Creole society that has empowered him with a transitory but immediate sense of belonging to his life. Robert's privileging of this instant satiation of his need for meaning instead of hoping for something greater is his resistance against the absurdity of the impermissibility of true love. Robert is the conqueror who draws his strength for "profound and constant thought" (Camus 68) from Edna's imprisonment in her absurd condition. However, for her, Robert's plane of survival is the absurd world she must challenge.

The absurdity of Edna's condition is that she is forbidden from indulging in the same transgressions that her husband and lover are allowed. While the absurd actor changes his guises to live through as many roles as possible, she must resign herself to the role of "mother-woman". Edna's prioritising of herself and venturing for "most living" is censured in the Creole society, where she is already an

outsider. Edna, too, desired to feel the "grandeur of the human mind" (Camus 64) as it passionately stood in defiance of the restraints of an "inhuman"/alienating world. Standing naked in the open at the beach for the first time, Edna felt the passions, sensuous and liberating, that she could feel neither with Robert nor with Arobin. She sought an ally in Robert and Arobin, ignorant that, much like her husband, they too are pontiffs of her absurd universe and that they are in a revolt against the cryptic non-human world where she will find her freedom. ""Good-by – because I love you." He did not know; he did not understand. He would never understand" (Chopin 109); Edna realised because Robert, like Leonce Pontellier, saw in her the weakness of the feminine flesh, puerile promiscuity, while she yearned to share and rejoice with someone the vibrant chaos of her wild creativity, her ability to be limitless "selves" that did not withhold from her psycho-sexual fulfilment. It is only while she swims in the sea, surrendering herself to its arousing and comforting embrace, that Edna feels liberated, even if for a transient moment before everything ends, into a world where transience invites celebration, where mysteries hope to be explored, where no one is an outsider, where deviance is a treasure, and where the ancient knowledge of the universe rests in ciphers and scraps. "How strange and awful it seemed to stand naked under the sky! how delicious! She felt like some new-born creature, opening its eyes in a familiar world that it had never known." (Chopin 109) The sea that the enterprising men desire to control becomes the elusive, obscure nature world that constantly evades masculine rationality and shocks the masculine hegemony with its impertinent indifference. For women like Edna, it is the space where they can register their protest and assert their agency because in here is manifested their primeval collective memory of a "home" that rejects hegemony and shatters all its alienating and marginalising constructs.

A lot of the criticism against Edna's suicide, like those in the cases of Anna Karenina and Madame Bovary, emerges from the nineteenth-century trope of feminine women's suicide, which presumptuously attributed the act to the guilty conscience of a woman who gave way to her feeble morality with sexual transgressions. Contrary to the opinion that Edna's visualisation of her children as exhaustion overpowers her, and she realises that she

can no longer return to the shore of society, it is not representative of her final attempt at absolution and her ultimate effort to free them of her disgraceful connection. Instead, she is freeing both herself and her children from the oppressive restraints that will lead to the replication of the tyrannical patriarchal hegemony that she had wanted her children to be free from. It is almost as if Edna had realised that despite her refusing to mould herself in the role of the mother-woman, and thereby enabling her children to find their autonomy and agency beyond the normative dictates of their society, they were entangled in the web of constructions, ultimately giving in to what was demanded of them – to "possess her, body and soul" (Chopin 109). In submitting to the call of the sea, Edna not only renounced her own subjugation but also made an extremely courageous attempt to give her children a chance to free themselves of an absurd world that lay in wait for them.

As Camus draws closer to the conclusion, he proceeds to empower the absurd man with that transcendent potential that will fortify man from the ideation of suicide to escape his absurd condition. He draws on Nietzsche to passionately reiterate his idea that by being awakened to the truth of the absurd condition, the absurd man might eventually find something worthwhile to live for – "virtue, art, music, the dance, reason, the mind – something that transfigures, something delicate, mad, or divine,'" (Camus 48), because to be able to decide to live is "his" prerogative. On the one hand, according to Camus, suicide is like the impenetrable darkness of a night called upon oneself. At the same time, the decision to live is a lucid encounter, even of despair, that might lead to "that white and virginal brightness which outlines every object in the light of the intelligence" (Camus 48). Camus' scheme against the absurd condition not only negates alternative possibilities that are much less characterised by disillusionment, but it also trivializes the sociological and philosophical motivations for women's "suicide", especially when considered in the literary context. The desire for lucidity even in the darkness of the absurd universe underlines the fact that Camus cannot break away from his phallogocentric indoctrination as he subliminally continues to push for a rationalisation of the incomprehensible darkness. The desperate need to derive any hint of power within the master-slave narrative, even in

an existential crisis, is distinct through his characterisation of hope with the oppressively feminised ideas of whiteness and virginity that shall facilitate the masculine desire to understand and control everything through "his" intelligence. Hope is feminised and transformed into a mere object that man can assert his ownership over by dint of "his" intellectual prowess, as implied by his analogy of conquest. Moreover, when Camus rejects the enriching possibilities inherent in the darkness and belittles this potential of darkness as mere "stirring lyricism" (Camus 31), he seems to be ignorant of the cavernous darkness that overflows with the creative principle symbolised by the womb, accessible to women, for they do not misjudge darkness as an antithesis to light and hope. This ancient and dark cave that shelters the collective cultural memory of the woman treasures in it the myths and memories that keep alive and throbbing the mysteries that kindle the feminine creative potential. This, however, should not be mistaken to imply an essentialisation of the creative principle as feminine. Camus and his absurd man cannot access this energy because the rationalising man has long forgotten the cave. Hence, as Camus confesses, the man has no memory of the "lost home" (Camus 7) from whence he had emerged into the world of his rationality and "light", and Camus is arrested by the lack of his memory of women exploring their existential question through fiction.

His neglect of the female artist further highlights Camus's phallocentric and phallogocentric compulsions. Taking his cue from Nietzsche, Camus rightly exalts the power of "'Art and nothing but art'" (Camus 68) as a relief from the absurd condition. However, the problem lies in Camus' glorification of the male artist living a double life through his art, where he replicates the absurdity of his existence while at the same time completely obliterating any possibility offered by the female artist to explore the very issue that lies at the heart of Camus' essay suicide. This is a potent reminder of the humiliating rejection that women writers have been subjected to, vigorously and recurrently highlighted in the works of women writers. In The Awakening, Edna Pontellier tries to express and resist the absurdity of her existence through art. Her art, like her swimming, symbolises her search for and awakening to a sense of selfhood that she had not found within the bounds of societal norms. She is as passionate about

her swimming as her art, resonating with the process of her realisation of her independent, individual identity. So, when she swims towards the immeasurable vastness of the sea, it is not with despair but with passion, for she feels a sense of freedom, which she had never been allowed to feel before surrendering herself to that cryptic, non-masculine world. The waves, like the serpentine coils of Medusa's hair that curl up to her feet, are an invitation for her from the depths of the sea – womb-like, nestling the "new-born creature" of Edna in the amniotic fluids that shall nurture her to speak with a new language.

In contrast to what Camus' idea of the absurd and suicide as an escape from it suggests, Edna swims into the infinite vastness of the sea, suffering through the anxieties of authorship, looking to redefine the terms of her existence. As she sinks into the unknown familiar world beckoning her, she shall reclaim from those depths the language where silence and voice coalesce into a tapestry expressing unspeakable desires. In the paradoxes hidden in the myths of her "ancient mother's womb" she will find the fecund diversity of consciousnesses ecstatic in their absurdity and leave behind "her" story to be retrieved and revived by another of her kind who comes searching. Edna, therefore, is neither Kirilov because she does not seek rationalisations for what has been construed as the answers, nor is she like Camus' absurd man who lives with indifference. Her suicide is not a sacrifice made to free others of their illusions nor an escape from the absurd. This absurd woman does not need God to validate her existence; she is her mistress, fearlessly taking a plunge into the unknown just because her passions seek new adventures, and if, in doing so, she ceases to exist, she would still have felt absolute freedom, an ultimate assertion of her autonomy at that moment which is eternity. Unlike the rational man whose idea of eternity relies on the presence of the "other" to revere him, Edna's eternity is the moment of her liberation because, beyond that, nothing matters, for nothing exists.

Although the importance of *The Myth of Sisyphus* by Albert Camus is unquestionably compelling, it fails to consider the discrepancies in the very existential conditions of men and women from a sociological and philosophical point of view. Camus' contemplation of the absurd condition with his comprehensive

rejection of suicide as an escape is dictated by the patriarchal hegemonic discourse that does not oblige any alternatives except the phallocentric understanding of the world. As such, women's texts must be retrieved from their forced obscurity as they engage "in a complex, sometimes conspiratorial, sometimes convivial conversation" (Gilbert & Gubar xxi) that echoes the multiple feminine consciousness across time and space. A women's text like Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* exposes the inadequacy of Camus' thesis in inclusively addressing the philosophical predicaments that haunt men and women. Here is a magnificent work of art that explores the absurd and its multiple manifestations that Camus failed to acknowledge. The implied author of Chopin, here, assumes the role of a flaneuse, observing the psychogeography of the Creole society where the extreme psycho-social stress felt by a woman in search of her identity must resort to disembodying herself so that she can swim away from the shores that hold her hostage.

In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus seems to be, quite literally, restricted to the myth of Sisyphus, the story of Merope's sacrifice submerged in the inundation of Sisyphus' glorification. The absurdity of her world, a nymph berated and betrayed by the mortal husband to whom she had unquestioningly devoted herself, only to be condemned for eternity, finds no recognition in Camus. Thus, while Camus suggests that Sisyphus rejoices in the nihilistic endeavour of rolling the boulder up the hill and so must the absurd man, a woman can hear and narrate the sighs of Merope's existential struggle. It is not unlikely that having been forsaken to suffer alone in her misery by a traitorous man, Merope would have chosen to roll the boulder over the cliff or abandoned it altogether, seeking new, enriching experiences, ready to author her own story.

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3.

Women and Body Politics: A Study of Select Short Stories of Mahasweta Devi

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Abstract

When discussing feminist issues, Mahasweta Devi is a force to be reckoned with. Women's oppression is a recurrent theme in her writing as she strives to bring about justice for women. Patriarchal ideology has created its own discourse around a woman's body. In a patriarchal society, a woman's body is not just something made of flesh and blood, which solely belongs to her. Instead, it is seen as a site where age-old patriarchal ideologies are imposed upon to oppress, shame, and control women. The politics involving the female body is a burning issue in a patriarchal society. This article deals with three powerful short stories by Devi, namely, "Draupadi", "Breast Giver," and "Behind the Bodice: Choli ke Picche," where she highlights the suffering of women because of being victims of body politics. The protagonists are oppressed because of their bodies. Their bodies are used and abused to serve patriarchy's purpose. Despite coming from different social strata of society, they suffer because of their bodies. Devi also presents two of her protagonists as resisting this oppression by using their very own abused bodies.

Keywords: Women, body, politics, patriarchy, oppression

Mahasweta Devi has been a tireless warrior fighting to give voice to one of the silenced sections of our society, that is, women. Notably, she foregrounds women's suffering irrespective of the caste and class they belong to. In the three short stories studied in this article, "Draupadi," "Breast Giver" and "Behind the Bodice: Choli ke Picche" from the collection *Breast Stories*, we find numerous commonalities: the protagonists are females, they are dehumanised because of their bodies, their bodies are politicised, suffering is their lot because of their gender, even though, interestingly, these three protagonists come from different caste and class. In these three select stories, we see that despite coming from the supposedly socially 'high' caste or

socially 'low' caste, the suffering of these women is the same. Devi, in this way, shows that the plight of women is not exclusive, and the women of the high class are no better than the women of the marginalised sections. Women themselves are the marginalised sections of a society where patriarchy rules. Arpita Mukhopadhyay, in *Feminisms,* comments, "Unlike Jews or blacks, women have never identified themselves as a minority group; they could never transcend the immediate context and have always lived 'dispersed' among men" (32). When it comes to women, their suffering transcends any caste and class barrier. Their bodies are used as a site where sexual politics plays out in a patriarchal society. Kanchan Mathur, in "Body as Space, Body as Site: Bodily Integrity and Women's Empowerment in India" remarks aptly, "The female body is a contested terrain all the world over. Constructed differently in different contexts, it remains a site where power is played out. Though the body is intensely "personal" in that it rests in individuals, its manifestation is shaped by the same variables that influence social relations, gender, age, class and ethnicity" (54). Sonya Andermahr et al. define 'body' in *A Glossary of Feminist Theory* in these words: "Feminism has a history of deep ambivalence towards the female body, which has figured alternately as the source of women's OPPRESSION and as the locus of a specifically female POWER" (25). "Body politics" is an important term related to the study of Feminist theory. In a patriarchal society, a woman's body is highly politicised as various forces try to exert their control and dominance over it. Patriarchy considers women inferior to men, which, in turn, gives rise to the view that her body is also something to be used, abused, commodified, and governed by superior powers. Nadia Brown and Sarah Allen Gershon, in "Body Politics," write, "Feminist scholars have argued that the body is both socially shaped and colonised. The politics of the body, different from the body politic, argues that the body itself is politically inscribed and is shaped by practices of containment and control" (1). In the stories discussed below, the female body is presented as a source of oppression. However, at the same time, it also shows the body as a source of female power in "Draupadi" and "Behind the Bodice: Choli ke Picche," as Spivak, in the Introduction to *Breast Stories*, calls Dopdi and Gangor, "the subjects of resistant rage" (viii).

"Draupadi" by Mahasweta Devi is an explosive short story as it explodes right at the head of the patriarchy and smashes it into innumerable splinters. "Draupadi" is an immensely potent and moving tale of a tribal Naxal woman and her resistance against the nefarious forces of patriarchy as well as social and political hierarchies. Shreya Chakravorty, in "Politics of Positionality: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Samik Bandhopadhyay as Translators of Mahasweta Devi," comments, "Draupadi" is significant as the story of a brutal attempt to stifle a mass, underclass movement by smothering the body of one of its leaders. It supplies the voice of dissent to innumerable individuals systematically subdued by oppressive establishment" (122). In this story, the eponymous protagonist is a Santhal woman. The story is set in the backdrop of the Naxalbari movement of West Bengal in the 1960s and 70s. Even though she is given the Brahmin name 'Draupadi' at birth by the high-caste Mistress of her mother, her name is tribalised, and she is known by the name 'Dopdi' by all and sundry. Dopdi is on the 'Wanted' list of the police as she is one of the accused in the murder of Surja Sahu, the high-caste landlord of her village. Dopdi is also a victim of the curse of bonded labour. The high-caste landlord-master (Surja Sahu) oppresses her and her whole generation. They suffer it all mutely with sad resignation at their unjust fate. However, things reach a simmering point when Surja Sahu refuses to share water with the society's marginalised sections during the village's drought. Consequently, Dopdi and her associates punish Surja Sahu as his inhuman behavior reaches its acme. They dispatch him, taking revenge for generational oppression, too. Since then, Dopdi has been on the run, frequently changing her identity and hide-outs. To catch fugitives like her and other such Naxals, the government splurges huge amounts of money as it fills the forest of Jharkhand with military force under the operation called 'Operation Jharkhani.' This operation is led by a callous army officer named Senanayak.

Despite all her ingenuity, Dopdi is ultimately captured. However, what they do with her after apprehending her is a tale of chilling horror and outright violation of law. Very casually, before going for his dinner, Senanayak orders his subordinates to "Make her. *Do the needful*" (31), which is a euphemism to gangrape her to extract all the information related to her Naxal companions. She is

disrobed and gangraped by the police officers, which leaves her half-dead. Her whole body is injured. Devi describes her painful condition: "Then a billion moons pass. A billion lunar years. . . Trying to move, she feels her arms and legs still tied to four posts. Something sticky under her ass and waist. Her own blood. Only the gag has been removed. Incredible thirst. In case she says 'water' she catches her lower lip in her teeth. She senses that her vagina is bleeding. How many came to make her?" (31), and further she describes, "In the muddy moonlight she lowers her lightless eye, sees her breasts, and understands that, indeed, she's made upright. Her breasts are bitten raw, the nipples torn. How many? Four-five-six-seven – then Draupadi had passed out" (31). Dopdi faints because of excruciating pain and exhaustion. After some time, she regains her senses, and again, the police officers come to repeat the violence on her body. This act of gangraping a tribal Naxal woman to extract information from her is the highest form of sexual politics of a doubly oppressed woman. Firstly, she is oppressed as a woman, and secondly, she is oppressed as a tribal.

On the other hand, the officers who violate her are doubly empowered – firstly, as men and, secondly, as agents of social power. Her body is used as a site of committing violent acts where not only patriarchy but the social and political hierarchies also assert their ideologies, their utmost supremacy and overpower her. In the Introduction to *Breast Stories,* Spivak says, "In 'Draupadi', what is represented is an erotic object transformed into an object of torture and revenge where the line between (hetero)sexuality and gender violence begins to waver" (vii). Since time immemorial, sexual violence has always been used to punish women and relegate them to their inferior positions. Using rape as an agent of torture has always been the discourse of patriarchy, of male supremacy. Senanayak too believes the worst punishment one can give a woman is rape. He believes this violation of her body will instantly break her physically, mentally, and psychologically, and she will give in. Spivak, in "Draupadi: Translator's Preface", remarks, "The men easily succeed in stripping Dopdi – in the narrative, it is the culmination of her political punishment by the representatives of the law" (10).

However, Devi presents her tribal protagonist resisting all the mighty evil power in front of her. She turns the table very

unexpectedly; she refuses to be dressed at the whims of her torturers after her violation; she walks naked confidently and presents herself to Senanayak with a laugh, saying "The object of your search, Dopdi Mejhen. You asked them to make me up, don't you want to see how they made me?" (33) She spits on Senanayak and pushes him with "her two mangled breasts" (33). Her confident body language and her fearlessness annul the patriarchy's ideology of using the tool of rape to weaken a woman. Samana Madhuri, in "Still I Rise": Reading Mahasweta Devi's *Draupadi* as a Feminist Text" comments, "Her unabashed display of her bloodied body and mutilated breasts accompanied by resounding laughter strips the phony sanctimonious attitude of Senanayak and the web of honour and disgrace woven by patriarchal society to ensnare women" (40). The last line of the story is a strong assertion of writing the female body and using it as a source of resistance as Devi writes, "... and for the first time Senanayak is afraid to stand before an unarmed *target*, terribly afraid" (33).

Mahasweta Devi's other short story, "Breast Giver", initially published in Bengali as "Stanadayini," deals with the theme of how motherhood is used to exploit a woman's body. The body politics here surrounds the hallowed ideas of 'motherhood.' The story underlines the suffering of Jashoda, who pays with her life for abusing her body in the name of motherhood. Jashoda gives birth to twenty children; some survive, and some do not. One can imagine the pain and tumults her body goes through because giving birth twenty times is neither a trivial matter nor a healthy thing. Her life is reduced to just being a breeding machine. She has no identity of her own except that of being Kangalicharan's wife and a mother to many children. The story's opening lines set the tone, highlighting the problematic identity of Jashoda: "It is as if she were Kangalicharan's wife from birth, the mother of 20 children, living or dead, counted on her fingers" (34). Her whole life has revolved around being a mother perennially, "Jashoda doesn't remember at all when there was no child in her womb, when she didn't feel faint in the morning, when Kangali's body didn't *drill* her body like a geologist in a darkness lit only by an oil lamp" (34). She produces babies in a mechanical manner. Her consent and her willingness to be a ceaseless mother are nowhere in this whole affair. Her youth is spent in a whirlwind of

ceaseless motherhood, which does not leave her any time to ponder her situation; as Devi writes, "She never had the time to calculate if she could or could not bear motherhood" (34). However, this ceaseless childbearing and the turn of events lead her to another unexpected tragic situation.

Devi presents Jashoda as a blind husband-devotee, to the point of being stupid. Even when her children starve, she does not blame her husband. Devi blames the conditioning of women through Indian myths, legends, and movies because they glorify a woman's sacrifice while, in actuality, they are merely exploited. Devi is scathing in these lines: "Jashoda is fully an Indian woman, whose unreasonable, unreasoning and unintelligent devotion to her husband and love for her children, whose unnatural renunciation and forgiveness, have been kept alive in the popular consciousness by all Indian women from Sati-Savitri-Sita through Nirupa Roy and Chand Osmani" (41). Devi says the woman is made a scapegoat in the name of familial devotion, whereas the man is always considered innocent and childish. She comments, "Such is the power of the Indian soil that all women turn into mothers here and all men remain immersed in the spirit of holy childhood. Each man the Holy Child and each woman the Divine Mother" (42). Jashoda becomes a wet nurse at the Haldar household to feed her family. Now, to earn a livelihood through this, Kangali suggests that she has to be pregnant all the time, which will lead to having milk in her breasts. This leads to a new episode in Jashoda's life, which plays an important role in her impending doom. She becomes a worker; she earns food for her family through her breasts. Also, one must mention that in this story, Jashoda is not the only woman whose body has been objectified as a mechanical breeder. The women in the Haldar household are also always engaged in breeding. In this context, Devi's tongue-in-cheek remark is: "The *lady doctor* and Sarala the midwife never leave the house. The Mistress has six daughters. They too breed every year and a half. So there is a constant *epidemic* of blanket-quilt-feeding spoon-bottle-oilcloth-*Johnson's baby powder*-bathing basin" (43). The Haldar sons find the idea of Jashoda as a wet nurse a reasonable proposition, as their wives will no longer have to breastfeed their endless issues and spoil their bodies. This goes on for a long time, and Jashoda attains a superior position in society for breastfeeding so many children and

for being so bountiful. She is called the "Mother of the World" (47), and "Everyone's devotion to Jashoda became so strong that at weddings, showers, namings and sacred threadings they invited her and gave her the position of chief fruitful woman" (48). Jashoda is so proud of what she does, only to realise years later that this has caused her breast cancer! This is Jashoda's ignorance of their bodily exploitation of hers. Devi avers that in our patriarchal society, women are put on a pedestal only to exploit them, to befool them. Kanchan Mathur comments, "A woman is identified primarily with her bodily functions, seen essentially as a vehicle for male sexual satisfaction and reproduction and its natural corollary, childbearing, rearing, and nurturing. Her entire life, her roles, her position and status in society, are defined by this primarily body function" (55). Years later, when all her biological and milk children have grown up, Jashoda loses her worth. Even her husband starts having extramarital affairs with a young girl, as her body neither attracts him nor can it bring food to his house any longer. Her body attains a productive value; it is rarified, and everyone abandons her when it loses its commercial value. As Devi writes, "Jashoda's good fortune was her ability to bear children" (56). Kumar Madar, in "A Story of the Breast Giver," writes, "Mahasweta's narrative is aimed at exposing the relentless collusion of patriarchal and capitalist ideologies in the exploitation of the disadvantaged" (826).

Due to her ignorance, Jashoda's breast cancer is detected at a much later stage, and she dies a pathetic death at a hospital. In her whole life, she suckles around fifty children, which is a gravely unhealthy thing to do. Her ending is heart-wrenching as she suffers from fever, ineffable pain, and the unbearable stink of her cancerous breast. As her condition becomes more and more hopeless, Kangali accepts the inevitable and stops visiting her at the hospital. Jashoda is betrayed by her false belief that what she had done was the greatest thing, but neither her biological nor her milk children visit her on her deathbed. She has her anagnorisis on her deathbed, "If you suckle you're a mother, all lies!" (61). Her most prized possession betrays her, that is, her breasts, her body. In the Introduction to *Breast Stories*, Spivak comments about the breast that "it is a survival object transformed into a commodity, making visible the indeterminacy between filial piety and gender-violence, between house and temple,

between domination and exploitation" (vii). Ultimately, she dies with no one from her family or any of her milk sons beside her. The last line of the story reflects Devi's anger at Jashoda for allowing her body to be used, abused, and abandoned as her seething words are these: "When a mortal masquerades as God here below, she is forsaken by all and she must always die alone" (69).

The last and third short story in the collection is *Breast Stories*. With this, the collection ends on a bleak note of documenting the body politics of women and the various ways of the oppression of the female body. Here, the protagonist, Gangor, is a downtrodden, poor Dalit woman who has migrated to Jharoa in Purulia to work in a brick kiln. Interestingly, her body is looked at through two different perceptions – all leading to her tragedy. Upin is a photojournalist who clicks her photo while breastfeeding her child, thinking it to be an aesthetic photo. He becomes enamored with her breasts, but his feelings are devoid of any lustfulness. He perceives her breasts only as aesthetic objects, as Devi expresses his feelings, "No, he cannot forget those *mammal projections*. It has become a seismic upheaval in his brain. Ujan! *There lies all the mystery*. How can this be?" (126) His friend Ujan thinks he is lusting after her breasts, but he reprimands him saying, "Learn to praise and respect a beautiful thing" (126). Upin's benign appreciation of breasts leads to Gangor's doom because after the photo is published, her own community and her village outcaste her. Her own family ostracizes her because they think it is a vulgar, obscene photo. Consequently, she has nowhere to go and ends up choosing the path of prostitution for her survival. Spivak, in the Introduction to *Breast Stories,* writes, "Upin made Gangor self-conscious about the unique beauty of her breasts, without any thought of the social repercussions" (xii). Upin comes with many privileges; he is a man from an elite class armed with education and a good life in the metropolitan city of Kolkata.

On the other hand, Gangor is crippled with her unfavourable circumstances – she is a woman; a Dalit; a poor labourer; and uneducated. Upin's privileges in a class-divided and patriarchal society bar his understanding of the life of a poor, marginalised woman. He forgets how a woman's breasts or her body is perceived in the patriarchal society. Spivak, in the Introduction to *Breast Stories,* says, "To preserve the breast as an aesthetic *object* by photography or

implant is to overlook its value-coding within a patriarchal social relationship: it is 'natural' that men should be men. It is therefore 'natural' that women should be modest, and not provoke, by making the living breast dance" (xii). After taking up prostitution, Gangor becomes a victim of sexual harassment by men around her, including that of police. Police brutality is a recurring theme in Devi's works. When Gangor does not comply with the sexual demands of the police, she is gang-raped by them. She reports the same and charges her culprits, but preposterously, she is put behind bars and is gang-raped again in prison by the police! When Upin meets her after she has gone through this catastrophe, she takes him as her client and shows her breasts. What Upin sees is evidence of only violence against a woman's body, and nothing sexual is there as Devi writes, "No breasts. Two dry scars, wrinkled skin, quite flat. The two raging volcanic craters spew liquid lava at Upin – " (137). Sonya Andermahr et al. define the term 'Violence against women' in *A Glossary of Feminist Theory* in these words: "Rather than seeing violence as the idiosyncratic behaviour of a few deranged men, feminist theory views male violence as a key element in male POWER over and control of women" (286) and "For many women male violence is inextricably enmeshed in the risk of state violence, including rape, murder and beatings in police custody (Rai 1996)" (286). Through rape, the police exert their supremacy over Gangor, a doubly marginalised woman. Gangor's life is ruined by men – Upin and the other patriarchal men of the society. She is eve-teased also by the boys on the road singing the vulgar double-meaning Bollywood song "Choli ke pichhe kya hai?" The Caretaker also believes that initially, she should not have refused the police because they are men and have their needs. In this context, one can quote Spivak, from the Introduction to *Breast Stories*, "In 'Behind the Bodice,' she [Devi] decries the supposed 'normality' of sexuality as male violence" (vii).

Thus, this story showcases how the whole patriarchal society objectifies a woman's body and how violence against a woman's body is so normalised when the police themselves become the violators. Kanchan Mathur says, "Women live in constant threat of violence; are discriminated against and exploited, are denied the right to spatial mobility, right to make informed choices over their bodies and sexuality" (54). Indian audio-visual media also plays a significant role

in normalising women's objectification and vulgar perception towards the female body as the very title of the story is taken from a famous Bollywood bawdy song that goes like "Choli ke picche kya hai?" The literal answer is breasts. The whole country plays this song with double-entendre and thus normalises and preaches the sexualising of the female body in society. In earlier Bollywood also, we find such songs where the female body is sexualised, for example, in the song "Are yaar meri tum bhi ho ghazab" in the 1965 movie *Teen Devian*, where the hero shows exasperation with the heroine for not covering herself with veil since she is a young girl now. In contrast, the heroine rejects covering herself and flits around like a free-spirited soul. This song also shows the attempt to control the female body in society.

Thus, these stories portray the horrible condition of women, which they face because of body politics because of their gender. To quote Nida Brown and Sarah Allen Gershon's words: "Analysing the body as a site where power is contested and negotiated provides scholars with the ability to examine the fluidity of privilege and marginalisation" (1). Women's bodies are used by the patriarchal society against them. Women have to go through ineffable suffering because of their bodies. In Dopdi and Gangor's case, their breast is forcibly taken away from them, while in Jashoda's case, she herself gives her breasts to patriarchy because of having internalised patriarchal ideas. Devi's stories are usually powerful to the core. The short stories are long and power-packed with more profound implications and weighty relevant issues. Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* points out women's predicament in the patriarchal society, "... women have never formed an autonomous and closed society; they are integrated into the group governed by males, where they occupy a subordinate position;... " (653). Therefore, Devi wishes for an overall restructuring of society and unity amongst women to stop the injustice meted out to them so casually because of their subordinate status.

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4.

The Burden of War: Examining Postcolonial Melancholia in *Blue Mimosa* and "Lahure Phool"

Bhanu Bhakta Sharma Kandel

Abstract

Blue Mimosa (Shirishko Phool) is mainly studied as an existential expression of an educated, modern, bold lady who could not make her life a fulfilling experience. The life of any character in the novel has not been characterised to be meaningful enough and has been expressed in the form of her knowledge of nothingness and absurdity. However, the main objective of this research article is to study the novel from the postcolonial point of view that the women and indigenous people have been more exploited in the war or by the colonial power than anyone else. However, some subaltern people have realised colonial exploitation, subordination, and subjugation, and they have developed their character not to let anyone exploit them like that of Sakambari. The postcolonial literary theory, with a special focus on the ideas of Leela Gandhi, Edward Said, and other postcolonial thinkers, has been used to read the text, and the bold characters of Sakambari and the war widow have been made to challenge the power of the people who try to exercise power upon the less powerful people. This article explores the themes of destruction, alienation, cultural displacement, unjust exploitation, and the shared legacy of loss caused by colonial power and its residue. The poem "Lahure, I want to Change Your Name" by Tirtha Shrestha criticizes the lahure culture developed among Nepali people and its adverse effects on family, society, nation, and the subordinate mentality of Nepali people.

Keywords: alienation, disillusionment, exploitation, subordination, suffering, war

Introduction

Blue Mimosa, a novel by Parijat (Bishnu Kumari Waiba), is regarded as a semi-autobiography of the novelist and the account of the effect of great wars. In the novel, the narration is made by the male

protagonist Suyog Bir Singh, a retired soldier of WWII who fought for the British army in Burma against Japan. He has a bleak expertise of the war and its aftermath on the soldiers and society. He has not married, has no family, lives a lonely life, and wanders around the city aimlessly. Though the pension from the army supports him, he leads a lonely life, feels completely alienated, and regrets his past because no one trusts him; he has done nothing good for humanity. He has the bitter memory of raping the innocent girls in Burma, living a beastly life, the hardship undergone while dragging the living corpse while returning to India. He feels sorry for surviving in the war. He has not been killed in the war even if he has remained an officer in the army, but he feels remorse for fighting for nothing good but killing others just for the benefit of the colonisers. Through the character of Suyog Bir Singh, Parijat has exemplified the dire situation of the soldiers who died, and those who survived have found it more challenging to live rather than die. The war has left them just as the residue of colonialism. Society has developed pessimism, and the youths do not see any better prospects for their future. The war has not only destroyed objects but has slain humanity in the people. The family members, especially the widows, have suffered more than anybody else in the war that has been well described by the poet Tirtha Shrestha through his protest poem "Lahure, I Want to Change Your Name," which expresses the widows' contempt against the war because he does not like even the lahure flower standing upright on her courtyard because it reminds her of her husband and adds salt on the injury.

Blue Mimosa has been read from diverse perspectives by different readers. Krishnachandrasingh Pradhan also comments upon the notion of meaninglessness revealed in the novel. (345). Indra Bahadur Rai, a well-known writer and critic of Nepali literature, has categorised the novel as an absurdist creation. He has claimed that the novel inaugurates the theme of absurdism and meaninglessness in Nepali literature (196). Krishna Hari Baral and Netra Atom have commented *on Blue Mimosa* as a pioneering novel that heralds the theme of nihilism and absurdism in Nepali novels (187). Murari Aryal contends that Parijat is a towering novelist of Nepali literature, and *Blue Mimosa* is an uncontested Nepali novel. According to him, the themes of absurdism and nihilism expressed in the novel affect

her understanding of the devastation wrought by the Second World War on human life (59). Simone Gautam has analysed the varied experiences of women as depicted in the novel and finds them influenced by feminist thought developed in the West during the sixties. According to him, Bari bears several persona petals (149). However, Arun Gupta asserts that over-reading the novel from absurdist and existentialist approaches has marred the novel's beauty (10). Another reader, Govinda Bhatta, on the other hand, finds the novel entirely worthless. For him, it is like a beautiful flower of paper written in a beautiful language that has no use-value (123-28). These are all obvious facets of the novel; however, the novel and poem both are byproducts of the war, and postcolonial study can dig out the effects and consequences of war on the people who were directly involved in it and those affected by it. It is basically library research that employs qualitative methods. Books, journal articles, critics' opinions, and texts themselves are studied in depth to discover the meaning and message of the texts. This mode of research has been adopted for reading texts and books. Critical insights of postcolonial theory and the opinions of critics and academics have been used to delve into the meaning of the novel.

According to Leela Gandhi, "Postcolonial Study is mainly the study of relationships of the dominance of the colonisers and the pain of subordination of the colonised and long history of colonial consequences" (3). In this context, Edward Said has argued that colonisation is a fate with lasting, indeed grotesquely unfair, results (Representing 207). According to Said, the colonial aftermath does not yield the end of colonialism; as Jean-Francois Lyotard has argued, "... it is both possible and necessary to break with tradition and institute absolutely new ways of living and thinking" (90). Gandhi highlights, "... the postcolonial dream of discontinuity is ultimately vulnerable to the infections of the residue of its own unconsidered and unresolved past" (7). According to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, the postcolonial study has blossomed into the garden where the marginal can speak and be spoken, even spoken for" (Outside 56). The postcolonial theory supports other revolutionary and political theories as Gandhi asserts, "Feminism and postcolonial theory alike began with an attempt to simply invert prevailing hierarchies of gender/culture/race, and they have each progressively welcomed the

poststructuralist invitation to refuse the binary oppositions upon which patriarchal/colonial authority constructs itself" (83). "Colonialist ideology is based on the colonisers' assumption of their own superiority, which they constructed with the alleged inferiority of native (indigenous) people" (Kandel 115). He adds that postcolonial writing "... resists colonialism's oppressive ideology by depicting the misdeeds of the colonisers, the suffering of the colonised, or the detrimental effects of colonialism on the colonialised" (116). Homi K. Bhaba adds in this context, "As the aftermath of colonialism, undergoing of cross-currents of fantasy and phobia of colonial power, the person feels... displacement, guilt, aggressivity... " (169). The consciousness of self, according to Franz Fanon, "is not the closing of a door to communication-National consciousness, which is not nationalism, is the anything that will give us an international dimension" (199).

Colonial power has impacted the genre of the novel as if it would not have been complete without the colonisers' influence, whether direct or indirect. Edward Said, in this case, asserts "... imperialism and the novel fortified each other to such a degree that it is impossible... to read one without in some ways dealing with the other" (84). "Women, as the people regard those of inferior rank, she asked, "Is there an "unpresentable subaltern class that can know and speak itself' (Spivak, Can the Subaltern 285). Therefore, the main objective of postcolonial theory is, according to Benita Parry, "... the constitution of politically conscious, unified, revolutionary Self, standing in unmitigated opposition to the oppressor" (30) that has been practiced in different novels written after the end of great wars.

Suyog Bir's Alienation

Suyog Bir Singh is a retired soldier from WW II and a survivor of a British Gurkha rifle that fought against Japan in Burma. He is almost forty-six years old and lives in a rented flat in Kathmandu. He lives a lonely life that suffers in itself; he says, "Simply to suffer in life doesn't make life meaningful. . . . All lives are meaningless" (Parijat 7) because he has nothing except Alienation and dark memories of war. He further adds, "I came back empty" (Parijat 7) because his experience is but just ".... running away with bottles and glasses"

(Parijat 7). As a soldier, he has learned to drink alcohol, and bottles and glasses have been his friends.

Suyog Bir is well enough and lives on a pension, but he does not feel a special love for any beautiful woman like even Sakambari. He expresses the hollowness of his heart, "Yes, I have become an old man. I do not feel passion of that young boy..." (Parijat 20) because, as he as he adds, "... I have fought among bayonets and bullets" (Parijat 23). He drinks too much, and in fact, he does it to forget the trauma of war and to mitigate his loneliness. He confesses, "I am an old man, a soldier, a drunkard... Suyog Bir Singh, old man, drunkard, soldier" (Parijat 25); a worthless person's life is like the burnt down ashes of cigarettes and emptied bottles of whiskey every night. The soldiers suffer not only on the battlegrounds; they are hated in society and disliked by the people. As Sakambari says, "Who can trust a soldier" (Parijat 38)? It makes Suyog Bir feel "... a chill through my whole body" (Parijat 38) and questions himself, "Is a soldier nothing but the symbol of distrust" (Parijat 38)? He is confused about whether he likes a girl or not or should love one.

He feels like people satirise him when they speak to him just to "... make my life sour. Having grown up accustomed to meaninglessness. I was indeed afraid of life "(Parijat 39). He does not know what love between a man and woman is, exemplified when he expresses," I do not know if it is necessary to love a wife. What a lie love is, what a joke, what futility"(Parijat 39). War has made him forget the essence of life. He had only a sour experience of living when he was a Lahure, "By my body, almost a corpse, kept on crawling"(Parijat 66); he has the experience of having humanity washed its hand from people. Suyog Bir does not see the meaning in other's life, either, because when Shiva Raj feels sorry for Sakambari's illness, he thinks, "For no reason this man lives in nothingness without meaning he escapes" (Parijat 83). He also runs away from Sakambari after he kisses her with his blue lips because his life has taught him not to be emotionally close to anyone in its real sense of love and togetherness.

Cultural Displacement

Nepal was never colonised politically by any imperial power. However, the Nepali people were involved in the great wars through

the British and East Indian armies, and the wars left a powerful cultural effect on the Nepali people, whether they were directly involved in the war or not. Girls started cutting their hair short, as Suyog Bir notices in the first meeting with Sakambari, "Her hair was cut very close to her head in the style of ancient Hebrew soldiers.... "(Parijat 3), cutting hair so short for Nepali women was not a usual cultural practice at that time. Smoking for a woman is not culturally acceptable in Nepali society. However, Sakambari is a revolutionary young lady who smokes a lot, "Seeing a thin line of smoke glisten in the sunlight and vanish, I realised that she was putting on a cigarette... " (Parijat 11) and talking to an unknown man very frankly are relatively uncommon for a Nepali woman of that time. She smokes excessively, as Suyog Bir comments, "Instead, I always found her with a cigarette in her hand. Sometimes, I teased her, "You will get cancer this way, Bari" (Parijat 32), but Sakambari takes it too easy and retorts him, "It will be welcome" (Parijat 32) despite the fact she already suffers from bad health.

On the other hand, going to a bar and drinking there is a kind of cultural displacement for Nepali people. Brahmins and Kshertriyas are generally not supposed to drink alcohol, and drinking in public places is taken as a cultural deviation. Drinking alcohol is common for ethnic groups and Mongol communities, but even they are supposed to drink at home. Nevertheless, Suyog Bir and Shiva Raj spend most of their evenings at a bar and go home only late at night after they get drunk. A soldier is not trusted in society because people think that they have cruel manners in personality and sexuality, especially being part of homosexuality. The soldiers are regarded as the source of cultural deviation in Nepali society through the practice of smoking, excessive and open drinking, and homosexuality.

Lahure as a Symbol of Colonial Residue

Suyog Bir is a war veteran and survivor, but his life is as disorganised as the war that devastated human societies. He is already forty-six years old but has not been able to get married and settle in a family. He indulges in unhealthy habits like excessive drinking, smoking, and regularly visiting bars. He is attracted to the girls but not the normal, homely ones. He prefers Sakambari instead of Mujura, a humble, homely, and normal Nepali woman because he has seen the

kinds of ladies like Sakambari who are supposed to be forward and modern. His life is as meaningless as a war when he expresses his pain, "Simply to suffer in life does not make life meaningful.... All lives are meaningless.... We suffer until we die" (Parijat 7). He adds, "I came back empty" (Parijat 7), and that war has left him just like a meaningless, useless dregs. War has spoilt his life; he realises this when he says, "Now,... what interest do I have in love or woman? What use" (Parijat 15)? because he does not have the experience of being loved, cared for, and looked after warmly.

When he thinks of getting married, even falling in love with Sakambari or Mujura, he hesitates even to propose to marry him because he knows "How easily she calls me first soldier and the old man" (Parijat 17) because Sakambari says openly that soldiers cannot be trusted. He feels that his life is fading as the "... mimosa flower is fading too (20); he realises that he is good for nothing and no one and adds, "Suyog Bir Singh, old man, drunkard soldier... " (Parijat 25) is the identity he carries on his shoulders. When he finds a void around him, he feels, "Having grown up accustomed to meaninglessness, I as indeed afraid of life" (Parijat 30) because living is useless, and it is not easy to die. The war has made Suyog Bir unfit for anything. He laments, "I wanted to find out whether my life had any value or not... whether I had grown old for nothing... I wondered, who can give me any value, who can give me importance?... What reward at the hands of mankind? Where is my refuge?" (Parijat 51) The war has left him good for nothing; he cannot do anything good for anybody, even himself. In this regard, he memorises the time of coming out of the Jungle during the war, "By my body almost a corpse, kept on crawling" (Parijat 66). The subedar's life has become a useless residue of colonial hypocrisy.

War as a Tool of (Colonial) Exploitation

War does good for nobody. It is just a tool for exploitation and destruction. Although Suyog Bir is an army officer and draws a good pension to make a living, he feels he is wholly exploited. He lives like a living corpse and resents it. People think he gets a lot of money and leads a luxurious life with the money he draws, but in reality, he suffers; he is entirely hollow inside. Wearing a uniform and carrying a gun does not make one strong, and being able to use power on

others does not make a person powerful and happy. Suyog Bir recalls his life, "You all think that you can have a 'good time' in the army. But there is a 'good time' is only folk songs and rum. There isn't anything else" (Parijat 7). The soldiers are constantly living under terror of being killed. They drink just to forget the terror because, as Suyog Bir says, "War means cutting up men who are just like us, that's all it is "(Parijat 7); the ones who can cut others are valorised as the brave soldiers that is just a futile an experience, "... it was just their duty, to cut went on be leading enemies already killed by bombs" (Parijat 8). People think killing the enemies is an act of bravery, but they forget that the one who is killed also is a soldier like the one who cuts. Even the soldier who survives the war feels empty, good for nothing, as Suyog Bir feels sorry for himself, "What do I have now? I am an empty urn. I am an absurdity" (Parijat 17), just meaningless, useless.

War is a crime against humanity, but the irony is that the one who calls for war does not go to the battlefield, and the one who fights on the battlefield has no power to call off the war; that is how war exploits the people, "The war we fight in someone's name, under someone's orders, is a crime committed by one individual against another. Every killer ought to write his crime on his forehead" (Parijat 27). It is how ordinary people judge the soldiers, but soldiers are the ones who are more exploited than anybody else. Suyog Bir says the soldiers are made to kill and get killed, "In the name of heroism we die, we sacrifice and are sacrificed" (Parijat 27) as if human life has no value, no meaning. The lahures are not only exploited, but they also exploit the weaker section of humanity, especially women. Suyog Bir memorises himself raping the young ladies in the Burmese Jungle; in the course of quenching sexual thirst and also perhaps proving heroism, "I plundered her to my heart's content. She looked helpless" (Parijat 58). It is reported in the roll call, "A Kachin buffalo herding girl was found on the ground, bleeding profusely; she was covered with bruises" (Parijat 59). It is what the war has taught the soldiers; it has taught them to be cruel. Suyog Bir gives another example of colonial cruelty exercised upon Matinchi, a Burmese farmer's daughter, "On her breast the bruises would still be painful but she would love even the pain of the Gurkha soldier's boot... " (Parijat 64). It is an example of the extreme inhumanity war has presented as a

gift to humanity. Suyog Bir, the veteran, exercises another exploitation on Sakambari by kissing her forcefully with his blue lips, and he eventually kills the protagonist. Suyog Bir's activities and their results are examples of colonial exploitation of the victims and the offender as well.

Women's Suffering in "Lahure Phool"

War destroys everything; the soldiers are killed or mutilated, and those who suffer the most in the war are women and children, the mothers or wives and children of the soldiers. The poem 'Lahure Phool I want to Change Your Name," written by Tirtha Shrestha, reminds the killings, destruction, and the worst effect of colonial hegemony that caused war in the world. The poem also reminds us of the 'Lahure' culture that has developed in Nepali people and the dreadful impact caused on the women, who are dependent on the soldiers and their earnings. The lahure flower is the dahlia, and it symbolises a soldier standing upright with his head high, wearing a special cap on his head, and guarding an army camp. The Nepali name Lahure Phool is believed to have originated either from the plant's soldier-like appearance or from its introduction to the mid-mountain regions of Nepal by lahures (soldiers), as many of the Gurkha soldiers in the British and Indian armies hail from this area.

The poem's speaker is a war widow who has lost her husband in the war, but the dahlia flower (Lahure Phool) in the yard stands upright as if the flower were a soldier guarding the house. She reminds her of her husband and feels infuriated by the flower because it reminds her of the war and killings caused by it. She reminds the time when she received the information of her husband's premature death through a letter bound by a cotton thread. She feels terrible herself when she realises that she depends on the pension of her husband, a lahure killed in the war; she feels sorry for herself, when she says:

> I can hardly think of a letter
> bound by a cotton thread, and
> my husband's lifelong earning- a pension
> reeking of corpse on which my life leans heavily
> Facing the door of this shelter where
> a poor widow like me lives
> how you bloom so shamelessly
> O Lahure flower! (Shrestha)

She is reminded of her stout and young husband when she looks at the flower and addresses it: "No more opening wounds, no more salt to injury" because her husband's death has caused her an incurable, lifelong injury in her heart. The most humiliating instance of the lahure life that is exercised on their wives is that it forces them to live a lonely life and makes them dependent on their dead husband's pension. The speaker wants to change the war scenario, the war caused by British colonialism at that time, or any other force worldwide. She does not want the recruiting of young boys like her husband and sends only the information of the lahure's death and declares intends to change the terms and conditions of the Sugauli treaty of 1816 between the government of Nepal and East India Company in which Nepal had lost a massive chunk of her land, had lost so many of her brave sons and the lahure culture began since then as Nepali youths began to be recruited in the British Gurkha army. The speaker represents all the war widows who lost their husbands during the war and expresses the desire on behalf of all the victimised women when she declares:

> Turning the folds of the wound, I want
> to change the history of treaty
> by easing the gapes of wound I want
> to stop this blood-trafficking,
> tear this black page of history and throw away
> Wait, o Lahure flower
> I want to change your name. (Shrestha)

Here the poet expresses the Nepal people's contempt for war and the people who signed the treaty but also condoms the Lahure culture that has not only sucked the blood of Nepali people but also has developed colonised, dependent mentality among Nepali people. The war widow cannot stand the presence of the "Lahure Phool" at her doorstep, which reminds her of the most significant loss in her life; instead, she changes the flower's name and calls it by some other name instead of "Lahure Phool."

Conclusion

The novel *Blue Mimosa* and the poem "Lahure Phool" I Want to Change Your Name share the legacy of the loss and lament the adverse effects of war in Nepal and among Nepali people. Nepal was never physically colonised by any colonial power. However, the colonisers developed feelings of dependence, subordination, and subjugation among the Nepali rulers through the wars and had an

unequal and unjust treaty signed. It created a kind of craze among Nepali youths to join the British or Indian Gurkha army in search of earning a livelihood and making families utterly dependent on the salary or pension paid to the soldiers. Nepali people slowly developed a mentality that they could not even make a living without joining the foreign army and serving foreigners, whether in the form of a room boy/girl (kanchha/kanchhi) or a doorkeeper (bahadur). This Lahure culture has developed servility and a lack of self-dependence among Nepali people. On the one hand; on the other hand, it has created frustration, alienation, cultural division, and cruelty among the survivors of war. The worst and most long-lasting effect of this influence of the colony and colonisers on Nepali people is that they have forgotten their glorious history; they do not believe that they can do something by themselves. Nepali people enjoy serving foreigners for a living who exercise political, economic, or cultural hegemony over them by making Nepali people and Nepali nationality completely crippled, hopeless, and helpless.

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5.

Affirmative Embodied Experience Matters: (Mis)Understanding and Representation in Digital Cancer Narratives

Jilu Jose Devasia and Lal CA

Abstract

Digital affordances reconfigure the perception of illness, revealing the cultural construction of embodied experiences. Though precarity and fragility deepen our understanding of cancer, the susceptibility to generate blame and misunderstanding reinforces panic in the afflicted. Self-blame subjugates individuals, perpetuating fear through falsified experiences and fabricated realities that homogenise personal experience of illness. Moreover, the manipulation of technomedicine to disseminate false hope and knowledge is significant. Conversely, digital narratives subsume shame, stigma, and silence and promote posthuman subjectivity, enabling fluidity in experience. The post-pandemic phase has opened up diverse platforms across media to articulate, interact, and convert one's feelings and emotions; social media platforms, WhatsApp groups, online blogs, and YouTube channels promote effective conversations. The tendency for an evidence-based understanding of disease remains dominant and illness marginalised; the concept of 'immunitas' emphasises biomedical discourses as indispensable and coercive control diplomatic. Drawing on select narrative accounts from TEDx and Advertisements, the article examines how digital cancer narratives affirm the lived experience, reclaim agency, and negotiate the interplay between power and knowledge. The reconfiguration of power dynamics provides inclusivity and relationality.

Keywords: affirmative, digital cancer narratives, embodied experience, power, representation

The ontological paradigm of digital humanities posits technology as a supplementary rather than intrusive entity that augments traditional notions of the study. The field of inquiry encompasses diverse perspectives from literature, philosophy, history, and cultural studies. It integrates critical digital studies (artificial intelligence, machine

learning), information and technology, data analysis, and computational tools in reconceptualising the world's perceptions. Digital health, a subset of digital humanities, involves using digital technology to make healthcare more efficient, accessible, and inclusive. Some primary vectors manifested in the field are Electronic Health Records (HER), healthcare commerce, telemedicine, mobile health apps, wearable and biosensing devices, digital medical devices, analytics/big data personalised medicine, gamification, and data visualisation. Besides, the discourse on bioinformatics is an emerging area of study where information about the human body is turned into data to improve health outcomes and control people. The veracity in accessing one's health becomes problematic when medical interventions involving technology detect hidden signs of disease, the screening strategy to find invisible diseases like 'HIV antibodies, tiny breast lumps, high lipid cholesterol levels, hypertension, precancerous cells, genetic markers for disease' (Lupton 99) make people appear vulnerable and fragile never than before.

At this juncture, critical inquiry like digital health humanities integrates 'digital technologies, health humanities, and medical humanities to address health-related issues, promoting patient-centered care and health equity.' It exposes the subjective experience of the patient undergoing any particular illness, providing a platform where the affected can share his/her notions of disease and experience of illness. It probes into how technologies can optimise health outcomes and create disparities among people. Technological advancement, especially in digital health through the medical humanities and literature framework, bridges the gap between knowledge and power in medical-assisted technologies, data-driven technologies, and people. The impact of information overload on our bodies, coupled with AI and therapeutic devices like Apple watches that monitor our pulse rate and glucose levels, raises concerns about the potential for manipulation and exploitation for commercial gain. Sousveillance and surveillance of bodies through technology empower and exclude the population gradually. Meanwhile, healthcare crowdfunding, unregulated telemedicine, digital health monopolies, and lack of transparency in health data sharing contain capabilities and possibilities of exacerbating disillusionment. While the negative implications are a growing concern, Paul Rainbow's

concept of biosociality examines the biosocial configurations of health developments through the 'intersection of class, gender or race, role of state and non-state actors or institutions including disease advocacy organisations, production of novel biomedical knowledge and technologies, generation of wealth and commercial interests in biology and 'life itself.' (Gibbon and Novas, 5) These widespread themes understand how biological and social factors affect individuals and collective identities. Power operates through individuals and communities where the need for protection, exclusion, connection, and inclusion becomes essential.

The wake of datafication and the production of narratives is addressed as a significant gap in digital health. Datafication involves converting into data aspects of the world previously not quantifiable, objective, and analysable compared to subjective and meaning-making narratives. Moreover, the visual rhetoric of illness has revolutionised social media platforms through paintings and advertisements. Advertisements portray the dangers of addiction, especially cigarettes and beedi, on people. Though the advertisements last a few minutes, their impact on catching the person's consciousness is remarkable. The present study attempts to unleash the politics of representation and how cancer care becomes a tool of coercive control rather than comfort. Though TEDx talks and advertisements on cancer highlight awareness regarding the illness/disease, the strategy of controlling the minds of the affected and instilling the notion of blame, shame, and guilt by promoting exclusion and hindering means of connection and making the individual feel marginalised and victimised have been in the forefront. '… 'Either Power negates life or enhances its development; or violates life and excludes it or protects and reproduces it; objectivises or subjectifies it-without any terms that mediate between them' (Esposito 46)

In the TEDx talk on 'How to change your perspective on Cancer,' popular oncologist Dr. V P Gangadharan exhibits the dominance of biomedical discourses and their role in reinforcing ideas about cancer. Cancer is perceived as solely biological and needs appropriate treatment and care, yet social phenomena like disgrace, self-blame, and stigma compound it. The conversation proceeds to how, in a reputed institution, he was described as a 'great doctor who helps

patients who are ready to leave this world and go to the other world (Gangadharan).' He emphasises the social reconfiguration of cancer as death and reengineering cultural norms and beliefs that impede the mindset of a large population. He insists his agenda is to eliminate stigma and fear about the treatment and claims that cancer cure is promising over time. He specifies how obituary articles often address heart-related issues as a consequence but eliminate reason as cancer since the disease/illness is seen as obnoxious and secondary; he suggests redesigning the aesthetics of cancer from crab to rose as essential, thus reshaping existing knowledge and cultural acceptance of power. Meanwhile, Gangadharan compares his patient's outlook to a picture that portrays dry or dead leaves as his/her impression of cancer; he establishes that the notion of cancer equals death gets materialised in the image. The doctor posits this view as negative and compares it to another image where he is glorified as St. Michael by refashioning the archangel to the doctor. The negative and positive sides of the painting are underscored. However, the phenomenological approach views each experience as subjective and an immersion of his/her feelings about the disease/illness that needs to be addressed. 'The writer's tale transcends the clinician's history because his or her language is charged with meanings. The writer of literature can evoke a vicarious experience of illness and suffering….' (Pellegrino xix)

The subjective experience of each individual is affected when he/she is facing a terminal illness like cancer. Gangadharan proceeds to distinguish the image as negative and follows a positive version portrayed by another person. The attempt to denote the stigma behind the disease is apparent, but the need to respect the views of the person affected is also essential, as there is a thin line between bright-siding cancer and living with cancer. Moreover, the appearance of living with cancer may sometimes subsume the hidden, invisible realities that the affected face. A closer examination of the intimate experience of cancer is revealed in the portraits that the doctor focuses on in his talk; digital storytelling thus opens a medium for representing these realities in subtle ways, and the framework of critical/medical humanities becomes the tool for underscoring the stark non-medical aspects. 'Stay positive is the refrain, as if it were a sin to voice the intense pain and suffering of

cancer patients. Why are we so afraid to tell stories of the majority who die? Why keep promoting the positive anecdote (Azra Raza 7)? The presentation is an example of how medical discourses fail to realise subjectivity. However, it is aware of the social aspects that threaten the person and spreads awareness meaningfully through digital storytelling where the audience is larger. The impact it can spread on the consequences of stigma becomes the need of the hour. 'If you really want to understand someone's politics, understand their cognitive load, how prone they are to snap judgments, their approaches to reappraisal and resolving cognitive dissonance. Even more importantly, understand how they feel about novelty, ambiguity, empathy, hygiene, disease and dis-ease, and whether things used to be better and the future is a scary place.' (Sapolsky 477) The biopolitical dimension of medicalising the aspects of cancer needs to be expanded, and the role of stories is inculcated, making room to expand conversations.

The recent breast cancer awareness ad by Yuvraj Singh Foundation, which situated women's breasts to oranges, has provoked discussions about how Indian society deliberately condemns women's breasts, as their vaginas and breasts remain taboo for discussion. While the advertisement was the product of an AI-stimulated image, the aesthetic representation of breasts as oranges trivialises and insults women's bodies; women are still portrayed as objects of desire rather than individuals with agency and aspirations, and the agenda of making women silenced of their body parts in public has been of the essential components of patriarchy to tame and make them appear vulnerable. The invisibility of the breasts in the advertisements indicates Indian attitudes and behaviors toward wrapping women's bodies, rendering them always hidden and a source of objectification. On the other hand, society denounced Jilu Joseph's advertisement about breastfeeding awareness in public, making it sensational. Rather than considering women's health to be prioritised, the scheme of considering it as disposable and docile is featured and produced through transmedia. The subjectification of women's bodies perpetuates the marginalisation and exploitation of the affected.

The practice of removing clothes before the doctors was a hindrance, especially for women; in contrast, Marunnu by Punathil

Kunjabdulla mentions a scene where a person comes to a physician and says that he has an itch in his private area. The doctor asks him to remove the undergarments, looks through them, and suggests changing them. The students who witness the scene represent no form of giggle or an aspect of shame but participate in the doctor's conversation with the patient. As Simon de Beauvoir suggests, the body is not a thing. It is a situation, embodied experience, relationship with the environment, and socio-cultural factors that affect the body. Siddharth Mukherjee mentions the story of Atossa, daughter of Cyrus, recorded by the historian Herodotus: Atossa had a bleeding lump in her breast. .." If Atossa had desired it, an entire retinue of physicians from Babylonia to Greece would have flocked to her bedside to treat her. Instead, she descended into a fierce and impenetrable loneliness. She wrapped herself in sheets, in a self-imposed quarantine." (Mukherjee 41). The 'private shame' associated with breast cancer has been prevalent and still exists in upgraded versions. Audre Lorde in *The Cancer Journal* posits that after a mastectomy, she was forced to believe that something was wrong with her in not wearing prosthetic breasts and acknowledging herself.

The accountability in addressing issues related to breasts becomes a growing concern when breasts are objectified rather than viewed as flesh and blood. The unburdening of shame and stigma associated with breasts happens only when society is empowered to look beyond the breast, a sense of responsibility in making women aware to prioritise their health, and ensure that breasts are not material for consumption and oppression. On a different plane, when men are affected with penile cancer, they face difficulty in opening up as there is much silence regarding how masculinity is thwarted forever. As Arthur W. Frank in *The Wounded Storyteller* exposes, not all stories are equal. A deeper understanding of the nuance of the statement reveals that accessibility to better healthcare depends on socioeconomic factors like income, expenditure, gender, and race. A closer analysis of breast cancer and penile cancer remains predominant in addressing issues related to gender, thus alienating specific experiences as invisible and reduced only to bodies. Furthermore, it is also poignant to address that educated urban women/men may have better access to healthcare than their rural

counterparts, thus producing a constant gap in availing healthcare resources.

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare exposes the adverse effects of smoking on the lungs through the advertisement 'Sponge.' The ads focus on how individuals who smoke are more prone to chronic diseases. The tendency to blame the individual is constantly reflected in the advertisement, 'The imputing of blame for illness based on the assumption that ill people have indulged in 'risky' activities means that the ill are forced to protest that they have done all they can to avoid its onset…Such a claim is demonstrating that in an age in which a lifestyle choice rather than an act of God is viewed as the cause of disease, the ill are placed in a position in which they must justify themselves' (Lupton 93). Advertisements signify cancer as the sole responsibility of the individual affected. Tobacco certainly causes a serious threat to our lives when consumed for a prolonged period, but the advertisements unleash to control and regulate the individual lives.' "Academic investigators could provide data about risks and argue incessantly about proof and causality, but the solution had to be political. 'The obstinacy of[policymakers]," he wrote," compels one to conclude that it is their own addiction…which blinds them." (Mukherjee 257) The regulation of the lives of cancer patients begins when cancer is represented only as personal rather than social; advertisements hardly address how the sick who have/had lung cancer are made to believe that the reason for their illness is only due to their intake of tobacco when the history of cigarettes provide a terrible story of how cigarettes were initially advertised understanding the psychological vulnerability that the person and means to manipulate them. When affected, ostracising the person regarding the disease is quite common. Hardly do advertisements reveal what it means to be affected by illness. When an individual is affected, the community becomes his/ her aid to recover the illness. Medical treatment plays an important role in tackling the disease. However, the healing begins when the individual is understood. Stigma related to cancer based on preconceived notions is one of the significant barriers. Though awareness regarding cancer is prevalent, the attitudes, assumptions, and behavior toward the illness are evident.

The systemic forces constantly drag awareness campaigns on cancer to spread panic amongst the masses. Even though they claim the potential of ads to raise responsible citizens, their primary aim is to instill fear in people's minds. The agenda of saving lives begins at the cost of losing one's liberty. Rather than exposing the bleak realities of regulating lives, expansion through notorious methods is done. Advertisements as a form of art convey the hidden dangers of tobacco but fail to address manipulation. Though packets of cigarettes instruct the person that it is harmful, the constant reinforcement of the ads in the theatres projecting a one-sided story of illness is political. Our understanding of the pathological is rooted in an awareness of the human organism's fragility-not simply its mortality. However, that has always and everywhere inspired fear of the ultimate loss of control, but its susceptibility to disease, pollution, corruption, and alteration are things that we experience in our own bodies and observe in others. (Gilman 23). The knowledge of human fragility and precariousness to the unprecedented crisis has made the logical construction of disease/illness fearful. The reification of sick bodies and visceral exploitation demands social justice and need for ethical concerns.

Diagnosis of cancer and treatment affect people in diverse ways; socioeconomic factors shape the perception of cancer. When the sophisticated have financial resources and get access to the best quality treatment, they maintain a positive outlook on cancer in life and share positive experiences through public platforms and social media. As they get better treatment, chances of survival increase, and becoming better can be attained. The issue addressed is the stigma of cancer that penetrates the lives of the affected invisibly and visibly. While the lower- or middle-class people struggle to cope with the available resources and fear of dying of cancer, the family and children become drastically disrupted by the diagnosis and cost of treatment. As the cost of cancer treatment cannot be managed, it puts their life at more risk, and even though they look forward to being positive, their situation fails. The philosophical framework of Agamben's concept of zoe and bios enables one to look beyond the realm of class differences and unleash the approach of viewing some lives as dispensable and disposable and others as qualified or distinguished.

To conclude, the article looks into the diverse representation of cancer in the media through popular media platforms, YouTube, and advertisements. The framework of digital health humanities features aspects of technologically assisted devices to enhance and empower society; the focus of the study assimilates health-related technologies employed for better access to healthcare and improving lives. Even though technological advancement has grown rapidly, the societal constructions of shame, blame, and stigma are still evident. Through TEDx talk and advertisements on cancer, the study focuses on subjectivity that asserts the patient's agency, autonomy, and accountability and the need for interconnectedness, inclusivity, and relationality with species that make this world a better place to live. The negative and positive sides of the painting are underscored, and the phenomenological approach views each experience as an immersion of his/her feelings about the disease/illness that needs to be addressed. The embodied experiences of the person affected matter, and each person's cancer journey is unique and intimate. Affirming their experiences allows them to express themselves without judgment and makes them feel worthwhile.

The advent of advertisements in spreading awareness of issues related to tobacco and cancer is acknowledged, but the harsh realities of cultivating victim blaming and promoting them as the true version of the illness are accountable for interrogation. Similarly, metaphors can be a way of transgressing knowledge on cancer but also have the potential to marginalise the person affected if not conveyed effectively and efficiently. Women's bodies are commodified as objects of desire and alluded to weird metaphors that require redesigning cultural interpretations of cancer. The deeply infantilising and 'cutesy euphemism' are representative of how stereotypes continue to minimize and trivialise women when affected by life-threatening conditions. The association of women's breasts in voyeuristic language needs to be rewired, and cultural constructions like shame, stigma, and silence need to be amplified, thus enabling affected individuals and people, in general, to be vociferous and culturally sensitive in creating metaphors. Therefore, in this era of misinformation and medical misogyny, evidence needs to be evaluated, and emotional contagion should be cautioned as huge chunks of information are available to us.

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6.

Post-Partition Identity and Memory of the Enclave in Short Stories from the Two Bengals

Mausumi Sen Bhattacharjee

Abstract

Whether in Bengal or Punjab, partition has been a raw wound that has never healed. Walter Benjamin's comment in the historical context of the holocaust Germany and its texts, "There is no document of civilisation which is not at the same time a document of barbarism" is equally valid for the 1947 partition of India; its aftermath possibly lingers. This article aims to analyse how the partition of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh and the post-partition event of pawning enclave land masses within the land, a nation within a nation is geopolitical the trope that is intricately connected to memory and, subsequently, both affect and effect an identity formation of the people subject to these events. I aim to explore by studying selected short stories about the "chitmahal or enclaves of the two Bengals that as memory is a live wire it only provokes, instigates, and generates "abjection," and identity is perpetually in a state of being beckoned by uncertainty, anxiety, and a sustained sense of pain.

Keywords: post-partition, identity, memory, pain, enclave literature

Imagining an undivided Bengal is not merely an exercise in cartographic reversal. It is a deeply affective act, shaped by memory, longing, and rupture. It is to remember rivers that once flowed freely across now-severed geographies, to recall a language and culture that spanned both sides of an invisible yet violently enforced line. The landscape of pre-partition Bengal continues to haunt its people – those who stayed, those who crossed, and those born later into a legacy of inherited loss. It is in literature and poetry that this Bengal survives most vividly, refracted through the melancholia of dislocation and the tenderness of remembrance. One is thus sensitised by the lines from Jibanananda Das, whose evocation of Bengal transcends geography and enters the realm of mythic return:

I shall return to this Bengal, to the dhansiri's bank:
Perhaps not as a man, but myna or fishing kite;
Or dawn crow, floating on the mist's bosom to alight
In the shade of this jackfruit tree, in the autumn harvest land…
With torn white sail -white regrets swimming through red clouds
To their home in the dark. You will find me among their crowd.
(Trans. Sukanta Chaudhuri, Sengupta 2018)

This picture of a bountiful landscape of undivided Bengal, post-partition, has been a realm that triggers nostalgia, and this looking back (intricately related to the memory formation) connotes irreconcilable regret and trauma when seen etched by ruthless barbed wires that punctuate its borders. Whether in Bengal or Punjab, partition has been a raw wound that has never healed. Walter Benjamin's comment in the historical context of the holocaust Germany and its texts, "There is no document of civilisation which is not at the same time a document of barbarism" (Benjamin 256), is equally valid for the 1947 partition of India, and its aftermath possibly still lingers. Gulzar's poem "Toba Tek Singh" provocatively replicates the post-partition iconic identity the problem so popularised by Saadat Hasan Manto's short Story "Toba Tek Singh":

I've got to go and meet Toba Tek Singh's Bhishan at Wagah!
I'm told he still stands on his swollen feet
Where Manto had left him,
He still mutters:
Opad di gudgud di moongdi dal di laltain…
(trans. Anisur Rehman, Sengupta 10)

Partition, memory, and identity are interlinked phenomena, one developing out of the other and being intertwined in nuances. This article aims to analyse how the partition of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh and the post-partition event of pawning enclave land masses within the land, a nation within a nation, are geopolitical tropes intricately connected to memory. Subsequently, both affect the identity formation of the people subject to these events. It is not merely forced displacement, migration, or refugeehood that can define this *nada* situation. In this study, we aim to take up the post-partition literature, especially the "Chitmahal" or Enclave Literature, to substantiate my proposition that such geopolitical disasters have left permanent scars upon both the individual memory and the memory of the nation-state that has never healed. In the process, I

aim to explore with the help of the representative fiction that as memory is a live wire, it only provokes, instigates, and generates "abjection." Identity is perpetually in a state of being beckoned by uncertainty, anxiety, and a sustained sense of pain.

The great partition riots were one instance when our society, culture and the very basis of civilised life tottered. Be it in the verse of Iqbal or Faiz or the stories of Sa'adat Hasan Manto, partition is a grim reality writhing in trauma, pain, bitterness, and anxiety, and it has been best addressed through the trope of memory. The violence of partition, for Manto, was not so much the triumph of unreason but that of perverted reason, and it is evident in Bhishan's madness in the story so named. The formation of identities may be understood in three categories. According to David A. Snow and Catherine Corrigall-Brown, they may be social, personal, and collective identities. Social identity refers to "identities attributed or imputed to others in an attempt to situate them in social space." (Snow 10) Personal identity is how narrators make a sense of self, and collective identity is understood as a sense of we-ness. This we-ness is the realm of "collective conscious" or the consciousness of the nation-state.

In short stories on the Bengal partition, we have seen their community taking advantage of the collapse of norms and either settling old scores or beggaring their relatives and friends. Pratibha Basu's *Flotsam and Jetsam* and Manik Bandyopadhyay's *The Final Solution* illustrate such experiences. Furthermore, there is also a depiction of the trope of resistance that came in a direct form, for instance, as depicted in Aten Bandopadhyay's "Infidel," or an indirect but powerful form, as in Syed Waliullah's story, "The Tale of a Tulsi Plant" that deals with the life of a humble, abandoned Tulsi plant, the modest but ultimate marker of domesticity in a Bengali Hindu household. However, what partition literature could not fathom is more intensely represented in the post-partition literature from both the Bengals. The Enclave Literature comes in here. Emerging from the enclave crisis post-drawing of the Radcliffe line, it may be seen as a unique post-partition effect that constantly defies and defers categorisation, and it has not been addressed enough due to its lack of unavailability and the little that is written about its existence still in a nascent state. Bangladesh and Indian enclaves, popularly called in

Bengal the "Chitmahal," are enclaves or zones of state abandonment that are very different from other conflict zones.

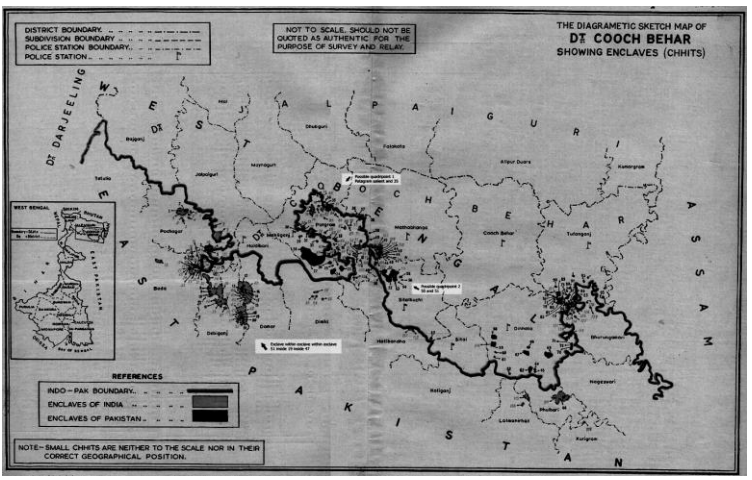
The Indo-Bangladeshi complex borderlands, focusing on the enclaves or 'chitmahals', became unique stateless conflict zones between India and Bangladesh. A historic Land Boundary Agreement was signed in 2015 that officially exchanged all enclaves of both Indian and Bangladeshi sides towards incorporation and inclusion within national sovereignty after almost seventy years since the Partition of the Indian subcontinent. However, the question about identity and space posed a challenge to easy resolutions within. Literature is the only space that reflects it well. Short stories from both the Bengals adequately address this crisis vis-a-vis identity formation. Through my illustration from a few selected short stories, I aim to study the enclaves as such complex borderlands that emerge as memory spaces still hovering in a space of 'abjection' between inclusion within national sovereignty and not yet fully there.

The border between India and Bangladesh is one of the longest and incredibly complex borders in the world due to its haphazard construction and arbitrary delineation. Resulting from an unfinished and forced partition and uneven decolonisation (or lack thereof) of the Indian subcontinent after British colonialism, certain hinterlands of the border became unique enclave territories. These odd constructions are called "chits" or "chitmahals" originating from the Bengali word "chit", which means a tiny speck of land. They are cartographic enigmas officially quasi-resolved in 2015 but left as conflictual abandoned spaces for sixty-eight years since the independence of India from British colonialism in 1947. These "chits" are tiny land masses belonging to one nation but surrounded by another. According to Brendan Whyte, there are three types of enclaves in the world:

> enclaves in Western Europe,
> in the former Soviet Union and
> the Indo-Bangladeshi ones,
> which according to him face a bias in receiving attention for study.
>
> (Whyte 23)

He also mentions in another study that the enclaves are the "result of peace treaties in 1711 and 1713 between the kingdom of Cooch Behar and the Mughal empire, ending a long series of wars in

which the Mughals wrested several districts from Cooch Behar". (*The Economist)*. These Indo-Bangladeshi enclaves make up 80% of the world's enclaves in a complicated situation and have affected 55,000-odd people trapped in these enclaves. The enclave dwellers possess no birth certificate, national identity card, passport, or access to state facilities, including electricity, civic amenities, schools and hospitals. Enclave life depends entirely on the host country's mercy for economic, health and educational facilities. The present situation has not shown significant changes, as the report discusses elsewhere. Before the partition of India, these fragments of land belonged to the independent "princely states" that enjoyed some autonomic freedom and were ruled by Hindu or Muslim kings who were ultimately legally bound to the British Empire. When the British demarcated the border under the arbitrary guidance of Cyril Radcliffe, the princely states did not join India or Pakistan due to cartographic complexity. At the time when the choice became imperative due to the official sovereignty of the nation-states, these dots of land found themselves situated on the wrong side of the border and hence became enclaves. In some cases, there were even counter-enclaves, which are enclaves within an enclave. These complicated things are intrinsic to the dwellers within these spaces, who lack identity or reclamation.



(geosite.jankrogh.com)

In 2015, there was a boundary commission agreement called the Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) between India and Bangladesh to exchange these disputed spaces, and yet, these enclaves continued to

be haunted. In her 2021-22 report, Amrita Ghosh of Lund University calls it "a fuzzy border" and "postcolonial forgotten zones" between India and Bangladesh. (Ghosh 1)

In the last five years, people's identities have not completely shifted towards a consolidated national identity in the larger framework of national citizenship. Recent reports from the now "exchanged" enclaves reveal that a particular kind of "enclave identity" exists within a precarious dialectic of resistance against the nation-state despite people living extremely vulnerable lives. William Van Schendel has further streamlined the enclave identity with the connotations of transterritoriality:

> A striking characteristic of the nationalisms that developed in India and Pakistan after 1947 was *transterritoriality*. Both states saw themselves as being in charge of the populations living in their own territory but also of a category of people living in the territory of the other state. These two groups can be described as *citizens* and *proxy citizens*. Thus, India's proxy citizens were the Hindus in Pakistan, and Pakistan's proxy citizens were the Muslims in India. This complementary transterritoriality – backed up by various agreements and institutions – was seen as a safeguard for the well-being of minority religious communities, but it also weakened their position. For example, Muslims in Pakistan were exclusively citizens of Pakistan. However, Hindus in Pakistan were citizens of Pakistan (their territorial nation) as well as proxy citizens of India (their trans-territorial or potential nation). This highlighted their liminality as loyal citizens of their territorial nation. The question of the loyalty of proxy citizens became a moot issue in the antagonistic nationalisms that Pakistan and India proceeded to build. It was in this situation that enclave people had to find their footing. In terms of identity, they were pulled in three directions: they were citizens, proxy citizens, and enclave people. (Schendel 127-28)

Since the 2015 LBA, not much has changed within the enclaves socio-culturally, legally, or economically. Deboleena Sengupta, in her 2018 ethnographical study as cited by Amrita Ghosh, confirms that residents of these enclaves still call the territories "chits" and refer to themselves as 'enclave people.' She further confirms that since this exchange of enclaves, chit people are still overlooking international borders and do not readily form a part of either India or Bangladesh. Therefore, it is important to study how this "chit" identity reconfigures postcolonial identity, defying the rooted order of the

nation-state, particularly when, as Sengupta's survey study shows, most narratives of the chitmahal are still situated within the narrative of the nation-state and not beyond it (Ghosh 12). Here, I will identify similar tropes in literature and the extant stories on the chitmahal survivors to look beyond Deboleena Sengupta and Amrita Ghosh's work and study the inclusivity of the literature produced due to the enclave to underscore the intensity of the ravages both on memory and identity. Neither citizen nor refugee, neither landed nor landless, it captures the mournings of 55,000-odd people residing without an identity. I aim to study these complexities through literature, especially the short story from both sides of the border, and how these narratives expiate the voices of the people from a no man's land through dependence on memory and a subsequent identity evolution both on a personal as well as individual level and that of the nation's memory.

The Radcliffe's line border ratifying the partition in 1947 had nothing to do with spatial rationality, and the Border Commission also had a tiny idea of how they were dividing the land. Willem Van Schendel explains, "The new international border was anything but a straight line; it snaked through the country in an irregular zig-zag pattern. Nowhere was it more tortuous and unpredictable than in the region where these enclaves were located" (Schendel 120). Crossing these exceptional spaces is fraught with multiple boundaries and borders is difficult. Their impact is most evident in the literature produced. Barendu Mondal introduces his anthology of short stories with a very pertinent question:

> Is Bengal's enclave literature written about the enclave survivors or literature on the enclave survivors? (my translation, Mondal 10)

Compared to other world enclave literature, India Bangladesh's writings of the enclave survivors could not be recognised and are yet to be acknowledged as the voices of the oppressed or survivors.

The 2015 June report by the Bangladesh census of the number of Indian enclaves inside Bangladesh is cited here:

Country	District	No of Chit land masses	Total	Space area (in acres)	Population	
India	Cooch Bihar	47	51 Bangladeshi	7,11002	14090	

			enclaves			
	Jalpaiguri	04				
Bangladesh	Lalmanir hat	59	111 Indian enclaves	17,160,63	37383	Crossed 41,0000 now
	Panchagarh	36				
	Kurigram	12				
	Nilfamari	04				

(my translation, Mondal 13)

The agreement was realised on 31st July 2015 after the amendment of the Indian constitution and a ceremonial exchange. After sixty-eight years of struggle, the enclave people were given a nation, an identity card, and a passport. 'Chitmahal' or the Bengal enclaves may be read as a post-partition realm. It is to be sharply distinguished from the European diaspora. As Barendu Mondal points out in his introduction to the anthology

> Chitmahal, just like partition, is not an event but rather a 'process'…" they may be seen as post partition stories…in terms of time space and significance…the people of the chitmahal are aliens in their own land… Moreover, after the exchange of the enclaves, many have been homeless, if not reduced to refugees. Hence, these stories cannot be called direct exponents of refugee studies … hence, we prefer to call them enclave literature. (my translation, Mondal 9)

Then again, we are confronted with another question – is it the literature written by the enclave people or the literature about the enclaves? Due to their lack of proper identity documentation, the enclave people could not access formal education in schools or colleges, and scripting literature, memoirs, or fiction was a far cry for these people. According to Mackenzie, the necessity of narrative that arises out of the first personal perspective happens in the following way:

> Even if what makes us persons is the capacity for a first-personal perspective, our temporally extended first personal experience is often of change, fragmentation, and contingency. Narrative self-interpretation is a response to this experience of change and fragmentation. Narrative identifies and forges patterns of coherence and psychological intelligibility within our lives, connecting our first personal perspectives to our history, actions, emotions, desires, beliefs, character traits, etc. (Mackenzie and Atkins 219)

Mackenzie's observation helps consider that narrative mediates the narrator's first-person perspective and emotions. The first-person perspective, though, is connected to history, action, and emotion; control over emotion is contested by ethical necessity put by imaginary construction that comes into being because of negative emotions circulating in the societal space. Both in terms of control over memory and emotions, the first-person perspective is not autonomous but contested and compromised. This is evident in Amar Mitra's story "What happened in the War" ("Juddhye ja Ghotechilo"). It foregrounds the historical pawn fight between the two arbiters of Cooch Bihar and Rangpur. In the first person narrative, the victim author expiates

> Mashaldanga, Batrigach, and Angarpota villages were lost as pawns in moments. … now that we exist as Bangladesh within India and many spaces of India are inside Bangladesh, is its root reason for this staccato rhythm of guns and grenades. … their pawning war games eclipsed our fates …. We do not have a country. Since we do not have a country, we have nothing" (my translation, Mondal 53)

History is represented and disseminated through personal memory here and, as a result, gets compromised into a narrative of emotions. It may further be pointed out how the author describes the limbo state of the enclave:

> Please come and witness the catastrophe out of the epical war of the Mahabharata, the war of pawning everything in chess. After the eighteen days' war of the Kurukshetra, the mass mourned, and the same cries reverberated amidst the enclave people…that, for us, it is perpetually an eternal battleground that requires no special mention. (my translation, Mondal 55-6).

Apart from historicising the personal narrative, the story also highlights the existence of these enclaves that emerge as spaces of abandonment. They are a conflict zone very different from other post-colonial geopolitical conflict zones. Conflict zones from colonial pasts, such as Israel-Palestine or Kashmir, are "spaces of exception" (to borrow Agamben's phrase). As Amrita Ghosh argues in her report, the enclaves from the two Bengal present something different – they are a different kind of "exceptional spaces," where abandonment is the keyword that marks them as zones of abandonment versus occupied necropolitical spaces, that create 'death worlds' to use the terms of Mbembe, using maximum violence

over certain subjects to establish the sovereignty of the nation-state. (Ghosh 21) As the narratives, in general, are subjective reconstructions of memory on the part of the narrators, the derived meaning is constructed through the way reasoning is put together. The way myriad meanings are made gives notions of how the past is interpreted, and by extension, putting rationale is also a way of forming an identity. Sara Drew Lucas, drawing on Mackenzie's idea of identity, wrote:

> Identity formation always employs narrative reasoning, and identity will always, practically speaking, be organised according to a narrative structure. (Mackenzie 12)

Then, analysis of the narrative reasoning and structure can be a viable way to extract the formation of personal identity in the narrative and examine to what extent social identity is affected and framed by such narratives as depicted in the stories to be discussed. In "Murdering Wolves-1" ("Nekre Nidhan Parba-1"), Afroza Parvin Rika, writing from Bangladesh, addresses the issue of gender-based violence in the post-partition realm. Here she recreates a Kafkaesque world, expressionistically exploring the conscious terrain of the rape victim Malati. Malati suffering rape due to the enclave commotion is pregnant. While her phlegmatic father hopelessly sits fishing on the banks of the Kartoyar River, she complains to her father,

> The soil of the enclave, which my great ancestors did not relinquish, has not respected your emotions. The pack of wolves of Ramshankar and his sons snatched away our land and never let us live in peace. (my translation, Mondal 287)

As Meghna Guhathakurta explains in her introduction of the book *Of the Nation Born: Bangladesh Papers*

> Rape was increasingly being discussed and accepted, not only as a weapon of war but also as a crime against humanity and as an instrument of genocide. The 1998 Akeyesu judgement by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda provided a clear definition of rape and delineated its elements as a crime against humanity and as an instrument of genocide. (Hossein 43)

This element of genocide is intricately aligned with rape. Furthermore, it is also related to Julia Kristeva's notion of the "abject". In the *Powers of Horror,* Kristeva explains that the abject refers to the human reaction (horror, vomit) to a threatened

breakdown in meaning caused by the loss of the distinction between subject and object or between self and other. The primary example of what causes such a reaction is the corpse (which traumatically reminds us of our own materiality); however, other items can elicit the same reaction: the open wound, shit, sewage, and even the skin that forms on the surface of warm milk. (Kristeva 10) The abject marks for Kristeva a "primal repression," one that precedes the establishment of the subject's relation to its objects of desire and of representation, before even the establishment of the opposition, conscious/unconscious. Without delving into the complexities of the Lacanian realm to which Kristeva's notion is sourced, we can here infer how this primal repression operates in Malati. Malati, as a rape victim, hauls a question that haunts even the reader outside the framework of the story: it goads us to question not only the vulnerability of enclave existence but even the aftermath of the Land Border Agreement exchange, "will there be no darkness in your new Bengal? (my translation, Mondal 289). This question is punctuated by her sustained caressing of her bulging abdomen

> …Very soon the sun will rise. A new Sun!. ..in the new Bengal, there will be a cry one day, disturbing the entire world! She weaves a surprising vision of a new world within her mind, perhaps a new cry will strengthen the times to come …" (my translation, Mondal 289)

This story ends with a note of hope that possibly Malati's progeny will avenge the wrongs and initiate a new journey of avenging the wolves and bring hope to the oppressed people denied any identity whatsoever, and it is the memory of the hard times that will paradoxically provide them strength to wait for that new dawn. In "Midnight's Home Swap" ("Madhyarater Gharbadal") by Selina Hossein, we have a broad perspective of these enclave lands. The story opens with the proclamation that "We are free, free. We are no more the fettered people of the enclave." (my translation, Mondal 307) The author claims liberation through the excitement of Suleiman and Haradhan:

> A huge excitement is flowing through the pockets of the enclave. Two oldies hold their hands tight to look beyond - these tiny specs of land masses as they visualised ceased to exist. Then these tiny masses of scattered lands got united to the two countries. (my translation, Mondal 307)

Their expiation is a cue to the role of memory in archiving trauma and the pain of partition. "Memory makes us weep," says Haradhan. (my translation, Mondal 308) The realm in which such characters preside and their uncertainty about space may be related to what Ranabir Samaddar calls "postcolonial spatial anxiety" vis-a-vis the Bengal borderlands. In his book *The Marginal Nation* (1999), Samaddar focuses on the post-partitioned Bengal border and explores the influx of refugees in both East and West Bengal. Samaddar views the encounter between the state and the people at the borders as a contest reflective of a "post-colonial anxiety: of a society suspended forever in the space between the 'former colony' and the 'not yet nation'" (Samaddar 108). Keeping allegiance with this theory, we can also view Semanti and Abanish's ordeal in the story. As enclave residents, they decide not to leave their soil despite the Land Border Agreement order being passed. Resolution and memory here come up in a different shade. As they prepare to move to their decided spaces in search of identity, Abanish asks Semanti to break their brewing relationship, "I will not leave my motherland. Our love? It will stay. You will stay in my memory. I will live with the memory of my first love. Only that we will never have a home." (my translation, Mondal 309) Thus, in this situation, memory becomes a trope to underscore building bonds during co-struggle while acknowledging the anxiety of growing up without an identity, country, or citizenship. Hence, it is paradoxically a double-edged sword to sustain and move on.

In this story, the conversation between Sohan Banik and Mohsin again underscores the pain of losing a land that one presumed to be his own. After the 2015 pact, this is how they react. "Now I realise I am not a poor man but only a sad person". (my translation, Mondal 311). Sohan specifies that "Fifty-one enclaves of India are exchanged as of one hundred and eleven enclaves of Bangladesh" (my translation, Mondal 311), which is a sense of relief and distress. That the enclave has been recognised in the maps is an achievement. Nevertheless, quitting the space that nurtured these people of the no man's land has been a pain. He ruminates, sitting in front of the Dharla river:

> Have you seen the river?
> -No, I am listening to the song of the river.

- Song?
- The song of breaking the banks of the river.
- This is not the time for the banks to slide. They slide in the rainy season.
- Bursting with loud laughter, Sohan Banik said, the sound of the banks sliding away is in my heart; its breaking images are in my eyes. My whole body is immersed in the river. My age has built a nest inside the river. Only the fishes are a witness to that nest. (my translation, Mondal 310)

Such speculations reflect how, despite not belonging to the soil, these characters residing in the enclave have intuitively bonded with the soil of Bangladesh, and the river Dharla has been their source of sustenance:

> This river has been our source of joy even while surviving in the enclave. Dharla has eradicated the sorrow of the people without identity. (my translation, Mondal 310)

Furthermore, when asked what he will carry with him, Sohan says he will carry his memory of living a life in the enclave as objectified in the river Dharla. The river sustained a sense of belonging to these rootless people that was not given to them by their nations. Moreover, the river image is common to almost all the enclave-concerned stories, and it may be seen as an objective correlative to the memoryscape of the enclave survivor. Hence, we infer from this that even after 2015, the enclaves remain indeterminate spaces subject to decay and abandonment. Within these liminal spaces, the people residing in them, or those who have moved to claim citizenship rights, become "subaltern counterpublics," as Amrita Ghosh defines, who challenge easily fixed notions of identity (Ghosh 18). This story also includes the tale of a husband and wife, Salma and Manoar, separating due to the migration of the enclave exchange. It finally closes on a positive note of their unison and their two sons. What is more interesting is the closing line, "When Manoar looked at Sohan's face he could not find him there; his whole body became a map". (my translation, Mondal 317)

Here, we may refer to the theoretical premise of Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia."As Freud defines:

> Mourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as fatherland, liberty, an ideal and so on. (Freud 153)

As Freud goes on to link up melancholia with mourning, he further explains

> Melancholia … borrows some of its features from mourning, and the others from the process of regression from narcissistic object-choice to narcissism. It is on the one hand, like mourning, a reaction to the real loss of a loved subject, but over and above this, it is marked by a determinant which is absent in normal mourning or which, if it is present, transforms the latter into pathological mourning. (Freud 149)

In the context of the stories discussed above, this mourning has objects, such as partition, landlessness, uprootness, lack of identity, etc. Shuttling between the identity of the trans territory, citizen, and proxy citizen, these inhabitants have subverted the very notion of identity into a strange abjection. Melancholia, which for Freud is objectless, is also related to it, and it could be no better expressed when a "body" finally, at the closure of the story, becomes a "map." Therefore, such narratives may be subversive, but they also enable us to rewrite the rhetoric of post-partition through memory anew as what Gyanendra Pandey calls "histories of confused struggles and violence, sacrifice and loss, the tentative forging of new identities and new loyalties." (Pandey 56) The lines of the poem, "For your Lanes, my Country" by Faiz Ahmed Faiz epitomise the hope we envision out of this pain and anxiety that enables us to assert our identity on newer lines:

> We are part today, but tomorrow
> we'll be together separation from one night isn't much.
> What if my rivals are riding high today, their reign of a few days isn't much.
> Those who remain true to you
> understand what the daily turmoil really means.
>
> (translated by Riz Rahim, Sengupta 17)

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7.

Rethinking Sustainability: The Nature-Centric Perspective of Tagore

Chitra Jha

Abstract

Rabindranath Tagore's literary and philosophical writings, which highlight the inextricable bond between people, the natural world, and cultural values, provide significant insights into sustainability. His writings, poetry, and pedagogical philosophy all exhibit a profound ecological awareness that aligns with current environmental discussions. This essay examines Tagore's ecological philosophy through writings like *Gitanjali, The Religion of Man*, and his vision for *Shantiniketan*. It shows how his emphasis on harmony, simplicity, and respect for nature offers a model for sustainable living. Modern ecological theories such as deep ecology, biophilia, and cultural sustainability align with his support for self-control, coexistence, and a spiritually enhanced relationship with nature. Given the present environmental difficulties, Tagore's portrayal of nature as a sentient, guiding force emphasises how urgent it is to return to his vision. This study presents Tagore's ideas as timeless and crucial for influencing modern sustainability practices through an interdisciplinary method that combines literary analysis with ecological theory. Reiterating his ideology as a lighthouse for sustainable and holistic living, the study concludes by urging the incorporation of his ecological ethics into environmental legislation, education, and culture.

Keywords: Coexistence, Culture, Deep Ecology, Harmony, Nature, Sustainability

The 21st century has awoken to the threat of climate change. More and more, it is becoming important to adopt sustainable living techniques. Given this, some early environmental conservation pioneers should be honoured. One such visionary is poet Rabindranath Tagore, the first Indian Nobel Laureate. The love for nature was one of the features of Tagore's complex personality. The inspiration poets typically receive from the beauty and grace of a natural world has little to do with who he is and why his bond with

nature is so strong. Because of his intimate connection with nature, the poet bonded with it on various emotions such as delight, astonishment, and companionship. Tagore wrote a beautiful song that embodies this:

> The sky is filled with the sun and the stars,
> And the world is filled with life,
> In the midst of all this I have found my place,
> This makes me wonder-struck
> And awakens the music in me
>
> (*My Song* by Rabindranath Tagore)

In the era of modern science and technology, humans tend to use terms and view nature as subordinate to them. However, Rabindranath Tagore's concept of humanism has a more inclusive and harmonious outlook in the sense of the principles of sustainable development. Tagore stresses the need for a social dimension in unity but is pluralistic because they coexist peacefully in diversity. Kalyan Sengupta points out that in Tagore's works, 'Nature' is almost synonymous with 'world,' 'universe,' and 'earth.' (Gupta 58). The poet sees the natural world around him as a quiet, majestic beauty; he is so moved he becomes filled with and shaped by imagination. Tagore understands that nature is more than some entity one can exploit; it's part of his very identity and that of all humanity, which has a relationship with nature that is not based on a resource to engage in, but rather that of deeply connected relations which we must honour and respect.

Driven by the Cartesian idea of a separation between spirit and matter and the Darwinian postulate of the survival of the fittest, some conclude that the natural world was created for a purely human end. This is a perspective that reduces the universe beyond human beings down to merely a tool for the progress of human beings and denies nature its worth. Conservation of nature is even thought of in the context of human utility. In contrast, Rabindranath Tagore's environmental philosophy is far afield from such views. His literary works and speeches are all about the analogy of a close relationship between humanity and nature; till this connection is not cut, suffering and despair will be the consequence. Not only does Tagore recognise nature's intrinsic value (the value of nature, not value to man) for

what it is, apart from human interest, but he thoroughly accepts it. (Dasgupta 33)

Rabindranath Tagore acknowledges the deep relationship between humans and nature and their conjunction. 'There is a reality of that same energy, ancient sages believed, which moulded the countless forms of the external world, which also dwells within us as consciousness.' Tagore feels this insight presents the wholeness of existence, where all is bound together (Tagore 21). The Indian seers felt, in this depth of serene mind, that the same energy that vibrates and passes into various forms in the world also manifests itself as consciousness in our inner being, and there is no break in unity (Tagore 21). While Tagore's environmental thought is practical, there are no utilitarian reasons behind his environmental thought. Instead, it is based on a distinct non-utilitarian foundation. This is central to his very idea of 'surplus,' which he says is the spiritual essence of humanity. This surplus is more than a surplus in meeting our basic needs and utility; it is beyond our humdrum lives. This surplus, Tagore defines, is an emotional, 'useless' 'surplus' in that it is not guided by self-interest or associated with 'moral or practical' purposes. He points out that pragmatic needs dictate one part of human life, and the other – spiritual, creative one, he says, needs to be fulfilled in its appreciation, creativity, and joy. Tagore believes life has true meaning only in the experiential state achieved through both practical achievements and the enrichment of this spiritual dimension, which his 'surplus' tries to capture. (Gupta 13)

A perspective is that humanity is not destroying the environment out of irrational self-indulgence but attempting to exploit it for increased convenience and comfort in day-to-day living. The reason behind environmental destruction is much the same as the reason behind protecting it. Tagore criticizes a rational, utilitarian approach to ascribing essence that assigns value to that which is utilitarian but calls for which is intellectual or moral 'human nature.' At the same time, what is lower in the hierarchy of beings is merely 'nature' (Tagore 7). He notes that the Indian mind has never severed its mooring to Nature because of the unbroken relationship it has always coeval with all forms of life (Tagore 7). Tagore thinks humanity's wrongheadedness makes nature seem alien, distant, and even hostile. He uses analogies like goal, road, river, and banks to

show this interconnection. Tagore calls "the universal man" the climax of human development, as he often speaks of him in his writings. Nothing of this concept goes beyond human abilities. As a biological entity, man must satisfy his daily, basic needs. However, he is also yearning for something bigger. The reality of life is that the ultimate realisation of life is that man will say that man's salvation is in unity since salvation is in union and not in isolation; in reality, man does not find the truth in isolation; he only finds the truth in connection (Dasgupta 35).

A strong desire to leave one's biological nature in pursuit of a higher state of existence is the desire that inspired man's aspiration to reach a higher state of existence. There is a way for him to do this through nature. Tagore believed human perfection to be a widening of one's personality by which one endows oneself with so much empathy for all of existential existence. Power is more than bringing this understanding; this brings to an ananda the ultimate joy by linking souls. 'The spring of our ideas must be dried up, when we consort with our argumentative friends,' he once told us or again he warned us to 'keep off your reason or argument when I am imagining my infinite life in looking at stars at night, when I am roaming in-universe when I am enjoying my intimacy with new lives of innumerable planets.' Tagore elaborates upon this in *Sadhana*, where he expounds that the union of man and nature proceeds from the One, or the Absolute. The Absolute is simply the Spirit and the Nature, subsumed without loss of existence (Das 324).

Contemporary environmental ethics stresses the oneness and harmony connecting trees and man and living and non-living species and ecosystems. The term 'deep ecology' is a cosmo-centric environmental ethics theory with an introduction provided by a Norwegian philosopher, Arne Naess. It argues for the environmental environment as it is for its intrinsic value, and it emphasises the significance of symbiosis, a regularity of well-established ecology. According to deep ecology, all life forms mutually depend on each other and have the right to benefit. Deep ecology is 'deep' because it uncovers the bases upon which we hold our values and how we interpret the world. While there is no deep labelling because it empirically interviews ecosystems, this style is labeled because it promotes perspectives that many things have influenced. However,

ecologists have become logically validated to protect and care for the natural environment. A better understanding of deep ecology is a cyclical flow of practical environmental policy (praxiology) shaped by normative principles driven by a fundamentally scientific, though ultimately philosophical, view of reality and what it means to be human. By expanding our understanding of the ecological context, says Naess, we can come to feel a sense of belonging to the larger ecosystem, for which he uses the word 'eco-spheric belonging' (Srivastava 27).

In his short story *Balai*, Rabindranath Tagore describes this harmony between man and nature well. To say the least, the play's plot revolves around the act of - the protagonist, Balai, enlarges his consciousness through integration with the aspects of nature: the dark clouds, raindrops, and sunlight. While the character is playing among the grasses, he feels delight in nature; at the same time, feeling sad when the gardener mows the grass. Such a relationship promotes the upbringing of a protective attitude toward the world. Likewise, in another story, *Atithi,* Tagore portrays the relationship between man and Nature through the person of Tarapada, a boy who feels freedom is enclosed in Nature's arms. Similarly, while playing in the natural world, he frees himself from home and traditions that he believes isolate him from the natural world and the union with it (Dasgupta 35). The practical implications of religious and spiritual perspectives on the natural world begin with the field of education. It then discusses their relevance to personal development and environmental policy. Thus, the aim is to describe the relationship between individuals and their spiritual beliefs and attitudes towards the environment and the development of environmental awareness and concern. The Office for Standards in Education describes the scope of spiritual development, as stated in the Framework for Inspection of Schools:

> Spiritual development relates to that aspect of inner life through which pupils acquire insights into their personal existence which are of enduring worth. It is characterised by reflection, the attribution of meaning to experience, valuing a non-material dimension to life and intimations of an enduring reality.
>
> (OFSTED 1994:8) (Cooper and Palmer 140)

The central theme of the ecology of sustainable development is the growing ecological crisis in the form of climate change, glacial melting, greenhouse effects, and ecological refugees. By 2050, natural disasters will displace 50m, 250m by climate change, or 645m by dam, mine, and other development projects, warns Clause Vestra. (May 94) Today's displacement rate by development is 15 million people per year. If we are to safeguard the environment for the sake and security of humanity, that cannot continue! Initially, the movement stood against anthropocentrism, but its (inevitable) practical approach involves an anthropocentric viewpoint. On the contrary, Tagore proposed the principle of Universal Life in setting up the eco-friendly space of Santiniketan, guiding human existence near and with the land and environment, endeavouring to build a model of ecological existence in peace. Tagore's work influenced Arthur Geddes, and Patrick Geddes, a living environment leader, supported his son in studying Tagore's activities. Arthur later went on to create Masque of Earth and Man, a pioneering meld of ancient folk and modern science and welfare technologies, believed to be India's first venture. (May 99)

In 1930, Tagore commented on "Planetary Overload" and "Universal Mind of Man" during the Hibbert Trust Lecture at Manchester College, Oxford. The triad of "place-work-folk" was what he believed to be a reflection of "truth, beauty, goodness." The mechanised approach of science that Tagore foresaw would eventually end in war. He urged that the only route to green peace would be through a biocentric approach to life – building kinship with the rest of existence and developing relationships with all living things (Chakraborty 484). Literature is a way through which one gains a sense of personal growth; the process from what is initially foreign to our object to our subject and the gap between the known object and the subject. Therefore, nature is never viewed as an object. Literature bridges the distance between the knower and the known, and science maintains the distance between the knower and the known. Through self-knowledge, the artist can humanise an external world, creating an external world through mediums such as sound, color, and gesture, expressing personal emotions like joy, sorrow, fear, and grief.

The belief of India in the omnipresence of Nature, which has been the backbone of India's civilisation since its inception, has been the subject of India's long promulgation. The country believes actual superiority does not lie in domination but in unity and, therefore, in cultivating a universal sympathy for life, even beyond sustainable development. Thus, the ṛiṣhis, or sages, were considered ideal persons who had found their essential unity with the Supreme Consciousness that was within, and that was within, every part of the universe. Thus, their lives were dedicated to serving the world's greater good. 'Shallow' ecologists or environmentalists, such as 'that priest!' (i.e., the ecological priests, as these so-called ones often typify their most poignant eschatological utterances), often look to the pragmatic results of how we treat the environment, which is primarily concerned with the direct results on human beings. They want to protect nature because if it were destroyed, it would mean the end for human beings. Bernard E. Rollin states that the consequences 'of lack of control of environmental damage could vary from the loss of potential benefits through the loss of new medications from plants to severe harm, such as a dramatic rise in cancers or diseases caused by deterioration of the air, water, or food chain.'(Gupta 69) The underlying idea is that we survive in the universe by caring for the environment and taking care of the Earth. However, Tagore's concern for nature is not pragmatic or utilitarian. Humans have biological and material needs, but there is something more, something 'extra,' something of a 'surplus' within them, which pushes them to 'something else' beyond mere survival. It is these reflections because human beings do not just live by material sustenance but have a sense of longing once their needs have been met through technology. Tagore understands that although a person cannot be seen entirely in 'this state,' that does not mean they are without fault and must be without humanity. (Cooper and Cooper 162)

It is true that, as a general rule, we humans tend to act in our self-interest, but there are some who, despite the comfort of a secure life, choose a road fraught with uncertainty, anxiety, and risk. They do it in order to create a better future for humanity than there has ever been. So, what powers this effort to change the world for everyone? The real essence of human nature is this. A deeper

ontological relation between the Self and other (I and Thou) is contracted to an internal formation (l am Thou). In fact, Tat Tvam Asi and Aham Brahmasmi – ' I am Brahman' – are about the claim that the Self cannot be distinguished from the Other. It is a union between two, a sign I need the other and the other is needed for my union to the All-Inclusive Spirit. To attain a global consciousness, we must match our feelings with what I call The Infinite of the All-Pervading Spirit. It is only possible when we do away with all our desires, get ourselves ready for social duties, and take the share of other individuals' burdens as our own. In this, "I" and "Thou" join in a common cause whereby the unity of consciousness may be accomplished, for all lives have the same source – the Single Soul – the First Cause, named as "Abhinnanimitta upadanakaraṇa brahma." This gives utterance to the path to the spiritual life and the Heavenly kingdom, as Kant called it, the "Founding of a kingdom of God on earth." (Das 114)

E.O. Wilson has lately developed and promoted the concept of scientific humanism,' though not exclusively in his recent works, including *The Meaning of Human Existence* (2014). According to this philosophy, humaneness and other virtues can be cultivated through sufficient scientific knowledge of the world and our biological evolution and needs. Although he admits religions evolved out of evolutionary benefits, Wilson has acknowledged in an interview with *New Scientist* (21 January 2015) that religious belief can be 'an impediment to progress' (Cooper and Cooper 297). The moral principles of deep ecology are supported in two important ways by the idea of a 'comprehensive Self.' First, those who buy into this approach will inevitably be well-disposed toward universal altruism; they realise that individuals are not discrete entities. Second, it is this view of the Self that suggests genuine self-realisation, that the Self could also be the Self in compassion with the well-being of the whole. In this view, suitable for someone is also suitable for everyone, and the reverse is true as well; it is bad for someone if someone else is bad, and that bad is carried into the Self. Although some deep ecologists have come in for criticism that what is best for the environment is too often at the expense of human interests, for Naess, the idea of a 'comprehensive Self' renders this opposition inapposite. (Cooper and Cooper 252)

Whereas education in deep ecology does not refer explicitly to moral imperatives, it closely parallels Rabindranath Tagore's notion of education, in which the realisation of the 'comprehensive Self' takes place. Just as the deep ecology extols the enlargement of the Self beyond the egoism of the individual, Tagore visualises education as a way to break through the limited self-interest for the acceptance of the entire. In terms of his educational philosophy, he regards true self-realisation as recognising that all beings are interconnected (human and non-human) and that what supports one supports all. Tagore's educational vision conforms with the theme of deep ecology in fostering our sense of universalistic altruism, which extends to the well-being of the entire ecosystem. Each time, empathy, unity and the harmony of the collective are what it centres on. For Tagore, education is not only an individual achievement but also cultivating greater responsibility and feeling about connectedness to the world around us.

Isn't it fascinating to be reminded by Tagore's work in the twenty-first century how important it is to seek closeness to ourselves, others, and the world around us? It bids us welcome back to a state of balance with Gaia that is birthed out of paying close attention and constantly seeking patiently and delicately in ourselves and the world about us. In participating in legal culture, we are exposed to social and environmental values that indicate that the role or place of the world is not to be dominated, but we are part of the world. This shift breaks our anthropocentric paradigm, which requires a shift from division to unity, war to peace, domination to reverence, and meanness to sharing. Cognizant that each life form experiences the world through a lens; this lens is the umwelt that promotes imagination, wonder, and compassion. The relationship is the thread of life, and Earth has programmed itself so that every being is more connected than disconnected. As the scientific discoveries suggest, and especially the world's wisdom traditions unanimously confirm, man is not an observer but a co-participant in the universe's unending drama. Fundamentally, life involves turning about and turning to one another; over and over, we give and take. With such a view, we come to appreciate the joy of living and put into practice the notion of having a place that belongs to our individual life's canvas.

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8.

Food Sovereignty and the Anthropocene: Food, Women and Resistance in Vandana Shiva's Select Writings

Rituparna Sengupta

Abstract

The Anthropocene is generally considered a human-centric geological epoch where capitalism has altered the lives of humans and non-humans alike by changing the climate, food practices, marine ecosystem, and biodiversity. This article intends to explore the impact of patenting genetically modified production of 'seeds' in the neo-liberal economy of post-independent India and how it disrupts the culture of food in the subcontinent through the works of Vandana Shiva, focusing on her memoir *Terra Viva: My Life in a Biodiversity of Movements* (2022) and *Seed Sovereignty, Food Security: Women in the Vanguard* (2015). While acknowledging a sustainable approach through her narrative of activism and resistance, Shiva propagates the idea of archiving knowledge through food grains, i.e., women actively gather and preserve these seeds. She introduces the idea of 'seed sovereignty,' where Indigenous communities retain the power of owning, producing, and distributing food and the knowledge system around it. This article argues that employing self-sustaining methods and integrating non-anthropocentric ideas with futuristic farming practices, like planting 'heritage seeds' that can survive natural calamities, could help transcend the Anthropocene question. Since dietary consumption is the most intimate connection of the consumer with the external environment, dietary transformation at the elementary level will efficiently resist monocultures and the monopoly of rights retained by food corporations patenting genetically modified seeds. Thus, this article will look closely into the role of women in gathering, preserving, documenting, and, in turn, propagating food sovereignty by resisting corporate grab through activism.

Keywords: Indigeneity, Food sovereignty, Resistance, Anthropocene

Introduction: Indigeneity and the question of soil

In the natural world, man thrives when he works in harmony with the cycles of life and the other members of the soil-based ecosystem

to which man belongs. In the history of humanity, dread of the natural world appears to have received far too much attention, while a sense of place and belonging has received far too little attention. "Biotechnology and super genetics are now becoming the driving engine behind a more rapid phase in that power shift, one that is moving all of us farther away from the sources of our food while moving farmers into a new kind of technological-genetic dependence" (Doyle 254). Most of the time, scientists who have investigated the origins of human cognition are experts in their field and are not immersed in everyday life situations. The relationship between humans and soil in this specific context is necessary before delving into any analysis of the connections between humans and the soil they survive on and are dependent upon. The necessity might not be apparent right away. However, a moment of reflection will demonstrate that these two notions represent intricate and varied ideas, making it possible for the writer and reader to disagree. "In this new era, food will be more finely shaped at its point of origin – at the level of the seed, the gene, and the molecule" (Hyams 9). In the context of the neo-liberal economy of post-independence India, this article will examine how patenting genetically modified 'seeds' has affected the food culture of the subcontinent. This article closely analyses Vandana Shiva's writings, particularly her memoir- *Terra Viva: My Life in a Biodiversity of Movements (*2022) and *Seed Sovereignty, Food Security: Women in the Vanguard* (2015). Shiva promotes the idea of archiving wisdom through food grains or seeds, where women actively harvest and save them while acknowledging a sustainable method through her narrative of activism and resistance through her writing.

The Green Revolution evolved around the idea that technology is a better alternative to nature and, as such, an approach to generating growth unrestricted by the limitations of nature. However, the belief that technology is a source of excess and nature is a source of restriction leads to the development of technologies that, through ecological degradation, introduce new scarcities into the natural world. Because of the Green Revolution's tactics, there has been scarce genetic diversity in crops and fewer acres of accessible agricultural land, which suggests that the movement created scarcity rather than abundance at the ecological level. As most scholars have

observed, it is unjust to single out religion as the cause of intergroup conflict, as multiple economic and political variables are at play. These are not just tensions between two religious groups; they also represent a breakdown in culture and society and tensions between a dejected agricultural community and the centralising state, which sets prices and regulates inputs, financing, policy, and agriculture. These conflicts and disillusions are rooted in the Green Revolution. The violence that exists in modern-day Punjab defies all accepted wisdom. According to the accepted norms about societal violence, "material scarcity" is the primary factor contributing to humanity's cruelty to another. It is suggested that social groups have existed in circumstances that were inadequate to meet their fundamental requirements since pre-Neolithic times. Thus, nature has been linked to economic scarcity, which in turn has been linked to disputes over limited resources, and this, in turn, has been associated with violence.

Socio-economic factors behind the Green Revolution

As a science-based movement, the Green Revolution started as a socio-economic measure to provide for the world's population by addressing food scarcity. Its primary focus was to build a relationship between agricultural technology and productivity in developing countries by providing food grains for the increasing population like India, Mexico, and Pakistan, where wheat is cultivated as a staple food grain. While addressing the problem of food was the primary focus, multiplying the productivity of the land with the help of science-based technology was driven by the convenience of administrative bodies and policymakers rather than by technological accuracy. The project was backed by the field research conducted by the following research institutions popularly known as the Global Two - the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) working between 1970-74. Their fieldwork focused on three primary tenets of technological changes in rural agrarian societies – factors that might aid or discourage the use of genetic-chemical technology, the socio-economic factors that might alter the quality of life and nutrition as a consequence of technological intervention in primarily agrarian societies and finally, measures taken by the government to mediate between the old farming practices and the new that might

potentially modify the social structure. An inventory was put together by a group of researchers, including agronomists, anthropologists, and social historians, who considered the sensitivity of local producers. However, no singular methodology was insisted upon. Simultaneously, multiple rural settlements had to be closely scrutinised, and more importantly, their relationship with the urban market hubs, focusing on priorities and disagreements, was emphasised. "These contradictory trends affecting negatively many social groups can in no way be considered to have been 'caused' by the new high-yielding varieties of food grains" (Pearse 140).

Proponents of the Green Revolution in India

Indian agriculture experienced a setback in the second half of the century, from World War I to the Declaration of Independence, the global recession and depression, and the nearly total shipping paralysis during World War II. Its fall was compounded by the anarchy of partition and the spread of commercial crops such as groundnuts and sugarcane, which drove food grains onto poorer areas with lower yields per acre. India was experiencing a severe food shortage as a result of the uprisings during this time.

The Western scientists who had previously been dispatched to improve Indian agriculture had discovered that the farming principles dictated to preserve and extend nature's processes and patterns could not be further improved. Indian agriculture had been less effective when disruptions in the distribution of supplies enabled productivity, not because of outdated ideas or subpar techniques. The colonial era brought about an array of variables, including land dispossession, forest reservations, and the growth of cash crop farming, which made it difficult to obtain enough local inputs of manure and water to sustain agricultural output. The war brought about the food crisis, which was addressed through two distinct approaches. Whereas the first was indigenous or internal, the second approach was exogenous or external. Thus, as Hyam states,

> The commercialisation of production and exchange relations, the growing competition for good-quality lands by entrepreneurial farms, and the increasing numbers of landless labourers and families trying to extract a living from diminishing areas of poor-quality lands all contribute to this process of decay (140).

The independence movement served as the foundation for the indigenous response. Its goals were to increase the self-sufficiency of the nation's peasants and the ecological foundation of agriculture. India's earliest agriculture minister, K M Munshi, recognised that the agricultural crisis was linked to a breakdown of nature's processes and developed a comprehensive plan based on a bottom-up, decentralised, participatory methodology for reestablishing and recovering the ecological base of agricultural productivity. Recognising the need to take into consideration the diversity of India's soils, crops, and climates, a programme for the revival of Indian cultivation was developed. Planning from the bottom up, taking into account each village and occasionally every farm, was seen to be crucial for the 'land transformation'. Restoring the natural order of nature and cooperating with its processes were seen as essential components of the indigenous agriculture programme.

Even though Indian scientists and policymakers were devising sustainable and environmentally friendly solutions to revive agriculture in their country, a different agricultural growth model was emerging among American foundations and associate organisations. This idea was based on conquering nature rather than working with it. It emphasised the growing use of credit and bought ingredients like chemical fertilisers and pesticides rather than the escalation of nature's processes. It was predicated on dependency rather than independence. Its foundation was uniformity rather than diversity. Advisors and experts from the United States traveled there to change India's agricultural research and policy from a traditional and sustainable model to an exogenous, high-input one. Naturally, they found allies among some elite segments since the novel approach suited their political interest and objectives.

The American Government, the World Bank, and the private American Foundations were the three international organisations that helped bring the American agricultural model to India. Since 1952, the Ford Foundation has worked in agricultural extension and training. Since 1953, the Rockefeller Foundation has been actively redesigning India's agricultural research system. The principal architect of the Green Revolution in India was M. S Swaminathan, who was appointed the Director of IARI in 1965 after being schooled by Norman Borlaug; he worked under various agricultural projects

initiated by the Rockefeller company in Mexico, and C. Subramaniam, who became the Agriculture Minister in 1964. Following his 1963 visit to India, he sent 400 kg of 'semidwarf' variety for testing there. The International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), which had just been established with Ford and Rockefeller, brought rice seeds in 1964. Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri cautioned against rushing towards a new cultivation founded on novel varieties in 1965. His untimely death in 1966 made it easier to implement the new plan. Because it was seen as a bottleneck, the Planning Commission, which authorises all significant investments in India, was likewise disregarded. "The Green Revolution was essentially a seed-fertilizer package since the new seeds were bred to be high 'consumers' of fertilizer" (Shiva 134). In the opinion of Rockefeller agricultural scientists, the Third World farmers and scientists are incapable of developing their farming practices. They thought that the American-style agriculture system held the key to increased output. Nonetheless, there was opposition to the American agricultural model's imposition in America and the Third World. Like K. M Munshi in India, Edmundo Taboada, the chief of the Mexican department of experiment stations, believed that the development of ecologically and socially acceptable research methods could only occur with the active involvement of the peasantry.

Violence of The Green Revolution

This science-based revolution of Third World farming was the Green Revolution and its most renowned success in Punjab, India. Ironically, Punjab today is neither a prosperous nor peaceful region after 20 years of the Green Revolution. There has been a great deal of unrest and violence in this region. Punjab is no longer experiencing abundance; it is experiencing flooded deserts, pest-infested crops, unhealthy soils, and unsatisfied and indebted farmers. Punjab has inherited violence and war rather than peace. In the past six years, at least fifteen thousand people have died. In 1986, there were 598 fatalities in Punjab due to violent conflicts 1544 was the death toll in 1987, and it had increased to 3,000 by 1988. The elements of the Green Revolution's ecological and political demands as an experiment in science in development and agricultural change contributed to the disputes and violence in modern-day Punjab. The Green Revolution

was widely recognised as a significant technological and political accomplishment in human history. It was intended to bring about peace by generating abundance by overcoming the constraints and limitations of nature. The Green Revolution was presented as a political initiative to establish a stable and peaceful social structure. "After the Wars, there was cheap and abundant fertilizer in the west, and American companies were anxious to ensure higher fertilizer consumption overseas to recoup their investment" (Subramaniam 12). However, scientific research discipline was intentionally detached from governmentality and social dynamics, while aggression was a direct outcome of social manipulation. Science and economic mechanisms were disconnected when dissatisfaction and new scarcities appeared.

The traditional paradigm of science, technology, and society connects the causes of violence to politics, ethics, and the use of science and technology rather than scientific understanding. This model's presumptive dichotomy between values and facts suggests a division between values and facts. According to this perspective, the world of facts is related to scientific knowledge, while the fundamental domain of values contains the roots of violence. Punjab's experience with the Green Revolution exemplifies how contemporary science is produced politically and socially, strengthening its social exclusion and impeding its social appraisal. "It's an illustration of how science limits its own shortcomings and claims credit for accomplishments. The dramatic increase in cereal production in the Green Revolution state of Punjab has been linked exclusively to the use of this seed-fertilizer package" (Munshi 145). The catastrophic narrative of Punjab illustrates the unrealistic conviction in the ability of contemporary science to manipulate society and the natural world. However, as numerous scholars and experts have suggested, it is erroneous to attribute Punjab's crisis origins solely to religion as the disputes stem from the ecological, political, and economic effects of the Green Revolution. These are tensions between a disillusioned agriculture sector and a centralised state that controls agricultural policy, financing, credit, inputs, and commodity prices rather than just disputes between two religious communities. These disputes and disappointments are rooted in the Green Revolution.

Seed sovereignty and decolonising the seed

The eternal principles of diversification and exchange serve as the foundation for all sustainable agricultural systems, both current and future. These two ideas are connected rather than separate. The ecological capacity for reciprocity and mutuality, for cooperation and sharing, is created by diversity. Monocultures destroy diversity by replacing varied systems' decentred arrangement and self-regulation with external inputs and centralised control. The majority of Third World nations consider genetic resources as a shared legacy. Until recently, most countries' patent laws did not include plants or animals. This changed with the introduction of biotechnologies, which altered ideas about who owned what. The new biotechnologies allow us to own life. An organism is reduced to its genetic components by the possibility of gene manipulation.

Several generations of innovation are completely denigrated, granting monopoly rights on living forms to those who modify genes with cutting-edge technology, elevating their contribution above the intellectual labour of Third World farmers who have been developing plant and animal genetic resources for decades. Diversity guarantees pluralism as a system of production, in addition to conservation. It prevents biological systems from being classified as either 'primitive' or 'advanced.' Communities all over the Third World are opposing the faulty concepts in the agricultural sector by looking for seeds that farmers have been using for centuries and using them as the foundation of futuristic, self-reliant, and sustainable agriculture, much like Gandhi did when he searched for the spinning wheel to challenge the false concepts of low input and effectiveness in the manufacture of textiles. "There may be grain available but no money to buy it…Spinning is the readiest and the handiest" (Gandhi 7).

As Vandana Shiva looked closely into the threats posed by biotechnology to ecology, it led her to the path of grassroots activism. She was keen on adopting a holistic approach to help the agricultural community recover from the devastating effects of the Green Revolution. It established a non-sustainable approach to farming, pretending that genetic modification of seeds would produce more food. Unrealistic claims like monocultures producing more output in fisheries, forestry, animal husbandry, and so on had to be eradicated

to combat food scarcity and global hunger. A knowledge system based on the elemental agricultural production unit, like the seed Bija Vidyapith or the Earth University, was established in 2000. The Navdanya farm, or the seed bank, was set up where "a seed is an inspiration for renewal as well as an example of the small embodying the whole" (Shiva 14). With the sole motive of saving seeds and promoting organic farming as opposed to a system of agriculture manipulated by industrial policies, Shiva considered the knowledge of seeds as 'intellectual property'. Hence, patenting seeds is a theft of intellectual property by monopolising its use. The Navdandya initiative started as an earth-centered and a women-centered movement that has successfully created over a hundred seed banks that freely exchange seeds and farming knowledge.

Lesser grown sustainable crops like *jhangora* (barnyard millet), *ragi* (finger millet), *marsha* (amaranth), *naurangu dal,* and *gahat dal* have been circulated in the local markets. These crops are resource-prudent, requiring less rainfall and being nutritionally dense. Millets can multiply the production of food grains, utilising a limited water supply. Shiva likes to term these food grains as the seeds of the future as they can provide the subcontinent with food security. Navdanya translates as nine seeds or the 'new gift' in the face of food scarcity. The nine seeds that represent nine cosmic energies are *Yava*(barley), which represents the sun; *Shamaka* (little millet) represents the moon; *Togari* (pigeon pea) stands for Mars, which regulates the nervous system; *Madga* (moong) represents Mercury which influences intelligence; *Kadale* (chickpea) stands for Jupiter; *Tandula* (rice) represents Venus; *Til* (sesame) stands for Saturn; *Maasha* (black gram) stands for Rahu and *Kulittha* (horse gram) stands for Ketu (Shiva 21). Hence protecting the resources of the land, in fighting privatisation of seeds, water and biodiversity, Shiva believes we can achieve food sovereignty through *bija swaraj* seed freedom, *anna swaraj* (food freedom), *jal swaraj* (water freedom), *bhu swaraj* (land freedom) and *vana swaraj* (forest freedom).

Women, resistance, sustainability

Women are essential to both creativity and productivity. They are the ones in charge and managers of the health care and food security systems. A new knowledge and development system based on

violence destroys their work and nature's effort to produce nutritious food today. This system pits aggressive modern man against the web of life in an attempt to control nature and the economy and generate profit. "In each area we have come to understand that what we took to be humanly inclusive problematics, concepts, theories, objective methodologies, and transcendental truths are in fact far less than that" (Harding 30). Corporate integration is being maintained, even as it is being destroyed at the ecological level. Nature and women are being replaced by a few highly logical agribusiness companies headed by a few who maintain soil fertility, safeguard plants, control pests, and replicate genetic richness in all of its diversity. As a result, technologies that support life-sustaining eco-processes are replaced by non-sustainable technologies that interfere with them. The interference of ecology's work and female labour go hand in hand as women's physical labour is in tandem with nature to preserve seasonal and sustained flows of nutrients between crops and cattle. The ecological mechanisms of sustainable farming are destroyed when crop production and animal husbandry are separated because the organic matter base is eroded. The Green Revolution replaced the organic, renewable, and sustainable fertiliser used in agriculture with non-renewable, non-sustainable chemical inputs, rendering cattle and physical labour put in by women with cattle redundant for cultivating food grains. The white revolution undermines the foundation of the most advanced dairy culture in the world. It removes women from their position in the dairy processing sector by copying the wasteful and inefficient Western methods of animal husbandry and production of milk.

Conclusion

Food sovereignty as an activism emerging in Mexico parallel to the slow food movement in the United States, later introduced by Vandana Shiva in the Indian context, fosters a food system where the agricultural community producing food has the autonomy of distribution and consumption of the produce devoid of corporate intervention. This stands in strong contrast to the contemporary food regime, where industries control the global food system. Food sovereignty emphasises local food economies, Indigenous practices, and sustainable food production. Facilitating people's rights to

indigenous practices and the resources of production, food sovereignty protects indigeneity and functions as the base for developing narratives of resistance. In our everyday lives, food often acquires various meanings and implications that extend beyond the materiality of the food itself. As a narrative of pride, emphasis on the wholesomeness of particular traditional indigenous food in cooking and customs of preservation is an important instrument that constructs a sense of self within the modern discourse of sustainable eating. Through sustainable consumption and preservation, these narratives archive knowledge facilitating food security.

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9.

The Rhetoric of FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) in Digital Marketing

Sharad Acharya

Abstract

In the current digital era, the swift expansion of social media platforms, online shopping, and digital advertising has transformed how businesses engage with consumers. One of the most potent psychological tactics in this environment is Fear of Missing Out (FOMO). This study explores the Rhetoric of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) in digital marketing, analysing its impact on consumer decision-making, the psychological mechanisms it employs, and the ethical concerns it raises. Grounded in social comparison and loss aversion theories, this research examines how marketers use FOMO-driven strategies such as scarcity, urgency, and social pressure to influence consumer behavior. Through case studies, the study highlights how FOMO tactics tap into deep-seated human fears of exclusion and loss, often leading to impulsive purchasing decisions. However, while effective, these strategies pose ethical challenges, including increased consumer anxiety, financial strain, and environmental consequences due to overconsumption. The study argues for greater transparency and ethical responsibility in digital marketing practices to balance persuasion with consumer well-being.

Keywords: Fear of Missing Out (FOMO), Black Friday, Cyber Monday, Loss Aversion, Digital Marketing, Ethical Concerns

Introduction

In today's digital age, the rapid growth of social media platforms, e-commerce, and online advertising has redefined how businesses connect with consumers. The concept of Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) is among the most influential psychological tools in this landscape. FOMO refers to the pervasive anxiety individuals feel when they perceive that others are engaging in rewarding experiences or opportunities that they are excluded from. As a psychological phenomenon, it is deeply rooted in human social behavior, drawing

from innate tendencies like social comparison and the fear of loss (Festinger, Kahneman, and Tversky 125). Digital marketing exploits these tendencies by crafting persuasive messages and employing strategies to evoke an immediate emotional response, often bypassing rational decision-making processes. For instance, marketing campaigns may highlight phrases such as "Only a few lefts in stock!" or "Offer ends in 24 hours!" to instill a sense of urgency and compel consumers to act without delay.

The significance of FOMO-driven rhetoric in digital marketing lies in its ability to influence consumer behavior at an unprecedented scale. Social media platforms, such as Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok, amplify this effect by enabling marketers to showcase curated experiences and exclusive offers, creating an environment where individuals are constantly exposed to what they might be missing out on. Influencers, too, play a key role by endorsing products and lifestyles that appear aspirational, heightening the allure of participation or ownership (Cialdini). The effectiveness of FOMO in driving consumer engagement has made it a cornerstone of digital marketing strategies, particularly in industries such as retail, travel, and technology. However, the widespread use of FOMO raises critical ethical questions. By tapping into consumers' psychological vulnerabilities, marketers risk fostering unhealthy behaviors, such as compulsive spending and chronic dissatisfaction with one's current state (Tuten 95). This article explores the Rhetoric of FOMO in digital marketing, examining how it influences consumer decision-making, the mechanisms through which it operates, and the ethical dilemmas it presents. By analysing industry practices and psychological theories, this study sheds light on the dual-edged nature of FOMO as both a potent marketing tool and a source of potential harm.

Psychological Foundations of FOMO in Marketing

FOMO is deeply rooted in human psychology, particularly in the concepts of social comparison and loss aversion.

Social Comparison Theory

Humans have an innate tendency to compare themselves with others to evaluate their social standing, a concept central to Leon Festinger's Social Comparison Theory (1954). According to this theory,

individuals continuously assess their own abilities, achievements, and possessions in relation to those of others to form self-evaluations (Festinger 138). This inherent drive stems from a desire to determine where they fit within social hierarchies and to reduce uncertainty about their status. Consequently, individuals are often drawn to experiences, products, or behaviors that they believe will elevate their status or align them with perceived social norms. Marketers skillfully exploit this tendency by creating campaigns highlighting exclusivity, desirability, and social proof. By showcasing products, services, or experiences that others enjoy or aspire to, they tap into the fear of missing out (FOMO) and the human drive for upward social mobility. Limited edition items, luxury brands, influencer endorsements, and testimonials are common strategies designed to evoke admiration and aspiration, motivating individuals to make purchasing decisions that they believe will enhance their social image or status. Through these methods, marketers capitalise on social comparison and shape and reinforce consumer behavior patterns.

Loss Aversion

Studies in behavioral economics highlight a cognitive bias known as loss aversion, which suggests that people fear losses more than they value equivalent gains. This concept, introduced by Kahneman and Tversky in their seminal work *Prospect Theory* (1979), demonstrates that the emotional pain of losing something is significantly more intense than the pleasure derived from gaining something of the same value (Kahneman and Tversky 115). For instance, the distress of losing $100 often feels stronger than the satisfaction of finding $100. This asymmetry profoundly influences decision-making, often leading individuals to take measures to avoid losses, even if those measures are not entirely rational. Digital marketing has adeptly harnessed the principles of loss aversion to drive consumer behavior, particularly by creating a sense of scarcity and urgency. Techniques like displaying phrases like “Only 2 left in stock” or “Sale ends in 24 hours” leverage psychological pressure to compel quick decision-making. Scarcity implies that a product is highly sought after and could be unattainable if one hesitates, while urgency creates a fear of missing out (FOMO) on time-sensitive opportunities. These strategies activate the consumer’s aversion to loss, making them more likely to

act impulsively to secure the product or deal before it disappears. By doing so, marketers encourage purchases and enhance the perceived value of the product or service through the lens of exclusivity and immediacy.

Emotional Triggers

FOMO-driven (Fear of Missing Out) messages are powerful tools marketers use to evoke emotions, such as excitement, envy, and regret, prompting consumers to make impulsive decisions. These messages often highlight what others are experiencing or acquiring, thereby triggering a sense of exclusion and urgency. For instance, showcasing social media influencers enjoying a trending product or emphasising limited-time offers ("Sale ends tonight!") can make consumers feel as though they are missing out on something valuable or exclusive. By emphasising FOMO's "fear" aspect, marketers ensure that individuals feel an immediate and compelling need to act. This fear taps into the human instinct to avoid regret, as consumers worry about losing opportunities to gain social status, pleasure, or convenience. Messages such as "Hurry! Don't be the one to miss out" or "Join thousands who have already signed up" amplify the sense of urgency and capitalise on the psychological discomfort of potential loss. A heightened emotional state overrides rational decision-making, leading to spontaneous purchases or actions designed to alleviate the fear of being left out or falling behind.

Strategies for Employing FOMO in Digital Marketing

Digital marketers utilise a variety of tactics to create FOMO among consumers.

Scarcity and Urgency

Scarcity and urgency are among the most effective psychological tools for driving FOMO, leveraging the principles of loss aversion and the desire for exclusivity. These tactics create a sense of immediacy and limited availability, which compels consumers to act quickly to avoid missing out on valuable opportunities. By presenting products or offers as rare or fleeting, marketers tap into the primal fear of regret and the need to secure something before it

becomes inaccessible. Limited-time offers countdown timers, and low-stock alerts are widely used to stimulate immediate consumer action. For example, e-commerce platforms like Amazon frequently display messages such as "Only 3 items left in stock" or "Deal expires in 4 hours." These alerts not only emphasise the scarcity of the product but also suggest that others are competing for the same item, heightening the urgency to act. The combination of a ticking clock and the fear of losing a desirable product creates a psychological pressure that overrides deliberative decision-making, pushing consumers toward impulsive purchases.

This strategy is not limited to e-commerce. Travel websites like Booking.com often use phrases like "Only 2 rooms left at this price" or "Booked 10 times in the last 24 hours," fostering a sense of competition and urgency. Similarly, flash sales and event registrations often highlight phrases like "Hurry limited seats available" or "Register before midnight for early bird pricing." By employing these scarcity and urgency tactics, marketers effectively maximize conversions, leveraging consumers' FOMO to boost sales, increase engagement, and create a heightened perception of value for their products or services. Tuten and Solomon emphasise that these strategies are particularly effective in the digital age, where consumers are inundated with choices and are more likely to respond to offers that create a sense of immediacy and exclusivity (Tuten and Solomon). By strategically employing scarcity and urgency, marketers successfully tap into decision-making's emotional and psychological drivers, making FOMO a cornerstone of modern consumer behavior.**Social Proof**

Social proof is a powerful psychological phenomenon that plays a crucial role in amplifying FOMO by leveraging the behavior and opinions of others to influence individual decision-making. When people see that a product or service is popular or widely endorsed, they are more likely to perceive it as valuable and desirable. This sense of collective validation creates a compelling narrative that the individual risks missing out on something beneficial or rewarding if they fail to act. Marketers frequently utilise customer reviews, testimonials, star ratings, and real-time usage statistics to highlight the popularity of their offerings. These tools build trust and reinforce the idea that others are already benefiting from the product or

service, triggering a fear of being left behind. For instance, e-commerce platforms prominently feature messages like "Most popular item in this category" or "Best-selling product this week," encouraging consumers to follow the crowd and purchase.

Booking platforms like Airbnb and Booking.com are particularly adept at using social proof to create urgency and competition. Notifications such as "10 people are looking at this property right now" or "This property was booked 3 times in the past hour" combine social proof with scarcity, amplifying the fear that the opportunity could disappear. Similarly, phrases like "Join the millions of satisfied customers" or "Over 100,000 sold" signal widespread approval, making consumers feel they are part of a larger, booming trend if they act quickly. According to Cialdini, social proof is especially adequate when individuals are uncertain about their choices or perceive those endorsing the product as similar to themselves. In the digital age, this principle is further amplified by user-generated content, such as social media posts featuring influencers or everyday consumers showcasing their positive experiences. These endorsements act as modern testimonials, encouraging others to mimic their behavior and join the trend to avoid missing out. By integrating social proof into marketing strategies, businesses validate their offerings and create a heightened sense of urgency and desirability. This psychological approach fosters a perception of scarcity and popularity, driving consumers to act impulsively to align themselves with what others are already enjoying.

Exclusivity

Creating an aura of exclusivity is a highly effective strategy for motivating consumers, as it taps into their desire to feel special, valued, and part of an elite group. When individuals perceive that they have access to something not readily available to everyone, it fosters a sense of privilege and uniqueness. This exclusivity and urgency encourage consumers to act quickly to secure their access or maintain their privileged status. VIP memberships, early access to sales, and invitation-only events are some of the most popular tools marketers use to cultivate this sense of exclusivity. For instance, luxury brands and premium services often offer membership tiers,

where higher levels unlock special benefits such as personalised recommendations, priority customer service, or private shopping experiences. These perks create the impression that being part of the "inner circle" provides an enhanced experience that ordinary customers cannot access. Sephora exemplifies this approach with its tiered loyalty program, where members earn points through purchases that can be redeemed for exclusive rewards. Higher-tier members, such as those in the "VIB Rouge" category, gain access to early sales, exclusive product launches, and invitation-only events. This creates a strong incentive for customers to increase their spending to achieve or maintain their status, reinforcing brand loyalty and engagement.

Similarly, brands like Netflix or Spotify offer early access to new features or content for select customers, making them feel like insiders who enjoy privileges others do not. Other companies, like event organisers, leverage invitation-only strategies to add prestige and exclusivity, further motivating people to secure their spots. As Tuten and Solomon note, exclusivity creates a psychological dynamic where consumers feel a heightened sense of urgency and value for the offering. By framing access as limited or special, marketers create an environment where consumers are motivated to act and associate positive emotions, such as pride and satisfaction, with their purchases or memberships. This blend of privilege, urgency, and emotional connection makes exclusivity a cornerstone of successful marketing strategies (Tuten and Solomon 95).

Event-Based Marketing

Event-based marketing campaigns, particularly those tied to holidays, product launches, or special occasions, are highly effective in generating a heightened sense of FOMO. These campaigns leverage the natural excitement and anticipation of events to create a buzz that encourages consumers to participate or purchase. Marketers create a compelling narrative that draws people in and motivates action by framing the event as a limited opportunity to be part of something unique or groundbreaking.

One of the most iconic examples is Apple's product launches, which are meticulously crafted to spark excitement and anticipation. Apple often uses phrases like "Be among the first to experience the

future of technology" to position its products as must-have innovations that redefine the market. This message builds a sense of exclusivity and creates FOMO by implying that those who do not participate will miss out on a pivotal moment in technological advancement. The hype is further amplified by media coverage, influencer endorsements, and long lines outside stores, all reinforcing the idea that the launch is an unmissable event.

Other brands adopt similar strategies during holidays or seasonal events, such as Black Friday, Cyber Monday, or year-end sales. These campaigns emphasize limited-time deals and exclusive offers, urging consumers to act quickly to secure their purchases. For example, fashion brands might promote "holiday only collections" or "limited edition gift sets." At the same time, travel companies offer flash sales on vacation packages with messaging like "Book now for exclusive holiday savings." As Tuten and Solomon note, event-based marketing drives immediate consumer engagement and enhances brand loyalty by creating memorable experiences. By aligning their campaigns with moments of collective excitement and positioning their offerings as integral to the celebration, marketers effectively tap into the emotions of anticipation and urgency, ensuring that their audience feels compelled to participate to avoid missing out.

Case Studies

Black Friday Sales

Black Friday sales are a quintessential example of FOMO-driven marketing, showcasing how urgency and scarcity can drive consumer behavior on a massive scale. Retailers like Walmart, Best Buy, and others capitalise on the intense demand for deals by creating high-stakes shopping environments that encourage consumers to act immediately. By emphasising "doorbuster" deals, deeply discounted items available only for a limited time or in limited quantities, these sales create a sense of exclusivity and urgency, making customers feel they must act quickly or miss out on a valuable opportunity. Marketing messages such as "While supplies last" or "Limited stock available" further amplify this effect by suggesting that competition for these deals is fierce. This strategy leverages the psychological principle of scarcity, which, as Cialdini explains, increases the

perceived value of an item when it is in short supply. Coupled with the time-sensitive nature of Black Friday, where deals often expire within hours, these tactics compel consumers to prioritise immediate action over careful deliberation, often leading to impulsive buying behaviors (Kahneman).

The communal aspect of the event also heightens the frenzy of Black Friday. Images and stories of crowded stores, long lines, and shoppers rushing to grab deals reinforce the idea that everyone else is participating, triggering the fear of being left out. Even online retailers like Amazon replicate this atmosphere during Black Friday and Cyber Monday sales with countdown timers, flash deals, and notifications like "Only 2 left in stock" or "20 people are viewing this item." These digital strategies effectively mimic the high-pressure environment of in-store shopping, ensuring that the FOMO effect translates across all shopping platforms. In addition to driving sales, these FOMO-based tactics create memorable shopping experiences that encourage brand loyalty and repeat participation in future sales events. As a result, Black Friday has become more than just a shopping day; it's a cultural phenomenon that embodies the effectiveness of FOMO-driven marketing in stimulating consumer demand and maximizing revenue for retailers.

Instagram Influences

Social media influencers significantly amplify FOMO, leveraging their aspirational lifestyles and massive followings to create compelling narratives around products and experiences. By sharing curated posts depicting an idealised version of life, whether it is luxurious vacations, trendy outfits, or exclusive events, these influencers make their audiences feel they are missing out on something valuable if they do not follow suit (Banet-Weiser). This aspirational content blurs the line between advertising and entertainment, making the marketing message more personal and relatable (Solomon).

Influencers often enhance this FOMO effect by incorporating phrases like "Get yours now before it's gone" or "Limited stock available," which create a sense of urgency and exclusivity around the promoted product or service. For example, a beauty influencer might showcase a skincare product while emphasising that it's a "hot

item" selling out quickly, encouraging their followers to act immediately to secure it. These tactics are particularly effective because they come from individuals that audiences perceive as trustworthy or relatable, increasing the impact of the message. Moreover, influencers frequently depict products as essential for achieving similar lifestyles or experiences. For instance, a travel influencer posting photos from an exotic destination might credit a specific brand for their gear or accommodations, subtly suggesting that purchasing these products is a gateway to the same aspirational lifestyle. By tying the product to an emotionally charged experience such as adventure, beauty, or luxury, these posts tap into consumers' desires to emulate the influencer's success or happiness.

As Tuten and Solomon highlight, this dynamic makes social media an ideal platform for FOMO-driven marketing. The real-time nature of Instagram, combined with features like Stories and live streams, further intensifies the urgency, as these posts are often temporary and encourage immediate engagement. Additionally, the interactive aspect of social media, where followers can comment, share, or tag their friends, amplifies the reach of these campaigns, ensuring that the FOMO effect spreads across wider networks. Influencers wield immense power to drive consumer behavior through their aspirational content and carefully crafted messaging, making them indispensable assets in modern marketing strategies.

Streaming Services

Streaming platforms like Netflix and Disney effectively harness FOMO to retain subscribers and drive engagement by emphasising exclusive content and limited-time availability. These platforms strategically promote blockbuster movies, trending series, or special releases with marketing messages that urge viewers to "watch now before it's too late." By framing content as a fleeting opportunity, they create a sense of urgency that compels subscribers to prioritise their streaming experiences over other activities. For example, Netflix often highlights the exclusivity of its original productions, such as high-profile films or globally popular series like *Stranger Things*, positioning them as must-watch events. Countdown teasers, release-day promotions, and social media buzz amplify the excitement, ensuring viewers feel pressured to join the conversation while the

content is still trending. On the other hand, Disney frequently employs similar strategies with limited-time releases of legacy titles or highly anticipated originals like those from *Star Wars* or Marvel franchises. By announcing that specific titles will be "available for a limited time," Disney motivates subscribers to act quickly, reinforcing the idea that delaying could result in missing out entirely.

Additionally, streaming platforms capitalise on the fear of social exclusion. Popular series or movies often become cultural phenomena, sparking widespread discussions on social media, memes, and water cooler conversations. This communal aspect of viewing creates an additional layer of FOMO, as subscribers fear being left out of collective experiences or not understanding trending topics. Marketing campaigns tap into this fear by encouraging subscribers to "stay in the loop" and watch before spoilers emerge or the cultural buzz fades. Scarcity and exclusivity are powerful motivators for human behavior, and streaming platforms use these principles to keep viewers engaged and subscribed (Cialdini). By consistently offering fresh, exclusive content and emphasising its limited-time availability, platforms like Netflix and Disney ensure their audiences remain captivated, preventing churn and solidifying their place in the competitive streaming market.

Ethical Implications

While FOMO is an effective marketing strategy, it raises several ethical concerns.

Exploitation of Anxiety

FOMO-driven marketing tactics deeply exploit consumers' psychological vulnerabilities, tapping into their anxieties about missing out on desirable experiences or opportunities. This psychological manipulation can prompt impulsive and often unnecessary purchases, as consumers are driven more by fear of regret than genuine need or desire. By leveraging scarcity, urgency, and social proof, marketers create an environment where anxiety becomes a significant motivator. For instance, the fear of missing out on a limited-time deal or an exclusive product release can push individuals to buy impulsively, even when they may not have planned or wanted the item in the first place.

This exploitation of anxiety not only fuels immediate consumer actions but also contributes to a broader culture of dissatisfaction. Consumers who continuously give in to FOMO-driven urges may begin to feel dissatisfied with their choices or experience "buyer's remorse" when the initial thrill of a purchase fades. This can lead to a cycle of compulsive buying, where individuals feel compelled to make constant purchases to alleviate the anxiety of missing out but are left feeling empty or regretful once the momentary excitement subsides. Moreover, continuous exposure to FOMO-driven marketing reinforces a sense of inadequacy, as consumers often compare themselves to others who appear to have access to exclusive products, experiences, or lifestyles. This comparison can exacerbate feelings of anxiety and social pressure, leading to a heightened sense of insecurity about one's own status or worth. The relentless pursuit of staying ahead in the social or consumer race can contribute to stress, a decline in mental well-being, and, paradoxically, a deepening dissatisfaction with one's possessions and lifestyle.

Tuten and Solomon discuss how this exploitation fuels consumption and cultivates a mindset that equates material possessions and fleeting experiences with happiness and fulfillment. Ultimately, these marketing tactics contribute to a cycle of anxiety, impulsivity, and fleeting satisfaction, all of which undermine long-term contentment and well-being. By manipulating consumers' fears, marketers may create a short-term sales boost but also foster a deeper emotional and psychological burden on their audience.

Overconsumption

Marketing tactics that emphasise scarcity and urgency not only drive impulsive consumer behavior but also contribute to a broader issue of overconsumption, with serious environmental consequences. By creating a sense of urgency around limited-time offers and exclusive products, marketers encourage individuals to purchase items that they often don't need simply to avoid missing out on a perceived opportunity. This culture of overconsumption, fueled by FOMO, leads to excess buying, even in cases where the items purchased do not add long-term value to the consumer's life.

As Kahneman and Tversky observed, the human tendency to value potential losses more than equivalent gains plays a key role in

this behavior (115). The fear of losing out on a product or deal, even if unnecessary, outweighs rational decision-making, leading consumers to buy impulsively. This unchecked purchasing behavior exacerbates waste, as many of these products are unused or discarded. The result is financial waste for consumers and significant environmental costs associated with the production, transportation, and disposal of goods. Overconsumption also strains natural resources, contributing to the depletion of raw materials, excessive energy consumption, and increased carbon emissions. The manufacturing processes that support constant consumer demand require large amounts of water, energy, and raw materials, often leading to environmental degradation. Moreover, the rapid turnover of products, driven by the relentless push for new trends and exclusive releases, exacerbates the waste issue. Items purchased impulsively often have short lifespans, ending up in landfills once their novelty fades.

Furthermore, the constant cycle of consumption promoted by scarcity-driven marketing further entrenches the culture of disposability. When consumers are conditioned to view products as temporary or limited, they may discard them once the novelty wears off, leading to a higher turnover rate in consumer goods. The environmental implications of this overconsumption are profound, as it depletes finite resources and increases the volume of waste that must be managed. As consumers fall into this cycle of overconsumption, marketers, while driving short-term profits, inadvertently contribute to broader environmental challenges. This creates a paradox: the drive to fulfill immediate desires through FOMO-driven purchases leads to long-term consequences for both the individual and the planet. The unchecked growth in consumption and waste underscores the need for more sustainable consumption practices and a shift toward mindful consumerism.

Transparency

While scarcity and urgency are practical marketing tools, some campaigns cross ethical lines by using deceptive practices that exaggerate or fabricate these elements to manipulate consumer behavior. Phrases like “Only 2 left in stock” or “Sale ends in 24 hours” can be misleading if not based on product availability or time constraints. Sometimes, retailers may create a sense of urgency by making products appear scarce, even when they have ample stock or

the sale has no fixed end date. This deception can cause consumers to make impulsive purchases based on false perceptions, often leading them to buy items they do not need or cannot afford.

Cialdini emphasises the importance of ethical influence in marketing and stresses that transparency is essential in building consumer trust and loyalty. When businesses use exaggerated claims about scarcity or urgency, they undermine the integrity of their relationship with consumers, potentially damaging their reputation in the long run. Furthermore, the lack of transparency in these marketing tactics can erode consumer confidence, as individuals may feel deceived when they discover that the urgency or exclusivity they were led to believe was fabricated. This manipulation breeds dissatisfaction, contributing to a general mistrust of marketing practices. There is a growing demand for greater transparency in marketing to counteract these deceptive tactics. Consumers should be able to make informed decisions, knowing they are not being pressured or misled by exaggerated claims. Transparency in product availability, pricing, and promotion timing would allow individuals to approach purchasing decisions with a clearer understanding of what they are committing to. This would help mitigate the anxiety-driven behavior induced by FOMO and empower consumers to make more thoughtful, intentional choices rather than succumb to the urgency created by deceptive marketing tactics. By embracing transparency, companies foster trust and goodwill and cultivate long-term relationships with their customers. Ethical marketing practices that provide clear, truthful information about products and offers contribute to a healthier consumer environment and ensure that decisions are based on accurate, honest representations, leading to more sustainable and ethical consumption habits.

Conclusion

The Rhetoric of FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) in digital marketing has proven to be a potent tool, harnessing psychological principles such as scarcity, urgency, and social comparison to influence consumer behavior. Marketers have successfully tapped into deep-seated human fears of exclusion and loss, creating campaigns that spur quick decisions and drive immediate sales. FOMO-driven tactics' effectiveness lies in their ability to tap into primal instincts,

prompting consumers to act without thoroughly evaluating their needs or the consequences of their actions. However, as with any potent tool, using FOMO in marketing has significant ethical challenges that must be addressed to maintain consumer trust and ensure responsible practices.

One of the primary concerns surrounding FOMO-based marketing is the psychological toll it can take on consumers. By exploiting feelings of anxiety, inadequacy, and social pressure, these tactics contribute to a culture of overconsumption and environmental degradation. Impulsive buying, driven by an artificial sense of urgency, not only results in financial waste for consumers but also contributes to broader societal issues, including resource depletion and increased waste. Furthermore, exploiting consumer emotions through deceptive practices, such as exaggerating scarcity or urgency, risks undermining trust and damaging the long-term relationship between brands and their audiences. Marketers must prioritise transparency and integrity in their campaigns to navigate these ethical pitfalls. Instead of relying on manipulative tactics, businesses should provide honest, clear information that empowers consumers to make informed decisions. Transparency regarding product availability, pricing, and promotional timelines would help mitigate feelings of anxiety and FOMO, promoting a healthier and more sustainable consumer experience. By embracing ethical marketing practices, businesses can foster loyalty and trust, positively impacting both their bottom line and the well-being of their customers.

As digital marketing continues to evolve, researchers and practitioners must deepen their understanding of FOMO-driven tactics' long-term effects on consumer psychology and societal consumption patterns. Future research should explore how the constant exposure to FOMO-inducing content impacts consumer decision-making over time, particularly regarding mental health, financial well-being, and environmental sustainability. By examining these effects, we can develop more holistic marketing strategies that drive engagement and promote positive outcomes for both consumers and the broader society. While FOMO-driven marketing remains an effective and powerful tool for brands, businesses must balance persuasion and ethics. With careful consideration and a commitment to transparency, marketers can craft campaigns that

engage consumers without compromising their trust, emotional well-being, or the broader interests of society. Responsible use of FOMO, guided by ethical principles, can lead to marketing strategies that are both effective and sustainable in the long run.

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10.

Quest for Eco-spirituality: Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantments*

Shivangi

Abstract

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni stands as a literary giant with several awards to her credit and a trailblasing career as a novelist, poet, children's writer, activist, and creative writing teacher. The passion and zeal with which she weaves her imaginative world have gained her a wide readership and much critical acclaim across the globe. Divakaruni's writings offer a unique standpoint that embraces nature while challenging the doctrines of patriarchy at the same time. Her unwavering belief in the reciprocity, mutuality, circularity, and interconnectedness of the natural world injects vibrancy and potency into her celebrated fictional cosmos. This article seeks to scrutinise Divakaruni's modern retelling of the Ramayan under the lens of spiritual ecofeminism.

Keywords: spiritual ecofeminism, environmental justice, nature, gender, Indian mythology.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's distinguished novel, *The Forest of Enchantments*, presents a refreshing and nuanced retelling of the *Ramayana* through the perspective of Sita. In the prologue, Divakaruni emphasises that Sita designates her narrative as "the Sitayan" (Forest 4). By positioning Sita at the forefront of the story, Divakaruni transforms this esteemed Indian epic into a narrative rich in pluralities and possibilities. As the narrator who defines her journey, Sita serves to interrogate the dominant patriarchal discourse critically. This modern reinterpretation creates new frameworks within traditional, male-centric narratives, enabling women to challenge the masculinist paradigms inherent in the so-called 'grand narrative'. Divakaruni's portrayal of Sita transcends the notion of victimhood, presenting her as a figure of considerable strength, fortitude, and resilience. The novel invites readers into a complex

world where women are no longer cast in passive roles designed to serve others.

Divakaruni often uses nature as a metaphor to explicate her philosophy of life. As the narrative unfolds, we see that nature plays an important role in Sita's self-discovery as a spiritual being who enjoys a profoundly intimate relationship with her natural surroundings. In the novel, Sita's identity is strongly mediated through her love and care for the natural world. Indeed, the close connection of Sita with land and nature cannot be understated. Her myriad interactions with the natural elements have deep spiritual undercurrents. This article seeks to ascertain strands of spiritual ecofeminism in *The Forest of Enchantments*. It attempts to study feminist and ecological lessons embedded in Divakaruni's retelling of the *Ramayan*, using the ideals and beliefs of neo-pagan thinker and foremother of the Goddess movement, Carol P. Christ. Though Divakaruni and Christ belong to different religious backgrounds, they are bound together by their vision to challenge the androcentric mode of thinking. At this stage, it is imperative to mention that while Carol P. Christ's Goddess scholarship acts as the main analytical framework in the article, views espoused by ecofeminists Charlene Spretnak, Vandana Shiva, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Starhawk (Miriam Simos), also play an important role in the thematic progression of the article,. A common thread runs through all of their writings, linking the arguments raised in the article, to a cohesive theoretical framework.

Carol Christ is credited with seeking to create a comprehensive account of the religious and ethical worldview implied by Goddess thought and practice. Her work is seminal to Goddess studies and scholarship. Feminist writings and the feminist movement resulted in her increased awareness of how Christianity was infused with patterns of thought that justified the subordination of and contempt for women and modeled divine power after the male warrior. Her early work in religion and literature was intended to connect theology to the experiences of people's lives and those of others. It led to the resolution of her uncertainty about whether the Goddess was simply a metaphor for oneself, the sum of an indifferent "nature" or whether the Goddess stood for an embodied personal power within and beyond us who deeply cares for us. Christ embraced the latter

view (Ruether, *Goddesses* 285-87). Christ believes that humans must not aspire to set themselves apart from nature. She believes humans should consciously eschew dualistic philosophies claiming human ascendancy over nature. Christ's feminist-ecological spirituality is revealed when she urges humans to "commune with nature and other people" (Christ, *Rebirth* 170) in new and empowering ways to save our planet from irreparable damage. At the core of her writings is the belief that the entire spectrum of life ought to be nurtured and celebrated. A deeper analysis of Divakaruni's novel will show that her characters echo Christ's radical ecofeminist notions and concerns. Both believe in the reciprocity, circularity, and symbiosis of the cosmic whole. Both believe in life-affirming values that envision all beings as deeply connected in the web of life.

Christ puts forth a new critical framework to challenge the unexamined presuppositions in Western theology. She calls her critical paradigm "the Goddess hypothesis," which recognises women as important historical and religious actors. Christ venerates the Goddess religion for its "effort to resurrect the egalitarian harmony between humans, men and women, and nature of prepatriarchal times" (Ruether, *Integrating* 99). Goddess religion endeavours to reintegrate the alienating hierarchical dualisms of patriarchal theology into a life-affirming communion. It does not simply reverse the patriarchal subjugation of women, nature, and the nonhuman world. Rather, it reestablishes these dualisms in an interactive harmony. Despite stiff resistance, the Goddess religion has made a powerful comeback recently. Christ feels that the re-emergence of Goddess symbolism is a force to reckon with. She believes that the resurrection of Goddess symbolism is a manifestation of the emerging power of women (*Laughter* 156). Divakaruni's creative epistemology seems to spring from her deep reverence for Goddess-based religion. In the novel, Sita presents a vivid account of the temple of the Goddess:

> The temple of Parvati was smaller than one might have expected in a palace: a single, windowless room built of rough-hewn stone. But the plain spire thrust itself unapologetically into the sky, demanding to be noticed by the heavens. No one knew when it had been constructed. Perhaps it was built by one of the earlier Janaks, or perhaps, as certain tales claimed it, it rose fully formed from the earth. Whenever I stepped into it, I felt I was entering a space of power where the

> relationship between men and gods remained intimate and primeval. (Divakaruni, *Forest* 18)

The above lines testify to Divakaruni's belief in the Goddess religion. They establish Divakaruni's theological stance as a liberating one. They also demonstrate how a confluence of shared interests in Goddess religion binds together Christ and Divakaruni. Divakaruni's Goddess seems to redress an imbalance by redefining the divine-human relationship. Her counter-discursive ideology is clearly reflected in her description of the Goddess. She seems to be inspired by the myths and symbols of the Goddess culture in her spiritual leanings. Divakaruni's representation of the Goddess contradicts the normative view of divine power as an unrelated and aloof spectator. In its most profound sense, it reflects the essence of divinity itself. Here, the Goddess stands for an egalitarian view of divinity. It challenges the patriarchal, masculinist paradigms of theology.

According to Christ, "Goddess/God is present with and in every individual, hoping to lure or persuade it to make choices that will be beneficial both to itself and to the whole of life" (*She* 52). Christ believes that Goddess/God is not separate from the world. Goddess/God is "internally affected by what happens in the world" (88). Goddess/God is relational and absolute at the same time. Goddess/God keeps the balance of the world "tipped in favor of life and creativity, thus preventing it from disintegrating into sheer chaos" (*She* 106). The power of Goddess/God is "infinite" which means that Goddess/God has the "power to be with every individual in the universe in every moment" (107). We are never really alone. However, the Goddess/God can "influence and inspire us only if we open ourselves to her power" (*Rebirth* 106). Christ argues that our world will improve if we open our hearts and work in tandem with Goddess/God to co-create a different world (*She* 108).

There are numerous instances in the novel when Sita prays fervently to the Goddess for guidance. At the novel's beginning, she invokes the Goddess to guide Ram's hand as he strings Shiva's bow so that he can secure her hand in marriage. After praying ardently, Sita waits hopefully for the Goddess to present her with a sign. However, there is no sign from the Goddess. Sita is halfway back to the palace when the temple priest calls her name. He informs Sita

that the Goddess has heard her prayers. The flower Sita placed on the idol's head while praying had fallen (Divakaruni, *Forest* 18-19). When Ram and Sita are about to exchange garlands after he wins her hand in marriage, Ram reveals his promise to his brothers long ago that they will all get married simultaneously. He refuses to proceed with the wedding unless King Janak fulfills Ram's vow. Sita again prays to the Goddess to help her find a way out of this unexpected roadblock. The Goddess comes to Sita's rescue, and words rise within her throat "like a fountain." Sita is able to fix the problem by reminding her father of her two unmarried cousins, Mandavi and Shrutakirti (36). Sita implores the Goddess for divine assistance when Kaikeyi invites her to fight a duel with her. She says, "*Oh Goddess... . Why do you send me this challenge, just when things are going smoothly and I'm beginning to think of Ayodhya as home?"* The answer comes to her with lightning speed and she realises that she has to fight this one battle to prepare herself for the many battles she must fight in the future (80-81). When Ram is banished to the forest for fourteen years, Sita prays to the Goddess to help her convince Ram to take her with him to the forest (110). She again invokes the Goddess to protect Ram after she regrets sending him on a risky errand to procure a golden deer for her. She says, "*Please, Goddess, let him come back to me quickly. I promise, I'll never ask him – or you – for anything again".* However, the Goddess does not send her a sign as she has angered the Goddess by being petulant and selfish (162). In the end, Sita realises that she is herself an embodiment of the divine spirit. Hence, Sita's power in the novel is both within and without. The Goddess bursts forth through Sita's personal experiences as power from within. However, the Goddess is also transcendent, as she has the power to empower, transform, and heal Sita.

Christ's philosophy exhibits strands of nature mysticism. Her works often describe her "sense of mystical connection to the natural world" (*Rebirth* 113). For Christ, no "fundamental distinctions" exist between humans and nature. She seeks to reconstruct egalitarian harmony between humans and the earth's body. In her opinion, neither humanity nor divinity supersedes nature. She urges us to transform the way we think. It calls for a deconstruction of the patriarchal methodology of thought. According to Christ, we must view the cosmos in a matrix of ongoing interconnectivity and

relationality. Similarly, Vandana Shiva, a leading Indian ecofeminist, attempts to dismantle patriarchal hegemony in her works. Her ontological vision is rooted in the symbolic association of women with nature. She argues that "[w]omen in India are an intimate part of nature, both in imagination and in practice" (*Staying* 39). In her works, she turns to traditional Hindu cosmology to explicate the worldview needed to restore ecological harmony and balance. She calls for the recovery of the "Feminine Principle" to counter the vicious forces of Western maldevelopment. She speaks of this recovery, not in the Western sense of a dichotomising of masculinity and femininity as polar binaries. Instead, it is a dynamic interaction of creative energy. Shiva says female *Shakti* and male form (*Purusha*) produce *Prakriti* (nature). She further states that both *Shakti* and *Prakriti* have been viewed and venerated as feminine in Hinduism. To further cement her point, she adds that Hinduism celebrates women as key agents in maintaining life (Ruether, *Integrating* 107).

Shiva asserts that the relationship between man and nature here differs radically from the view of man as separate from and dominating nature. She sees the daily worship of the sacred tulsi within Indian households as a good illustration of this difference. (*Staying* 41). She further adds that women have the potential to create new intellectual ecological paradigms. Their role in circumventing and preventing ecological crises is of the utmost importance. She believes that the producers of life alone can be its real custodians. Since women are embedded in nature, they have the wherewithal to take charge of its sustenance (*Staying* 47).

Christian feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether is another prominent voice critiquing patriarchal hegemony in traditional Christian beliefs. Ruether states that every aspect of life is intimately connected with nature in Hindu cosmology. Nature is seen as an embodiment of the divine in traditional Hindu thought. Hence, the veneration and worship of nature form an integral aspect of Hindu cosmology (*Integrating* 48). Divakaruni demonstrates similar views in the novel through Sita's character. In the novel, Sita shares an indispensable bond with nature. An attachment to the natural landscape seems crucial to her sense of self and personhood. Even though Sita is a princess, she yearns to commune with nature by walking barefoot in the palace gardens. She relishes the feel of

planting her feet in the luscious, dewy grass of the palace arbours. Moreover, she looks after the palace gardens, which is an unconventional responsibility for a princess of her stature:

> I walked through the extensive gardens of my father, King Janak, reveling in the feel of the soft grass, beaded with the dews of dawn, on my bare feet. I was accompanied by the chief gardeners, for I was the overseer of the palace arbours, an unusual duty for a princess. They pointed out problems they'd been unable to solve: a gnarled champak, refusing to flower; a rare harshringar, shriveling up no matter what they tried; a copse of bamboos with black rot creeping up their stalks. (Divakaruni, *Forest* 5)

The palace gardeners venerate Sita for her unique ability to heal withered flowers and plants through physical touch. Sita's innate closeness with nature equips her with the power to enter into an egalitarian communion with her environmental landscape. Through her benevolent and curative touch, Sita breathes new life into the palace gardens. Her reciprocal relationship with nature underpins and theorises the ecofeminist stance of the novel. Divakaruni subtly draws attention to the prevailing ecological issues by linking Sita to her natural landscape. In a way, Sita seems to be disseminating a new holistic paradigm through her incessant care and concern for her natural surroundings. It can help counter the ruthless plunder of our ecology, which is rampant in the current epoch.

Starhawk says, "From earliest times, women have been... priestesses, diviners, midwives, poets, healers, and singers of songs of power" ("Witchcraft" 260). She states that in ancient matrifocal civilisations, priestesses "discovered and tested the healing herbs" to unlock their therapeutic secrets. In addition, their knowledge of nature allowed them to tame cattle, grow wheat and corn, and keep track of the movements of the moon, stars, and sun (261). In this novel, Sita's ability to fathom the curative potential of plants and herbs demonstrates strands of nature-oriented spirituality. As an embodiment of the Goddess, she sustains all life forms and finds spiritual fulfillment within nature. Her ability to unravel the mysteries of nature is in harmony with her conception as a divine being which grounds and sustains the process of life itself. Sita's spirituality is closely linked with the healing arts, reflecting her earth-based theological worldview (Divakaruni, *Forest* 323).

Indian civilisation is unique in its veneration of forests as the primary source of life and fertility. All our ancient texts and scriptures allude to forests as places of retreat. Our sages revered them as sites for spiritual, intellectual, and metaphysical reawakening. It is believed that all our Vedic literature was composed in the forests. According to Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore, ancient Indian civilisation has its genesis in the sacred groves of our earliest forest hermitages. According to Vandana Shiva, "All religions and cultures of South Asian region have been rooted in the forests, not through fear and ignorance but through ecological insight" (*Staying* 57). She further adds that "[w]omen's environmental action in India preceded the UN Women's Decade as well as the 1972 Stockholm Environment Conference." She points out that some three hundred years ago, a few members of the Bishnoi community in the state of Rajasthan, laid down their lives to save their sacred *khejri* trees by clinging to them. At the forefront of this movement was a woman named Amrita Devi. Vandana Shiva says that this event marks the beginning of the recorded history of the Chipko movement in India. The Chipko movement was a novel forest conservation movement in India that embraced the concept of tree-hugging to prevent government-sponsored deforestation and lumbering. The movement began in the Garhwal region of Uttarakhand (formerly a part of Uttar Pradesh) in 1973. It has popularly been referred to as a women's movement as it was spearheaded predominantly by rural women. The movement was fueled by the "ecological insights and political and moral strengths of women" (66). The movement continues to be a landmark event in the annals of Indian activism for its collective mobilisation of rural women for the cause of forest conservation. According to Vandana Shiva, "The significant catalysers of the transformations which made Chipko resistance possible have been women like Mira Behn, Sarala Behn, Bimala Behn, Hima Devi, Gauri Devi, Gunga Devi, Bachni Devi, Itwari Devi, Chamun Devi, and many others" (67).

In the novel, Sita feels an inexplicable pull towards the forest. It foregrounds her inclusive vision along with her earth-based spirituality. Sita identifies herself with all the elements of the natural world, including the forests. Her holistic worldview acts as the facilitator, imbuing her with a deep yearning for the mysterious

world of the forests. Sita's spiritual reality is located in the natural world, and forests form an important aspect of her spiritual vision (Divakaruni, *Forest* 8). During their exile, Ram and Sita stay in the bounteous forests of Panchabati. Sita finds the region "wild and mysterious" but "welcoming" as well. Sita finds that the plants in Panchabati are "particularly attuned" to her. Bushes pull in their thorns or loosen the earth around their roots when she waters them. In this place, far apart from the world of cities and towns, Sita feels an undeniable sense of belongingness. Tired of their bland diet of fruits and roots, Sita plants a vegetable garden in Panchabati from the seeds given by Ahalya. Much to her surprise, the vegetables grow "enthusiastically", and Sita feels grateful to see that she has not lost her touch (Divakaruni, *Forest* 137-39).

When it is time for them to return to Ayodhya, Sita realises that she will miss the forest despite its hardships. She reckons that she has enjoyed freedom here, a lightness that she will never experience again once she is crowned queen of Ayodhya. In the forest, she has Ram all to herself. In Panchabati, Ram becomes her true confidant and lover. Their bond strengthens as Ram is no longer weighed down by his princely responsibilities and duties in the forest. Sita truly enjoys their intimate interlude in the forest (Divakaruni, *Forest* 154). This article, has shown how Divakaruni's novel explores the interconnections between ecology and feminism holistically. Her contemporary retelling of the *Ramayan* predates and anticipates much of the ongoing debates on ecofeminist theology and spirituality. Characterising Sita as an ecologically conscious person will inspire many to make mindful efforts to repair the web of life.

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11.

BrexLit through Gender Lens: A Study of Ali Smith's *Autumn* and Jonathan Coe's *Middle England*

Mousumi Chowdhury

Abstract

Brexit, Britain's exit from the European Union, has been approached critically from political, economic, social, and cultural points of view, but gender issues in the Brexit discourses are less explored. Brexit discourses have institutionalised masculinity to such an extent that Brexit has been critiqued as a masculinist resurgence. Theresa May's employment as Britain's second female prime minister and her steering of the Brexit deal does not offer any narrative of women empowerment. Underrepresentation of women in the Brexit deal, preference for "Hard Brexit", and naturalisation militarism in Brexit discourses betray Britain's androcentric culture. Social and political realities have been documented in the pages of creative literature down the ages. Brexit has spawned a new sub-genre called BrexLit, which, as state-of-the-nation novels, mirror various socio-political ramifications. Although BrexLit is critiqued from political, economic, and other perspectives, gender issues in Brexit novels are largely overlooked. Taking a cue from two major Brexit novels, namely *Autumn* by Ali Smith and *Middle England* by Jonathan Coe, the article, unveils the toxic, sexist culture of contemporary Britain. The article also analyses how gender issues trigger Euroscepticism and, driven by xenophobia, femonationalists stigmatise certain immigrants.

Keywords: women empowerment, BrexLit, Euroscepticism, xenophobia, femonationalism

Introduction

While gender occupies the centre stage of attention both in academic and critical parlance, the gender issue in the Brexit discourses is considered the elephant in the room – a subject which, despite its conspicuous presence, is avoided as a subject of discussion. Analyses of Brexit typically focus on political, economic, social, and cultural

dimensions, but seldom do they engage with gender perspectives. For instance, Goodwin and Heath, while discussing Brexit and the Referendum, have emphasised educational inequality and disadvantageous low skill but made only a passing reference that "who are against equal opportunities for women and homosexuals [were] much more likely to support leave" (qtd. in Dustin et al. 18). Critical Feminist theory surrounding Brexit has primarily addressed the gendered consequences of Brexit, like how Brexit will put women and the LGBTQI+ community into a tried situation. Less has been told about the gendered campaigning on the eve of Brexit. Brexit discourse, through its employment of militarism and centralising the Brexit deal, has institutionalised the dominant masculinity. UKIP leader Nigel Farage's constant encouragement to see Christopher Nolan's movie *Dunkirk* and the Daily Telegraph's urging to British people to imbibe the Dunkirk spirit, as well as their attempt to draw parallels between Brexit and Dunkirk evacuation, may be studied as an attempt to foreground militarism in Brexit discourses. Despite the presence of a significant number of gendered others, women and sexual minorities are offered minuscule visibility both in Brexit campaigns and Brexit deals. UKIP's poster *Breaking Point*'s veiled threat of sexual violence/ miscegenation may also be noticed. Rightly does, U. Mellstrom terms Brexit as a "masculinist political revival" (Mellstrom 135).

Politically and culturally, Brexit was engineered by males to such an extent that it can be safely attributed to the title of an all-male business. T. Branigan in *The Guardian* and O'Brien in 2017 drew our attention to the fact that only a single woman was appointed to the negotiating team "while most civil servants are female and 11% are from ethnic minorities" (Branigan 2017). The significant figures handling Brexit were all males (Boris Jonson, Nigel Farage, David Cameron, and EL Miliband, to name a few). Even if Brexit paved the way for the second female prime minister for Britain, the rise of Theresa May offers no narrative of women empowerment. Instead, she faced harsh criticism from her conservative colleagues, who labelled her a weak leader. Hozic and True (2017) argue that her ascent serves as a reminder that "women reach positions of leadership at precarious or risky times" (Hozic and True 276). Again, the Centre for Research in Communication and Culture estimated

that "during the campaign, men were afforded 85 percent of press coverage" (qtd. in Dustin et al. 27). Haastrup et al., in their 2016 study, show how women were supposed to vote on emotive issues that particularly interest them. This gendering of the voting tendency of females is a marker of the entrenched patriarchal culture of Britain. Underrepresentation of women in the Brexit process, upholding of maleness in discourses, centralisation of the Brexit deal, preference for Hard Brexit, and naturalisation of military discourse in everyday life with its tacit dominance of maleness evince a highly masculinist culture.

In the British public imaginary, the EU is perceived as a threat not only to its sovereignty but, because of championing and mainstreaming SOGI causes, to its dominant patriarchal structure as well. The EU is considered an LGBTQI+ advocate and a catalyst for change in the Western mindscape. The EU laws are beneficial to fight social, political, economic, and institutional discrimination. Eugenia Caracciolo di Torella, in her book chapter, "The Unintended Consequences of Brexit: The Work-Life Balance", has analysed how the 1974 Social Action Plan triggered belatedly the provision for some family-friendly measures to create work-life balance. The introduction of maternity leave in 1997 by the Blair Government was one such move. The EU legislation and different cases of CJEU influenced provisions for the leave for fathers, parents, and caregivers. Apart from the breakup of the family due to differences of opinion regarding Brexit and the resultant psychological, social, and financial insecurity, women were the worst victims of austerity measures also. Despite the 2002 Adoption and Children Act (enabling same-sex couples to adopt in England and Wales), Civil Partnership Act 2004 & 2005 (recognising same-sex couples), and Same-sex Marriage Act 2013, the societal attitude towards queers remains highly discriminating. Galop's submitted data (2016) shows a 147% rise in hate crimes against SOGI minorities between July and September 2016, and Stonewall's 2017 research claims a 78% increase in such crimes over four years. The sharp upswing in reported incidents of abuse and discrimination against the queer is proof of toxic culture. The EU proved itself a significant catalyst in improving the lived experiences of queer communities; naturally, post-Brexit

Britain outside the jurisdiction of the EU legislation spells danger for the said community.

Brexlit

The interface between literature and politics is a known domain of British literature. Andrew Hadfield remarks, "Political thought is too important to be left to political science and history alone" (Hadfield 111). Epoch-making socio-political events like the Holocaust and Partition have been approached repeatedly in creative literature. Similarly, Britain's recent withdrawal of its membership from the European Union has spawned a new subgenre, Brexlit. A variety of Condition-of-England novels of the 1840s, these 21st-century Brexit novels address issues like socio-economic inequalities, immigration, neoliberal capitalism, the devolutions, post-2008 economic insecurity, prolonged economic depression, racism, post-truth culture and the row over the question of the continuation of continental EU membership. Robert Eagleston, Professor of Contemporary Literature and Thought at the University of London, has brilliantly resolved the dispute regarding the viability of approaching this global watershed in literature:

> Brexit is not only political, economic, and administrative; perhaps most significantly, it is an event in culture, too. Brexit grew from cultural beliefs, real or imaginary, about Europe and the UK; the arguments before, during and after the Referendum were – and are – arguments about culture. (Eaglestone 1)

Literature is a part of culture, and the novel is intimately tied up with the formation of the nation. It has delineated the question of national identity; British novelists have approached this socio-political event imaginatively in the realistic tradition of condition-of-England novels. Kristian Shaw, Senior Lecturer in Contemporary and Postcolonial Literature at the University of Lincoln, says, "BrexLit concerns fiction that either directly responds or imaginatively alludes to Britain's exit from the EU or engage with the subsequent socio-cultural, economic, racial or cosmopolitical consequences of Britain's withdrawal" (Shaw 18). Baroness Young of Hornsey, the Chair of the 2017 Man Booker Prize judging panel, expressed her surprise over the prompt and ample response of the writers to Brexit. This genre, a version of twentieth-century dystopian fiction and a variation of

Condition-of-England novels, enhances British novels' engagements with political culture.

From a sprawling catalogue of works, the article concentrates on two major BrexLits: Ali Smith's *Autumn*, the most celebrated and widely acknowledged of Brexit Novels, and *Middle England*, the last work of Jonathan Coe's trilogy. These novels, apart from featuring the spiral rise of frenzied nativist politics and its attendant ills, expose the dominance of a masculinist culture.

Autumn

Autumn, the first of the seasonal quartet by the Scottish writer Ali Smith and popularly adjudged as the best of the Brexit novels, champions cosmopolitan friendship over narrow nationalism. Besides the social, political, economic, and cultural ramifications of Brexit, *Autumn* translates the highly male-dominated culture of contemporary Britain. Smith archives these by adopting various means, one being the extended reference to the Profumo Affair/ Scandal 63. Smith succinctly alludes to the sore political scandal titled "Profumo Affair" through the protagonist Daniel's ruminations. The author documents Christine Keeler's reluctance to pose nude for the photo shoot by Lewis Morley, her hostile reception in popular culture, her lying, harassment at the hands of the repressive state apparatus, and her helplessness. The Profumo Affair was a major catalyst in establishing the Labour Party in 1964. Setting aside the political issues, Smith delineates the all-pervasive masculinist ambiance that is antagonistic to the survival and progress of women.

Christine Keeler's life narrative is a sad tale of victimisation. In her girlhood, she was sexually abused by her stepfather and his friends. During her term at "Murray's" as a topless girl, she came in contact with the society osteopath Stephen Ward. Her affair with John Profumo, the Secretary of State for War, earned her the bad name of a woman of compromising morals. Media reports on Keeler's simultaneous liaison with a Soviet naval officer, Yevgeny Ivanov, and the possibility of risking national security convicted her. Smith details the moment when Keeler posed for photographer Lewis Morley, who, to promote the film *The Killer Affair, went* for a photoshoot. Smith captures Keeler's unease, reluctance, and helplessness to pose nude. In the narrative collage, Smith documents

how she was humiliated in the courtroom. Smith also archives how Miss Ricardo, a witness in the trial of the Osteopath Stephen Ward, was publicly humiliated when she announced her profession in euphemistic terms and declared that her previous statement to the police was untrue. Rather than testing the veracity of her statement, Smith chooses to catch the toxic ambiance and document the oppressive structure of the RSA, which forced her to lie.

Pauline Boty's painting dared to reverse the game, changed the dynamics of the Profumo Affair, and made Keeler the center of attention. To document the strongly sexist society of 1960s Britain, Smith resorts to archive the life story of Pauline Boty. Smith documents the societal expectations of the then Britain in unambiguous language:

> The ideal woman, a kind of faithful slave, who administers without a word of complaint and certainly no payment, who speaks only when spoken to and is a jolly good chap. (Smith 250)

Brought up in a strongly patriarchal family ambiance because of her father's misogynistic outlook, Boty could pursue the subject of her own choice only because of her mother. Boty's mother herself was a victim of domestic violence. Her father deterred her from pursuing her career as an artist. Though she was denied opportunities to flower as an artist, she could muster the courage to give her daughter space to fulfil her dreams. She took Pauline to America and persuaded the paterfamilias to admit Boty to Wimbledon Art School. Smith is realistic in her portrayal of Veronica, Boty's mother, as a frustrated homemaker, a victim of domestic violence, and oppressed by her husband.

To reflect the extent of toxicity against women with artistic talent, Smith quotes from the front page article of SCENE, November 1962, on Boty, appreciating her pulchritude, discounting her talent as an artist: "actresses often have tiny brains. Painters often have huge beards. Imagine a brainy actress who is also a painter and also a blonde" (Qtd. in Smith 249). The hallmark of Boty's painting was sexuality, both female and male, bordering on eroticism and critique of androcentrism. Indoctrinated in the feminist ideology of Genet, Beauvoir, and Gertrude, she was a free thinker. She preferred to paint Keeler as a thinker and not as a sex object, as Keeler is represented in

the photos shot by Lewis. A versatile genius, she dared to acknowledge the role of female sexuality as well as love and believed that "love was terribly important. She didn't mean romantic love. Generalised sort of love. Enjoying oneself was terribly important. Sex could be as varied as being alive could be Varied" (qtd. in Smith 247).

Boty's world and Elisabeth's remain the same. The highly derogatory, women-unfriendly societal attitude of the 1960s persists in the 21st century as well. As Elisabeth goes through the interview with Pauline Boty, which was documented in *Vogue* in September 1964, she feels that the British world, regarding women's liberation, strangely preserves its status quo. Boty voiced: "She has found by experience that she is in a world where female emancipation is a password and not a fact... . Lots of women are intellectually more clever than lots of men. But it's difficult for men to accept the idea" (qtd. in Smith 153). Elisabeth's supervisor, confirming Boty's words, "she is beautiful, therefore she should not be clever" (Smith 153), appreciates her beauty but dismisses her as "... not a painter of anything more than minor interest. She stole everything of any note in her work from Warhol and Blake... There are lots of highly sexualised images throughout Pop art" (Smith 154-5). Elisabeth's art tutor's denial of the existence of a noteworthy female British pop artist, by Elisabeth's art tutor, may be interpreted as an attempt to erase the female British pop tradition. His dismissal of Elisabeth's venture to write the dissertation on Pauline Boty and the lost female British pop tradition could be translated as an attempt to erase the female voice. Elisabeth could appreciate well that Pauline Boty's highly original painting is a portrayal of Britain torn by the threats of war and industrialisation, but, over and above all, it is a celebration of femininity.

Autumn mourns the dominance of masculinist discourse, which precludes an empathetic, dialogic approach. The extremity of the masculinist, militarist, heteronormative, and racialised Brexit discourses is to be located in the following excerpt:

> Rule Britannia, a bunch of thugs had been sing-shouting in the street at the weekend past Elisabeth's flat. Britannia rules the waves. First, we'll get the Poles. And then we'll get the Muslims. Then we'll get the gyppos, then the gays. You lot are on the run, and we're coming after you... (Smith 197)

The diatribe is evidence of Euroscepticism incurred on the point of the gender-friendly moves of the EU.

Smith subtly touches on the femonationalists' false attempt to safeguard the interests of the natives, especially the Western women, from the influences of Muslim immigrants. Driven by xenophobic motivations, nationalism often ties up with feminism, as is claimed by Sara S. Farris in her book *In the Name of Women's Rights: The Rise of Femonationalism*. The femonationalists try to justify their racist and aporophobic positions by stating that certain immigrants are dangerous for egalitarian Western society. Smith achieves her purpose through the verbal fencing between a Gunman and "a person dressed as tree" (Smith 124). The Gunman is no other than a right-wing nationalist who believes in rooted white ethnic identity. The Gunman's advocacy of defined hereditary background reveals his identity: "This town's been a town since long before I was born. If it was good enough for my parents, and my grandparents and my great grandparents" (Smith 125). Reversing the popular discourse of an "other" posing a threat to natives, Smith shows how the Gunman, a metaphor for a right-wing politician, threatens the man in a tree costume. The Gunman shows off his specious concern for the racial others:

> I'm a peaceable person, The Man with the gun said. I don't want trouble. That's why I carry this gun. And it is not like I have anything against people like you generally. (Smith 124)

The Gunman takes offence with the costume of the person dressed as a tree. The use of the word costume alludes to the contemporary row over the hijab and burkha, which are Muslim women's outfits. The intention is to demonise a Muslim immigrant. Femonationalists' attempt to save Western women from Muslim men is reflected in the following statement: "But if you got your way you'd be dressing our kids up as trees, dressing our women up as trees. It's got to be nipped in the bud" (Smith 125). The attempt to stigmatise the person is palpable. Smith, however, doesn't reveal the gender identity of the person: "the person dressed as a tree braced him or herself inside the thick cotton" (Smith 125). Smith communicates the threatened existence of the immigrants but at the same time confirms their existence and their ability to serve the country: "but just as the man with the gun is finally about to shoot, the person dressed as a

tree transforms before the Gunman's eyes into a real tree, a giant tree, a magnificent golden ash tree towering high above waving its mesmerising leaves" (Smith 125-6).

As a state-of-the-nation novel, *Autumn* documents how pro-immigrant female political personages were subjected to rape threats and death threats and even murdered all over Europe. A person as influential as Angela Merkel, who was adjudged by Forbes 2019 as "the most powerful woman in the world," is also not spared from sexist attacks like body shaming and demeaning sexualised comments for her pro-immigrant policies. However, the murder of Jo Cox is the worst example of nationalism gone crazy. A Labour member of parliament for Batley and Spen, she was slaughtered in the street in a village named Birstall where she was to hold a constituency clinic., a series of one-to-one meetings that an MP or other political officeholders hold with their constituents regarding local or National matters. In her maiden speech in parliament, she celebrated the ethnic diversity of her constituency. She advocated for the solution to the Syrian civil war with the active help of British military forces. Her nomination of the 'White Helmets' for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2016, her call for the lifting of the blockade of the Gaza Strip, and her work with the Tell Mama on "The Geography of Anti-Muslim Hatred" are sufficient to infer her political and ethical stance. A Remainer, she was shot thrice and stabbed several times by a 52-year-old Batley constituent named Thomas Mair, who shouted "death to traitor, freedom for Britain" (quoted in Dorling and Tomlinson 11) and "Britain First." Autumn documents this hate crime perpetrated against a gendered political personage:

> Someone killed an MP... A man shot her dead and came at her with a knife. Like shooting her wouldn't be enough. But it's old news now. Once, it would have been a year's worth of news. But news right now is like a flock of speeded-up sheep running off the slide of a cliff. (Smith 38)

Smith exhibits her superb craftsmanship in aligning Scandal 63/ Profumo Affair, Pauline Boty's undervaluation as an artist, and Elizabeth's supervisor's dismissal of Elisabeth's attempt to write her dissertation on Pauline Boty as Britain's entrenched gender discriminating-culture. Elisabeth's mother offers the answer to this social malady is offered by choosing a female partner. This same-sex

love relationship with Elisabeth's mother is an answer in defiance of the entrenched heteronormativity. Elisabeth-Daniel's asexual relationship is also a blow to the essential sexual basis of heterosexual love relationships. Along with a new definition of inclusive Englishness, Autumn also redefines love.

Middle England

Middle England, the third part of Jonathan Coe's trilogy, is a major Brexit novel not just for its documentation of the political confusion, ideological topsy turvydom surrounding Brexit, post-truth politics, the role of media and think tanks, the highly polarised artificially stirred-up divisiveness, the dilemma of the educated intelligentsia regarding Brexit, but the novel registers how Brexit directly changes the lives of the principal characters of the novel. Lorna, the relationship counsellor of Sophie and Ian, says that "many of the couples she was seeing at the moment had mentioned Brexit as a key factor in their growing estrangement" (Coe 326). One of the many reasons for the temporary rupture in Ian-Sophie's relationship is their different affiliation to Brexit; while Sophie is a Remainer, Ian votes for Leave. The political is made personal in marital relationships. Besides affecting heterosexual relationships, *Middle England* shows how, in the context of Brexit, consciousness about different racial and national identities thwarts the possibility of developing female solidarity. Because of her territorial understanding of society, Helena fails to appreciate the Lithuanian-gendered immigrant Grete's friendly gestures. Rather, she obliquely naturalises Grete's humiliation and physical assault.

Apart from these, *Middle England* portrays the toxic androcentric culture of contemporary Britain. Sophie, one of the protagonists, notices how the white natives resent the authoritative directives and expertise of an Asian woman during the speed awareness course. Their feeling of indignant victimhood is aggravated by being lectured by an Asian woman. Sexism aligned with racism is palpable in the white native Derek's speech, "Why should I take lessons from *someone like you*?" (Coe 40, emphasis added). Derek's name-calling to Asian-gendered instructor Naheed as a "sanctimonious bitch" and Coe's passing reference to the murder of Joanna Yeats prove that Britain is not a safe place for women. The conversation between Ian

and Mr. Wilcox on Ian's failed bid for promotion in favour of an Asian-gendered immigrant betrays the noxious, racist, sexist ambience of contemporary Britain. When Mr. Wilcox says that Ian, a native British, had been deprived of an Asian immigrant, Sophie protests for the sake of truth, as her husband Ian's silence betrays his tacit acceptance of the interpretation. The same toxicity is to be found in Mr Wilcox's reference to Ms. Thornsett and Mrs O'Sullivan as 'lezzers', a derogatory nickname for lesbians, purely on the assumption that they share a cabin and are vegetarian.

The mail sent by Ms. Joan Thomsett with the admission of their alternative sexual orientation brings to the fore the plight of such couples even in the second decade of the 21st century. She tells how they have been forced to cover up the reality of their relationship. In her admission, Joan says that "people do seem to be getting rather more tolerant" (Coe 169). The tolerance that she talks about may be due to the EU's gender-friendly legislation. She raises her voice against the essential heteronormativity of the nation: "tolerant... I have always found a peculiar word in this context" (Coe 169). The writer champions this same-sex, live-in relationship over heterosexual, marital relationships. Whereas Mrs. Murphy continues to enjoy the trip after the demise of her husband on that same cruise, Joan could not think of leaving fractured Heather. Their relationship is more "loyal and loving and supportive" (Coe 169).

Like *Autumn*, *Middle England* too documents the murder of the pro-Remain Labour MP Jo Cox, founder of All-Parliamentary Friends of Syrian groups (APPG). However, whereas Autumn does it subtly, Middle England goes to the details of documenting the occasion of the attack along with the nature of the attack and the motive behind it. It is shown through Lois, a victim of the Birmingham Pub bombings. Lois's bewilderment, frenzied reaction, and inadvertent delay to visit her father cause another death. Smith wants to highlight the destructiveness of such hooliganism and how it affects women, who are the abject sufferers in this power game. *Middle England* shows how right-wing politicians strategically plan to use public discontent against a gendered political personage who is coercively represented as thwarting the "will of the people." Gail, because of her candid admission of casting her vote in favour of Remain to the chairman of her own constituency and also because she disagreed

with the Government's proposal of setting a particular date for Brexit, is victimised as an enemy of the people, "the Brexit Mutineer". Gail receives abusive emails, threatening her with rewarding the same fate as Jo Cox for this. It reaches such an extent that Gail, "the woman of Steel" (Coe 361), is completely shattered. This cyber sexism takes a heavy toll on the mental health of Gail and her daughter Sarah.

As a state-of-the-nation novel, *Middle England* shows that Britain is going through a backlash phase. It documents how, in the 21st century post-feminist era, girls are not safe even with their family members. Benjamin relates how his daughter Malvina has been abused by his own brother, Paul. Similarly, Sigrid, the director of the Sky Art Documentary, confides to Sophie how she too became a victim of domestic violence, and her socialist husband kicked her in the face for staying out late with one of her girlfriends. It is a pity that twenty-first-century Britain turns a deaf ear to the consideration of a would-be mother's mental health. As Ian and Sophie entertain Helena with a treat on her 76th birthday, Helena finds the opportunity to initiate the discussion of Ian and Sophie inviting a baby in the happy news of Grete's mothering. Ian thinks that since Sophie is off work, it is the perfect time for mothering. Sophie is aghast to hear this from Ian, for she is going through the worst period of her life, as one of her students has lodged a complaint against her for alleged gender discrimination and, as a result of which, she has been suspended temporarily.

Conclusion

The discussion of the two Brexit novels documents the toxic androcentrism of Brexit Britain. In *Autumn*, the thumping of the Gunman, the hypnotist's claim to have the power of influence, the SA4A man's exhibition of brute force to Elisabeth, the right-wing spokespersons shouting at the female MP and branding her as a bigoted woman demonstrate the shameless proclamation of male power. The discussion on *Middle England* unveils the societal attitude towards queers. It shows how, outside the EU, both British women and gendered migrants suffer. But all is not lost. The incorporation of legislations like same-sex marriage and the gradually tolerant societal ambience towards the queer, as documented in *Middle England,* may be addressed as an influence of the EU. Sohan-Myke same-sex

couple's marriage and their social acceptance translate to the empowerment of the queers. The gendered protagonists Sophie in *Middle England* and Elisabeth in *Autumn* remain the epitomes of new women. Sophie's friendly gestures to Grete, a working-class Lithuanian immigrant, is a step forward in developing class-less female solidarity. In the context of BrexLit, freedom constitutes deliverance from the bondage of the crushing burden of blood, nationality, and religion, and empowerment lies in power to exercise one's choice of dwelling and language. Sophie and Elisabeth, who succeed in living on their own terms, are the only silver lines in the backdrop of bleak, dystopian Britain.

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FEATURE ARTICLE

1

The *Inner Cries* of Silence

Fewzia Benyelles Bedjaoui

Abstract

This essay is a personal interpretation of Alejandro Gómez de Tuddo's famous photographic exhibitions and installations, notably KI – Hasht-Bihisht (Irish Georgian Society, Dublin, 2015 Ireland), KII – Pantonecropolis (Auditorium Arte, Rome, Italy 2016), KIII – Pantonecropolis – Columbarium (Centro Nacional de las Artes, Mexico City 2018). Certainly, cemetery spaces are perceived more than demarcated sites of burial as they nurture the significance and meanings of sacred spaces for people's life, including religious, aesthetic, moral and transcendental dimensions.

Keywords: cemeteries, death, hope, life, photograph.

It is therefore an atypical invitation that Alejandro Gómez de Tuddo addresses to us, like a mythical poet, for an inner odyssey where the soul takes a journey through a cross-cultural landscape of cemeteries and gardens. The route that Alejandro Gómez de Tuddo has drawn allows us to outline a reflection on memory that preserves "intact" images beyond the wear of time, and on the reading of photography, because any "image fixes an infinity of possibilities" (Roland Barthes 1973) where imagination would express the unspeakable.

The garden of cemeteries, a pictorial transposition of reality, serves as a space of both death and life. It testifies to the uncontrollable cycle of life and the unsearchable power of nature. This space consoles memory, transcending the tyranny of time – "a time which would evolve without dying" (Giorgio Bassani 1962), where a fragile and precious plant universe is preserved by a

carefully delineated, heavenly setting. In contrast, the decadent garden, with its survival of wild and unmanageable vegetation, instills a pervasive sense of dread. This dread is assigned to an enigmatic game of chance, leaving us perplexed by the imperceptible, or offering a defiant derision to grief, perhaps even hinting at hell or nothingness.

Is this one location due to social and religious disengagements to their own ways, or amnesia inserted in the register of insurmountable torments and the many cares of life? Such is the fate intended for cemeteries, once places of solemn commemoration, now, in many cases, temporary memory spaces. This is indeed an impromptu walk through a maze of multiform tombs, where a universe of trees and stones symbolises the human soul in all its complexity, a metaphor on the meaninglessness of life and the tragic factuality of human condition and confinement. Countless questions and speculations emerge on such sites, both paradoxical and emblematic. Sometimes, the presumptuous language of epitaphs appears as a hasty utterance, though it sounds exemplary. The wording also translates, in a caricatural fashion, the loss of a loved one or other unknown personalities whose names remain silent forever in a capricious memory.

The silent reading of words engraved on tombstones resonates as a painful prophecy or a moving, if shameful, complaint. It recalls that the shared emblem is tragedy or inevitable relief, chanting the aberrations of insatiable desires, illusory hope, or the unnecessary investment of a rebel consciousness. Yet, it grants this auditory and visual perception the musicality of an obsessing incantation, becoming then the "patience of passivity" (Maurice Blanchot 1980).

Both intriguing and captivating, silence is nevertheless evocative and polysemous. Is it the victory of the spiritual over the material, the timeless over the ridiculous, the incomprehensible over knowledge, instinct over reason, or evil over good? Probably. But the silence of cemeteries, with its "inexplicable mystery" (T.S. Eliot 1948), cannot be consigned to oblivion. Thoughts and memories flood and drain, jostling with time and emotion on the borderline of the present and the past.

Nevertheless, these cemeteries are transformed into metaphorical spaces of remembering, where the past and the present meet and blend, or rather, where every remembrance is engraved in an indelible memory. These spaces engage in meaningful messages of remorse and regret, leaving astray those in grievous tears and desperate desolation. Certainly, this deep attachment to this symbolic transfiguration intensifies and appeases the binding thread of earthly lives with departed loved ones. And even if eyes weigh heavy with timid tears and fog the mind, a small smile sometimes appears at the corners of the mouth, with a superstitious reserve that annoys and weakens. While eyes are sickened by funeral objects and thoughts, the heart eludes an oppressive fate, and on the wings of time, sadness flies (Jean de la Fontaine 1694).

However, against all aesthetic dogmatism with its indecipherable arcanes, Alejandro Gómez de Tuddo helps us comprehend the originality and clarity of the prints with a natural ability. He offers a poetic take where hope serves as a stepping stone between life and death, pierces the walls of an eloquent silence, and removes the veils of an eternal sleep.

Indeed, the very print stands as a go-between reality and utopia, where the compelling desire to pop a truth of reality, or at least an interpretation devoid of any hesitation, reveals its full meaning, as only a "pledge of eternity" and not "a sign of death" (Susan Sontag 1979

No doubt, some deliberately blurred prints arise as defiant sensorial images that soften or amplify our de/constructed internal world of preconceived ideas and exquisite emotions. Conducive to meditation, they remind us that our landmarks and the boundaries between reality and illusion are growing increasingly hazy. Is our understanding not closely confined to our intimate recollections and visual perception of the real world, altered as time passes?

Even if these prints are calling at the doors of our heightened sensitivity, where doubt interferes insidiously, they generate a world of nostalgia and prophecy. White Angel, Mictecacihuati, Phoenix, Simurgh, Albatross, or any other mythical tinged creatures combine to weave the quintessence of a waking dream. Whatever its semantic richness, mystical name, or magical "glorified" (Octavio Paz 1972)

belief, death is steeped in imagination and sensuality, where impulses and thoughts take a heartbreaking turn, and where the mystic and spiritual sense resists all kinds of singleness.

"Polyphonic" (Mikhail Bakhtin 1929), this photographic exhibition/book remains an "open work" (Umberto Eco 1962): a recognition of the uniqueness and multiplicity of human experience torn between hope and pain, a revelation of blurred boundaries and deep connections that man nurtures, "facing the urn of his destiny" (Victor Hugo 1837). But, above all, these prints highlight subtle accents of testimony sublimated in terms of art and represent an inevitable step in the realisation of this photographic journey that metamorphoses the common man into a creative and visionary photographer, in search of a "poetic idealisation"which reclaims authentic emotions and intuitive perception, restores the sacred and the profane and freeses temporal elasticity forever and never.

A liminal space or rather a "no-wo/man's land" where art is a scrumptious subversive pathway into the mythic realm of imagination and the world of the soul: that is the kind of fascinating, timeless, and unforgettable voyage through the senses, Alejandro Gómez de Tuddo perceives, during these secret moments of extreme loneliness and intense emotions.

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BOOK REVIEWS

I.

Resonating Duologue with Ghalib's Oeuvre

Pradeep Trikha

Rahman, Anisur. *The Essential Ghalib.* New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2024.pp. 401. Rs. 499/-

The Essential Ghalib by Anisur Rehman is yet another feather in his cap following *Hazaaron Khwahishein Aisi*: The Wonderful World of Urdu Ghazals (HarperCollins, 2019). Rehman is a veteran scholar, author, and translator. In *The Essential Ghalib,* he presents an exemplary selection of Mirza Ghalib's Urdu couplets, translated into English, along with critical commentaries. Ghalib, widely regarded as one of the most influential poets in the history of South Asian literature, is known for his complex yet profound poetry that engages with themes of love, pain, spirituality, and existential despair. Rehman's anthology of Ghalib's poetry aims to provide a curated and accessible insight into the poet's expansive work. *The Essential Ghalib* distills the essence of Ghalib's poetry, making it easier for those unfamiliar with the intricacies of his work to appreciate and understand his genius, particularly for a broader global audience that does not read Urdu. Thus, Rehman's *Ghalib* is both representative and digestible. He notes in the introduction to the book:

> Ghalib created discourse around language and diction, evolved conceptual contiguities and antinomies with words….He recognised the merit of classical literature, as also of history, philosophy and ethics, which he nurtured on his own, and made his poetry metaphysically rich and stylistically accomplished. (xxv)

Finding a balance between interpretation of the meanings and faithfulness of the original text is one of the hallmarks of the present collection. Rehman makes significant changes to Ghalib's poetry when translating it into English. The translation attempts to capture the spirit and emotional impact of the original text rather than a literal one. On the one hand, Rehman's translations recurrently encapsulate the tone and tenor of Ghalib's poetry, which is characterised by a subtext of longing and sorrow. However, translations sporadically veneer the original writings' more complex, multi-layered meanings:

Dhaa.npaa kafan ne daagh-e 'uyuub-e barahnagii
Mai.n har libaas mei.n n.n na.ng-e vujuud thaa

Rehman's translation is:

My Shroud veiled the blemishes of my nakedness
from everyone's seeing
In each of my dress although, I ever remained
A disgrace to my being (8)

For instance, Ghalib's ghazals are notoriously difficult to translate because of their rich, idiomatic language and the deep intertextual references embedded within the verses. Rehman intermittently foregoes the multivalence of the original text in favour of clarity and accessibility. However, he retains the gist of Ghalib's verses, which are full of linguistic playfulness and philosophical depth.

Ranj se khuugar hua Insaan, tho mit jaataa hai ranj
Mushkilein mujh per padii itnii ke aasaan ho gaen

The Translation:

When a man is used to sorrows, sorrows leave a man for good
So many hardships I suffered
So very well I stood

Poetry translation is inherently difficult, particularly for poets like Ghalib, who wrote in a language full of historical and cultural references. Ghalib's use of Persian, the language of elite culture in 19th-century India, makes things much more difficult because the poet regularly combined Urdu vernacular with Persian idioms. Ghalib's central themes of longing, disillusionment, and existential pondering are successfully made understandable to an English-

speaking audience by Rehman's translations despite their inability to convey every nuance fully. Rehman has chosen poems that reflect Ghalib's emotional assortment, which includes the passionate longing for an idealised lover and the more contemplative reflections on existence, death, and the nature of God. Daisy Rockwell, an ardent translator of Hindi and Urdu, praises the collection as a:

> "…treasure trove of translations, analyses and vocabulary that enriches our understanding of the great poet".

However, the anthology leans too heavily on Ghalib's more melancholic and romantic works at the expense of the poet's more politically charged pieces. However, he was not just a poet of love and philosophy but also a social critic. Some couplets reflect his anguish over his time's political and social upheavals, and some are directed at the colonial establishment and the decline of Mughal rule. Satyanarayana Hegde, an Advocate and avid scholar, is of the view that Rehman's *Ghalib* is a:

> "…magisterial selection, translation and commentary on two hundred verses from Ghalib's Urdu ghazal poetry blaze a clear path for contemporary readers through the densely daunting sylvan thickets and brambles of Ghalib's poetry".

It is evident from:

> *Zindagi yun bhi guzar hi jaati*
> *kyun tiraa raahguzar yaad aaya*
>
> This life would have passed on anyway
> Why did I remember your path, anyway

Another strength of *The Essential Ghalib* is Rehman's ability to contextualise the poetry of Ghalib within the historical and cultural milieu in which it was composed. In "Introduction," Rehman reiterates: "Ghalib balanced his racial memory against his contemporary backdrop and the Perso-Arabic poetic against the evolving poetics." (xxvi). Ghalib's struggles, financial difficulties, the death of his children, and his experience as a witness to the fall of the Mughal Empire permeate much of the sorrow and fatalism. He says:

> *dard minnat-kash-e-davaa na huaa*
> *mai.n na achhaa huaa buraa na huaa*

Translated as:

My pain wasn't obliged to drug
to get a cure, for sure
That I didn't get well
wasn't too bad to endure (60)

Rehman adds a layer of depth to the collection by focusing on the philosophical and spiritual aspects of Ghalib's poetic oeuvre. Ghalib explores the nature of divine will, fate, and the human condition, which led him to become deeply engaged with existential questions. This position positions him not only as a master of romantic poetry but also as a thinker on par with some of the great mystic poets of South Asia, such as Kabir and Iqbal.

Anisur Rehman's *The Essential Ghalib* offers an accessible and insightful introduction to one of South Asia's greatest poets. The anthology provides insight into Ghalib's poetry's emotional depth, intellectual complexity, and cultural significance. Rehman's translations make Ghalib's work available to a wider audience, and his thoughtful contextualisation adds value to the reader's understanding. Despite its occasional shortcomings – particularly in its selective presentation of Ghalib's poetic concerns – the anthology remains a significant contribution to the appreciation of Ghalib's literary legacy. Through *The Essential Ghalib*, Anisur Rehman has made a lasting impact in disseminating Ghalib's work globally, solidifying the poet's position as a figure whose relevance transcends cultural and linguistic boundaries. The book is indispensably '*essential*' for the lovers of Ghalib because:

adaa-i-khaas se ghalib huaa hai nukta-saraa
salaa-i 'aam hai yaaraan-e nuktaa-daa.n ke liye

Translated as:

Ghalib has opened his lips, as a connoisseur,
with a unique elan
Here is an open call for discerning friends to join,
if they can (400)

2.

The Other Side of the Rainbow: A Tragedy of Misreading and Silence

Deepshikha Routray

Nayak, Niranjan. *The Other Side of the Rainbow*. Notionpress, 2024. Pp. 248. Rs. 299/-

The novel, *The Other Side of the Rainbow*, is an attempt to chronicle the inner tumult of a young man scarred by poverty, trauma, and emotional isolation, and to do so with honesty and psychological depth is not at all an easy feat. Yet Niranjan Nayak, in this debut novel, manages it precisely through a fictional account that has its roots in his deeply lived and intimately felt experiences. As Pati remarks, "A private emotion arising out of a lived experience of Nayak's has, with the years, snowballed into a story so huge that it clamours, as it were, for a public appearance" (Foreword, p. vii). This 'clamour' takes form in a compelling, emotionally layered narrative that defies easy categorisation. The novel doesn't cover a full developmental arc typical of a bildungsroman.

What clearly defines *The Other Side of the Rainbow* is its focus on friendship though it steers clear of sentimental portrayals of college camaraderie. It is a profound excavation of emotional terrain where friendship is liberation, limitation, salvation, and suffocation. The novel explores identity, class, belonging, psychological trauma, and the irreparable gaps between perception and truth through the intertwined lives of its two protagonists, Arun and Rajiv. In the words of Rajiv, their friendship was like "a continuous affair of loving, unloving, fighting and then compromising, envying and admiring a bunch of youngsters within whom, someone like me with a lonely childhood had discovered the meaning of living a life that had always been tardy slow, dull and boring" (61).

Dual Narration: Two Voices, Two Truths

One of the most striking features of Nayak's novel is his narratological experimentation. Told through alternating first-person perspectives, the story unfolds in the voices of both Arun and Rajiv. Nayak cleverly uses different font styles to differentiate the narrators, thus helping readers switch seamlessly between these two internal worlds. This formal device mirrors the core tension of the novel: the inability of even the closest of friends to inhabit each other's pain truly. With his privileged background and innate charm, Rajiv provides the lens of a reflective, often guilt-ridden observer. On the other hand, Arun carries the burden of lived suffering; his voice is anguished, introspective, and filled with unhealed wounds.

Arun's narrative begins in the crucible of poverty. The youngest in a struggling family, his life is marked by deprivation, loss, and a constant yearning for dignity. His father's death plunges the family deeper into economic hardship. Arun's escape into education is not a luxury but a lifeline. His mother's desperate plea – "You must survive, my son. Not for yourself but for all of us" becomes a refrain that stays with him (9). This plea haunts the novel, returning with devastating irony at its conclusion when Arun takes his own life. The boy who is supposed to survive for everyone else becomes the one who cannot survive. Arun is intellectually brilliant and emotionally intense. His entry into Ravenshaw College marks a turning point in his life and the beginning of his unravelling. There, he meets Rajiv, and their bond forms the emotional spine of the novel. Nayak aptly describes their bond: "two different entities with two completely different backgrounds, outlooks and ideologies, bound together in an inextricable affiliation, wrought by a capricious destiny, landed that day in their land of youth and dreams" (81). Rajiv's life is the antithesis of Arun's. Though not particularly ambitious, he is buoyed by a relatively stable upbringing. A hypochondriac and emotionally cautious, Rajiv is both fascinated and unsettled by Arun's intensity. Rajiv, who has nothing to hide, and Arun, who hides everything, form a contrasting yet complementary pair. Rajiv's reflections on love are particularly telling: love is a fleeting, ineffable state for him. "Love to me is a premature foetus that gets aborted a few days after it is conceived" (115). Friendship, in contrast, is enduring and sacred, perhaps because it requires less vulnerability. Into this fragile balance

enters Ruby, the "dark butterfly," who acts as a catalyst and a mirror that disrupts Arun's emotional equilibrium. Ruby is enigmatic, intelligent, and self-assured, while Arun, starved of affection and acceptance, misreads her intellectual curiosity as a romantic interest. Rajiv views Ruby as a threat to Arun's stability, and his apprehensions come true with Arun's humiliation at a high-end snack bar with Ruby and her elite friends, which becomes a pivotal moment. Arun recalls, "Standing isolated in one corner and watching Ruby and her friends having fun was so humiliating" (132). His rejection by Ruby, though respectful, becomes unbearable, triggering a deeper descent into despair.

The tragedy of Arun's suicide lies not just in the act but in the slow, unnoticed erosion of his emotional strength. His inner demons, fuelled by childhood trauma, class anxiety, and unreciprocated affection, remain invisible to those closest to him. "Being reclusive was not an option for me; it was a compulsion, deeply psychological" (156), he admits. Rajiv's guilt is profound. Despite his intuition, he fails to prevent the catastrophe. Arun's final note, in which he confesses to delusional psychosis and absolves others of blame, offers little solace. The pain of misreading Arun's silence lingers.

Saswati is a poignant figure whose forgotten voice dominates at the end. She is portrayed as a sensitive, intelligent girl deeply in love with Rajiv, but the latter fails to reciprocate her feelings. Her presence serves as a counterpoint to Ruby's. Unlike Ruby, Saswati offers unwavering support. Yet Rajiv's evasiveness causes her pain. Thirty years later, she confronts Rajiv, a happily married man with a son. She vents out her suppressed angst: "That was the first and the last occasion I had lied to my father and slipped out of my house to be with you" (198), she tells him, recalling his indifference after Arun's death. Her quiet fury and long-suppressed declaration of love become a moment of closure and reckoning.

Nayak's prose is lyrical, meditative, and emotionally resonant. The novel is packed with philosophical reflections, particularly on love, suffering, and the human need for connection. The statement "A man's destination is not his destiny" (89) encapsulates the existential undertones of the book. Nayak doesn't romanticise suffering rather he exposes it, especially the suffering that festers in silence. Arun's

story becomes a commentary on how structural disadvantages shape emotional outcomes, while Rajiv's reflections force readers to confront their own complacencies. Though set largely on a college campus, *The Other Side of the Rainbow* transcends the genre of the campus novel. It is a philosophical meditation on class, memory, and emotional inheritance. Prof. Himanshu Mohapatra rightly observes that the novel is "a serious engagement with the labyrinthine alleyways of the mind" (Mohapatra). The alternating narration allows readers to inhabit two contrasting interior worlds and shows how events are interpreted, misinterpreted, and reinterpreted across time and perspective.

The title of the novel is metaphorically loaded. A rainbow is often seen as a symbol of hope, but Nayak asks us to consider what lies beyond it: beyond joy, beyond reconciliation. For Arun, the other side of the rainbow is not salvation but silence. Arun embodies the paradox that portrays the desire for glorious living, which is marred by the desire to die. He is brilliant, kind, and full of promise but ultimately undone by a storm no one else could fully see. *The Other Side of the Rainbow* is a stunning literary debut. Honest, unflinching, and emotionally intelligent, it refuses easy answers or sentimental resolutions. It demands that readers confront uncomfortable truths about love, friendship, class, and the cost of silence. Niranjan Nayak emerges as a talented storyteller and a chronicler of the soul. His characters don't just live on the page, they bleed, ache, and endure. This novel will stay with readers long after the final page, whispering truths that most of us are not ready to face.

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