Editorial

The complex and multifaceted nature of human identity and culture has long been a subject of fascination and inquiry. At the intersection of ethnicity, history, and mythology lies a rich and contested terrain, where competing narratives and interpretations have shaped human understanding of the past, present, and future. They are interconnected concepts that help frame our understanding of human culture and identity. The present issue, "Literary Confluences: Myth, Memory & Identity" underscores the confluence of these fields contributing to a better understanding of our societies, origins and their relationships with each-other. In recent years, there has been a growing recognition for revisiting and re-examining the ways in which we think about collective memory, mythology and self. This has been driven in part by the increasing awareness of the complex and often polysemic nature of these concepts, as well as the need to challenge dominant narratives and promote subtle and inclusive understandings of human culture. The interplay of literature, myth and history illuminates societal identities, power dynamics, and inter/intra group relationships, thus fostering a deeper understanding of human culture and promoting tolerance and empathy.

This special issue features select research articles presented at the two-day international conference, *Revisiting History, Ethnicity, and Mythology in Literature,* held at Amity University Rajasthan, Jaipur in October 2023. Each contribution engages readers with a plurality of perceptions related to identity, memory and myth. A curated selection of these insightful papers is included in this volume.

Dr. Geetanjali Multani's paper sets the tone at the outset by examining the intersection of colonial and precolonial histories in shaping individual and collective identities. Through the lens of African literature, she uncovers the enduring complexities of cultural heritage and modernity. Following this, Ayushi Saini and Dr. Rajiv Ranjan Dwivedi explore the

dynamic adaptability of the *Ramayana* across time and cultures, highlighting its transformative potential and enduring relevance in contemporary storytelling. Dr. Harshita Poswal bridges the realms of literature and media in her paper, examining historical injustices through narratives that confront racial and cultural biases. Similarly, Debalina Roychowdhury traverses mythological landscapes to trace the symbolic evolution of avian humanoids, offering a fascinating exploration of their significance across cultures. Prof. Indrani Das revisits classical art in her analysis of Botticelli's immortalization of Venus; by intertwining mythology and artistic expression she highlights the profound impact of Greco-Roman myths on Renaissance art. On a different note, Dr. Lalita Sharma foregrounds the progressive ideals embedded in Munshi Premchand's literature, focusing on his critique of tradition and advocacy for social reforms, particularly concerning widowhood. Turning to more intimate explorations of identity, Manish Prabhakar Singh delves into the intricate link between culinary traditions and personal narratives. His work reveals how food shapes memory and identity within a broader socio-cultural framework. Preetha Prabhasan complements this special issue by examining the interplay of individual and collective memory, demonstrating how personal recollections resonate with societal histories. Himanshi Rathi, Prof. Parul Mishra, and Dr. Kaushal Kishore Sharma investigate the existential and mythical dimensions of identity in Kazuo Ishiguro's dystopian narrative shedding light on the human condition amidst technological and ethical dilemmas. Meanwhile, Vandana Kuldeep, Dr. Vipula Mathur, and Dr. Vishnu Kumar Sharma explore the symbolism of colour, showing how 'purple' becomes a metaphor for resilience, empowerment, and transformation in *The Colour Purple* and *Purple Hibiscus*. The interrogation of historical and ideological paradigms continues with Gazania Eden T and Dr. Vinata Sai's paper, which revisits Marxist thought through Vijay Prashad's *Red Star Over the Third World*. Ajay Kumar and Prof. Dipa Chakrabarti celebrate Ousmane Sembene's contributions to literature and social reform, underscoring his transformative role in African and global literary trajectory. Sajal Suneja and Dr. Gunja Patni invite readers on an alchemical journey through their Jungian interpretation of T.S. Eliot's

The Waste Land thus revealing profound insights into the human psyche and collective consciousness. Likewise, Dr. M. Shanthi and Dr. Deepa Prajith engage with Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, articulating the struggle to reclaim history and identity within the context of racial oppression. Laveena Bhagchandani and Dr. Prashant Shrivastava offer a postmodern critique of Sahu's *Sita* through Bakhtin's lens, challenging traditional narratives and reimagining a revered mythological figure. Pooja Bhuva A. delves into the interplay of religion and culture in literature, bridging spiritual ideologies and artistic expression. Finally, Shiwangi Shailja and Dr. Manoj Kumar reinterpret the *Mahabharata* using hermeneutics uncovering its timeless relevance and philosophical depth.

We hope this collection will inspire new insights, spark meaningful discourses, and contribute to a deeper understanding of shared human heritage. We are deeply indebted to Amity University Rajasthan, Jaipur (India) - our Hon'ble Chancellor, Dr. Aseem Chauhan, and Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Amit Jain, for their unwavering support and encouragement throughout this project. Their visionary leadership and commitment to academic excellence have been instrumental in bringing this project to fruition. We also acknowledge with appreciation the valuable support provided by Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR). We express our sincere thanks to all the authors for their cooperation and great patience that bore the ultimate fruit in the form of the present volume. Our heartfelt thanks to the Executive committee of RASE and the managing editors of the *Journal of Rajasthan Association for Studies in English (RASE)* for their commitment to bring out this Special Issue. Additionally, we owe our sincere thanks to all the contributors who were involved, directly or indirectly, in the completion of this academic pursuit and never failed to extend a helping hand to us.

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Identity Crisis: Dynamics of Colonial and Precolonial History as a Continuum in Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price*

Geetanjali Multani

In this paper the author proposes to analyse Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price* as a creative document that unfolds the dynamics of the colonial and the precolonial history as a continuum to reflect the change in the ethnicity of the Nigerian society. Colonization laid the foundation of a new world to the natives that was exploitative, oppressive and racist. This transition and all its complexity are very aptly depicted in *The Bride Price.* Intellectuals like Franz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi Baba and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o very strongly voiced their opinion that colonization was not just economic but more importantly it was psychological and cultural exploitation. Franz Fanon in his *Wretched of the Earth* argues among other things that the colonizer's aim was not just to exploit the colonized economically but also strip them of their sense of identity and dignity. The colonized were projected as the primitive, the uncivilized, who had to be moulded in the image of their masters, psychologically and culturally. Edward Said says that the West created the image of the "Oriental" as opposed to the "Occidental" and justified that there was a dire need to educate and civilize the Oriental who became a willing slave. The term that Ngugi Wa Thiong'o uses to describe the colonial invasion is, "Cultural bomb". The precolonial stage was thus associated with the primitive and colonialism with the civilized. This left the natives not only confused and uprooted from their ancestral heritage but also created a rift within them. This division had many layers that totally scattered the deep-rooted soil of African way of life that led to a massive upheaval in their ancient traditional way of life. This rift that was initiated with colonialism was between the so called

educated and the uneducated; Christian converts and the Tradionalists; men and women etc. This trial of angst, anguish and the identity crisis that Africa underwent under the Imperial sway is very powerfully captured by Buchi Emecheta in her novel *The Bride Price.* Being a female writer from Nigeria, Buchi Emecheta tends to project the precolonial history in Africa not simply as a glorious era of communal harmony but she does not hesitate to mirror the gender inequality that existed during the precolonial era. *The Bride Price* is the prism through which is reflected an attempt to highlight and understand gender politics which is an important and crucial component of the identity crisis as it existed in Africa. Buchi Emecheta's view regarding a woman's place in the society is closer to what Chimamanda Ngozi and bell Hooks advocate. They propagate for a broader and more inclusive understanding of feminism in the global context that involves everyone regardless of their gender in dismantling societal norms that perpetuate inequality.

The Bride Price, published in the year 1976, makes use of a love story to unravel the polemics of the Nigerian society that is caught between two worlds – the ancient, traditional, tribal world that is not yet dead and the new, complex baffling modern western world that is being initiated in Nigeria with the coming of the British. And this world is slyly and insinuatingly making its way into the lives of the natives thus bringing about a conflict in the very structure of traditional African set –up that had for centuries remained unchallenged. The novel is also an expose' into the exploitation of Nigerian women, within their tribes through the age old, ancient customs, traditions and practices. Buchi Emecheta being a female African writer dwells deep into the ancient, intimidating practices of traditional tribes and exposes these practices as a means of justifying the torture, domination and psychic control over the female sex in traditional African tribes. In this Buchi is quite in contrast to many African male writers who chose to project ancient traditional African society as mainly an ideal, matriarchal society. No doubt Buchi Emecheta reflects the communal fabric of the African society where the interest of the community takes precedence over individual desires but at the same

time, she does not hesitate to bare the truth as perceived by a female writer by contrasting it with the western ethics in a dynamic, vibrant and pulsating manner. The interweaving of the patriarchal and the matriarchal thread that constitutes the societal tapestry of Africa, more specifically Nigeria is laid threadbare by Buchi Emecheta in this novel especially through the age-old practice of bride price. In Africa bride price is the money that is paid by the bridegroom's family to the bride's family at the time of marriage. Buchi Emecheta defamiliarizes and exposes the exploitative nature of such practices in a society that is in the throes of transition and change, emanating from its contact with the western civilization.

The angst of the society torn between two diametrically opposing cultures and ways of life is analysed through the families of two brothers: Ezekiel Odia, who leaves his village and moves out into the world and his elder brother, Okonkwo who lives in Ibuza, remains confined to his village, is rigid and static in his beliefs and opinions. He is reluctant to let go of his ancestral way of life. He remains untouched by the western cultural influence that was digging deep into the African society through the spade of education and religion. Okonkwo does not send his children to school. Their way of life like that of their ancestors continues to be based and concretised on agrarian means. So, existence for Okonkwo and his family is comparatively peaceful devoid of competition and only based on day-to-day routine life. Okonkwo 's only ambition is to gain the title of Eze. That for him is the only milestone that he aspires for in his humble existence. He is completely untainted by the western system of education. For him that kind of education is meant for slaves. Okonkwo even remains untouched by Christian missionaries' preaching and their endeavour to civilize him, for their tentacles have not reached this part of Nigeria yet. Okonkwo prides himself on being a native free-man who has many wives, children and maybe even slaves. He wears his traditional attire and now and then has to beat his wives to control them. Polygamy for him is not a taboo. That his youngest wife is young enough to be his daughter does not at all prick his conscience. So, Okonkwo leads a traditional way of life that has been followed through

eons and generations. He knows and understands only this kind of life and so can accept no other. This for him is his ancestral legacy with which he can never tamper. He is a patriarch in his own right, owning his wives, his cattle, his children, his farm and his antique way of life is a mark of him being a freeman and not a slave. His steadfastness to his culture is a natural course of life for him.

On the other hand, is his younger brother, Ezekiel Odia, living in Lagos, working for the white man as a head moulder at the Loco yard, attired in the uniform provided by his master. His master, the white man trusted him more because people like Ezekiel had the distinction of having served the white man in the war. Ezekiel has adopted his master's religion, is a good Christian who goes to the church regularly along with his family. He is the first generation of Nigerians to realise the importance of western culture and now he makes sure that his children get the right kind of education through English schools for he ardently believes that these two qualifications of western education and religion would ensure his children's success in the new emerging Africa that was surely moving away from its antiquity and adopting the new way of life. No doubt Ezekiel's war experience and his job with the white man has somewhat made him the white man's willing bondsman but his roots in traditional African psyche have not been totally uprooted. Like the white man and like his elder orthodox brother, he is a devout patriarch. His wife, his children, his room apartment are his property. Ezekiel represents those Nigerians who had moved away from their roots but had not been completely displaced from their beliefs and customs and thus struggling between two cultures. This confusion is reflected in his relationship with his wife and his daughter. When Ezekiel comes back from war after many years and his wife, Ma Blackie is not able to bear him children, he nags her and accuses her of being infertile. This, despite the fact that he already had two children from her: Akuna, their daughter who is just fourteen years of age and their son, Nna-nndo who is eleven. Ezekiel's male centric mentality blocks his mind to rationalize that it could be his infertility that is proving to be a hurdle in his desire of becoming a father once more. In the most absurd fashion, he even

complains and grieves that his payment of a hefty bride price to Ma Blackie's parents and their marriage being sanctified through Christianity has all gone in vain. After spending so much of money, Ma Blackie has given him only one son and of course the daughter is not to be counted. Ezekiel's confused state of mind is reflected in the fact that despite being a practising Christian his belief in the native doctors remains firm for he doesn't hesitate to send his wife to a native witch doctor for curing her infertility but to no avail. So finally, to pacify her husband, Ma Blackie goes to Ibuza, her in-law's native town to, "placate their Oboshi river goddess into giving her some babies" (8). In her absence Ezekiel's foot infection that he had got from the war, becomes fatal and so he has to be taken to the hospital. And his children are now left to themselves. While leaving he reminds them that they will always remain his. The children are unable to understand and it is only later that the significance of the statement hits the readers. While going to the hospital his love and tenderness for his children unfolds. No doubt his behaviour towards his wife is somewhat that of indifference because her worthiness as a wife is measured in her capacity to bear children and looking after the house and family. But his daughter reserves a special place in his heart. He has a soft corner for her. He does send her to school yet he has not been able to rid himself of seeing her as a liability. He names her Aku-nna meaning "father's wealth", because the only consolation that a father could get from the birth of a daughter would be her bride price. Even Aku-nna, knows her place in the family: "Aku-nna knew that she was too insignificant to be regarded as a blessing to this unfortunate marriage" (9). So here is this little girl, barely fourteen, who has been so conditioned by this male centric society into believing that her only worth is in being a submissive member of her family and so she is determined:

> Not to let her father down. She was going to marry well, a rich man of whom her father would approve and who would be able to afford an expensive bride price. (10)

This is all she wants from life. Her father pities her for she appears to be so vulnerable both physically and emotionally. Probably Aku-nna's western education and her mental conditioning through the new religion,

Christianity has drilled the quality of being submissive into her psyche. After her father's departure to the hospital her neighbours assume the role of the children's protectors, for in the traditional African society, "everyone is responsible for the next person" (14). This sense of belongingness to the community is witnessed during the mourning and funeral of Ezekiel. At this hour of pain and grief, the entire community provides a support system to the children. For them it is imperative that a child belongs to the entire community. This is a matriarchal society where community welfare is a priority and each and every member of the community owns a responsibility towards its children who belong to all and not just to their natural parents.

MaBlackie too is given full emotional and psychological support. The delicate balance and conflict between the two cultures –the western and traditional that had been part of Ezekiel's life becomes a marked feature of his death too, specifically on the day of his funeral that is narrated with such comic ironic tones because it cannot be decided by the villagers whether he should be buried as per the Christian tradition or the traditional way. Finally, the decision is left to Ezekiel's eleven-year-old son, who is totally awed and baffled by all that is happening. He is now his father's heir to carry on his legacy. But the question is what is the legacy. So, not so much by conviction but more because of the pressure and urgency of the circumstances, he blurts out that he would want his father in Heaven. This is a moment of victory for the western culture because now Ezekiel will have a Christian burial. But how ironic that this new culture and way of life fails to provide the bereaved family a means of livelihood. For survival they have to return to Ezekiel's ancestral home in Ibuza, where his elder brother would adopt them and provide for them.

Paradoxically Aku-nna who had been so keen and eager to listen to Aunt Uzo's stories of traditional African lives in the distant past is now standing on the threshold when this distant past is going to become her destiny. Aku-nna had so enjoyed the stories narrated orally by one of her neighbours. Aunt Uzo's stories, which were not narrated passively but demanded an active participation from the listeners as well. Not

only that but each story had some philosophical lesson. What was the most attracted part of these stories was that these stories evoked life and times of the distant past of the forest people involved in rituals and life of times that belong to an unknown, yet known age, where people:

> Had been real forest people, whose births, marriages and deaths were celebrated alike with wild dances of coal-black maidens wearing short raffia skirts, performing the aja or oduko with bells on their thin ankles (24).

Ironically after her father's death Aku-nna along with her mother and brother is thrown and dragged back into such times, which become for her a nightmarish experience, exactly for the reason that her upbringing in an environment of new Africa has made her a misfit in the traditional Ibuza cultural set-up, that appears to her alien and from which she is totally estranged. Thus starts her journey back into the deep recesses the precolonial age, as it becomes inevitable for the family to go back to Ibuza. On the one hand there is the hard fact that the earning member of the family is dead and to earn a livelihood in Lagos would be next to impossible. On the other hand, there is a way out for the family by going back to Ibuza, because conventionally after Ezekiel's death, his family would be adopted by his elder brother. Aku-nna knows her destiny that the bride price that her marriage would fetch would be used to pay the school fee for her brother Nna-nndo. She is prepared for this and can only hope that she gets a good husband rich enough to pay a handsome bride price. But she is definitely not ready for what she encounters in her hometown.

The journey from Lagos to Ibuza is an experience in itself for Aku-nna. In going back, she is going back to a world from which her bond has been completely severed. What strikes her at first is the contrast in the landscape. As they travel on, the forest and the vegetation become thicker and greener. People as they walked along had seemed more happy, relaxed and healthy, than their relatives in Lagos. Among the women who come to welcome MaBlackie and her children is Aku-nna's first cousin Ogugua, who is of Aku-nna's age but is a complete

contrast to her. She has never attended any school and is more a replica of what MaBlackie would have been in her younger days; bold, vivacious, loud and even boisterous, "Ogugua was much darker, however her skin shone now, polished by a light morning perspiration...She was bolder, too, Aku-nna noticed." (64). Ogugua is a little woman in the traditional African set-up, judicious and wise about a woman's role and her tactics in playing that role. Aku-nna appears to be so naive and vulnerable in front of her. Ogugua does not hesitate in telling Aku-nna that it was only a matter of time before her father that is Ezekiel's elder brother-Okonkwo would marry MaBlackie. Since he has already inherited her and everything that belonged to Ezekiel. Aku-nna is shocked and starts to pity her mother and so resolves to study hard and become a teacher to protect her mother. This is a traditional patriarchal society, where everything, inanimate and human are the property of a single male inheritor. No doubt the matriarchal, communal fabric of the society forms its very strong foundation. It is because of this solid matriarchal base that women in traditional African setup are bold, shrewd and vibrant to take up the challenges of living in the patriarchal setup as opposed to their counterparts in the modern towns of Nigeria who have adopted Christianity and western education and are conditioned to be submissive and docile. Aku-nna and Ogugua become representative of this two opposing cultural ethos. Ogugua despite her lack of western education is confident, bold, aggressive, at once in tune with her traditional way of life and ready to accept its challenges, which for her are not challenges but a way of life. Aku-nna's western education on the other hand, makes her vulnerable and susceptible to this new way of life which paradoxically is not new but it is her inheritance and legacy from which she had been uprooted long back even before her birth and now the challenge is whether the sapling that had been uprooted can be planted back in its ancestral soil.

This challenge is unfolded through Aku-nna's relationship with two men who are in complete contrast to each other. On the one hand is her adopted father Okonkwo who is an orthodox traditionalist. On the other hand, is Chike, who is a slave descendent but now through education,

he and his family have risen financially and intellectually in the society but are still haunted by their ancient, ancestral legacy of being slave descendants. Okonkwo welcomes MaBlackie and her children within their household. Being totally ignorant and oblivion of the western influence his only ambition in life is to gain the title *Eze* within his tribe. For that he needs more money that he can now get through the bride price that his brother's daughter would fetch. So, he lets MaBlackie have a few luxuries despite a silent opposition from the other members of his family. Okonkwo even lets MaBlackie send her children to a missionary school. Even to a diehard traditionalist like him it becomes clear that an educated daughter would fetch a better bride price. Through the ambition of Okonkwo is projected the deep-rooted effect of colonialism that has finally managed to penetrate its tentacles deep inside the African traditional roots and is all set to uproot the solid tree of African culture, through its very powerful instrument of capitalism. It is the money, the capital, that is used as a bait to trap the unsuspecting natives. MaBlackie too becomes an innocent victim of exploitation of the capitalistic system. The money that she had saved from her husband's gratuity she invested in trading palm kernels:

> For she did not wish to have to carry baskets of akputo market on her head. Her type of trading was different and less strenuous: ...; she sold the kernels to eastern Ibo traders, who would have them reprocessed and exported to England to be used in the manufacture of famous brand name soaps. The cakes of soap would then be re-imported to Nigeria, and women like MaBlackie would buy them. The kernels, thus, made a completely circular journey (74).

Colonialism exploits without the victim's knowledge. And Ma Blackie is an exploited elite. Her children are going to the missionary school. She becomes the envy of Okonkwo's household. Sending a girl to school is not really encouraged in this part of the world. But MaBlackie has Okonkwo's support, not because he believes in educating a girl, but because it brightens his prospect of getting a bigger bride price through Aku-nna. He needs this capital to fulfil his ambition of becoming an *Eze*. It is ironic that this great native traditionalist who appears to be

untouched by the colonial influence is in a very subtle way being taken into its fold. People like Okonkwo are also being entrapped by colonialism. His decision to loosen the reins of domestic and familial control is met with silent opposition from other members of his family especially one of his wives, Ngbeke who because of her jealousy is able to provide a glimpse of the hard truth that the family will have to encounter later. When her sons had been convinced by their father on the relative merit of sending a girl to school with the prospect that she would bring a large bride price, it is negated by this jealous mother who more out of envy tries to turn her sons and through them her own husband against MaBlackie. For Ngbeke argues that the bride price would not go to Okonkwo but to Aku-nna's brother, Nna-nndo and the new European law will be on his side. The land is now being governed by new and strange law of the white man. She warns that MaBlackie will make full use of that law. Ngbeke in her heightened state of frustration and jealousy declares Aku-nna to be a 'ogbanje'- "a living dead". For she has all the characteristics of an ogbanje-she is timid, shy, soft spoken, unsure, not well built. Such girls, "die young, usually at the birth of their first baby. They must die young because their friends in the other world call them back" (79). Aku-nna's good behaviour becomes her greatest drawback in her ancestral environment. Her people do not understand her. If she feels like an alien among her own people, for these people also she is nothing less than an enigma. She realises that, she was trapped in the intricacies of Ibuza tradition. "She must either obey or bring shame and destruction on her own people" (116). And so, life moves on as Aku-nna and her brother accept the fatality of their situation; that there is no escape from the countless and unchanging traditions of their own people. Even MaBlackie has become oblivion to the emotional needs of her children, especially Aku-nna. It never strikes her that they are like babes who have lost their way in the deep forest and need their mother's guidance and support. The emotional need of Aku-nna is lost to her as she gets involved and has to survive in the family politics.

Aku-nna does not know where to turn for support. She desperately fights the eruption of tender feelings in her heart for Chike, her young

schoolteacher who is barely twenty-four years of age. She had first met Chike on her arrival when she was on her way to her village Ibuza along with her mother and the women of her community. Seeing her tired Chike had offered her bicycle ride which she refused not because she was a coward but the young men riding the bicycle realized, "that there was a kind of delicacy about her, for she had not yet been toughened by life as had the girls born and bred in Ibuza" (69). It is this quality of Aku-nna that attracts Chike towards her. As her lessons with Chike starts, he cannot help falling in love with this girl, "even had it occurred to him what was happening he was powerless to stop the process. He had never seen a girl so dependent, so unsure of herself, so afraid of her own people" (80). Both Aku-nna and Chike fall in love with each other. For Aku-nna she can relate to Chike in this alien land of her ancestors. He is the only one who appears to be familiar and understanding. For Chike Aku-nna's alienation from her own people makes her so fragile that his natural instincts of protectiveness that finally blossoms into love is so powerfully evoked in his heart. The tragedy is that both of them realise the futility of their ardent desire for each other. Aku-nna has been told multiple times that Chike is a slave descendent. In the conversation between Ngbeke and her sons, when Ngbeke hints at the prospect of such a relationship between Aku-nna and Chike, the immediate reaction of her sons is that of anger. They express their resentment that there can be no such relationship between a slave and a member of their family. That according to them would be the greatest insult that could befall their family. And of course, Aku-nna could never be interested in a slave. Besides, "how could a quiet girl like Aku-nna attract such a learned man like Chike, the headmaster of the whole school...and a common slave" (80). There can never be the marriage of heaven and hell. This is the dynamic reality of Chike's position in the new Africa. His being a slave is a thing of the past. With the coming of the British the class of slaves were the first to get education and they were among the first to adopt the new religion of the whites and so "these same educated slaves ended up commanding key positions" (74). But then the past, present and the future are one continuum reality. Chike and his family have risen financially, intellectually and in terms of

status in the new Africa but the past continues to haunt their present. There is an unspoken compromise between the slave descendants of antiquity who have become slaves of the colonial power on the one hand and the freemen of antiquity who are on their way to becoming willing bondsman in the new regime. According to that compromise both do not interfere in each other's lives. Chike is a modern progressive man, who aspires of going to the university. For him being a slave descendent holds no meaning for him. But because of the unspoken law between the freeman and slaves of antiquity he thinks it wise not to meddle with old practices and traditions. However, when Aku-nna comes on the scene, Chike cannot stop himself from falling in love with this innocent girl. He tries his best to nip the budding of such tender feelings in his heart for Aku-nna. Even his father tries to put some sense into his son's mind by telling him that Aku-nna's father was his junior in school so he would not want Chike to spoil her. To which Chike reacts, "How can a man spoil an angel" which shows that his feeling for Aku-nna is true and genuine. He loves her passionately. Perhaps if people had left these two individuals alone, they would have conquered their private feelings for each other. But it is precisely the antagonism that they encounter from all quarters that gets them closer to each other. This antagonism is not just from their family and community but also from students in school. It is through this antagonism that Buchi Emecheta exposes the ancient customs and practices of traditional African tribes as patriarchal power structures to oppress and dominate the female sex. These practices are exposed as exploitative and torturous in nature. Buchi unlike some male African writers like Ngugi Wa Thiong'o does not glorify their ancient past. This is because she is a female who has witnessed and experienced these practices as powerful tools in the hands of the male centric society of traditional African tribes. *The Bride Price* reflects her black African consciousness in which is embedded memories of these dark practices. The autobiographical element in this novel is very strong. Buchi Emecheta herself acknowledged that of all her novels, *The Bride Price* was closest to her heart. The trials and tribulations of Aku-nna are at once synonymous with Buchi Emecheta's own experiences. In baring the reality of patriarchy to understand the

crisis of identity in Africa, Buchi Emecheta can be seen in conformity with feminists like bell hooks and Chimamanda Ngozi who believe in the need to challenge patriarchal norms and traditions that perpetuate inequality. Aku-nna's cousins who have now become her half-brothers, her adopted father and especially Okoboshi's, a physically handicapped young native boy of her village all are exposed as instruments of torture and exploitation in a deep-rooted patriarchal set-up that has maintained its hegemony since ages. The very thought that Aku-nna could marry Chike, an oshu i.e., a slave descendent evokes in the male members strong, passionate feelings as saviours of their family honour; a thing not to be tempered with by a mere girl. If she digresses, they will not hesitate to kill her. They forget or cannot be sensitive to her being a human being with feelings and emotions. She is nothing more than family property and has to live her life in accordance to their demands. Her worth is measured only in terms of the bride price that she can fetch for the family. Her bride price becomes her only valued asset. Her adopted father needs it for getting the title; her mother needs it for her unborn child; her own brother needs it for his education. Everybody is waiting for her to become a woman. Even her own brother has started behaving odd. Since he is a boy, he is given so much of liberty and importance that he has become a little arrogant commanding and demanding things to be done by his elder sister. In such an environment Aku-nna feels a little stifled. It is only in Chike's presence that she feels secure and comfortable. Chike finally declares his love for her but realises the futility of their love ending in a happy marriage. Both of them know that Aku-nna has to pass her exams to continue her studies otherwise she would be married immediately. Chike helps her in her studies and also provides her love and support in her hour of pain and anxiety. They continue to meet secretly or Chike visits her house on the pretext of helping her with her studies thinking that the time thus gained would somehow buy them time to unknot this impossible puzzle. A ray of hope is provided to the young lovers by Chike's father when he tries to make his son understand that the most rigid of the minds are liable to change. So before taking some extreme and drastic step, he very judiciously advises his son that they would try and talk to Aku-nna's family. Chike's

father is an experienced man and knows that a good bride price can act as a bait.

Okoboshi, who emerges as a strong rival for Aku-nna's hand is a cripple both physically and mentally. In his childhood he was bitten by a poisonous snake. He managed to survive the venomous bite but it wounded Okoboshi for life. He has a bad limp. Mentally he appears to be a sadist. He is Chike's student, studying in the same class as Aku-nna, but his only purpose appears to be to malign Aku-nna's reputation and feeling. Aku-nna dreads him. She cannot understand why he wants to marry her when he has so much bitterness in his heart against her. His confidence in claiming that Aku-nna will ultimately marry only him frightens her. Chike cannot openly challenge him, because customs of the tribe provide Okoboshi the right to claim Aku-nna as his wife. For that he has to simply cut a lock of her hair and then Aku-nna will not only be married to him but tied to him for life. Whether he loves her, cares for her or not is immaterial. She will be bonded to him for life and must serve him and bear him children and in the process will be ultimately tamed and harnessed like cattle. A woman's role is only to serve and breed. If at all there is a display of emotions, that becomes a taboo and can be punished with death. So Okoboshi takes resort under the shelter of these traditions, customs and practices to physically and mentally torture Aku-nna. The episode where he comes to MaBlackie's hut as one of the suitors for Aku-nna's hand is particularly reflective of this trait of Okoboshi. Aku-nna against her wish and desire has to entertain and make herself presentable to the suitors who come to her house for her hand. She cannot stop them from touching her if they so desire. Okoboshi takes full advantage of this practice to physically hurt her in Chike's presence. Chike is his teacher but that doesn't stop him from insulting and abusing both his teacher and the girl who he is so keen to marry. It is so apparent that he doesn't want to marry Aku-nna out of love but only because of the dark 'poisonous desire of revenge, hatred, frustration and sadist pleasure. When Okoboshi hurts Aku-nna, Chike cannot contain himself any longer. Both of them come to blows and in the process Okoboshi too gets hurt. MaBlackie instead of coming to

her daughter's defence fully and boisterously supports Okoboshi. Aku-nna is shell shocked. How could her mother have forgotten all the material and moral support extended by Chike in their hour of need and hardships? How could she be blind to Okoboshi's abusive behaviour and above all how could she be insensitive to her daughter's feelings that Aku-nna had not hidden from her mother. MaBlackie had just stopped herself short of calling Chike a slave. She is given another shock by her mother who in a heightened emotional state discloses that she is pregnant. Aku-nna's hopes of continuing her studies come crashing down. Now she knows for sure that she would not be allowed to continue her studies. She can no longer aspire to become a teacher. There was another claimant to her bride price i.e., the unborn child of MaBlackie. Aku-nna very rightly analyses that now MaBlackie would not go against the wishes of her husband, who had given her this happiness. MaBlackie too becomes a part and parcel of oppressive patriarchal domination. The only hope that Aku-nna had of her marriage being delayed for the sake of education are trampled upon by MaBlackie. This episode ultimately catapults into a great disaster and tragedy for Aku-nna. During one of her dance rehearsals for the upcoming festival for which all the girls of the village have to practice, she is kidnapped by Okoboshi's friends and family. The entire episode is so intimidating. It is made amply clear that there are no laws to protect the young, vulnerable girls. In the dreaded darkness of the night, while the girls are practising, Aku-nna is carried away to Okoboshi's house through sheer force and violence. Aku-nna is frightened out of her senses. She doesn't realise what is happening to her. It is only when the women of Okoboshi's household come to prepare her as a bride that truth dawns on her. For Aku-nna it is not marriage but suicide. She is trapped like an animal; abused and tortured both physically and mentally. She groans with pain and shock. She is told by the womenfolk that everything will be alright as she would be married and in due course would bear Okoboshi's children. She is even warned not to resist Okoboshi's advances that can lead to more violence and force. This chilling and monstrous advice leaves her in a pathetic condition. Her situation is worse than that of a

prisoner of war, a sacrificial animal and the irony is that all this torture and violence has the sanctity of age-old customs and traditions. This marriage ceremony is deep down a celebration of kidnapping, extortion and rape. The entire tribe of Okoboshi takes part in the celebrations and merrymaking. What is more shocking is that Aku-nna's own family too accepts this marriage. It is a part of the ancient practice that the family of the girl thus abducted is left with no option but to accept the marriage and more importantly the bride price. Okoboshi, a crippled man represents patriarchy at its height, as a strong but ugly monster that needs to be destroyed. When Okoboshi visits Aku-nna at night and tries to use force, Aku-nna reacts strongly and hysterically. She knows that she has to preserve her honour, come what may:

> A kind of strength came to her, from where she did not know. She knew only that, for once in her life, she intended to stand up for herself, to fight for herself, for her honour. This was going to be the deciding moment of her existence. Not her mother, not her relatives, not even Chike, could help her now (136).

And so, she reacts in a way that surprises her also. She doesn't recognise the woman who blurts out that Okoboshi has gained nothing in marrying Aku-nna. She laughs hysterically and pronounces shame on Okoboshi by claiming that she has already been disvirgined by the slave Chike and she might be carrying his child. This shocks and stops Okoboshi instantly and he further hits and spits at her calling her a common slut. What double standards Okoboshi and his people have. Being a man gives him the right to do any kind of violence and damage to a female. But when a girl digresses even an inch from her defined role, she becomes worse than the beasts. The hollowness and hypocrisy of such practices is exposed. The novel delves deep into the hegemonic control being exercised over women in a systematic manner. The exploitation and heinous nature of such practices is scrutinised. But at the same time by making Aku-nna her own saviour instead of some male character rescuing her, Buchi Emecheta resonates feminism of both bell hooks and Chimamanda Ngozi, who advocate for women amplifying their voice and becoming agents in making choices about their life. The climax is

reached when Aku-nna, who has always been so submissive, is projected as a powerful agent, who amplifies the voice of the marginalized. Finally, Aku-nna escapes from this hopelessly bleak situation along with Chike. Both of them escape to another town of Ughelli, where with the help of some friends and the money that had been given by Chike's father they finally settle down. Chike gets a job in an oil company and Aku-nna works as a teacher. Their love story gets close to having a happy ending in a typical western fairytale style with the lady in love being rescued from the clutches of a monster and thereafter enjoying a blissful happy life ever after. But then this is not a fairy tale. It is a tale steeped in hardcore reality of the twentieth century Nigerian history. Chike and Aku-nna bask in each other's love and enjoy domestic bliss. But the ghost of past does haunt them on and off. They have crossed the barriers of distance and moved to a different town to escape from the precolonial historical legacy; but they could not escape from the barriers of time. They are so unsuccessful in disentangling themselves from their past. Chike provides support to Aku-nna's brother and mother too but the issue of bride price is so deeply embedded in Aku-nna's psyche that it has left a permanent scar of guilt on her conscience. Her bride price has not been paid and this weighs heavily on her heart and mind. Despite her education, she has not been able to rid herself of superstitious beliefs. Chike continues to reassure her that his father would pay double the bride price. Back in Ibuza the lovers have not been forgotten or forgiven so easily. They have desecrated their ancestral soil and have to be punished. Chike's father faces a lot of antagonism from the Okoboshi's family. His plantation is destroyed and his family lives under the shadow of constant threat because of which he sends his family away but cannot bring himself to leave his ancestral land. In a legal battle with the Okoboshi's family Chike's father wins only to further the enmity with the natives. This time the law is on the side of the slaves because it is based on English justice that makes no allowance for the freemen of antiquity. These are strange laws., "The free men had to plant new cocoa for the slave and the heavy fines were duly paid" (155). Buchi shows the dynamics of the new emerging Africa in such a vibrant manner. Through its policy of divide and rule the English have created a barrier

between the slaves and freemen of traditional African society by providing the slaves with their western brand of education and religion and thus empowering them against the freemen of antiquity. The polemics of the society are changing when in fact both the slaves and freemen of bygone days are being reduced to being slaves of the new masters i.e. the colonialists.

As for Okonkwo, he is reduced to an embittered man who has now totally forgotten his cherished ambition of gaining the title of *Eze* because of the shame that Aku-nna has brought to his name. He even disowns Mablackie as his wife. A thing that no Ibuza man in his right senses would do. He is distraught with anger, shame and a strong feeling of revenge. His own people have antagonized him against his own brother's daughter so much that he doesn't just stop at cursing her but makes a doll in Aku-nna's image and practices black magic to kill her. MaBlackie is frightened and even informs Ofulala, Chike's father, who advises her not to tell the young people, since he believes these curses work only when the victim is aware of it. Ofulala even tries to make peace with Okonkwo by offering him big amount of bride price that is outrightly refused by Okonkwo, who cannot free himself from his mental, psychological and cultural block. For him Chike is still a slave and he cannot give his daughter to a slave but his conscience doesn't prick him when he practices black magic to take his daughter's life.

This is the identity crisis that Nigeria is facing; transformation of power structures along with the dynamics of resistance and acceptance. *The Bride Price* echoes Bell Hooks' concept of inclusive feminism and Chimamanda Ngozi's intersectionality that emphasises the importance of recognising how different aspects of identity like race, class, gender and cultural background intersect and influence one another. In the novel Aku-nna and Cheke's love story is shaped and characterized not only because of the dynamics of gender but also because of their race, class, cultural background and even education. Both of them cannot live happily ever after, because Buchi shows that domestic bliss cannot be achieved in a land engulfed by so many identity issues. The novel is about to end on a note of hope, as Chike and dying Aku-nna name their

daughter, "Joy" but than simultaneously comes the writer's last note that Aku-nna's death becomes a lesson for all girls in the village for generations to come, that desecration of ancient customs and disobeyance of one's parents can never materialise into happiness. We as readers are left to draw our own conclusion. Does Aku-nna die because of black magic practised by her adopted father or is it the superstitious strain in her conscience that acts as poisonous guilt and gradually kills or is it nothing more than her medical condition of having a weak constitution because of which she is not able to bear her tough child birth and dies in the process.

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Mythical Metamorphosis: The Transformative Journey of *Ramayana* in Contemporary Narratives

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Within the labyrinthine depths of M. Alan Kazlsev's insight on mythopoesis as expounded in the *Mythopoesis in the modern world*, 'Mythopoesis is the anthropocentric and anthropomorphic representation of the Imaginal as material-physical, historical, and egoic-personal narrative.'(Kazlsev 33). Mythology is not religion or science; it is a category unto itself, providing solace to both the heart and mind or acting as a bridge between emotion and intellect, truth and ideal, human being and nonhuman. Mythology is one of the oldest forms of literature and it lays its foundation on giving pleasure with morality to the readers/ listeners. It is a timeless literary form which reinstates the belief of the members of any society into its legends, religion and faith. This fluid form of mythology gave birth to the term 'Mythopoesis', a literary genre that incorporates ancient mythological ideas and archetypes into modern fiction. Myths are anything but static, they evolve with the evolution of society, technology and time. This paper is an attempt to read one such mythological text through the lens of mythopoesis. With the evolution of our society, the way we view the legends and myths changes and mythopoesis plays a major role in it. *The Ramayana*, a cornerstone of Indian society, reflects the enduring essence of Hindu philosophy, reshaped across various disciplines and immortalized in popular culture. It is one of the pillars on which the philosophy and belief of Indian Hindu society still stands and will continue to stand for as long as myths are studied and interpreted. Against the backdrop of India's rich cultural heritage, this study carries significance, shedding light on the dynamic interplay between tradition and contemporary interpretation. The paper

attempts to study the evolution of *the Ramayana* and its characters in popular culture.

By focusing on the Ramayana's evolution, one hopes to reveal the dynamic nature of mythology and its adaptability across different cultural contexts. Methodology involved in this observation is a comparative analysis of various versions of Ramayana, examining how different adaptations have reshaped the characters and narratives. Historical research and textual analysis will be the methodology adopted in this study to trace the evolution of the epic.

In the tapestry of human existence, societies are woven together by the threads of collective beliefs, answering the profound questions of 'What,' 'Why,' and 'How' that underpin the cosmos. William Righter quotes Warren and Wellek in his book *Myth and Literature* (1975) and says, "Myth is narrative, irrational...and comes to any anonymously composed story-telling of origins and destinies, the explanation a society offers its young of why the world is and why we do what we do" (Righter 05) which provide a collective identity to people of different generations. These beliefs, manifesting primarily as narratives, are handed down through generations as oral traditions or written scriptures, forming the bedrock of cultural identity. These narratives unveil the intricate tapestry of religious, political, and social constructs within a society, often establishing unyielding boundaries for its members and are called myths. They provide teachings, morals, and principles that lay the foundation for a society's existence. R. Shashidhar in his exploration of "*Literature and the New Myths*" observes that "Myths have always been powerful tools in managing societies. Myths have helped naturalize social order. Myths have told us that "This is how things have always been" (Shashidhar 08). These foundational narratives possess the uncanny ability to captivate the human imagination, blurring the boundaries between history and mythology. In the realm of India, three monumental texts—the Mahabharata, the Ramayana, and the Bhagavad Gita—they stand as the pillars of this cultural edifice containing whole landscape of Indian Hindu mythology.

A. K. Ramanujan wrote in his essay "Three Hundred Ramayanas: Five examples and Three thoughts on Translation", "the countless textual and oral versions of the tale of Ram are like little streams that flow towards the mighty river that is Ramayana literature." (Ramanujan 154). Despite originating in the Vedic age, these texts continue to wield their influence, their original ideals now embedded in the fabric of social, religious and political dogma. The Ramayana, a timeless epic, narrates the saga of Lord Rama and his devoted consort, Sita. Attributed to the venerable sage, Valmiki during the Vedic age, this magnum opus, originally composed in Sanskrit, has transcended linguistic boundaries, finding its expressions in numerous vernacular languages. Various renditions of the Ramayana exist, the Tamil version by Kampan called Iramavataram, the Sanskrit version called Adbhut Ramayana, the Bengali rendition by Krittivasa, Assamese Ramayana by Kandali, Odia Dandi Ramayana by Balaram Das, Kashmiri Ramayana and the Awadhi incarnation penned by Tulsidas known as the Shri Ramcharitmanas to name a few. The populace of the narrative is immense not just in India but in other major South Asian countries as well, countries like Vietnam, Cambodia, Nepal has their own versions of Ramayana revolving around the same central characters while offering distinctive insights into the social and religious ethos of their respective regions. Despite being a Hindu epic, the Ramayana has extended its roots in other religions as well, Muslims who live in Mappila region of Kerala have adapted the Ramayana and calling it Mappila Ramayana making it one of the many Muslim versions of the epic.

The Ramayana, owing to its sheer length and complexity, interweaves multiple narratives. Yet, at its heart, it revolves around the timeless tale of a righteous king, his unwavering adherence to dharma (duty), and his relentless pursuit to rescue his abducted wife from the clutches of a demon king. The central theme of the Ramayana is to provide an ideal example of a King, Son and Man. However, it talks about many other issues in the society, religion and universe present within the discussions carried by various sages in the epic. Over the centuries, this epic has inspired countless works of art and cultural expressions, finding a place

in plays, films, television series, classical dances, and various other artistic forms. From *Ramleela* played in every street corner before Dusshera festival in North India to various forms of classical dance like Kathakali performing various stories from the epic, Ramayana have reached every house and every generation in the country. These artistic adaptations allow for the interpretation and popularisation of the diverse versions of the epic, shaped by the artists' unique perspectives. As researchers across the globe grapple with the intricacies of the original text, a perennial debate persists regarding the interpolation and interpretation of the narrative which in itself becomes complicated and fluid with ever evolving and adapting nature of the tale.

The renowned French philosopher, Roland Barthes, in his seminal work elucidates the concept of myth as a form of communication. Myth, according to Barthes, transcends the subject matter of the message; it is about the manner in which the message is conveyed. He posits, "Mythical speech is made of a material which has already been worked on so as to make it suitable for communication: it is because all the materials of myth (whether pictorial or written) presuppose a signifying consciousness, that one can reason about them while discounting their substance."(Barthes 108). Barthes argues that myths are not just stories or narratives but are complex systems of signs that convey and reinforce cultural values, ideologies, and ideals. Mythological communication, therefore, seeks to instil these ideals into the collective consciousness to the extent that they become ingrained in the very essence of society. It reinforces cultural values and ideologies and could be adapted in different ways. Such is the nature of the Ramayana within Indian Hindu society. Along with serving as a guide for ideal behaviour and righteousness the Ramayana also communicate values such as dharma, loyalty, love, honour, and sacrifice. It serves as a repository of ideals, emphasising vigilant masculinity, kingly dharma, and societal order, primarily directed toward the male members of society. It perpetuates conservative dogma, fostering a paradigm of masculine personality—a foundation upon which much political, social, cultural and religious rhetoric and agendas are constructed. Feminist scholars have found time and

again the promotion of subdued femininity and patriarchal submission from the female of the epic. Barthes emphasises the role of symbols and sign system in conveying myths, the Ramayana is laden with symbols and signs through various smaller plots in the epic, for example characters like Sita, Ravana and Hanuman symbolises different aspects of human nature and morality, minor characters like Urmila also symbolises strong emotions such as sacrifice and determination. The traces of the lessons from Ramayana are so relevant that they are very much a part of everyday rhetoric since ages. However, mythopoesis has made the characters and plot lurking in the background in the main epic, stand out. The adaptations and reinterpretations of the Ramayana continue to communicate and adapt the myths with the moving world, making them relevant and ideal.

Mythopoesis as a practice also submits to what Roland Barthes believed, it helps writer to reimagine the myths and yet establish a new myth about the chosen character or plot. It helps to demolish the patriarchal cycle and establish the belief in accordance with modern world. Although the definition of mythopoeia as "a creating of myth" was first recorded in 1846 and the concept of mythopoeia was introduced by J.R.R. Tolkien in the 1930s as the title of one of his poem, the practice of mythopoeia has been started in second century CE. According to Devdutt Pattanaik, as recorded in his book *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of Ramyana* "The *Ramayana* literature can be studied in four phases. The first phase, till the second century CE, is when the Valmiki Ramayana takes final shape. In the second phase, between the second and tenth centuries CE, many Sanskrit and Prakrit plays and poems are written. Here we attempt to locate Ram in Buddhist and Jain traditions as well, but he is most successfully located as the royal form of Vishnu on earth through Puranik literature. In the third phase, after the tenth century, against the backdrop of the rising tide of Islam, the Ramayana becomes the epic of choice to be put down in local tongues. Here the trend is to be devotional, with Ram as God and Hanuman as his venerated devotee and servant. Finally, in the fourth phase, since the nineteenth century, strongly influenced by the European and American gaze, the Ramayana is

decoded, deconstructed and reimagined based on modern political theories of justice and fairness." (Pattanaik 08)

Influenced by the external influences like colonialism or globalisation and changing socio-political conditions have also impacted how the narrative of/from Ramayana is changed/understood. While colonialism made people look at the epic through a European perspective, it challenges the Indian mythology with western concepts, which generated more terms and confusion and questioned the religious aspect of the epic. One of the most prevalent discussions is to treat these foundational texts as history or myth. Having proven from various architectural, scientific and archaeological findings, Indians treat the epic as history, also the term 'myth' is Western to the natives, however disagreeing with each other on this debate, scholars of history and mythology both agree on the immense importance of the text to India and various South Asian countries. Globalisation has also made the epic available to a wider audience to read and learn, it brought to forefront the availability of multiple versions of the same epic. Neena Paley's adaptation of Ramayana as an animated musical romantic comedy-drama "Sita Sings the Blues" is one of the popular examples of how globalisation has influenced the course and understanding of Ramayana. Paley used the plot of Ramayana using paintings from 18th century Rajput painting tradition mixing it with jazz music and strikingly modern technique of vector graphic animation. Although the movement of figures is minimal but the contrasting silhouettes discussion by three voices about their personal impression and knowledge of epic is ironical, humoristic and yet intellectual.

Manifestation of the Ramayana has happened across genres and disciplines, although in this study the evolution is studied only in few popular adaptations of the Ramayana across genres along with some popular culture references to visual adaptations as well. The first cinematic adaptation of Ramayana came in 1943 called *Ram Rajya*, a film seen by Mahatma Gandhi. Till today there have been hundreds if not thousands of adaptations and reinterpretations of *the Ramayana*. From a silent film called *Sati Sulochana* in 1921 to *Adipurush* in 2023,

the epic has been talked about and learnt from in all its glory. Each reinterpretation has added to the legend, making all of them a part of mythopoesis. Tulsidas, through his *Shri Ramcharitmanas* portrays Rama as a divine being, his actions representing the righteous path ordained by the gods to establish dharma. While *Valmiki's Ramayana* is considered the oldest rendition, if not the original, Tulsidas' Ramcharitmanas achieved equal fame by elevating Rama to the status of the supreme deity. This distinction often leads to confusion among readers and viewers. *Valmiki's Ramayana* presents Rama as "Purushottam," an embodiment of virtue, while *Shri Ramcharitmanas* portrays Rama as the supreme deity. Ramayana has been written and rewritten by various writers representing their own ideologies and moulding the characters with the socio- political situation of the writer. From R.K Narayana to Amish Tripathi, *the Ramayana* and its characters are read and re-read, interpreted and reinterpreted, critiqued and analysed in so many different versions and yet the plot, characters and morals are ever evolving.

Lanka Dahan, a silent film is one of the oldest adaptations of the Ramayana and was directed by Dadasaheb Phalke. This film featured the first double role in Indian cinema making the same actor play the role of Rama and Sita making it one of the iconic films of Indian cinema. Ramayan, another film in 1954, directed by Shankarrao Vyas and Hariprasanna Das was followed by an already successful trilogy - *Bharat Milap* (1942), *Ram Rajya* (1943) and *Ramadan* (1946) which was received well by the audience. This film revolved more around Luv and Kush, Ram's sons and the latter part of the epic. Another manifestation of mythological communication is the television series "Ramayan," directed by Ramanand Sagar. Drawing from various versions of the Ramayana, this series first aired from January 25, 1987, to August 1989, and was re-televised in 2020 during the lockdown, garnering record-breaking viewership. Such was its impact that people began venerating the actors and even the television sets themselves. In multiple narrations Ramanand Sagar has communicated that various scenes have been derived from different versions of *the Ramayana*. Whereas for most of the viewers Ramanand Sagar's "Ramayana" holds

the place of original Ramayana. Hence the line between original and popular stays blurry.

Another serial rendition of *the Ramayana* that aired on Zee TV in 2012 stood in a very different light than the previous one. Aligning to the spicy and patriarchal stream of Indian TV serials of presenting women as either a naive personality or cunning negative personality showed Sita, ever accepting her circumstances in stark contrast with Manthara and Kaikeyi who plotted to send Rama to forest for fourteen years. The serial stood out far from any version of these characters written in the texts. It gave unnecessary attention to the character of Manthara from the very starting, making her as not only the creator of a lot of circumstances but also adding unnecessary drama to the plot. The attire of the cast stands particularly away from legend and very near to then prevalent modern style of Indian clothing. The plot seems to set the epic away from morality and near the emotional dramatic turmoil of unnecessary incidents. *Ramayana: The Legend of Prince Rama (1992),* an animated film by Yugo Sake and Ram Mohan is an Indian - Japanese film, that attracted a huge younger audience and remains one of the most faithful adaptations of the epic. Although there was criticism about colour in the film, yet it is considered one of the iconic adaptations of the Ramayana.

Movies like RRR derives its fight sequence heavily from Ramayana, with the protagonist wearing saffron dhoti and fighting war with the help of Arrows and having a brother along with him. Adipurush is the latest film based heavily on Ramayana. Directed by Om Raut the film is criticised for its portrayal of characters, plot and excessive influence of western films. The film has been called 'a weird blend of fantasy and fallacy'. The film problematized the representation of epic on so many level- romanticised the forest life of Rama and Sita, Ravana's Lanka shown in black and not gold, use of a dragon like creature in place of Pushpak Viman somehow degrades the venerated legend and components. Although the film is appreciated for its efforts with VFX but one cannot turn his head from the problematics of presenting a celebrated and venerated legend.

The diverse adaptations of *the Ramayana* across various literary works have presented multifaceted dimensions of this ancient epic, leaving a profound impact on readers. From Valmiki's foundational narrative to modern reinterpretations by authors like R.K. Narayan, which the timeless story of Lord Rama has been portrayed. These adaptations have humanised the characters, delved into their inner conflicts, and explored the moral complexities embedded within the epic's narrative. By shifting perspectives or highlighting specific characters like Sita in Devdutt Pattanaik's or Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's work or employing a contemporary narrative style in R.K.Narayan's retellings, these adaptations have engaged readers in thought-provoking ways, challenging traditional perceptions and inviting reflection or moral dilemmas, societal norms, and the universal themes of righteousness, sacrifice, and devotion. They have sparked discussions, evoked emotions and compelled readers to contemplate the relevance of the Ramayana's teachings in the context of their own lives, fostering a deeper appreciation of the epic's enduring impact on literature and culture.

These visual as well as written adaptations of *the Ramayana* moves with the movement of society, not necessarily in a progressive way. Mythopoesis create myth about the physical appearance, attire, language, and the plot itself. Mythology or Mythopoesis is an ever-evolving genre which leads us to stay connected to the legends of the land while still moving forward with the society. It depends on the author how he/she presents the myth. The character of Ram, serving political ideologies since a long time, has been reserved to a conservative, rigid, masculine individual who stands tall for being an ideal man whereas critics have always questioned him about different norms of his characters.

The Ramayana, as an ancient Indian epic, has not merely stood the test of time; it has metamorphosed through centuries, evolving with the changing tides of society, technology, and ideology. At its core, it narrates the timeless saga of a virtuous king, Lord Rama, and his relentless pursuit to rescue his abducted wife, Sita, from the clutches of a demon king. While the foundational narrative remains constant, the Ramayana's adaptability is the hallmark of its enduring influence. This adaptability is

due to its embodiment of mythological communication, a concept elucidated by the renowned French philosopher Roland Barthes, which transcends the subject matter of the message, emphasizing the manner of conveying it.

The Ramayana, deeply ingrained in Indian Hindu society, serves as a repository of ideals, propagating notions of vigilant masculinity, kingly dharma, and societal order. It perpetuates conservative dogma, underpinning a paradigm of masculine personality. Yet, mythopoesis, as a practice, breathes new life into the characters and plots that often linger in the epic's background, instilling fresh perspectives and narratives. The debate over Ramayana being an history or mythology is an ever-going complicated debate yet with every new adaptation of Ramayana one can deduce that the process of mythopoesis is as old as the Ramayana. Every author deconstructs the Ramayana only to add his or her version to the Ramayana literature and make a new myth of his own.

This paper has traced the evolution of the Ramayana across different phases, from its earliest origins to its contemporary reinterpretations. It has explored the impact of external influences and changing socio-political contexts on the narrative, highlighting key adaptations and interpretations that have left a lasting mark on the epic. Whether through literary masterpieces by authors like R.K. Narayan and Amish Tripathi or cinematic and television adaptations, the Ramayana continues to captivate and inspire audiences. Visual adaptations have adapted and portrayed characters to reflect societal trends, for better or worse, sometimes challenging norms.

In a world, where myth and history often blur, *the Ramayana* exemplifies the dynamic nature of mythopoesis. The characters, the plot, and the morals of the epic have remained ever evolving, a testament to the enduring power of myth to shape and reshape cultural landscapes. As scholars, artists, and audiences engage in a perennial debate regarding the interpretation and interpolation of the narrative, *the Ramayana* continues to be a symbol of both constancy and change, connecting the

past and the present in an unending mythological tapestry. This captivating evolution of the Ramayana in popular culture underscores its significance as a timeless and ever-relevant narrative.

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Challenging Racism and Prejudice by Postmodern Spanish Literature and TV Productions

Harshita Poswal

In a world marked by growing awareness of social injustices and a resounding call for inclusivity, the realms of postmodern Spanish literature and television productions have emerged as potent catalysts for addressing and dismantling racism and prejudice. These creative channels offer Spanish writers and filmmakers a unique platform to challenge age-old stereotypes, re-evaluate historical narratives, and foster cross-cultural dialogues, thereby advancing a more inclusive and equitable representation of society. This article embarks on an exploration of the pivotal role played by postmodern Spanish literature and TV productions in confronting racial biases, all the while championing a society that embraces diversity and tolerance.

The paper begins with an examination of how postmodern Spanish literature, with its diverse array of literary works, embarks on a mission to deconstruct deeply rooted stereotypes. Through a careful recontextualization of historical events and characters, these literary pieces challenge prevailing narratives and present alternative viewpoints that undermine racist ideologies. This critical analysis delves into the nuanced ways in which Spanish authors engage with complex issues, offering readers fresh perspectives that encourage critical thinking and confront ingrained prejudices. Postmodern Spanish literature actively fosters cross- cultural dialogues by incorporating diverse voices and experiences. This approach not only promotes a more inclusive representation of society but also serves as a testament to the rich multicultural tapestry that is Spain's heritage. Authors like *Najat El Hachmi*, who have made significant contributions to Spanish literature,

exemplify how these voices are reshaping the narrative landscape, offering perspectives often marginalized in mainstream discourse.

Transitioning from the written word to the visual realm, we then explore the groundbreaking TV productions that have brought these literary narratives to life on screen. By analyzing the visual representation of characters, settings, and historical events, this research study highlights how Spanish television has contributed to the dismantling of racial prejudices and the promotion of empathy among viewers. These television series serve as a bridge between the written word and a broader audience, challenging stereotypes and fostering a sense of shared humanity. Moreover, this study delves into the impact of these TV series on public discourse. It emphasizes the potential of visual media to challenge societal norms and inspire a more equitable and tolerant society. As viewers engage with these narratives, they are compelled to reflect on their own biases and prejudices, contributing to a broader awareness of the need for inclusivity in storytelling.

Deconstructing Stereotypes

Postmodern Spanish literature stands as a formidable force in the ongoing struggle against racism and prejudice. At its core, it accomplishes this noble mission by meticulously dismantling deeply ingrained stereotypes and subjecting the very concept of ethnic identity and cultural representation to a profound and critical examination. Spanish authors skillfully wield a diverse array of literary techniques, thereby challenging prevailing narratives regarding race and ethnicity. Through an intricate reconceptualization of historical events and characters, these literary works transcend simplistic preconceptions and offer alternative viewpoints that strike at the heart of deeply rooted racist ideologies.

One exemplary work that illustrates the power of deconstructing stereotypes in postmodern Spanish literature is *Javier Cercas's "Soldiers of Salamis"* (2008). This novel takes a historical account of the Spanish Civil War and transforms it into a narrative that deliberately blurs the lines between heroism and villainy. Through meticulous character development and exploration of motivations, Cercas challenges

the simplistic, binary understanding of good versus evil that often characterizes discussions of the war's participants. By humanizing both sides of the conflict, the novel invites readers to question their preconceived notions about the individuals involved, effectively challenging prejudices associated with the war.

Juan Gabriel Vásquez's "The Sound of Things Falling" (2012) presents another compelling example of how postmodern Spanish literature confronts stereotypes. This novel delves into the complex history of Colombia's drug trade and its profound impact on the lives of ordinary people. Through a multi-layered narrative that intertwines the personal and political, *Vásquez* prompts readers to consider the broader socio-economic factors that have contributed to the drug trade's prevalence. By presenting a nuanced perspective on this issue, the novel challenges prejudiced views that tend to oversimplify the complex forces at play.

The beauty of postmodern Spanish literature lies in its capacity to engage with multifaceted social issues. These literary works not only challenge stereotypes but also encourage readers to engage in critical thinking and self-reflection. They compel individuals to question their own biases and confront the oversimplified narratives that have perpetuated racism and prejudice. Additionally, postmodern Spanish literature actively fosters cross-cultural dialogues by incorporating diverse voices and experiences into its narratives. This approach fundamentally promotes a more inclusive representation of society and invites readers to embrace the rich tapestry of Spain's multicultural heritage. Authors like *Najat El Hachmi*, born in Morocco and residing in Catalonia, represent the changing face of Spanish literature. Her novel *"The Last Patriarch"* (2012) delves into themes of cultural identity, displacement, and the immigrant experience in Spain. By centering the narrative on the experiences of immigrants, *El Hachmi* challenges stereotypes and offers a perspective that is often marginalized in mainstream discourse. Through her work, she not only contributes to the deconstruction of stereotypes but also serves as a beacon of representation for a growing demographic within Spain.

Postmodern Spanish literature, with its capacity to challenge stereotypes and incorporate diverse perspectives, serves as a driving force in the broader movement to combat racism and prejudice. It invites readers to see the world through different lenses, fostering empathy and understanding. As readers engage with these narratives, they are not only entertained but also enlightened, compelled to confront their own biases and preconceptions.

Fostering Cross-Cultural Dialogues and Inclusive Representation

Postmodern Spanish literature transcends the traditional boundaries of storytelling by actively fostering cross-cultural dialogues and incorporating a diverse range of voices and experiences. In doing so, it promotes a more inclusive representation of society, celebrating the rich tapestry of Spain's multicultural heritage. This inclusive approach challenges not only stereotypes but also encourages readers to embrace the complexities of a diverse world, ultimately contributing to the broader mission of combating racism and prejudice.

One significant aspect of postmodern Spanish literature's commitment to cross-cultural dialogues is its exploration of the immigrant experience in Spain. As Spain has evolved into a diverse and multicultural society, literature has played a pivotal role in capturing the nuances of this transformation. *"The Last Patriarch"* explores the complexities of identity through the eyes of an immigrant woman striving to navigate the intricate terrain of belonging. *El Hachmi's* narrative provides a platform for individuals from diverse backgrounds to see themselves reflected in literature, fostering a sense of inclusion and representation that is crucial in the fight against prejudice.

Furthermore, postmodern Spanish literature encourages readers to empathize with characters from various cultural backgrounds. By weaving these diverse voices into the fabric of the narrative, authors challenge preconceived notions and promote a more comprehensive understanding of society. Readers are invited to walk in the shoes of

characters whose experiences may differ from their own, fostering empathy and a broader perspective. In addition to exploring the immigrant experience, postmodern Spanish literature often engages with themes of cultural hybridity and the fluidity of identity. The work of *Almudena Grandes*, such as *"The Wind from the East" (2010),* exemplifies this approach. *Grandes* navigates the complex relationships between Spain and its former colonies, particularly in Latin America. Her narratives delve into the intricate dance of cultural exchange, identity negotiation, and the enduring legacies of colonialism.

By embracing cultural hybridity and acknowledging the interconnectedness of societies, postmodern Spanish literature challenges the notion of rigid boundaries between cultures and ethnicities. It encourages readers to recognize the intricate interplay of influences that shape individual and collective identities. Moreover, postmodern Spanish literature extends its commitment to inclusive representation by addressing issues related to gender and sexuality. Works like *"Outlaws"* (2014) by *Javier Cercas* delve into the experiences of marginalized communities, including the LGBTQ+ community. These narratives challenge stereotypes and provide a platform for under-represented voices. The celebration of diverse voices and experiences in postmodern Spanish literature serves as a powerful means of fostering cross-cultural dialogues and promoting a more inclusive representation of society. It encourages readers to engage with the complexity of the world, challenge stereotypes, and embrace the richness of Spain's multicultural landscape.

Translating Literature to the Screen: TV Productions

While postmodern Spanish literature has laid the groundwork for challenging racism and prejudice, television productions have emerged as dynamic mediums for bringing these narratives to life on screen. Spanish TV series have garnered acclaim for their visual representation of characters, settings, and historical events, making them essential in the dismantling of racial prejudices and the promotion of empathy among viewers.

One remarkable example of the power of Spanish television in challenging stereotypes and promoting inclusivity is the TV series *"La Casa de Papel" (Money Heist)*. This series, which has gained international recognition, features a diverse ensemble cast involved in a heist. By showcasing characters from various backgrounds and cultures working together, *"La Casa de Papel"* challenges stereotypes and promotes the idea that individuals from different walks of life can collaborate effectively. The diverse characters in the series are depicted as multi-dimensional individuals with their own motivations and struggles, transcending one-dimensional stereotypes often associated with their backgrounds. This nuanced portrayal humanizes the characters and encourages viewers to see beyond racial or cultural labels, fostering a sense of shared humanity.

Similarly, *"Vis a Vis"* explores the experiences of women in a Spanish prison, addressing issues of race, class, and gender discrimination. The series provides a platform for underrepresented voices and exposes the harsh realities of the criminal justice system. By depicting the challenges faced by a diverse group of women, *"Vis a Vis"* confronts stereotypes and encourages viewers to reflect on the complexities of individuals' lives. Beyond the characters, the visual representation of settings in these TV productions is pivotal in challenging racial prejudices. Spain, with its diverse landscapes and urban environments, serves as a backdrop for these narratives. The series often showcase the multicultural fabric of Spanish society, further emphasizing the importance of inclusivity and representation.

Moreover, the depiction of historical events in these TV productions contributes to challenging prejudices by offering alternative perspectives on Spain's history. *"El Tiempo Entre Costuras"* (The Time in Between), for example, explores Spain's history during World War II. Through the lens of a young seamstress, the series recontextualizes historical events and challenges prevailing narratives, inviting viewers to consider the broader implications of Spain's role during that period.

The impact of these TV series extends beyond entertainment and into public discourse. They prompt discussions about diversity and

representation in the media, encouraging viewers to critically evaluate the importance of accurate and multifaceted portrayals of characters from different backgrounds. These conversations contribute to a broader awareness of the need for inclusivity in storytelling and media representation. Additionally, the success of these TV series has implications for societal norms. By presenting diverse characters and narratives on a mainstream platform, they challenge conventional views of what is considered "normal" or "typical." This has the potential to reshape public perceptions and foster a more equitable and tolerant society.

Impact on Public Discourse and Social Change

Postmodern Spanish literature and TV productions have not only entertained audiences but also influenced public discourse on racism and prejudice. These creative endeavors have the potential to challenge societal norms and inspire a more equitable and tolerant society. As viewers engage with these narratives, they are compelled to reflect on their own biases and prejudices, contributing to a broader awareness of the need for inclusivity in storytelling and media representation.

The success of TV series like "La Casa de Papel" and "Vis a Vis" has led to increased discussions about diversity and representation in the media. Viewers are engaging in conversations about the importance of accurate and multifaceted portrayals of characters from different backgrounds. This heightened awareness has prompted discussions about the need for greater inclusivity in the entertainment industry.

Moreover, these discussions extend beyond the realm of entertainment and into broader societal conversations about racism and prejudice. The narratives presented in these TV series often parallel real-world issues, making them a powerful tool for raising awareness and promoting empathy. As viewers identify with the struggles and experiences of the characters, they are more likely to connect these narratives to the broader societal context. For example, "Vis a Vis" highlights the challenges faced by incarcerated women, addressing issues of race, class, and gender discrimination. The series prompts viewers to question the

fairness of the criminal justice system and consider the factors that contribute to individuals ending up in prison. These discussions can lead to increased awareness of systemic injustices and a call for reform.

Furthermore, the success of these TV series has implications for the broader media landscape. It has prompted industry professionals to reevaluate their approaches to storytelling and representation. Producers and creators are increasingly recognizing the importance of diverse narratives and are making efforts to incorporate them into their work. The impact of these TV series extends beyond entertainment and into individual consciousness. Viewers are compelled to reflect on their own biases and prejudices as they engage with these narratives. This self-awareness can lead to personal growth and a greater commitment to combating racism and prejudice in their daily lives. In this way, postmodern Spanish TV productions contribute to the broader mission of fostering a more equitable and tolerant society. Additionally, these TV series have served as platforms for underrepresented voices to be heard. By showcasing diverse characters and narratives, they offer opportunities for actors and creators from marginalized communities to gain visibility and recognition. This representation is crucial in breaking down barriers and challenging stereotypes within the entertainment industry.

Impact on the Socio-Cultural Landscape of Spain

Postmodern Spanish literature and TV productions have had a profound impact on the socio- cultural landscape of Spain. By encouraging open dialogue and critical reflection, these creative endeavors play an essential role in shaping the collective consciousness of the nation. In a country with a complex history of diverse cultural influences, literature and television offer a space for individuals to explore their own identities and understand the experiences of others. This fosters a sense of unity and shared identity that transcends racial and ethnic boundaries.

Spain's history is characterized by a rich tapestry of cultural influences, from its Moorish heritage to its colonial past. Postmodern Spanish literature and TV productions acknowledge and celebrate this diversity.

They provide a platform for voices and experiences from various cultural backgrounds, contributing to a more inclusive understanding of Spanish society. Moreover, these creative endeavors actively engage with issues related to immigration and cultural identity. As Spain continues to evolve into a multicultural society, literature and television offer a lens through which individuals can explore their own identities and the experiences of those from different backgrounds. This fosters a sense of empathy and understanding that is crucial in promoting a more inclusive society.

The works of authors like *Najat El Hachmi*, resonates with a growing demographic within Spain, individuals who have diverse cultural backgrounds and stories to tell. Through literature, these voices find a platform, contributing to a sense of belonging and representation within Spanish society. Furthermore, initiatives aimed at supporting diverse authors, filmmakers, and actors have gained traction in Spain. Organizations and institutions recognize the importance of providing opportunities for underrepresented voices to be heard. This commitment to diversity enriches the cultural landscape of Spain and promotes inclusivity.

In the realm of television, the success of series like *"La Casa de Papel"* and *"Vis a Vis"* has prompted discussions about diversity and representation within the media industry. Viewers and industry professionals alike are recognizing the importance of telling diverse stories and portraying characters from various backgrounds accurately. This recognition is leading to changes in the way stories are told and the actors who are cast to portray them. Additionally, these TV series challenge conventional views of what is considered "normal" or "typical" in society. By presenting diverse characters and narratives on a mainstream platform, they broaden public perceptions and foster a greater acceptance of differences. This contributes to a more equitable and tolerant society where individuals are more accepting of diversity in all its forms.

The Transformative Power of Literature and Television

Postmodern Spanish literature and television productions possess a transformative power that extends beyond entertainment. They have

the capacity to challenge deeply ingrained racism and prejudice, ultimately inspiring individuals and society as a whole to embrace inclusivity and diversity. This transformative influence is a testament to the potential of literature and television to drive social progress. At the heart of this transformative power is the ability of these creative endeavors to engage with complex social issues. Postmodern Spanish literature delves into the intricacies of racism and prejudice, offering alternative perspectives that encourage critical thinking and self-reflection.

By challenging stereotypes and presenting diverse voices, these literary works compel readers to confront their own biases and preconceptions. One of the key aspects of this transformation is the expansion of empathy. Literature has a unique ability to transport readers into the lives and experiences of characters from different backgrounds. Readers become emotionally invested in these narratives, forging connections with characters whose experiences may differ from their own. This emotional connection fosters empathy, encouraging readers to view the world through different lenses and consider the perspectives of others.

Television productions, in turn, bring these narratives to life on screen, amplifying their impact. Characters become tangible, and viewers are invited to walk in their shoes. The visual representation of diverse characters and settings challenges stereotypes and fosters a sense of shared humanity. Viewers develop a deeper understanding of the complexities of individuals' lives and the systemic challenges they face.

Additionally, the success of these literary and television works has led to increased awareness and discussions about diversity and representation. The broader public discourse is influenced as viewers and readers engage in conversations about the importance of accurate and multifaceted portrayals of characters from different backgrounds. These discussions contribute to a broader awareness of the need for inclusivity in storytelling and media representation. Furthermore, these creative endeavors challenge societal norms by presenting diverse characters and narratives on mainstream platforms. This has the potential

to reshape public attitudes and foster a greater acceptance of diversity in all its forms.

The transformative power of literature and television is not limited to individual consciousness but extends to the broader socio-cultural landscape. By encouraging open dialogue and critical reflection, these creative mediums play an essential role in shaping the collective consciousness of Spain. They foster a sense of unity and shared identity that transcends racial and ethnic boundaries, contributing to a more inclusive and equitable society. Through literature, these voices find a platform, contributing to a sense of belonging and representation within Spanish society.

The Role of Creators and Scholars

Postmodern Spanish literature and television productions are not solely the products of artistic expression but are also the result of the dedication and vision of creators and scholars. The individuals behind these creative endeavors play a pivotal role in advancing the cause of challenging racism and prejudice. Their commitment to exploring complex social issues, promoting inclusivity, and challenging stereotypes contributes significantly to the transformative power of literature and television. Creators, including writers, directors, and actors, wield their craft as a means of addressing pressing social concerns. They breathe life into characters and narratives that challenge deeply ingrained racism and prejudice. By creating multi-dimensional characters from diverse backgrounds, they invite audiences to engage with stories that transcend simplistic stereotypes.

Creators contribute to a more diverse literary landscape, providing a platform for underrepresented voices. Moreover, the commitment of creators to fostering inclusivity extends beyond their work. The success of series like *"La Casa de Papel"* and *"Vis a Vis"* has prompted industry professionals to reevaluate their approaches to storytelling and representation. Creators recognize the importance of diverse narratives and are making efforts to incorporate them into their work, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive media landscape.

Scholars also play a crucial role in advancing the cause by providing critical analysis and contextualization. Their research and insights into postmodern Spanish literature and television productions shed light on the ways in which these creative mediums challenge racism and prejudice. Scholars offer a deeper understanding of the impact of these works on society and provide a framework for evaluating their significance. The academic community provides a platform for discussions and debates about the role of literature and television in shaping public discourse. Scholars examine the themes, techniques, and cultural implications of these creative endeavors, offering valuable perspectives that enrich the discourse on racism and prejudice in Spain.

Furthermore, scholars contribute to the development of critical thinking skills among students and the broader public. Their research encourages individuals to engage with literature and television in a more thoughtful and reflective manner. By fostering critical analysis, scholars empower individuals to challenge stereotypes and question prevailing narratives. Additionally, scholars often bridge the gap between academia and the broader public. They communicate their research findings through publications, lectures, and public engagement, making the insights gained from their work accessible to a wider audience. This dissemination of knowledge contributes to a greater awareness of the transformative power of literature and television in challenging racism and prejudice.

The Way Forward: Promoting a Just and Inclusive Society

As we reflect on the transformative power of postmodern Spanish literature and television productions in challenging racism and prejudice, it is crucial to consider the path forward. These creative mediums have laid the groundwork for progress, but the journey toward a more just and inclusive society is ongoing. To advance this cause, it is imperative that scholars, creators, and audiences continue to actively engage in the pursuit of social change. One fundamental aspect of promoting a just and inclusive society is the continued production of diverse and inclusive narratives. Creators, both in literature and television, must remain

committed to challenging stereotypes and providing a platform for underrepresented voices. By telling stories that reflect the complexity of Spain's multicultural society, creators contribute to a more inclusive media landscape. Furthermore, creators should actively engage with issues related to diversity and representation within their industries. This includes advocating for equal opportunities for actors, writers, directors, and producers from marginalized communities.

Initiatives aimed at promoting diversity in the entertainment industry, such as inclusive casting and mentorship programs, should be encouraged and supported.

Scholars can continue to examine the themes, techniques, and cultural implications of these creative endeavors, offering valuable perspectives that inform the ongoing discourse on racism and prejudice. Additionally, scholars can contribute to education and awareness initiatives. They can develop educational resources and engage in public speaking events that promote critical thinking and foster a deeper understanding of the issues at hand. By disseminating their knowledge, scholars can empower individuals to challenge stereotypes and question prevailing narratives.

Audiences also have a responsibility in the journey toward a just and inclusive society. As consumers of literature and television, audiences can actively seek out diverse and inclusive narratives. By supporting creators who prioritize inclusivity and representation, audiences send a clear message that they value stories that reflect the richness of Spain's multicultural heritage.

Furthermore, audiences can engage in open and constructive discussions about the media they consume. Social media platforms and online forums provide spaces for individuals to share their perspectives and engage in dialogue about diversity and representation. These discussions can lead to increased awareness and contribute to the broader mission of social change.

In addition to supporting diverse narratives, individuals can take action in their daily lives to promote inclusivity and combat racism and prejudice. This includes examining their own biases and prejudices and actively

working to challenge and unlearn them. Engaging in empathy- building exercises, such as reading literature and watching television that provides diverse perspectives, can contribute to personal growth and a greater understanding of others. Moreover, individuals can support organizations and initiatives that work toward social justice and inclusivity. By volunteering, donating, or participating in advocacy efforts, individuals can contribute to broader social change movements. These collective efforts are essential in addressing systemic issues and fostering a more just society.

Conclusion

In the contemporary cultural landscape of Spain, postmodern literature and television productions have emerged as powerful agents of change, challenging deeply ingrained racism and prejudice. Through a rich tapestry of narratives, characters, and visual representations, these creative endeavors have transcended the boundaries of entertainment to inspire profound social change. As we conclude our exploration of the transformative potential of postmodern Spanish literature and TV productions, it becomes evident that they play a critical role in shaping a more just and inclusive society. The journey through the subthemes of this article has illuminated the multifaceted ways in which postmodern Spanish literature deconstructs stereotypes, fosters cross-cultural dialogues, and promotes inclusivity. It has also highlighted the visual power of television to bring these narratives to life, challenging prejudices and promoting empathy among viewers. The impact on public discourse, the socio-cultural landscape of Spain, and individual consciousness underscores the transformative potential of these creative mediums.

Postmodern Spanish literature accomplishes its mission by meticulously deconstructing deeply ingrained stereotypes and subjecting the concept of ethnic identity and cultural representation to profound scrutiny. By recontextualizing historical events and characters, authors challenge prevailing narratives that have perpetuated racism and prejudice. They offer alternative viewpoints that strike at the core of these deeply rooted ideologies. Moreover, these literary works engage in cross-cultural

dialogues, incorporating diverse voices and experiences that foster a more inclusive representation of society. Authors like *"Najat El Hachmi", "J. Cercas", "J. Vasquez", "A. Grandes"* whose work explores themes of cultural identity and displacement, exemplify the changing face of Spanish literature. They provide a platform for underrepresented voices, contributing to a sense of belonging and representation within Spanish society. The power of postmodern Spanish literature lies in its capacity to encourage critical thinking and self-reflection among readers. These narratives compel individuals to confront their own biases and preconceptions, ultimately contributing to the broader mission of combating racism and prejudice. Literature serves as a vehicle for expanding empathy, prompting readers to view the world through different lenses and consider the perspectives of others. On the other hand, television productions serve as dynamic mediums for translating literature to the screen, amplifying the impact of these narratives. Through visual representation of characters, settings, and historical events, TV series like *"La Casa de Papel" and "Vis a Vis"* humanize diverse individuals and challenge stereotypes. Viewers are invited to walk in the shoes of characters from various backgrounds, fostering a sense of shared humanity.

Furthermore, these TV series have prompted discussions about diversity and representation in the media industry. They have raised awareness of the importance of accurate portrayals of characters from different backgrounds and have encouraged industry professionals to reevaluate their approaches to storytelling. Initiatives aimed at promoting diversity within the industry have gained traction, leading to changes in the way stories are told and the actors who portray them. The impact of postmodern Spanish literature and television extends beyond entertainment and into public discourse. These creative endeavors have prompted discussions about diversity and representation, encouraging viewers and readers to engage in critical conversations about the media they consume. These discussions contribute to a broader awareness of the need for inclusivity in storytelling and media representation.

Moreover, these creative mediums actively shape the socio-cultural landscape of Spain by celebrating the nation's diverse cultural heritage. As Spain continues to evolve into a multicultural society, literature and television offer platforms for individuals to explore their own identities and the experiences of others. This fosters a sense of unity and shared identity that transcends racial and ethnic boundaries, contributing to a more inclusive and equitable society.

Creators and scholars alike have played instrumental roles in advancing the cause of challenging racism and prejudice. Creators have used their artistic talents to create narratives that challenge stereotypes and promote inclusivity. Scholars have provided critical analysis and insights, deepening our understanding of the impact of these works on society.

As we conclude our exploration of the transformative potential of postmodern Spanish literature and TV productions, it is clear that they are catalysts for social change. They expand empathy, foster critical thinking, and encourage discussions about diversity and representation. By challenging societal norms and promoting a sense of unity, these creative endeavors contribute to a more inclusive and equitable Spain.

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Avian Humanoids: Myths Across the World

Debalina Roychowdhury

Myths and legends have always had the function of reflecting the society in which they originated. With their different perspectives on life, truth, society, and psychology, these tales shed light on the values and beliefs of many cultural groups. Myths and legends have the ability to enthrall audiences and have a profound influence on the shared awareness of humanity by combining imaginative components with real-life encounters. World mythologies are comprised of stories about gods, heroes, and supernatural entities that represent the desires, anxieties, and ambitions of past and present communities. Myths and legends, ranging from the grand exploits of Greek heroes to the origin stories of indigenous societies, provide insight into the human condition and the enigmas of the cosmos. Through the exploration of themes such as love, betrayal, sacrifice, and redemption, these stories have a lasting impact on audiences worldwide. By exploring the domains of mythology and folklore, we can reveal fundamental truths about the human experience and the interdependence of all living organisms. These ageless narratives serve as a reminder of our collective human nature and the lasting influence of storytelling in shaping our comprehension of the world. As we further investigate the depths of mythology across various cultures, we develop a greater understanding and admiration for the wide range of human experiences and the lasting impact of these ancient narratives. Among which the flora and the fauna play a vital role.

Birds have also exerted a substantial influence in diverse cultures and mythology across the globe. Birds were regarded as representations of liberty, sagacity, and transcendence in numerous antiquated societies. They frequently had connections with deities, and their conduct and attributes were thought to possess profound significance and communications for humanity. In contemporary society, birds still

fascinate and motivate us with their exquisite appearance, elegance, and ability to recover from adversity. Birdwatchers and ornithologists find them intriguing, as they investigate their behaviour, migration patterns, and habitats to get a deeper understanding and save these remarkable species. Avian species also have a vital function in upholding the equilibrium of ecosystems. Bees have a crucial role in regulating insect populations, spreading seeds, and pollinating flowers, so enhancing the well-being and variety of plant and animal species. Their existence in our surroundings serves as a reminder of the interdependence of all organisms on our planet. Undoubtedly, birds are extraordinary beings that have captivated the emotions and intellect of humans for many years. Due to their high level of intelligence, ability to adapt, and attractive appearance, they have become a representation of freedom, resilience, and the marvels of the natural world.

The mythological creatures that are half-bird, half-human, demonstrate the long-standing human fascination with and respect for birds. These creatures epitomize a dual nature, symbolizing the celestial and the terrestrial, the ephemeral and the palpable. Their mysterious and ambiguous nature, which may exhibit both kindness and cruelty, enhances their appeal and continues to fascinate people around the globe. The harpy is the most renowned creature in ancient Greek mythology that possesses both human and bird-like characteristics. These creatures were shown as avian-bodied ladies with wings, frequently depicted with talons and a threatening countenance. Harpies were renowned for their capacity to seize and transport persons, especially those who had perpetrated offenses or incurred the wrath of the deities. They were perceived as enforcers of punishment and retribution, functioning as a symbol of the outcomes resulting from an individual's behaviour. In Norse mythology, the *Valkyries* were hybrid beings, possessing both human and avian characteristics. These formidable female characters were frequently portrayed as winged warriors, mounted on horses, and determining the fates of those in combat by deciding who would survive and who would perish. *Valkyries* were linked to both mortality and safeguarding, as they would escort deceased warriors to the realm

beyond and also defend those they valued from danger. Regarding ancient Egyptian mythology, the god Horus was frequently portrayed as a divinity with the head of a falcon. *Horus* symbolized the fusion of the celestial and terrestrial domains, being the offspring of Osiris and Isis. He was seen as an emblem of safeguarding, monarchy, and solar power. *Horus*'s falcon-headed form symbolized his affinity with birds, highlighting his capacity to fly high and observe everything. The Thunderbird is a significant mythical creature in Native American folklore, characterized by its combination of human and avian features. This creature is commonly shown as a colossal avian with formidable wings, capable of generating thunder and lightning through the movement of its wings. The Thunderbird is revered as a formidable and revered being, closely linked to potency, safeguarding, and the elemental powers. The Thunderbird is thought to possess the ability to bestow rain and fertility upon the land, while also acting as a protective spirit for individuals and communities. In this paper we would delve deep into the realms of World Mythology and trace the nature, similarities, and dissimilarities of this kind.

In the sylvan world of Greek mythology, the *Sirens* were described as beings that were half-bird and half-woman. They were thought to have gorgeous faces and voices that were so enticing that they could entice sailors to their deaths. They were frequently portrayed as being alluring and dangerous, with the ability to take sailors off course and lead them to their deaths using their songs. It is stated that the goddess, Demeter cursed the *Sirens* by transforming them into half-bird creatures as a kind of punishment for their failure to prevent the kidnapping of her daughter, Persephone. This was said to be included in certain mythologies. *Harpies*, on the other hand, were creatures that had wings and possessed the bodies of birds as well as the faces of women. They were notorious for their offensive odor and their dogged search for food, which frequently included stealing from people and leaving havoc in their path. As agents of divine retribution, the *Harpies* were said to have been dispatched by the gods to punish those individuals who had committed crimes or have broken pledges, according to certain myths. Both their outward

appearance and their behavior were designed to instill fear in the minds of mortals and to serve as a constant reminder of the repercussions that would result from their acts. The *Sphinx* is commonly portrayed as a sentinel, strategically placed at the entrance of temples or tombs to repel malevolent entities and safeguard consecrated areas. The *Sphinx* in Egyptian mythology is intricately linked to the sun deity Ra, serving as a representation of the continuous process of life, mortality, and regeneration. The Great *Sphinx* of Giza, situated near the pyramids, is a highly renowned and enduring emblem of ancient Egypt, serving as a tribute to the resourcefulness and skill of the ancient Egyptians. The *Sphinx* has also been a prevalent motif in art, literature, and popular culture, serving as a source of inspiration for numerous interpretations and adaptations. The enigmatic and mysterious aspect of it has captivated the imagination of individuals throughout history, resulting in a multitude of ideas and guesses regarding its origins and significance. In general, the Sphinx continues to be a potent and long-lasting representation of intelligence, power, and enigma, captivating and captivating individuals worldwide. The prevalence of storytelling and the human imagination throughout diverse mythologies and cultures serves as a reminder of their enduring power.

Thoth's role as the deity responsible for judgment and acquiring knowledge is closely connected to his affiliation with the act of writing. The ancient Egyptians regarded writing as a sacred and divine skill, attributing the invention of hieroglyphics, the ancient Egyptian writing system, to Thoth. He was attributed with the invention of written language and imparting it to mankind, enabling the documentation and safeguarding of information and wisdom. Thoth, in his role as the divine scribe, had the duty of preserving the celestial archives and monitoring the activities and accomplishments of both humans and gods. *Thoth's* association with language and writing also designated him as the divine protector of scholars, scribes, and intellectuals. He was highly esteemed as the supreme authority on knowledge and wisdom, and both gods and humans alike sought his guidance and assistance. *Thoth* was reputed to possess the capacity to comprehend and elucidate the enigmas of the

cosmos, rendering him the supreme arbiter of matters pertaining to veracity and fairness. His sagacity and erudition were deemed indispensable for the efficient operation of society and the preservation of universal harmony. *Thoth* was renowned not just for his function as the deity of judgment and knowledge, but also for his adeptness in safeguarding and restoring. He assumed a pivotal position in the mythological narrative of *Isis* and *Horus*, wherein he safeguarded *Isis* during her gestation and subsequently restored the wounded eye of her offspring, *Horus*, during a confrontation with the deity *Set*. *Thoth's* ability to cure was much respected, and people frequently called upon him for safeguarding and curing during periods of sickness or harm. Thoth's connection with the moon is another important element of his mythos. The moon was seen as a representation of sacred wisdom and enlightenment, and Thoth's association with it further highlighted his position as the personification of knowledge and communication. The moon's crescent shape, reflected by the beak of Thoth's ibis, represents the cyclical aspect of time and the uninterrupted transmission of knowledge and wisdom. Thoth's influence transcended mythology and religion, leaving a deep imprint on ancient Egyptian culture. His affiliation with writing and language resulted in the creation of an exceptionally advanced system of hieroglyphics, which subsequently became the predominant method of communication and documentation in ancient Egypt. The introduction of writing had a transformative impact on Egyptian civilization, enabling the sharing of knowledge and the establishment of intricate governmental structures. *Thoth*'s position as the deity responsible for judgment and acquiring knowledge had a substantial influence on education and intellectual endeavors in ancient Egypt.

Slavic Mythology features a bird called *Sirin*, which is closely linked to divination. These avian creatures are reputed to produce harmonious melodies that possess the ability to induce amnesia and eliminate all other desires in those who listen to them. *Sirins* are regarded as the counterpart of *Alkonost*, a mythical bird that likewise had the ability to sing enchanting melodies, predicting future happiness for saints. The *Sirin* is commonly portrayed as a hybrid creature, possessing the head

and chest of an attractive lady, and the avian body of a bird, typically adorned with eagle wings. According to Slavic legend, the *Sirin* is said to inhabit the celestial realm and only makes its way to the earthly realm during the short transitional period between winter and spring. The *Sirin*'s songs are reputed to possess such mesmerizing and enthralling qualities that they have the ability to bestow joy and happiness upon anyone who listens to them. Nevertheless, the potency of the *Sirin*'s melody is reputed to be perilous, as it has the potential to captivate listeners to such an extent that they completely lose touch with reality and neglect their duties and commitments. According to many renditions of the legend, the *Sirin*'s melodic enchantment possesses the power to drive individuals to their demise, as they get utterly fixated on experiencing it once more, disregarding their fundamental necessities. The *Sirin* is commonly linked to the notion of celestial inspiration and divination, as its melodies are thought to encompass concealed messages and prognostications regarding the future. According to Slavic legend, the ability to comprehend and decipher the songs of the *Sirin* is reserved for individuals who possess both a virtuous nature and a profound affinity for the spiritual domain. The *Alkonost*, like the *Sirin*, is a legendary bird renowned for its melodious singing. Although the songs of the *Sirin* evoke feelings of joy and happiness, the songs of the *Alkonost* are believed to elicit a sense of longing and melancholy. The *Alkonost* is commonly portrayed as a hybrid monster, featuring a woman's head and chest, and a bird's body, typically with a fish's tail. In Slavic mythology, the *Alkonost* is said to dwell in a heavenly region known as *Buyan*. It is claimed that the Alkonost's singing can predict future joy and contentment for holy and virtuous humans. The songs of the *Alkonost* are reputed to possess such enchanting qualities that they have the ability to cause listeners to disregard the difficulties and grief of the world, and instead concentrate on the potential of a more promising tomorrow. The *Sirin* and the *Alkonost* hold a renowned status in Slavic mythology due to their capacity to provide solace and inspiration via their captivating melodies. They are commonly regarded as representations of the potency of music and its capability to surpass ordinary experiences and establish a connection with the divine.

There is a fascinating monster that is referred to as the *Wakwak* that is mentioned in the ancient mythology of the Philippines. This fabled figure is portrayed as a one-of-a-kind hybrid of a bird and human, exhibiting traits that are characteristic of both of these animals. Because of its capacity to fly and its sharp, claw-like appendages, it is frequently connected with nails and bats. This may be so because of its ability to fly. The *Manangal*, which can be thought of as the female equivalent of the *Wakwak*, is yet another fascinating monster that can be found in Philippine mythology. This legendary entity is said to have a particular fondness for the blood of pregnant women, according to their beliefs. It is supposed to have the capacity to split its upper body from its bottom half, which granted it the ability to fly and search for its victims. In addition, the *Ekek* is still another legendary monster that is a hybrid of a human and a bird. The characteristics of both species have been combined in this hybrid monster, which has resulted in a being that is both singular and mysterious. Its presence in Philippine mythology contributes to the rich tapestry of mythical animals that have captivated the minds of people throughout the course of history at various points in time.

Gaduda, the progeny of *Vinata* and *Kashyap*, was endowed with prodigious strength and formidable might. He had the power to metamorphose into an enormous avian being with an expansive wingspan, adept at bearing substantial burdens and smoothly gliding through the atmosphere. *Gaduda's* position as the sacred steed of Vishnu enhanced his stature in Hindu mythology. He was frequently shown as bearing Vishnu on his back, acting as a means of conveyance for the deity during his numerous exploits and manifestations. *Gaduda*'s loyalty and devotion to Vishnu were unmatched. He would exert significant effort to safeguard and fulfill his duty to his master, including participating in intense conflicts with demons and malevolent entities to guarantee the security of Vishnu and the world. *Gaduda* had a pivotal role in the *Samudra Manthan*, a significant event where the cosmic ocean was churned. Utilizing his formidable wings, he generated a forceful gust, agitating the ocean and facilitating the recovery of valuable treasures

and sacred artefacts that surfaced from its depths. *Gaduda's* connection with his stepbrothers, the *Nagas*, was intricate. Despite occasional disagreements, *Gaduda* frequently provided aid to the *Nagas* during times of necessity, demonstrating his sympathetic and supportive disposition. The fraternal connection between *Gaduda* and *Arun*, who serves as the charioteer of Surya, contributed an additional dimension to his character. They frequently worked together and provided assistance to one another in their individual positions, representing the interdependence of different celestial entities in Hindu mythology. *Gaduda's* character in Hindu mythology exemplifies the complex network of relationships and connections. It underscores the interdependence and unity among the divine beings and their companions, emphasizing the significance of loyalty, devotion, and cooperation in maintaining the cosmic order. *Gaduda's* role in Hindu mythology symbolizes the importance of company and assistance throughout life's journey. His steadfast commitment and unflinching dedication to Vishnu demonstrate the characteristics of a genuine friend and ally, motivating others to develop similar values in their own life. Apart from *Gaduda* , The Gangahridi Culture, the oldest culture of Bengal, revolved around the Ganges River. Winged female sculptures have been found in this society, providing insight into the *Balaka Matrika Pujan*, a ritualistic worship of the Heron-Mother Goddess. Gradually, this religious ritual became closely connected with a specific deity called *Bagalamukhi*, who is one of the ten *Mahavidyas*. The name Bagalamukhi originates from the Sanskrit term 'Bagula', which signifies heron. The wings on these sculptures are thought to symbolize activeness, freedom, and imagination. Bagalamukhi is venerated as the divine mother who bestows onto her followers the highest form of spiritual emancipation, referred to as moksha, as stated by Professor Dr. Tamal Dasgupta. The idea that the Bird-Mother Goddess defends her followers is compared to a mother bird defending her young, highlighting the protective and nurturing qualities connected to this goddess. (Roychowdhury, 67)

Gary A. David in his essay The Celestial Birdman of the Ancient World said, " Many ancient cultures around the world have legends of the Birdman, which describe in various forms some sort of half human, half

avian creature. These tales are possibly connected to our universal psychological yearnings for flight" (David 3). The phenomena of avian flight have captivated humans for a considerable period, owing to the elegant motions and capacity to glide effortlessly through the atmosphere. Their cognitive prowess is seen in their aptitude for traversing vast distances, engaging in intercommunication, and resolving intricate challenges. The development of aeroplanes has been influenced by the flight of birds, since people aim to imitate their ability to soar and move freely in the sky. The prowess of birds is seen in their capacity to engage in hunting, safeguard their area, and undertake migrations spanning thousands of miles. The amalgamation of intellect, technical progress, and dominance has continually enthralled the human mind, resulting in a profound admiration and attraction for these beings. Likewise, the progression of a fetus throughout pregnancy is a remarkable phenomenon of the natural world. Starting as a solitary cell, it undergoes a process of transformation, ultimately becoming a sophisticated human being, maturing and evolving in diverse conditions. The complex process of cellular division, organogenesis, and expansion is a tribute to the marvels of life. Curiously, one of these situations, referred to as avian development, shares similarities with the traits observed in birds. Similar to birds, a fetus too has a process of maturation and change, progressing from a little embryo to a complete and developed human being. The correlation between the embryonic development and the traits of avian species introduces an additional dimension of astonishment and fascination to the phenomenon of existence. Crypto-zoologists provide a theory that posits the potential emergence of distinct types or species on Earth through the interbreeding of diverse species. This idea questions conventional concepts of species boundaries and emphasises the possibility for novel and unforeseen living forms to arise. This hypothesis suggests that there is a complicated and interwoven relationship between the mystery origins of certain creatures and the intriguing nature of hybrid species, indicating an intricate web of life on our planet. It implies that the divisions between species may not be as inflexible as previously believed, and that the mixing of genetic material can result in completely novel and separate animals. This concept presents numerous opportu-

nities and prompts inquiries regarding the variety and development of life on Earth. Cryptozoologist Ken Gerhard wrote, "Throughout the course of human history, for thousands of years there has existed a cross-cultural belief in anthropomorphic, sentient beings. They are frequently portrayed as having both human and avian characteristics, specifically wings" (Gerhard 36). This statement encourages us to re-evaluate our comprehension of the natural world and accept the notion that concealed interconnections and unexplored species yet to be unveiled could also exist. Crypto-zoologists push us to deepen our understanding of the natural world by examining the possibility of hybridization and inter-breeding. This provides a novel viewpoint on the richness and diversity of life.

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Revisiting the Greco-Roman Myth of Venus in the Paintings of Botticelli (1445- 1510)

Indrani Das

The revival of Greco-Roman ideals and the homocentric individuality of the Renaissance are predominantly reflected in the visual arts of that period when both the artists and the writers drew their inspiration from the Greco-Roman literary world. The Pagan world was rediscovered and recreated in a Christian milieu. In this paper "Revisiting the Greco-Roman Myth of Venus in the paintings of Sandro Botticelli" (1445-1510), the Florentine artist of the early Renaissance, two of his famous paintings- *The Spring* (1482) and *The Birth of Venus* (1486) will be discussed to see how the mythological figure of Venus was reconsidered and appropriated in his paintings, during the Renaissance. During the thirteenth century, Florence, a small business town in Central Italy, emerged as a rich and powerful autonomous city-state or Commune. Zealous and jealous of their individual identity and material success, the Florentines, through uncommon artistic ventures, transferred their city to a vanguard position to realise the Renaissance. The representation of mythological subjects in works of visual arts was part of a broader artistic and literary European culture with its origins in education in Latin and sometimes in Greek classics. During the medieval period, there was a tendency to see a direct and unbroken connection with the Roman past. Thus, Greco-Roman myths were regarded as an integral part of contemporary culture and their artistic representation, like other legends of the past, was based exclusively on literary tradition. In the early Christian period, features of mythological figures did not play a significant role in the development of the Christian artistic tradition. The Medieval scholars or Byzantine artists never adopted a reimagining of the ancient past.

In the Renaissance, the Greco-Roman myths were viewed as something apart, the product of a particular historical period characterised by their distinct forms of visual expressions. Art for the 'humanistically' educated elite in Renaissance Italy was one way of understanding the ancient world. Their initial approach to the Greco-Roman culture was through studying Latin and Greek texts, most of which were unknown to Italian scholars a century or two earlier. Very soon, it became a popular practice to visually reproduce classical myths or traditionally familiar stories about Gods and heroes in the manner of the ancients— "*all'antica*"—and decorate private domestic space with those paintings by the aristocrats (Freedman, 2011). During that time, the Roman myths created, in most cases, the base for both literary and artistic revival of the classical models. The humanistic education curriculum recommended learning the myths diligently from reading Ovid's *Metamorphoses* or *Fasti*, in which ancient myths and histories were treated in considerable detail. In the Renaissance, familiarity with well-known and lesser-known myths indicated a person's education and, hence, social–standing. The sources of the visual artefacts of antiquity included not only sculpted reliefs in sarcophagi, mutilated statues, coins and gems but also texts that described paintings as the paintings themselves were no longer available. Pliny's *Natural History*, Alberti's Treatise *On Art* and Poliziano's poetical work *Le Stanze per la Giostra* were rich and famous sources of such description (Freedman, 2011).

Thus, in general, paintings of classical myths were created without much help from antique artefacts but on the inventions by contemporary humanists, appropriating according to the tastes and demands of the literate elite of that period. Almost every painting on classical mythology was a commissioned painting, and the choice of a particular episode, or the combination of stories to be painted in a series of pictures, was often done in consultation with a humanist who was at the service of a Patron. Botticelli was admitted at a very early age to the Medici court, where he met humanist philosophers like Marsilio Ficino and Pico Della Mirandola and poets like Poliziano, whose influence can be traced in his mythological representations (Bertelli, Briganti, & Giuliano, 1986). A

study reveals that the Goddess Venus assumes new meanings and symbols different from her traditional role in the paintings of Botticelli. The figures of Venus in both those paintings have an articulated chin, high cheeks and doomed forehead, and it is astounding to see the subtle transformation with which he turned them into markers of ideal beauty considering his age (Gombrich, 1998).

During the Roman period, the goddess Venus (associated with Greek Aphrodite) was thought to be the daughter of Jupiter, the wife of Vulcan or Mars and the mother of Cupid and became one of the most important goddesses of the Roman Pantheon. She was the protector deity of love, beauty, sex, fertility, prosperity and victory. In Roman mythology, she was the mother of the Roman people through her son Aeneas, who survived the Fall of Troy and fled to Italy. Julius Caesar claimed him as his ancestor—the story of which is immortalised in Virgil's *Aeneid*. Venus was central to many religious festivals and was venerated in Roman religion under numerous cult titles.

The Romans adopted the myths and the iconography of her Greek counterpart, Aphrodite, for Roman art and Latin literature. In the later classical tradition of the West, Venus becomes one of Greco-Roman mythology's most widely referenced deities as the embodiment of love and sexuality. Later, under Greek influence, she was equated with Aphrodite and assumed many of her aspects. In myth, Venus or Aphrodite was born of seafoam. Roman theology presents Venus as the yielding, watery female deity essential to the generation and balance of life. Venus was offered an official cult in specific festivals of the Roman Calendar. Her sacred month was April, which Roman etymologists understood to have derived from *aperire* ("to open") with reference to the springtime blossoming of trees and flowers. Images of Venus have been found in domestic murals, mosaics and household shrines (Lararia). Prospective brides offered Venus a gift before their wedding- though the details are unknown. In dice games, a popular pastime among Romans of all classes, the luckiest, the best possible roll was known as 'Venus.'

Venus became a popular subject of painting and sculpture during the Renaissance period in Europe. As a 'classical' figure for whom nudity was her natural state as an embodiment of spiritual beauty and physical beauty, it was socially acceptable to depict her unclothed. As the goddess of sexuality, a degree of erotic beauty in her presentation was justified, which appealed to many artists and their patrons. Around 1478, Botticelli was commissioned by the Medicis the great table called *La Primavera* or *The Spring*, the most celebrated mythological painting of the fifteenth century. It is one of the most lyrical creations of the Renaissance but also one of the most mysterious and complex regarding its origin and meaning, despite numerous proposed hypotheses. The message of the work of art can be received on different levels. "The conceptual meaning, dictated by the poet Poliziano—the 'Venus-Humanitas' will be clear only to the philosophers, but the general public can find the pleasantness in the orange-orchard and flower-studded meadow, in the rhythm of the figures, in the attractive beauty of bodies and faces, in the harmonious flow of lines, in the delicate play of colours" (Argan, 2008, 146). There is perhaps a moral lesson hidden in it, too. The young Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici, to whom the painting was destined, was supposed to meditate on the unusually chaste effigy of Venus, the queen, contrasted to the carnal embrace of Zephyr, on the right, which transformed his wife Chloris into Flora, the dispersion of flowers, to the delicate dance of graces almost imitating the absorbed Mercury who dispelled the clouds. The figures posed in front of a shady orchard built up the background. The meadow strewn with innumerable flowers in imitation of Flemish tapestry and orange trees laden with oranges created a non-religious atmosphere where the religious connotation of Venus is subjugated so that the painting has been called *La Primavera* or *The Spring* and not the Reign of Venus as some neo- Platonist critics have suggested. Even the figure of Venus placed in the middle as a reigning deity does not resemble any Greco-Roman model. Some critics have attempted to visualise a philosophical message where the manifestation of pagan divinity is appropriated to a neo-platonic re-evaluation of the classical myth. But we can easily discern a point of meditation

characteristic of the Florentine culture: the conscience of living in the present marked by a grave economic and political crisis from which the artist tried to escape idealising a mythical age of Gold at the beginning of human history, avoiding the ugliness & violence prevalent at the time. It is the Florentine dream to return to the lap of nature untouched by civilisation's corruption. *La Primavera* can also represent an ideal human paradise immersed in natural beauty inhabited by the eternally young and beautiful, living in perfect Universal harmony.

The second one—*The Birth of Venus*—is a 1486 painting that Lorenzo il Magnifico, perhaps commissioned for his nephew Giovanni di Pierfranco de' Medici. It depicts the Goddess Venus, having emerged from the sea as a fully grown woman, arriving at the seashore drifted by the Winds where the Hour of Spring waits for her with a cloak. The subject comes from Hesiod's *Theogony* (Graves, 1992) [verses 188-200], published in Italian translation in 1474 in Ferrara and from Ovid's Metamorphoses who described the Hour handing a cloak to Venus Anadyomene, later from humanist Poliziano.

The iconography of the painting is very similar to a description in a poem by Angelo Poliziano, the contemporary of Botticelli, entitled *'le Stanze per la giostra,'* written between 1475-78; the poem includes a fictional description of reliefs cast by Vulcan, the mythical god of Greco-Roman pantheon for the door of the Temple of Venus.'

The ninety-ninth stanza of the poem reads:

> In the stormy Aegean, the genital member is seen to be received in the lap of Tethys, to drift across the waves, wrapped in white foam, beneath the various turnings of the planets; and within, both with lovely and happy gestures, a young woman with nonhuman countenance, is carried on a conch shell, wafted to shore by playful zephyrs; and it seems that heaven rejoices in her birth. (Sharma, 2023).

It seems that Botticelli knew this poem when he painted it, and for Venus, he had in his mind the portrayal of the goddess in antique statues, especially the one popular in Florentine aristocratic homes—a gorgeous nude woman holding her left hand to pudenda, her right hand to her breasts. Botticelli retained the classical features but added long golden hair to make the image more contemporary, connecting it with contemporary images of St Mary Magdalene or Petrarch's description of Laura, his lady love. Savonarola's fiery preaching objecting against the revival of pagan culture might have cast gloomy shadows over this painting, making it look rather rigid and pale compared to the earlier one, even contributing to the deliberations of the clear and conscious recall to the *Baptism of Christ* painted by Verrocchio & his disciple Leonardo da Vinci in 1475.

Some critics connect it to the Arrival of Venues, propelled by Zephyrs and Chloris, in Sicily after the anonymous poem *Pervigilium Veneris* of the second or third century A.D. alluding to the coming of Aeneas, the Trojan hero and the son of Venus, to Italy. By the 1950s, famous Art historians like Argan or Gombrich advanced several new neo-Platonic interpretations. However, for Plato, as for his followers of the Florentine Platonic Academy members, Venus had two aspects: She was an earthly Goddess who aroused humans to physical love or a heavenly goddess who inspired intellectual love in them. Plato further argued that contemplation of physical beauty allowed the mind to understand spiritual beauty better. Therefore, Venus, the most beautiful of goddesses, might at first raise a physical response in viewers, which then is lifted towards the Creator. A neo-platonic reading suggests that fifteenth-century viewers would have looked at the painting and felt their minds lifted to the realm of divine love. Another neo-platonic interpretation takes the scene as the birth of Humanities, created by Nature with its four elements and the union of Spirit and Matter.

Recently, questions have been raised about Neoplatonism as the dominant intellectual system of late fifteenth-century Florence, and scholars have indicated that there might be other ways to interpret Botticelli's mythological paintings. In particular, both *The Spring* and

The Birth of Venus have been seen as wedding presents that suggest appropriate behaviour for the bride and the groom.

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Challenging Tradition: Social Reforms and Widowhood in *Prema* by Munshi Premchand

Lalita Sharma

Widowhood in early 20th-century Indian society was marked by deeply ingrained sociocultural norms that dictated the lives of widows, leading to their marginalisation and stigmatisation. The period was characterised by a conservative and patriarchal social structure, heavily influenced by religious beliefs and traditional customs. In those days, the position of widows within this societal framework was particularly challenging, as they faced numerous restrictions and discriminatory practices that denied them agency, dignity, and social standing. Widows were often subjected to marginalisation and stigmatisation due to prevalent beliefs that considered them inauspicious. Widows were excluded from participating in various social and religious ceremonies. The death of a husband was seen as a result of past misdeeds or bad karma. In this context, a famous Indian social reformer, Pandita Ramabai, writes:

It is observed that throughout India, Hindu women regard widowhood as a punishment for some horrible crime or crimes committed by them in their previous birth…Widowhood, and its accompanying miserable existence, is considered an atonement for some sin committed in a previous birth (95).

A widow was viewed as an embodiment of evil due to sociocultural notions firmly ingrained in Indian women's minds regarding the association between widowhood and sin.

Widowhood as a Catastrophe in Indian Society

In traditional Indian culture, widows were often considered inauspicious and expected to lead a life of asceticism devoid of joy or personal fulfilment. A.R.Caton and E. Merielli, famous scholars, conceptualise

Hindu widowhood as a life of agony, pain, suffering and austerity. It is a life inflicted by social customs (1930,p.125). Widows were subjected to numerous social restrictions that governed their lives. They were often required to adhere to strict dress codes, which typically involved wearing plain white clothes to symbolise mourning. Widows were also expected to follow a restricted diet, abstain from certain foods, and sometimes even be limited to a single meal daily. While the practice of *sati* (self-immolation of widows on their husband's funeral pyre) had been officially abolished during British rule, child marriage remained prevalent in some parts of India. The early marriage of girls made them vulnerable to becoming child widows, trapped in widowhood from a very young age. Widows were denied access to education and intellectual growth. They were largely economically dependent and viewed as a burden on their families, particularly on their deceased husband's family. They were often denied inheritance rights, and their access to property and assets was severely limited. This economic vulnerability made widows susceptible to mistreatment and exploitation. Widows had limited legal rights and often had no say in matters concerning their own lives, property, or children. The legal system did not offer adequate protection or support to widows, leaving them at the mercy of their families and society.

Fostering Social Activism through *Prema*

In the context of the prevailing sociocultural norms and challenges, Munshi Premchand's Hindi novel *Prema* (1907) emerges as a significant literary work that sheds light on the struggles of widows and advocates for social reforms to empower them. *Prema* was initially written in Urdu under *Hum Khurma O Hum Sawab* (the best of two worlds). Its subtitle is *Do Sakhiyon ka Vivaah* (marriage of two friends). Prema and her friend Poorna's marriages are the novel's primary focus, which justifies its subtitle. Poorna, Prema's neighbour and friend, who is married to Pandit Basant Kumar, also plays a significant role in the story. The author describes Poorna, a twenty-year-old woman, as "very beautiful and intelligent." Poorna comforts Prema when her marriage is called off because they have a special bond. Basant Kumar drowns after two happy years of marriage on the day of the Holi festival. Poorna is forced

to fend for herself and endure a miserable existence as a widow. In the course of the narrative, Poorna marries Amritrai and is subject to social excommunication because social conventions forbid widow remarriage.

The English translation of *Prema* was also published in 2016; it is a classic work of Indian literature that delves into the complexities of widowhood and challenges prevalent suppressive sociocultural norms. *Prema*, set in early 20th-century India, provides a vivid portrayal of the lives of widows, shedding light on the injustices they faced within a traditional society. The early 20th century saw the beginning of social reform movements in India. Influential leaders and thinkers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, and Pandita Ramabai had already initiated discussions on the need to address the plight of widows and advocate for women's rights. These reform movements aimed to challenge oppressive customs and promote social changes that would empower and elevate the societal status of women, especially widows. Through the narrative of *Prema*, Premchand also challenges tradition and urges for a re-evaluation of societal attitudes towards widows. The novel ultimately contributes to the broader discourse on women's rights and empowerment in early 20th-century India.

Munshi Premchand, An Advocate of Social Reform

Premchand used his storytelling prowess to critique societal injustices and advocate for progressive social reforms. He is known as one of the most prolific and versatile spokespersons of the disadvantaged and marginalised through his novels, stories, plays, and countless essays. His writings always included a message for society, exposing the social ills, including dowry, corruption, poverty, the feudal system, *Zamindari*, *Dalits*, and women's exploitation. In her book, *Munshi Premchand (Biography of a Great Hindi Writer)*, *Rekha Sigi* opines that the writings of Munshi Premchand direct society on a new path, and his writings serve as a constant motivation and source of inspiration. Premchand has tried to reflect on the current societal conditions through his literary works while educating and inspiring readers. His novels and stories are still relevant today (2006,p.8). His stories and books paint a

realistic image of people's lives full of challenges and suffering. Premchand was also a social reformer, as his compositions exhibited the naturalness and idealism of the time. Premchand belongs to an age of reform movements, and his writings represent the utopian ideas that build the base for the India of tomorrow. Premchand created the character of Amritrai as an ideal character to change the perception of society towards widows. As a true believer in the liberation of widows, Amritrai is represented as a radical thinker who loses the love of his life, Prema, to marry a widow. He prioritised social services and sacrificed his fiancé to set up an example for the upliftment of the downtrodden. During his conversation with Daannath, he asserts, "I'm ready to face any difficulty for the fulfilment of my purpose; one who is ready to die for his country has no place for anything else in his heart" (57). Amritrai is presented as a social reformer who is ready to lose everything for the cause of the eradication of social evil. In Premchand's make-believe dish, social concern served as the salt; without it, the ingredients would have been lacking and bland. Prema is praised as a novel for advocating the widow's remarriage. It depicted the tragic real-life circumstances of Hindu widows crushed by social conventions.

Premchand earned accolades for writing about the emancipation of widows and practising what he preached. When his first wife deserted him, he married a widow, Shivarani Devi, to set up an example for society. Premchand faced much social criticism for this revolutionary step. Through the narrative of 'Prema,' Premchand humanises widows' experiences and advocates for their liberation from the chains of tradition. An in-depth analysis of the novel *Prema* is provided in this research paper, along with an examination of how it challenges convention, promotes widowhood-related social reforms, and advances the larger conversation in society about women's empowerment. *Prema* reflects the societal awakening during the early 20th century, which sought to challenge oppressive practices and promote progressive reforms for women's rights and social justice. *Prema* stands out for its unflinching portrayal of widowhood as an institution burdened with oppressive traditions. Premchand wrote and supported remarriage for Hindu

widows in his novels, and at that time, it was considered a progressive step for women's liberation.

The novel's setting within the context of the Indian freedom struggle adds another layer of significance. The nationalist sentiments of the time, advocating for independence from British colonial rule, also resonated with the call for social reforms and women's empowerment. Premchand incorporates nationalist elements, making *Prema* a part of the more significant movement for societal transformation. The novel invites readers to empathise with the struggles of widows, prompting a deeper understanding of their experiences and the need for social reforms. By humanising widows through the narrative, Premchand encourages readers to challenge stereotypes and work towards a more compassionate society. The novel's portrayal of widows and its advocacy for their liberation prompts readers to engage in conversations about gender equality, the role of women in society, and the necessity of breaking free from restrictive traditions. The literary analyses of *Prema* underscore its significance as a literary work that challenges tradition and advocates for social reforms. In this novel, Munshi Premchand presents widowhood as an oppressive institution. As a literary masterpiece, *Prema* inspires readers and remains relevant in advocating for positive changes in the context of social reforms.

Widowhood in Literary Discourse

Through the transformative journey of the protagonist, Poorna, and her defiance against societal constraints, the novel serves as a powerful catalyst for initiating discussions and calls for change, ultimately aiming to reshape attitudes towards widows and foster social reforms that elevate their status and rights within the broader societal landscape. Widowhood has been a recurring theme in Indian literature, and various scholars have explored its portrayal in literary works from different periods. These studies have shed light on the prevailing societal norms surrounding widowhood and the efforts made by writers to challenge oppressive customs and advocate for social reforms. The research on widowhood in Indian literature reveals the evolving representation of widows and their struggle for empowerment, reflecting the broader

societal shifts towards women's rights and dignity. Previous research has highlighted how Indian literature often portrayed widows as victims of oppressive customs and social stigmatisation. Widows were depicted as individuals burdened by their widowhood and confined to a life of seclusion and sorrow due to prevalent beliefs about their inauspiciousness. Works from earlier periods tended to reinforce these traditional societal norms, emphasising the widow's marginalised status. However, due to the impact of reformative movements, Literary works started reflecting the calls for widow remarriage, widow education, and improved rights for widows.

Recently, Indian literature has depicted widows as resilient individuals who resist societal norms and seek empowerment. Contemporary writers have presented widows as characters who challenge oppressive traditions and demand their rights to lead dignified lives. The research on widowhood in Indian literature demonstrates the dynamic portrayal of widows across different periods. Through its nuanced depiction of widowhood and advocacy for social reforms, *Prema* by Munshi Premchand adds to this rich literary discourse, advocating for the liberation and empowerment of widows in early 20th-century Indian society. The literary analyses of *Prema* highlight its significance in social reforms, particularly regarding widowhood and women's empowerment. This research paper explores *Prema's* transformative potential as a literary piece that encourages debate and demands social change in India.

Amritrai, as a Spokesperson of the Author

In the novel, the protagonist Amritrai, an idealistic character, longs to reform society and fight against the evils of widowhood through his progressive ideology. Amritrai, a professional lawyer, is inclined towards ameliorating his society. He takes a vow (Pratigya) to remarry a widow only and work to uplift widows. He breaks his engagement with Prema to fulfil his determination. He faces severe criticism from the father of Prema, Lala Badri Prasad, for his revolutionary decision to marry a widow. Lala Badri Prasad arranges Prema's marriage to Daan Naath

(a friend of Amritrai) after Amritrai refuses to marry her. Poorna, a widow, is the novel's female protagonist; she is a neighbour and a friend of Prema. Amritrai, defying all the orthodox social customs and ideology, marries Poorna with police protection as society is agitated with this marriage. Although Prema was married to Daannath, she was still fostering soft feelings for Amritrai, who had been married to Poorna. Dannath feelings of envy bring the novel's climax, where Daannath, in a fit of rage, conspires to shoot Amritrai, but in a twist, Daanaath and Poorna die in the scuffle. In the story's denouement, one more remarriage occurs in the novel between Amritrai and Prema.

The portrayal of widowhood in *Prema* by Munshi Premchand is a central theme offering a poignant critique of societal norms in early 20th-century India. Through the experiences of the protagonist, Poorna and other widow characters, the novel sheds light on the challenges, stigma, and oppression widows face while advocating for social reforms to empower them. *Prema* vividly portrays the oppressive societal norms that surround widowhood. Widows are depicted as social outcasts, burdened with the perception of being inauspicious and responsible for their husband's death. The novel underscores how these norms lead to the marginalisation and stigmatisation of widows, forcing them into a life of seclusion and sorrow. The dress codes, dietary restrictions, and limited social interactions imposed on widows serve to reinforce their subjugation. According to Gurmeet Singh Widowhood, "It is an event that constitutes the greatest and saddest change in the life of a woman. It also leads to the loss of status, resulting in a state of helplessness and hopelessness" (67. 20). The novel highlights the limited agency and rights granted to widows within the patriarchal society. Widows have little say in decisions concerning their lives, property, or children, and their economic dependence makes them vulnerable to mistreatment and exploitation by family members. *Prema* delves into widows' emotional struggles, showcasing their grief, loneliness, and emotional turmoil. As the protagonist, *Poorna* exemplifies resilience as she defies societal expectations and seeks to lead a life of her choosing, challenging the traditional role assigned to widows.

Religious beliefs and traditions play a significant role in shaping the portrayal of widowhood in *Prema*. *Prema* has the potential to impact readers by evoking empathy and compassion for the struggles of widows. The characters' resistance against traditional customs and their advocacy for social reforms in *Prema* will likely evoke empathy and introspection among readers. The novel's portrayal of strong, defiant characters challenges readers to reconsider their attitudes towards widowhood and societal norms. Through their acts of defiance, the characters challenge oppressive norms and call for reevaluating societal attitudes towards widows. The novel's impact on readers lies in its ability to foster empathy, promote social consciousness, and contribute to ongoing discussions on women's rights and societal transformation.

Poorna: From Widow to Wife

Through Poorn's character, the author presents the widows' emotional turmoil and struggles of widows, inviting readers to empathise with their plight. The protagonist, Poorna, emerges as a symbol of empowerment and resilience. She defies societal expectations and attempts to lead a life on her terms, challenging the oppressive customs that dictate her actions. Premchand portrays Poorna as a courageous individual who resists the limitations imposed upon her as a widow, inspiring readers to question the status quo and advocate for empowerment and dignity for widows. At the beginning of the novel, Poorna conforms to the societal expectations imposed on widows. She leads a life of seclusion, dressed in white, and follows restrictive customs. Even when Poorna visited her friend, Prema, her neighbours did not like her; even Prema's Bhabhi voiced their disapproval. Amritrai, who gave Poorna financial assistance after her husband's death when she could not make ends meet, was also disliked by her neighbours when he visited Poorna. Vighnesh N. Bhatt, in his article "Status of Widows in Karnataka: Historical Account and Analysis of Present Scenario", writes about the predicament of widows in Indian society, "In all cultures, widowhood is a crisis in a woman's life because of the economic misery it attributes and cultural seclusion it forces upon the individual"(100). The real-life depiction of

the widow's life in *Prema*, as shown by Poorn's character, supports the abovementioned statement.

However, as the story progresses, Poorna experiences a gradual awakening. She begins to question the unjust treatment of widows and her potential for a more fulfilling life beyond traditional roles. As Poorna's awareness grows, she starts to defy traditional customs and expectations. She questions the validity of practices that isolate and stigmatise widows. Poorna's defiance is evident in her refusal to accept her marginalised status and insistence on leading a life on her terms. Poorna's desire for love and companionship challenges the rigid customs surrounding widow remarriage. Her affection for Amritrai, a progressive and compassionate individual, leads her to contemplate remarrying despite societal opposition. Pursuing remarriage becomes a pivotal aspect of her journey to attain personal happiness and liberation. Poorna's journey is not without obstacles and adversity. She faces societal backlash, condemnation, and even rejection due to her defiance. However, Poorna's resilience and determination to stand up for her rights and desires drive her forward despite her hardships.

Poorna's transformation into an agent of change is evident in her willingness to challenge oppressive customs for herself and other widows. Her actions inspire fellow widows to question their circumstances and unite in pursuing dignity and liberation. By the novel's end, Poorna emerges as a symbol of empowerment and resistance. She embodies the courage to challenge tradition and advocate for social reforms concerning widowhood. Her transformative journey is a beacon of hope for widows seeking liberation from societal constraints. From conforming to societal norms, Poorna evolves into a courageous and defiant individual, challenging oppressive customs surrounding widowhood. *Prema* by Munshi Premchand resonates as a powerful call for social reforms and a celebration of the human spirit's capacity to resist oppression and pursue liberation. In *Prema*, the impact of challenging tradition and advocating for social reforms related to widowhood is both powerful and far-reaching. The novel is a significant voice in the broader movement for women's empowerment and societal transformation in

early 20th-century India. *Prema* boldly challenges the oppressive traditions and norms surrounding widowhood in Indian society. Through the character of Poorna, the novel highlights the struggles and stigmatisation faced by widows, inviting readers to empathise with their plight and question the fairness of societal expectations. The novel serves as a potent advocate for widow empowerment. *Prema* urges readers to recognise the agency and resilience of widows and their right to lead fulfilling lives beyond widowhood. The novel fosters empathy and understanding among readers, prompting them to reflect on the unjust treatment of widows and the need for social reforms to address their marginalisation. Poorna's courage and determination inspire resistance and defiance against unfair practices, encouraging readers to question and challenge established norms.

The novel highlights the importance of collective empowerment and solidarity among widows. By presenting widows as a supportive and united group, *Prema* emphasises the strength that can be gained through solidarity and challenges the notion of widows as isolated and helpless individuals. The implications of *Prema* in promoting gender equality and empowering widows are profound and multifaceted. By portraying Poorna as a strong and independent woman who defies traditional customs, the novel challenges the perception of women as passive victims. It asserts their agency in shaping their destinies. The novel serves as a powerful advocate for widow empowerment. Poorna's desire for remarriage and her rejection of societal expectations challenge the notion of widows as meek and dependent. *Prema* advocates for widows' right to make choices about their own lives and seek personal fulfilment beyond widowhood.'Prema' humanises widows, presenting their struggles and emotions as relatable. The novel fosters empathy and understanding among readers, breaking down stereotypes and prejudices against widows. This increased empathy is crucial in promoting a more inclusive and compassionate society. *Prema* sparks conversations about the need for progressive reforms and societal change to promote the dignity and empowerment of women, especially widows. Through Prema's defiance against the stigmatisation faced by widows, the novel

encourages widows to resist societal pressures and claim their rights to dignity and respect. It inspires them to challenge harmful customs and norms that perpetuate their marginalisation. The novel highlights the power of collective empowerment and solidarity among widows. By presenting widows as a united group supporting each other, *Prema* emphasises the strength of coming together and challenging oppressive norms. The novel inspires readers to question regressive customs, examine their attitudes towards women and widows, and actively advocate for gender equality and women's empowerment.

Prema by Munshi Premchand has significant implications in promoting gender equality and empowering widows. The novel challenges patriarchal norms, advocates for widow empowerment, fosters empathy and understanding and encourages resistance against oppressive customs. By advocating for women's education, inspiring collective empowerment, and sparking social discourse, *Prema* remains a powerful literary work that resonates with readers and contributes to the ongoing pursuit of gender equality and women's rights. The novel holds immense societal significance in reshaping attitudes towards widows and marginalised communities, particularly women, in early 20th-century India. Its impact extends beyond its literary merit, as it addresses pressing social issues, challenges deeply ingrained traditions, and advocates for transformative reforms. Poorna's decision not to tonsure her hair is a challenge to the patriarchy, which wanted to desexualise a woman after her spouse's death. Poorna becomes the mouthpiece of Munshi Premchand's reformative zeal and asserts:

A brahmini living in the neighbourhood, told me so many times to shave my head. A widow should not keep long hair, but still I haven't obeyed. I know, my neighbours are talking about me, everybody is saying bad things. Billo tells me everything that people say. I listen to it and cry. I know that my life is now full of grief. It is my destiny. But I will not shave my head.Let people say whatever they want. God has snatched away everything from me, now, I will not lose my hair (83).

Prema empowers widows by presenting them as strong, resilient individuals capable of making choices and asserting their rights. Poorna

strongly rejects tonsuring(shaving the head) due to societal pressure. At the beginning of the novel, Poorna even fears what her neighbour would say; she submits to social conventions and is afraid to break widows' specific social taboos. It is visible in the conversation between Poorna and Prema when Prema oils and combs Poorna's hair. Poorna says, "What are you doing, Prema. People pass comments if I comb my hair then who knows, what they will say when they see oil in it?" (Premchand,2016,p.84). In traditional Indian society, widows were supposed to shave their heads so that they could not attract anyone because it is considered that if a widow had long, beautiful hair, she would attract men and indulge in sexual relationships. Her character would be questionable. In traditional Indian society, widows were expected to shave their heads so they could not attract anyone. It is believed that if a widow had long, beautiful hair, she would attract men and engage in sexual relationships. Due to combing and decorating her hair, even her morality would be questioned. Greg, in his article " The Elderly Widow and her Family, Neighbours and Friends", rightly said:

widowhood is an event that brings about the greatest change in the status of a widow, for it is often accompanied by deleterious consequences. This is not only because of the loss of the husband but also because of the lack of clear-cut cultural expectations regarding the proper role of the widow (757**).**

Even Poorna's neighbour guided her conduct and asked her to follow the prescribed societal norms like shaving her head, not combing her hair, and not allowing any male to visit her as she is a young widow**.** Her neighbour tells her that she should tell Amritrai that he should stop visiting her. She thought, " how can I ask him not to come. He is an innocent man. If I don't feel uncomfortable when he comes here then what is their problem. No, I can't stop him. People are free to say whatever they want, I don't care"(99). Later on, she consented to marry Amritrai and faced repercussions of defying societal norms, such as marrying even after being widowed, in the form of threats and attacks at the time of her marriage. At the novel's end, she emerges so empowered that she saves her husband's life by shooting Dannath and dying herself.

Through Prema's transformative journey, the novel challenges the perception of widows as helpless victims and promotes a more empowering narrative for these marginalised women. The novel encourages readers to confront societal stigmatisation and biases against widows and marginalised communities. By portraying widows' emotional struggles and challenges, 'Prema' compels readers to reflect on their attitudes and prejudices, thus promoting a more compassionate and inclusive society. *Prema* advocates for gender equality by challenging patriarchal norms restricting women's agency and opportunities. The novel's emphasis on women's empowerment disrupts traditional gender roles and calls for equal rights and opportunities for women in society.

Prema: Catalyst of Change

The novel catalyses social reforms related to widowhood and women's rights. At its core, the novel emphasises widows' and marginalised individuals' inherent dignity and humanity. *Prema* fosters empathy and understanding of the struggles of widows and marginalised individuals. *Prema* encourages readers to come together to challenge oppressive customs, advocate for social reforms, and create a more equitable and just society. *Prema* challenges the status quo and reimagines societal norms regarding widowhood and women's roles. The novel prompts readers to question the validity of traditional customs and envision a more progressive and inclusive society that values the contributions and agency of all its members.

The widow remarriage motif that would later appear in the novelist's other works was first introduced in this book. Premchand was sure his works would raise awareness among the general public by depicting Amritrai as a responsible individual who tried to eliminate social evils. The rumour that Amritrai has converted to Christianity prevented him from getting married to Prema (the daughter of Lala Badri Prasad), and it has spread since Amritrai was linked with reformist society. Due to their strict religious beliefs, Prema's parents trivialised Amritrai's rehabilitation efforts and grew unsure of their decision to allow their daughter to marry. As they put it: "All the orthodox Hindu families of

the town were against this marriage. Amritrai has all the qualities, but he behaves like a Christian; he is not a suitable match for Prema" (60). In Hindu society, an individual is considered an outsider if they do not adhere to the socially mandated rules.

Poorna's Defiance of Societal Norms

Premchand's writings are praised for developing the relationship between couples, which is also reflected in the blossoming of relations between Amritrai and Poorna. As a keen observer of society, he focused on the everyday life of his characters. Meetings between Amritrai and Poorna are pretty significant. He aesthetically painted the passions of Poorna towards Amritrai and her dilemma for not being able to confess her emotions. Their feelings for each other are visible when Amritrai brings *gajra* (wreath of flowers as a hair accessory) for her hair. Tonsuring widows was common among Brahmin widows; *gajra* as a gift is a mark of condemning nefarious customs like tonsuring. After accepting this gift, Poorna has a sleepless night; she suffers from guilt and shame and thinks her liking towards Amritrai would be considered promiscuous. She is quite aware of the consequences of such relations. She knows that widows are not allowed to adorn themselves in a conventional society, and having a romantic relationship would be considered a sin. Poorna becomes the victim of harsh comments from society for retaining her long hair and even her visits to Prema's house. The intermingling of widows with unmarried girls of her age is considered inauspicious. Prema's mother and Bhabhi became annoyed over her intermingling with Prema, murmuring, "Prema is already in a difficult situation, and now this widow is her friend" (Premchand,2016,p.90).In Indian society, a widow is considered inauspicious, and even her company with an unmarried and married woman is considered equally ominous. A widow is supposed to live an ascetic life without friends and visitors. If she tries to mingle in society, she is criticised for defying societal norms and questioned by society. Even Poorna's neighbour said, "People will question your character, shave your head, don't go to other people's home, don't dress up, you must obey all the rules for widows and tell Amritrai not to come and visit you" (91). A widow's character is

susceptible to society, especially if a male person visits her alone. Widows were often secluded from society and confined to their households' margins. They were discouraged from participating in social gatherings or public events. The isolation of widows prevented them from forming connections outside their families, leading to a life of loneliness and sorrow.

Ramkali as a Social Rebel

In the same novel, Premchand depicted the hypocrisy and insensitiveness of society towards widows through the character of Ramkali, who is also a young widow of seventeen years old. She is a minor character in the novel but plays an essential role. Through the portrayal of her character, Premchand presented a rebellious widow character. She is depicted as assertive, outspoken and enthusiastic; Premchand has created her as a rhetorical device to compare and contrast the character of the chief protagonist, Poorna. Ramkali's resentment is visible in the lines:

> "how can I express my distress? Sometimes I feel like consuming poison.If this continues I will definitely do it someday, I don't know why God is punishing me?... They treat me like a maidservant, they don't allow me comb my hair or wear colourful saris... I'm also young I want to laugh and talk. If you are hungry and don't get food, you have to steal food" (99- 100).

A widow has to face many restrictions, and they have to suppress their desires even if they are sixteen or seventeen years old. Continuous suppression and exploitation result in the revolt of the oppressed. The prolonged anguish transformed Ramkali into an agitator; She became used to these harsh comments and criticism. She discovered her moments of merriment by visiting temples and eating betel leaves. She finds happiness in stealing pleasurable moments, which she defends as: "I don't come here to worship. I just come here to enjoy looking at these good-looking men and talking to them makes me happy" (Premchand,2016,p.105). As a widow, Ramkali was not allowed to visit anywhere or interact with male persons, but being only sixteen or

seventeen years old, she wanted to enjoy her life, and she fulfilled her desire when she visited the temple. The Author has described her as a beautiful young woman, and unlike Poorna, she is not shy; rather, her behaviour is somewhat coquettish; she walks provocatively to attract men while going to the temple. She even persuades Poorna to lead an insouciant life. Ramkali represents the neglected section of young widows who have never experienced the bliss of married life as she is a victim of child marriage. However, the ridiculous fact is that she has never seen her husband. Premchand raised the issue of forced asceticism upon young and teenage widows, and in the absence of remarriage, they usually get involved in an occasional dalliance with the priests. Prema sets a milestone for the theme of remarriage for widows in Indian literature. The novel sets the example for the remarriage of widows, namely the remarriage of Poorna, Ramkali, and Prema. The narrative ends on an optimistic note, indicating that the ardent efforts of the social reformers are not always doomed to failure.

Conclusion

Prema by Munshi Premchand has a profound and transformative impact on reshaping attitudes towards widows and marginalised communities. The novel's portrayal of empowerment, resistance against stigmatisation, and advocacy for social reforms contribute to the broader societal movement for gender equality and dignity for all individuals. By challenging oppressive customs and fostering empathy, *Prema* becomes a catalyst for positive societal change and is an enduring literary work that continues to inspire and enlighten readers. By analysing the novel's portrayal of widowhood and the characters' defiance against societal constraints, This research paper aims to unravel how *Prema* becomes a catalyst for reshaping attitudes towards widows and advocating for social reforms to empower widows. Through examining the transformative journey of the protagonist, Prema, and her pursuit of liberation, this research sheds light on the significance of literature as a medium to promote social reforms and empower marginalised communities. Munshi Premchand's *Prema* is a powerful literary work that advocates for change by challenging oppressive traditions

surrounding widowhood. The novel's portrayal of the protagonist, Poorna's transformative journey and critique of oppressive customs surrounding widowhood have far-reaching implications for promoting gender equality and empowering widows in early 20th-century Indian society and beyond. *Prema* challenges patriarchal norms that perpetuate gender inequality and the subjugation of women. The novel's portrayal of the characters' advocacy for social reforms emphasises the potential of literature to initiate discussions and advocate for positive societal changes. It also highlights the significance of promoting inclusivity and understanding within the larger social fabric to ensure that widows receive the support and empowerment they need to lead dignified lives beyond the constraints of tradition and belief.

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The Role of Food, Memory, and Experience: Contextualizing Self and Identity in Urmila Pawar and Temsula Ao's Autobiographies

Manish Prabhakar Singh

Food, memory, and experience play a significant role in shaping our sense of Self and Identity. Two powerful autobiographies, Urmila Pawar's *The Weave of My Life* and Temsula Ao's *Once Upon a Life: Burnt Curry and Bloody Rags*, delve deeply into this theme, illustrating the profound impact that food and associated memories can have on our understanding of who we are.

Pawar's experiences growing up in a Dalit community highlight how food can serve as a marker of social status and identity. In her autobiography, she highlights discrimination and exclusion and how food played a role in reinforcing the divisions. She reflects on her childhood experiences and how they shaped her sense of Self. Similarly, for Ao, food serves as a powerful symbol of cultural identity and belonging. As a member of the Ao Naga tribe, she grew up with a deep appreciation for her people's traditional foods and customs. The vivid descriptions of the foods and her experiences help her shape her Self and assert her identity. Through their autobiographies, Pawar and Ao demonstrate the complex ways in which food, memory, and experience intersect to shape our sense of self and identity.

The research paper aims to delve deep into how food, memory, and experience play a significant role in the formation of Self and identity. It will also shed light on how food can symbolize the cultural issues of resistance and how it builds one character with diligent recourse to textual analysis.

Memory and identity are two interconnected concepts that have fascinated researchers for decades. While memory refers to the ability to store and retrieve information, identity is the way we perceive ourselves and how others perceive us. As Smith and Watson(2010) write in *Reading Autobiography*, "Memory is not to be conceived of as stored structures but as a function of the whole organism, as a complex, dynamic recategorizing and interactive process." (32)

The connection between memory and identity is intricate and complex, with memory playing a crucial role in shaping our sense of Self. Leuzinger-Bohleber(2008), in *Biographical Truths*, clearly states that memory does not exist in isolation from the body. The pain, the suffering, the pleasures, and the hunger all become a part of the experience of our body. These experiences transcend into the language of memory, leading to knowing our true Self and helping us contextualize our identity. As Smith and Watson(2010) write, "The ability to recover memories, in fact, depends upon the material body. There must be a body that perceives and internalizes the images, sensations, and experiences of the external world." (37).

One of the fundamental ways memory and identity are connected is through the process of autobiographical memory. Autobiographical memory refers to our memories of our personal experiences and life events. These memories are crucial in shaping our identity, allowing us to reflect on past experiences and make meaning out of them. Our autobiographical memory is not just a simple recollection of past events but a complex and dynamic process intertwined with our sense of self. Autobiographies reveal experiences and cultural memories leading to cultural and individual identity creation. As argued by Brockmeier in his work *Beyond the Archive: Memory, Narrative and the Autobiographical Process*, since autobiographical writing is unique in that it intertwines past with present experiences, it is helpful to think of the autobiography as an archive, not only to shed light on the fabric of memory itself but also to explore how this memory is actively created or 'rememorized' in the present . Temsula Ao, in a similar vein, describes

memory as "not one-to-one transference; they emerge from multiple prisms of the subconscious of the 'rememberer'." (3)

Urmila Pawar's autobiographical narrative, *The Weave of My Life*, stands distinguished among the notable contributions made by the Dalit women writers. It is an essential milestone in Dalit women's writings. As Sharmila Rege writes in her afterword, "*Aaydan*, Urmila Pawar's testimonio, weaves a complex relationship between 'official forgetting', memory, and identity- forging a right to speak both for and beyond the gendered individual and contesting explicitly the 'official forgetting' of histories of caste oppression, struggles and resistance." (333)

On the other hand, Temsula Ao, in her autobiography *Once Upon a Life: Burnt Curry and Bloody Rags*, covers the different phases of life, a life that went on to overcome the ordeal of fractured childhood, early marriage, single parenthood, and the demand of a full-time job. It depicts her odyssey searching for the self-worth once lost to time and circumstances. She is able to portray not only her individual experience but also the experiences of her people. The fascinating part is the way she weaves her own story with that of her community.

It is interesting to observe that both autobiographies share a common thread - the profound impact that food has had on their lives and memories. These memories are deeply personal and communal, underscoring the significance of culinary customs and traditions passed down from generation to generation. This relationship with food is emblematic of cultural identity, enabling individuals to communicate and establish their uniqueness. People communicate and identify their distinctiveness through the medium of food. The culture of food acts as a powerful force that brings families, communities, and cultures together worldwide. It rings especially true for a country like India, whose intricate and diverse dishes highlight its rich heritage. Pawar and Ao come from different parts of India, but their autobiographies highlight the rich cuisine and cultural heritage. Deborah Lupton elucidates that societal class, location, customs, gender, faith, and even job occupation can all contribute to shaping our eating routines. These variables can enable us to

differentiate between various traditions, rituals, celebrations, and meal times. It highlights the intricate and multifarious nature of our relationship with food. (1) Food can bring people together but can also create divisions. Throughout the autobiographies, the authors delve into how various foods have been utilized to illuminate their experiences and emotions, providing context for their sense of self and constructing their identity. Furthermore, they portray the discrimination perpetuated by a patriarchal society, rendering their narratives all the more poignant.

Food is an essential ingredient in the recipe of our lives, going beyond mere sustenance to become a cultural and emotional symbol that plays a significant role in shaping our identities. Roland Barthes writes,

> for what is food? It is not only a collection of products that can be used for statistical or nutritional studies. It is also, and at the same time, a system of communication, a body of images, a protocol of usages, situations, and behaviors. (29).

People's food choices reveal much about their thoughts, likes, and dislikes and serve as a conduit for the stories of households, migrations, assimilation, resistance, and changes over time. It is fascinating how the food we eat defines us and acts as an agency for defining individual or communal identity. Moreover, food can also reveal much about the processes of gender stereotyping and oppression and the hegemonic potential of patriarchal society. By analysing our food habits and choices, we can shatter many myths regarding food consumption and food-related stereotypes. Every meal served on a plate tells a story, revealing personal connections, nostalgic longings, a sense of belonging, and racial pride. It is no wonder that food is celebrated in various art forms, from literature to film, and is an inevitable theme in studying human psychology and culture. In the "Introduction" to *Critical Approaches to Food in Children's Writing*, Kara Keeling and Scott Pollard argue that food is central to writing.

If food is fundamental to life and a substance upon which civilisations and cultures have built themselves, then food is also fundamental to the imagination and the imaginary arts. Food is fundamental to the imagination

because food is fundamental to culture. (5)

Food is an essential component of who we are as individuals. It has a nostalgic effect on us, reminding us of memories and bringing a sense of familiarity and security. They serve as a form of emotional support, helping us cope with difficult situations and providing a temporary escape from the challenges of adult life. Many of us have vivid food memories that have shaped our identities, whether the taste of our mother's homemade pickle or the aroma of a particular spice that takes us back to our childhood.

> food is not a mere detail or an embellishment in the backdrop; food is the protagonist, playing varied roles, such as that of a bond between different generations, as an identity marker, and as a symbol of religious rituals and remembrances. Food is indeed a crucial piece of the puzzle that aids us in better understanding of who we are as individuals and as a society. (230)

Food customs have always been integral to every community's cultural identity throughout history. Geography and cultural traditions have played a significant role in shaping the way we eat, cook, and share meals. This rich legacy is passed down from generation to generation, creating a sense of continuity and belonging and reflecting the unique history of a particular group. Our culinary traditions are vital to our identity and can reveal much about our ethnicity, religion, and geographical location. The food we consume and how we prepare it can tell a story about who we are as a people, offering a window into our cultural heritage and providing a deeper understanding of our shared history. When people are asked to describe the food, they talk about visual and taste perception. The sense of taste and smell is subjective in nature. It cannot be verified and is a part of bodily experience. Their narration signifies the cultural aspect and the different eating practices in different geographies. In a way, depicting food in social narratives helps create social identities. Temsula Ao, for instance, during her visit to her ancestral village during winter, met her father's paternal aunt. She depicts how the grand-aunt treated her brothers with her delicious home-brewed rice beer, a common tradition in the Naga households. The beer was consumed as a part of

the regular meals, but unfortunately, most of the Nagas abandoned this tradition after converting to Christianity as it was considered heathen. By describing such experiences, she brings to the forefront the cultural traditions of her community.

She mentions several other instances that give us a glimpse into her personal life and simultaneously sketches her society's collective identity. In one of the chapters titled 'Nakham and the Missing Guavas', she highlights the importance of the association of food items to different cultures. She writes

it makes me realize the importance of the association of food items to different cultures of the world. We know that often what seems to be stinky, ugly and inedible to some is a delicacy to others. This particular dry fish called 'nakham' has a very strong smell which is offensive to some but for many others it is a much relished delicacy. No meal is complete without this side-dish. Thus the association of food to nationalities is a world-wide phenomenon. (117)

In another instance, she narrates an anecdote about a member of a Konyak tribe. Nagas usually made a contraption of bamboo, which they used to dry fish or meat for preservation. However, when she entered their kitchen, she was shocked as she saw "big rats split open vertically, the openings held in place by wedging pieces of twig and bamboo across, and spread on the tray to dry!"(123). She later learned that it was considered a delicacy for the Konyaks. In another instance, she narrates the different kinds of wedding feasts that have gone out of fashion in modern times. The visual description of the prepared food, like the rice cooking process and how the meat was prepared, constructs the social identity.

The method of cooking meat for a big crowd was different: the longish meat pieces would be strung, in long bamboo strings with a knot on one end, meaty fat portions would be strung on separate strings and cooked in tins. All the spicy ingredients also would be put in. When the meat was done, it was put on to big winnowing baskets and sliced into medium pieces…Except for meat, one could have second helpings of rice and

gravy…In this custom there was no concept of 'jutha' or 'unclean' associated with the gift. (136-137)

In a similar vein, Urmila Pawar narrates the number of wedding feasts alongwith various cuisines throughout her autobiography. She also describes the kind of food given to a woman who had given birth to a child. She writes, "For the first two days, she would be given rice with a little coconut milk mixed with a bit of molasses and paper." (163-164)

In another instance, she narrates how she realised the difference between the status of her and her classmates. She would often visit her friend's house for help with her studies. "It was in their house that I enjoyed very tasty dishes such as varanbhat with a lot of ghee, spicy mutton curry, fish and delicacies like shellfish bhajis." (163)

Her friend and Neena often teased her by enquiring about 'sweet dishes'(163). One day, when they got a chance to look at her tiffin, their "face fell when she saw the coarse grain rice, with a little dal and vegetable on it,"(163)

Another instance highlights not only the social structure but also brings to foray the discrimination she faced as a child and its impact on her. Her mother often sent her to buy pickles from the 'Pandit' family who lived opposite them across the road. She writes, " The memory of their mango pickle – hot, fiery red, with raw mango pieces, floating in oil – made my mouth water."(77) She had to stand at the bottom of the stairs, waiting for someone to answer her call. After the first, to which there was no clear response, she had to call out again as if she 'was a thief or a beggar!' (163). After handing her the pickles, the water would be sprinkled on the coin to purify it.

Kaku would bring some fiery red pickle on a plantain leaf, the lime pieces covered with yellow rai dal and oil, and keep it on the second or third step. Then I kept my coins on a step, which the kaku collected, but only after she had sprinkled water on them to cleanse them of pollution! (78)

Several such instances fragmented throughout their narratives create a complex and vivid visual and olfactory perception that links the memory with bodily experience, helping one to understand how identity is perceived, and self is fashioned.

Food also connects with the idea of home and identity. It brings to the forefront the memories and nostalgia. Memory is very subjective in nature. For the girl who managed to smuggle nakham in the hostel, "…was a strong reminder of home, and hence her intense urge to taste a bit of that 'home' in the impersonal hostel environment was so overwhelming that she did what she did." (117)

Foods can evoke unique feelings that serve as vivid memories of previous moments and locations. Pawar's account of her childhood recollections of food, cooking abilities, and meal times gives a stark picture of Dalit households in the Konkan area. Rice cooked from coarse grains with a lentil sauce, occasionally a green vegetable, and Bhakri prepared from red jowar or grain dust were the staples of daily meals. As Rajyashri says, "There is no "Dalit cuisine"—these culinary traditions are as diverse as the regions and communities in which they originated." ("Dalit Identity And Food – Memories Of Trauma On A Plate").

While reading Pawar's autobiography, one observes that their cuisine was not even part of the mainstream discourse and was not quite popular. Moreover, most of the Dalits came from poor backgrounds and, in a few places, were denied rights as essential as food and water, indicating how those in power use it as a tool of oppression, making them invisible. She also highlights the differences in food practices between the upper and lower caste. She narrates the food prepared during the festival of Holi:

"On the Holi day, the Marathas and the Brahmins would make sweet chapattis called puran poli, and in our houses we would cook lentils called pavata or varana. This was the crop that would be ready around Holi. We ate dal and rice with cooked pavata lentils and gathered in front of the Shambhu temple in the evening to see the dancing of the palanquin. "(48)

Food is often related to the powerful emotional state. After her father's death, she depicts how her mother used different food ingredients in a thrifty and miserly manner. She presents it in complete contrast to the upper-caste community, where much food is wasted. Frugal usage and minimum wastage became the epicentre of cooking at home. She also highlights how flavour and taste affect the senses, and even hunger is completely overhauled even though food would have become stale.

The putrid smell of the ambeel gone sour assaulted our senses but we would be completely impervious to that. We just poured it down on our throats as hungry tummies would be hauling for food by this time. In the moment of joy at meeting the people we loved, the ambeel actually tasted sweet. (40-41)

Barthes has famously said, "an entire "world"(social environment) is present in and signified by food".(31) The world of upper and lower communities is directly signified by their food, how they prepare the meals and how they are consumed in their households. During any ceremony or festivities, the women from her community would go begging to collect the leftover food, carrying baskets on their heads to far-flung houses. The pathetic description of the way the leftover food was given highlights the humiliating experience. It also depicts caste becoming a tool for oppression and discrimination.

"But the kulwadi women who gave them food would pour everything in their baskets. Whatever they wanted to give- dal, vegetables, kheer—would all be poured on rice, in a mixed mound…They poured the insipid, cooked rice in an earthen pot and put it on the stove on low heat. Their entire house would survive for two days on those leftovers. In some houses the flesh of dead animal would be eaten" (51-52).

Throughout her autobiography, she presents several such instances highlighting how food can be a source of humiliation as well as pride for the Dalits. While they may feel ashamed of their cuisine, they also take pride in appreciating and preparing upper-caste dishes. It is particularly intriguing to note their attitudes towards food and how it is intricately intertwined with their self-realization.

These autobiographical accounts represent food in different ways- lack of food, suffering, and, most importantly, hunger. They reflect on their experiences by describing memories from early childhood. Describing early childhood memories is arduous as it's quite challenging to differentiate between the impressions and actual memories about food and poverty, which the readers can feel and many of them can associate with. During the early years, hunger played a significant role in their daily life. It served as a reminder that sustenance was not only a physical necessity but also a philosophical one, taking on various forms, such as the desire for material wealth, knowledge, and wisdom. However, the most pressing and intense form of hunger was undoubtedly the need for food, as its absence would trigger a painful sense of emptiness. Hilary Justice, in "The Consolation of Critique: Food, Culture, and Civilization in Ernest Hemingway", writes that pang of hunger is "both literal and metaphorical… [it is as] symbolic as it is culinary" (20). Food was a constant truth that provided essential fuel for the body and mind. Ao narrates various incidents that portray her naivety, poverty, and the loss of her parents at a young age. The experience as an orphan and the uncertainty of food on the plate highlights her fractured childhood. Many days, she had to go to school on an empty stomach as there was no food to cook. By highlighting typical food such as chana, aata, etc., she connects with the readers; one can feel her pain and suffering and associate with it. "If a school mate gave me a few grains of chana I would devour them greedily and was it down with water from the school tap" (43).

The hunger for food made her beg in front of her parental aunt. She went to her aunt's door with her younger brother and got a packet of flour, which also got washed down the rain, and the dreams of eating chapatti were washed along.

But with the atta we were not so lucky; it began to rain and no matter how much I tried to shield the packet of atta, the rain eventually won…All dreams of eating at least a hot chapatti that evening were thus washed away by the rain. That night too, we went to bed hungry. (44)

She narrates another incident where she entered the feast in the senior doctor's house with her brother despite having no invitation.

Of course the rice was from the bottom of the pot and slightly burnt. But it was more than compensated by the gravy of the meat curry. We even got to eat a few pieces of actual meat! Even while we were eating, there was a nagging feeling in my mind about our presence in the company of the workers. Young though I was, I was aware of the sense of 'shame' in eating the food we were not invited for. (44)

She describes the burnt rice, and her reaction to a few pieces of actual meat depicts the depth of her hunger. Food is often associated with happy memories, but Ao is associating it with the idea of shame, giving it a negative connotation.

At the same time, Pawar also reflects on her experiences by describing her memories of food and poverty. The reader once again becomes part of her narrative. During the fifth standard, she narrates an incident where she received twelve rupees as a scholarship. When she saw the money, her first thought was to eat many different things. It depicts how poverty sometimes kills the innocence of a child, and a small amount of money can make a child's unsatisfied desires come to the forefront. The readers can feel the child-like innocence when she starts listing foods like guava, tamarind, and bondas.

I so much wanted to hold two lollypops in either hand like red flags, and lick them; to buy the big juicy guavas in Khanolkar's shop near the school and eat them in class even while the teacher was teaching; to buy berries and keep them in my cheeks to look like a monkey and chew on them. I wanted to eat ripe tamarinds, amlas and make other girls jealous. Then I also wanted to buy the hot, spicy bondas, like the big cricket walls, sold in Pilankar's shop, and eat them without sharing without my brother. I so much wanted to tease him while eating them. (90)

At the same time, a naive child's innocence grew aware that they were born into a specific caste and adversity and had to live and survive. By talking about the politics of food, she presents the cultural differences

which, more often than not, act as a barrier. The upper caste girls would talk about various kinds of sweets like laddu, modak, etc., which were novel items. Pawar also recalls an instance from her school days in which her friends intended to make some food at school and discussed what everyone should contribute, but when she inquired about what she should bring, she was told to "bring some money."

They did not allow me to touch anything. However, we all ate together. I really enjoyed the meal. The next day I was horrified to hear that my eating had become the hottest topic for juicy gossip. Girls were whispering in groups about 'how much I had eaten.' (102)

Urmila found it extremely humiliating that even children display caste inequalities and Untouchability and that impoverished people are ridiculed for their hunger. This anecdote demonstrates how caste is engrained in the psyche of our upper-class children.

Going further, Pawar reveals that food, not just within the society but also within the home, portrays the difference between the two genders. Women have to work hard and for long periods, yet they are only allowed to have leftover food. The food was mainly cooked for the men of the house, and the leftover food was for the women. Similarly, Ao also narrates that despite being young, she had to cook most of the time as a girl, which resulted in the rice not being cooked thoroughly or getting burnt, leading to an empty stomach for all of them. John Stuart Mill, rightly remarks: "Women are brought up from earliest years…to live for others, to make a complete negation of themselves and to have no life but in their affections."(27)

Food plays a vital role in the construction of their self and identity. All the memories, whether a bad or a good one, constitute their experience of pain and pleasure. Throughout the narrative, different varieties of food items are weaved together to present a close-knit image of their true self. As Ben Highmore writes in *Ordinary Lives: Studies in the Everyday*

"the self stretches out into the world so as to become a self. The emphasis on food for a writer… it is an emphasis on process… the eater is not a

fully constituted subject, but a subject constantly becoming constituted through their orientations towards things like food. Food, then, always has the potential to join in the act of reconstituting the subject." (151)

Jon Holtzman, in "Remembering Bad Cooks: Sensuality, Memory, and Personhood", highlights the construction of self. Self is constructed through not only good experiences associated with the food but also bad experiences. He links food experiences to the construction of identity and the formation of self. (240) He highlights how 'food is a vital arena for memory'(p.236) and how it has multifaceted images in one's memory. In the case of both these writers, one can easily observe how bad experiences became a moment that marked their identity and helped them explore their Self through self-revelation.

Food is truly an experience in and of itself. It has always been like a fleeting commodity. As Lynz Z. Bloom writes "*Food is an intrinsically significant subject,* whose ramifications extend far beyond its nutritional value" (350).

It not only brings comfort and solace but also solidifies the memories, irrespective of good or bad, and that is one of the primary reasons why both Pawar and Ao use food as an anchor for depicting their personal experiences. By placing the traditional food plate in front of the readers and making them witness their sufferings of life in which food acts as bad memories, Pawar and Ao allow the readers to associate with their experiences and become a part of their narrative. It has the power to transport and connect us with people and places. By bringing food memories into their narratives, they are able to depict the dynamics between individuals and society. Hilary Justice rightly points out that "food is [a] dialogue" (17). It is not merely a dialogue with the readers but is associated with memory and acts as a specialized form of self-dialogue. By writing about their food experiences, they are able to convey their thoughts and emotions. Having an open conversation with the readers legitimizes their individual and communal experiences and acts as a way of personal revelation and exploring their self and true identity.

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When Individual Memory Represents Collective Memory: A Study of *The Years* by Annie Ernaux

Preetha Prabhasan

Introduction

The yarn of memory moves back and forth and criss cross in time, weaving a multidirectional narrative. It is a rare way of storytelling with no chapter divisions and bewilderingly proceeding in a single flow. She uses diverse means- photos, notes, diaries, books, radio, television, headlines and advertising to make a contrasting effect to her personal experiences and trauma. Toying with time she uses multiple narrative voices- personal and impersonal, making reading and analysis slightly slippery. It is also a story of different generations with their unique characteristics, perspectives, interests, preferences and value systems. Her existentialist self-searches and its traumatic epiphanies brush brusquely on the social, cultural, political, historical, and technological transformations in France with a rare ease, insight and magnitude. The question of gender, class, language and sexuality are also addressed in the work. At the same time it becomes a ruthless dissection of the contemporary tendencies of avaricious consumerism, fetishism and obsession with the media.

Annie Ernaux, the most acclaimed memoirist of France places her Nobel- winning novel *The Years* at the intersection of history, sociology and literature. It is widely considered as an autobiography at once personal and collective- a rare hybrid that spans the period from the year of her birth in 1940 to 2006. It turns out to be an unofficial socio-political and cultural history of France as she traces the gradual evolution of time from post war poverty to the consumer revolution of the 1960s, the liberalist and globalist era of the 1990s and the digital revolution thereafter. Written mainly in third person, it explores a wide spectrum

of themes ranging from identity, body, sexuality, class, politics, inequality, religion, war, ageing and crucial changes in her own native country-France- over time. The Nobel committee appreciated the clinical acuity and courage the book exhibits while it uncovers the roots, estrangements and collective restraints of personal memory.

Annie Ernaux ironically begins her multidirectional memoir by quoting Jose Ortega Gasset that all we have is history but unfortunately it constantly evades us and does not belong to us. She is sure that the posterity will put the previous generations so easily into oblivion and no generation is an exception. What seems so serious, significant and extremely important to one generation may simply be waved off as petty by the succeeding generations. So no generation can have absolute measures for what is significant or ridiculous. There is also a possibility that a way of life one generation embraces with much pride and affection may appear strange, inconvenient, and stupid and not even clean enough for the coming generations.

Even the preface has an ironic intro: 'All the images will disappear' (29) - may be from one's own memory or from collective memory. Then she goes on to throw an array of fragmented images from life around and also from literature. She justifies the presentation as images both from real as well as imagined worlds because they follow us all the way to sleep- everyday or eternal. The procession of these haunting fragments of memory never stops. They go on pairing 'the dead with the living, real with imaginary beings and dreams with history' (62).

Purpose of the Narrative

The reason for this type of narrative method is explained towards the end of the book. She begins to fear that as she ages her memory will turn cloudy and silent as it was during her infant years as forgetfulness gradually begins to settle on her. She could not remember certain words, concepts and even the names of her colleagues from her previous institution. She only sees silhouettes and faces but could not name them. She is afraid that one day 'all things and their names will slip out of alignment' (2796) and she may not be able to correlate words to reality.

Just before everything begins to fade from memory she decides to start the book to compensate for her future absence through writing. She has to construct a palimpsest time from thousands of notes she made at different stages of her life. If stripped of learning and memory both the individual and the world may slip into the depths of Alzheimer's unable to notice the passage of time. So she has decided to depict the period of time she existed on the earth in an intuitive way. She feels that she is an indistinct whole whose parts she manages to pull free, one at a time through an effort of critical consciousness: elements of herself, customs, gestures, words etc. during the process of which the tiny moment of the past grows and opens into a horizon, at once mobile and uniform in tone, of one or several years.

She finds out that majority of her personal experiences have certain similarity with the vast collectivity outside and she becomes whole only when she reciprocates everything with the collective consciousness. She recognizes this from a 'frozen memory- image' (2809) of herself with other kids on a hospital bed after tonsil surgery, after the war or crossing Paris on a bus in July of '68 and so on. Each individual memory is part of and attached to a greater sense of time, event or experience. Even if she is alone in a car on the highway, she knows that millions like her somewhere in the world feel the same way in similar situations. This collective sharing makes the readers identify themselves with the situations and emotions the author depicts in a text.

Nature of the Narrative

This book becomes a self- conscious narrative that correlates the images from her memory with, specific sense of the times, the years to which the images belong, gradually linking them to others. By skimming off common hopes, fears, beliefs and sense of self, she is trying to reconstitute the progression of a common time from the past to the present and gradually proceed to the future. Her intention is to capture the lived dimension of History 'by retrieving the memory of collective memory in an individual memory' (2821).

She says that the book is not a work of remembrance in the usual sense- aiming to put a life into story, creating an explanation of self. She looks within only to retrieve the world and divulge the memory and imagination of its past. She likes to grasp the changes in ideas, beliefs and sensibility. She also wants to portray the transformation of people, subjects and unnamed sensations. She intends to create a slippery narrative that devours the present in its course that uses an unrelenting continuous tense to create a final image of a life.

The narrative may be interspersed with photos and scenes from films- that capture her body shapes and social positions across time- which act as freeze- frames on memories. They act as the graph of her progression through life and reports on a combination of elements that made her life unique. These incessantly not- she of photos actually corresponds to the she of writing. As it is an impersonal autobiography, there is no 'I', but only 'one' and 'we'.

During her student days she longed, like any literature- loving youth, to do clairvoyance with writing, by magically revealing her innermost self in an exceptionally revelatory way in an exceptionally captivating language. As intensely as she wanted in her childhood to be Scarlett O'Hara one fine morning she wanted to tell about herself to others in the most revelatory way and become a literary legend overnight. But as she stood in crowded classes or pushing a shopping cart in a supermarket or sat on a beach in the public gardens next to a baby carriage, these dreams vanished into thin air. But she has not totally abandoned the idea of writing a masterpiece in inspired language.

When she finally writes her autobiography, it is a collage of 'many different atmospheres and registers, styles and rhythms' (2944) and a close correspondence between microcosm and macrocosm. It progresses at varying paces and is punctuated by scenes of feasting with family and friends on holidays. Their conversation places them in specific periods of time in history. They range from a time shortly after the narrator's birth to her sixty sixth year. During the holiday meals of her childhood, her parents and grandparents talk about war and the hardship in their

early lives. They had a common ground of hunger and fear and everything was told in the 'we'. The years between 1940 and 2007 are presented as if the story was not only hers but also of her generation.

She also intersperses the narrative with descriptions of photos and speculates about what the girl in the photo might be thinking about herself, people around her and also about her own future always in connection with the time period to which the photo belongs. The descriptions about the photos are quite graphic and in precise prose. But the descriptions are written in different styles. 'sinuous as she drifts from one memory to the next or telegraphic as she makes mental list of things seen and lived' (2977).

She had been pondering on writing this book for years and had taken down notes in profusion and had been ruminating on endless styles for its narration. She often visits her former selves in the past and get superimposed one on another. She also alludes to a specific type of sensation which she terms as a palimpsest sensation. She also waits for the correct image to emerge and sometimes the narration that follows may be in meandering sentences that grow into lengthy paragraphs. As her translator says these breathless sentences give the impression that the time is speeding up. ''Time in the book slows down, speeds up, sweeps us away, repeats itself, grinds to a halt'' (3000). Sometimes it transforms to a deeply entangled interior time. It is usually when she describes the holiday dinner scenes.

The Holiday Meals and the Nature of Family

The family gatherings on holidays are a recurring incident throughout the work. The nature of this microcosm around the table and their conversations are important markers of the passage of time and social change related to it. In the beginning it is an animated working class extended family collective constituted of grandparents, parents, uncles, aunts and cousins but towards the end of the book it shrinks to a bourgeois nuclear family with parents, children and a grandparent and was further modified to a post- nuclear family with a divorced grandparent, sons and their partners and one grandchild. As the narrator matures up her

role at the table also changes- as a kid listening to partially comprehensible adult stories to the shy adolescent partially allowed to participate in the conversations and finally to an authoritative hostess.

The themes of the conversation also trace the passage of time- during the 1940s and 50s it was boisterous adult talk, always harping on the Second World War, during the 60s and 70s it was about flying saucers, people landing on the moon, emergencies and the rising cost of living but always returned to the war times. But something had died with the grandparents who had seen both wars, the full reconstruction of cities, children growing up, furniture in instalments and the general progress. Life has become far better. By 1980s and 90s they simply vanish.

Personal Narrative Overlaps with the Collective One

Ernaux is well aware that family narrative and social narrative are one and the same. The voices around the table during the never- ending holiday meals mapped out territories of youth. It referred to the countryside in its vividness. Farms where men had been hired hands and girls housemaids. Factories where they had met, stepped out together and married. The small business to which the most ambitious had risen. The only personal details in their stories were births, weddings and funerals. Their travel narratives were confined to regiments in distant garrison towns and not to beautiful havens. Their existences were entirely filled with hard labour, harsh conditions and the perils of drink. School appeared as mythical backdrop and the schoolmaster with his iron ruler for rapping the knuckles was its rough god. Poverty, deprivation and the restrictions that long pre- dated the war marked their words. It was a timeless night, a bygone era with its difficulties, pleasures, customs and practical wisdom. Then they went through the albums but the author says that no one could recognise either their parents in wedding dress or themselves as half- naked babies of indistinct sex, an alien creature sitting on a cushion and from a mute and inaccessible time.

The laughter and joy of the holiday meals come out of the fear that their time will soon come and better enjoy the time they have at hand in the present. As they commemorate their ancestors through conversations

they will also be remembered by their predecessors. It is through other people's memories that one lives even after one's death. But with real insight the author adds that memories are transmitted not only through stories but through "the ways of walking, sitting, talking, laughing, eating, hailing someone, grabbing hold of objects, it passed from body to body" (249). This repertoire of habits and gestures pass from body to body and over years spread to wherever they migrate. It becomes an unseen inheritance photos alone cannot exhibit.

But the memory of generations also change and progress incrementally. For example the memory of parents show the progression of seasons through their different activities like planting colza, shaking apple from trees or collecting deadwood that too by absenting themselves from schools. But for the author's generation, the school calendar had replaced the cycle of seasons and the years were piled one top of each other in terms of school years, space- times that opened in October and closed in July. They remember folding blue paper covers over the used books handed over to them by students a grade ahead. A generation studied the works of same authors, memorised the poems of same poets thus making these elements of personal memory the common components of a generation's collective memory.

But at that time she was unaware of the war in Indonesia, Marcel Cerdan, boxing champion of the world and Besnard the arsenic poisoner. What she remembers are tiny incidents at school and her grades. She remembers the details of the day she visited the beech and the amazing postcard send by her cousin doing his military service in Tunisia. Her generation might have complained to their parents that they go nowhere beautiful. But they replied that they had everything at their time and place and asked where else did they wanted to go.

Then she looks around her and found out that they lived in a scarcity of everything- of objects, images, diversions, explanations of self and the world, whose sources were confined to the catechism. Every object in the houses had been bought before the war- the saucepans were blackened and missing their handles, the bowl's enamel worn away and

holes in the jugs were plugged with metal pellets. Coats were revamped, shirt collars were turned inside out and Sunday clothes were extended to everyday. Everything were mended and used for maximum duration. Nothing was thrown away. Kitchen garbage was used as garden fertilizer, dung of passing horses collected for potted plants and newspapers were used for wrapping different objects and even for wiping bottoms in the lavatories. People travelled on foot or by bicycles. The 'background was silence and the bicycle measured the speed of life' (555).

There were dead children in every family as they were affected by chicken pox, whooping cough, mumps, measles, bronchitis, ear infections, tuberculosis and meningitis. The author has a dad sister namely Ginette. She was only six when she died in 1938. She is remembered as a little girl in another photo. Children became safe only after they were fifteen. There were war children who were peaky and anaemic with spotted nails. They were forced to swallow cod liver oil and deworming syrup and chew Jessel tablets. They were weighed now and then on chemist's scale, bundled themselves in mufflers to avoid chills, eat soup for growing up. But the new borns were then beginning to get vaccinated. Here, as in many other pages, her narrative surpasses the individual realm and becomes unofficial social history.

Religion

Religion provided the official framework of life and governed Time. They shunned meat on Fridays. Sunday masses meant time to wear different clothes, put on hats and gloves, and carry a purse. It was also a time to see others and to get noticed. The church monopolised morality. It made them believe in afterlife and distinguish between good and evil.

School

It imparted immutable knowledge in silence and order. It inculcated a respect for hierarchy and absolute submission. To be bound by strict rules were even considered as a privilege. The curriculum never changed. Knowledge was imparted to a minority whose intelligence

and superiority was tested and asserted every year. But the strict observance of class can be seen in these institutions. The students of the upper class never even looked at the poor outside the school. She always hung out with girls from poor families as they seemed to share similar social backgrounds.

Politics

The French presidents of different time periods and how they appealed to the masses and classes of France are referred to in the book. Charles de Gaulle, Alain Pohe, Georges Pompidou, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, François Mitterrand, Jacques Chirac, Nicolas Sarkozy, François Hollande and Emmanuel Macron appear in vivid colours and shades. The period of civil unrest which lasted for seven weeks and marked by general strikes, demonstrations and occupations of the universities and finally resulted in Gaulle fleeing from the country are alluded to in the course of the book.

Conclusion

Using her clinically sharp flat narrative she provides a close intersection of the post second world war France through her personal memoir. It is not a detailed and graphic description of her life and events in linear progression but rather in fragments demanding reader's intervention- sort of a prose- Eliot challenging the reader's easy comprehension. She dives deep into her memories and picks up shimmering images which at once reflects the individual and the collective affect at once. Photographs and newspaper cuttings overlap with her diary entries to weave a rare palimpsest of emotions and experiences. In her own opinion she was carrying out an ethnological study of herself which in turn proves to be that of the society too.

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Quest of Identity Amidst Myth in Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*

Himanshi Rathi, Parul Mishra and Kaushal Kishore Sharma

As understood by most of the readers myth is not just a narrative or something, which has its roots with some story. Myth presents a country, a culture and society. They are stories aiming to preserve the culture's history, teach and inform their people, explain their origin, and help people understand the world around them. The word 'Myth' comes from the Greek word 'mythos' meaning the story of the people, fiction, utterance, tale, and/or legend. The traditional definition of myth is a widely held idea or belief that is false or incorrect, but the myth definition in literature is vastly different. In literature, the word myth is used to describe a traditional story that typically aims to explain a natural or social phenomenon. In literary myths, the use of supernatural beings is common and the time usually dates back to a period of early history of the beginning of various civilizations. The use of myths in Modernist literature highlighted the classical tone of the age. Myth has a symbolic value; it condenses emotions and experiences. TS Eliot's *The Waste Land* is perhaps the most representative of Modernist works with a profusion of mythical usage. TS Eliot employed the mythical method to accentuate the experiences of loss of fertility and death in *The Waste land*, which are weaved together by the multi-perspective and mythical character Tiresias. James Joyce in Ulysses recreates the mythical Homeric Odysseus into the modern Leopold Bloom and narrates his mundane, sordid existence in an ironic epic manner. Eugene O'Neill in Mourning Becomes Electra adapts the Greek mythical Electra from Aeschylus' Oresteia into Lavinia Mannon. WB Yeats, like his admired predecessor Blake, undertook to construct his own systematic mythology based on historical, astrological and occult material and consisting of the Phases of the Moon, the Great Wheel and the Gyres, as expounded in A Vision

and embodied.in a number of remarkable lyric poems such as The Second Coming and Byzantium.

Japanese Mythology covers almost two thousand years of Japanese myths that passed down orally from generation to generation. Most Japanese myths talk about creation of the world- natural forces, different Gods and Goddesses. Japanese literature throughout most of its history has influenced the cultural contact with neighbouring Asian literatures, most notably China and its literature. Early texts were often written in pure Classical Chinese. Kazuo Ishiguro is a well-known writer in the field of modern literature, and he is mostly praised for his distinctive narrative style, which skilfully combines aspects of myth and fantasy with the everyday realities of human existence. The existence of legendary aspects in Ishiguro's writings is examined in this abstract, bringing light on how they perform as allegorical and symbolic means of expressing important ideas and insights. He is one of the most critically acclaimed contemporary fiction authors writing in English. Kazuo Ishiguro (born November 8, 1954, Nagasaki, Japan) is a Japanese-born British novelist known for his lyrical tales of regret fused with subtle optimism. In 2017 he won the Nobel Prize for Literature for his works that "uncovered the abyss beneath our illusory sense of connection with the world." (Britannica). Ishiguro's first novel, A Pale View of Hills (1982), details the postwar memories of Etsuko, a Japanese woman trying to deal with the suicide of her daughter Keiko. Set in an increasingly Westernized Japan following World War II, An Artist of the Floating World (1986) chronicles the life of elderly Masuji Ono, who reviews his past career as a political artist of imperialist propaganda. Ishiguro's Booker Prize-winning The Remains of the Day (1989; film 1993) is a first-person narrative, the reminiscences of Stevens, an elderly English butler whose prim mask of formality has shut him off from understanding and intimacy.

The paper explores the unconventional novel of Ishiguro, *"Never Let Me Go"*. In this book Ishiguro creates a future society where human clones who were created solely for the purpose of organ donation must face their inevitable demise. This story reveals the painful and heart

breaking aspect of their life by striking a remarkable resemblance to the mythic paradigm of sacrificial beings, similar to soul-sucking creatures in folklore. The paper also explores how issues with memory and cultural forgetfulness are interwoven with the characters existence. The pervasive mist that covers the landscape symbolises a common myth of amnesia, mirroring the idea that the past can be buried and cast a long shadow over the present. This mythical mist turns into a striking allegory for the effects of erasing communal memory and the influence of historical narratives on the development of society. However, the novel is a beautiful love story which breakthrough the boundaries of the literary novel. *Never Let Me Go* is a 2005 science fiction novel by the British author Kazuo Ishiguro. It was shortlisted for the 2005 Man Booker Prize. Ishiguro's psychologically complex works draw on the tradition of the realist novel. He counts such authors as Charlotte Brontë, Anton Chekov, Charles Dickens, and Fyodor Dostoevsky among his literary influences. Ishiguro identifies as an international writer. He does not see his work as part of a Japanese literary tradition, and has stated that he is more influenced by Japanese films than literature. Although raised in a Japanese-speaking home, Ishiguro did not return to Japan until he was an adult, visiting briefly in 1989 as part of the Japan Foundation Short-Term Visitors Program. Never Let Me Go is Ishiguro's sixth novel. Blending psychological realism with science fiction, it takes place in a parallel universe in 1990s England where human cloning is an accepted practice. His first-person narrator is Kathy H., a clone engaged in recalling and reflecting on her memories of the past. Ishiguro began writing Never Let Me Go in 1990, when he referred to it as "The Students' Novel." His early notes featured a group of strange students living in the countryside, an image that remained core to the finished novel.

The dreamy nature of Kazuo Ishiguro's writings, which explore complex philosophical and existential issues, distinguishes his works. Ishiguro's novels are not only literary masterpieces but also modern myths that have a significant emotional impact on readers thanks to the mythic aspects he incorporates into his stories. These components give readers

a singular lens through which to consider the universal problems of human existence. In one of the most memorable novels of recent years, Kazuo Ishiguro imagines the lives of a group of students growing up in a darkly skewered version of contemporary England. The Sunday times quotes the book as one of the piercing questions about humanity and humaneness. A clear frontrunner o be the year's most extraordinary novel, Never Lt Me Go is the third book in what could be called Kazuo Ishiguro's Bewilderment Trilogy. Like its predecessors, The Unconsoled (1995) and When We Were Orphans (2000), it is riddled with mystery. The girl named Kathy, a thirty one year old is living in England in the late 1990s, looks back at her school days at Hailsham, a picturesque establishment nestling amidst quiet countryside, an unsettling strangeness emanates from her reminiscences. What initially seems a near idyll of benign teachers, lively students, stimulating classes, sporting triumphs on the playing fields, midnight gossips in the dorm and friendly strolls around the pond with its bulrushes and wildfowl assumes an increasingly out of true aspect. Graceful and grim, the novel never hardens into anything as clear-cut as allegory but it resonates with disquieting suggestiveness (Sunday Times 2005)

The myth present in the novel; is the interpretation of the song, Never Let Me Go by Judy Bridgewater album Songs after Dark. Listening to the song she creates a myth that she will never have the pleasure of having her oved ones. Her favorite track on the album, "Never Let Me Go," gives the novel its title. The song symbolizes both the depths of human love and the fear of losing those whom one loves. This becomes clear in the story that Kathy invents to explain the song's lyrics. Kathy imagines that the song is about a woman afraid of losing her baby. Holding tightly to the child, she sings a song that expresses her happiness as well as her fear of loss. This image of holding on recurs several times in the novel, most notably when Kathy and Tommy hold one another in the field after learning that deferrals do not exist. When the tape itself disappears, Kathy has her first experience of loss that presages the losses she will later experience on a much larger and more human scale. Kathy has created the Myth that she will lose whomsoever she

loves. This thought of loss is so much engraved in her mind that often the idea manifests in her life. She is quite successful in create g the modern myth that whatever is coming to you is a signal that you will soon manifest it in your life. The issue with the protagonist was that she always thought of negative ideas and they manifested it.

In 1990, even before starting The Unconsoled, Kazuo Ishiguro had been working on a project called "The Students' Novel," about "these strange young people living in the countryside, calling themselves students where there's no university."(23). Never Let Me Go is a story of three friends who grow up in an enclosed environment, a kind of boarding school. The children were growing in this confined environmenet and developing a myth that parentless children are not complete. Sexton comments that realization of the truth about the situation is gradual. There is no startling reveal, no single shocking disclosure of where to head. Rather, just as the children themselves only slowly come to understand their fate. It is likewise the case of the readers; only piece together the implications gradually, as most of the humans do in life. In fact, the word "clone" appears for the first time only in Chapter 14, in Ruth's tirade about the students modelled on "trash," long after the term will have occurred to the mind of every reader. Apparently, a work of science fiction, *Never Let Me Go* is indeed nothing of the kind. Ishiguro says he's perfectly open to people reading it as a chilling warning about biotechnology but feels they've missed the inner heart of the book if they take it that way. He has certainly given readers nothing to foster such a misread-ing. For the book is set in the past, not the future: "England, late 1990s" it is specified before the novel begins.

The narrator of the novel, Kathy H, is thirty-one as the book unwraps, and has been a "carer" for around twelve years. She looks back to her phase at that school she remains very proud to have attended, Hailsham, recalling first when she and her friends were children there, and then when they were teenagers, so locating it in the early and later Seventies, perhaps. Thereafter, in Part Two, she tells about their lives afterwards, in "the Cottages" (5) as young adults, perhaps in the early Eighties. But such dating is never precise and there are few contemporary references.

There is virtually no reference to technology, afar unexciting cars, Rovers and Volvos, and old-fashioned cassette tapes and Walkmans. Practically nothing about the authentic natal position of the clones is detailed either—neither how they were created, nor how they can make their "donations" and continue for a while to live. There is no information provided to the readers how the clones are going to change the society. Quite remarkably, there are simply no futuristic, alternative world or science-fiction components to the story. For what this book is about is ordinary, normal and every day, the knowledge that we are mortal, that our time is limited, death inescapable.

However on giving it an artificial touch of mid art and myths, the story is suggesting a development of myth of manifesting the ideas of past. In his invariably clear and modest way, Ishiguro describes this radical narrative thus: "The strategy here is that we're looking at a very strange world, at a very strange group of people, and gradually, I wanted people to feel they're not looking at such a strange world, that this is everybody's story." (7). lshiguro himself compares his ellipticality to that found in songs that contain many more hidden things than the average prose story. "You're going to try to structure the unsaid things as finely and narrowly as you structure the said things. So you often leave out explicit mean-ings. You deliberately create spaces in the songs for the person listening to inhabit," he told Alan Yentob in a 2021 Imagine TV profile. So it becomes your own story—rather as Kathy makes her own interpretation of the song "Never Let Me Go." One of the repeated criticisms of lshiguro's work remains that the prose is plain and flat. Revisiting Never Let Me Go, Rachel Cusk termed it his "'dead hand' approach." In a peculiarly dim review of Never Let Me Go in the London Review of Books, Frank Kermode recognized that the prose was appropriate to the character of Kathy but found the writing less engaging than in Ishiguro's previous books: "Everything is expertly arranged, as it always is in Ishiguro, but this dear-diary prose surely reduces one's interest." (London Review).

Ishiguro likes to experiment with literary hybrids, to hijack popular forms for his own ends, and to set his novels against tenebrous historical

backdrops. The narrator, Kathy H., is looking back on her school days at a superficially idyllic establishment called Hailsham. (As in "sham"; as in Charles Dickens' Miss Havisham, exploiter of uncomprehending children.) At first you think the "H" in "Kathy H." is the initial of a surname, but none of the students at Hailsham has a real surname. Soon you understand that there's something very peculiar about this school. Tommy, for instance, who is the best boy at football, is picked on because he's no good at art: In a conventional school it would be the other way around.(Brave New World). One motif at the very core of Never Let Me Go is the treatment of out-groups, and the way out-groups form in-groups, even among themselves. The marginalized are not exempt from doing their own marginalization: Even as they die, Ruth and Tommy and the other donors form a proud, cruel little clique, excluding Kathy H. because, not being a donor yet, she can't really understand (Atwood).

Never Let Me Go by Kazuo Ishiguro is a dystopian story about fate and friendship. The story illustrates complex themes such as the fate of human beings, the impact of childhood, and the complexities of friendships. The writer, Nobel-winner Kazuo Ishiguro, stated "growing up in England in a Japanese household was crucial to his writing, enabling him to see things from a different perspective to many of his British peers" (BBC, 2017). Allegedly, the novel is surely just another massive Ishiguro tease - Never Let Me Go is about a group of genetically engineered or test-tube children living in a comfortable country house called Hailsham. Here there is a sports pavilion and a playing field, and the students do ordinary things like playing rounders. From the uneasy opening lines onwards, we know there is something special about these children. They have no parents, no surnames, they never go on holiday, and they will never have babies of their own. They are being exclusively bred to become "donors"(9). The particular meaning of this ominous word is not made clear until page 73, when one of their more outspoken guardians suddenly blurts it all out. "None of you will go to America," she tells her charges. "None of you will be film stars... Your lives are set out for you. You'll become adults, then... you'll start to donate your

vital organs. That's what each of you was created to do"(24).

From his semi-detached house in suburban Golders Green, in north London, Kazuo Ishiguro has made himself an architect of singular, self-enclosed worlds. His writing traps the raders inside strange skulls. He spends, he says, around five years on each of his books and the first couple of these years, each time, involves little circumnavigations of the imaginative space of his novel, marking boundaries, testing structures, making himself at home. All of his quietly unsettling, intimate vantages have foundations in the voices that narrate them and he spends a good deal of time, too, 'auditioning' these voices, listening to different possibilities, before he settles on one. The voice of his new, oppressively brilliant novel, Never Let Me Go, is that of Kathy H, who at 31 is looking back on her curious English boarding-school days at a place called Hailsham. Kathy's world seems so logical and mundane, the surface of her language so steady and familiar, that it takes the reader a little time to discover the disturbing facts of the lives she describes. The first clue comes in her use of simple little euphemisms: she is a 'carer', these days, she explains, she looks after 'donors' before they 'complete'; she remains in thrall to the 'guardians' who taught her at school. The full implications of these charged little power relations emerge from her account very slowly. It is, hopefully, not giving away too much of Ishiguro's meticulous dystopia to say that Kathy and all the rest of the children who were at Hailsham are clones and that their macabre stories expand. Ishiguro is very good at seeing the sinister and chaotic where most of us, including his narrators, might kid ourselves we see normality (The Guardian). To the interview to The Guardian Ishiguro says, "for me England is a mythical place" (2

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Significance of Purple Colour in *The Colour Purple* and *Purple Hibiscus*

Vandana Kuldeep, Vipula Mathur and Vishnu Kumar Sharma

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, published in 1982, is a groundbreaking and influential novel that explores themes of oppression, empowerment, and resilience among African American women in the early 20th-century American South. The story is told through the eyes of Celie, a poor, uneducated black woman who endures severe abuse and marginalization at the hands of the men in her life. Through a series of letters written to God and later to her sister Nettie, Celie recounts her harrowing experiences and gradual journey toward self-discovery and empowerment.

Set against a backdrop of racial segregation and patriarchal dominance, *The Color Purple* addresses significant social issues such as racism, sexism, and the legacy of slavery. Walker's narrative shines a light on the systemic injustices that African American women faced and highlights the importance of female solidarity and community in overcoming these challenges. The novel is renowned for its rich character development, particularly the transformations of Celie and other key female characters like Shug Avery and Sofia, who defy societal norms and assert their independence.

The Colour Purple is also noted for its innovative use of the epistolary form, which creates an intimate and personal connection between the reader and Celie's innermost thoughts and feelings. This narrative technique, combined with Walker's powerful prose and vivid storytelling, has earned the novel critical acclaim and a lasting impact on literature and social discourse. The novel won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the National Book Award, and its themes and characters have resonated

with readers worldwide, solidifying its status as a classic in American literature.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, published in 2003, is a poignant and evocative novel that explores themes of family, faith, freedom, and political turmoil in postcolonial Nigeria. The story is narrated by fifteen-year-old Kambili Achike, whose affluent yet oppressive household is dominated by her devoutly Catholic and authoritarian father, Eugene. Set against the backdrop of political instability and societal change, the novel chronicles Kambili's journey from silence to self-expression, highlighting her struggles and growth in the face of familial and societal pressures.

Purple Hibiscus delves deeply into the complexities of Nigerian life, contrasting the rigid, oppressive environment of Kambili's home with the more liberal and nurturing atmosphere of her Aunty Ifeoma's household. Through this dichotomy, Adichie examines the impact of domestic tyranny and religious fanaticism, while also celebrating the resilience and strength found within familial bonds and community support.

The novel's rich narrative and complex characters provide a window into the intersections of personal and political identities, making *Purple Hibiscus* not only a story of personal awakening but also a broader commentary on the quest for autonomy and justice in a postcolonial society. Adichie's masterful storytelling and keen insight into human emotions and social dynamics have earned *Purple Hibiscus* critical acclaim, solidifying its place as a significant work in contemporary African literature.

The aim of this paper is to analyse the significance of the color purple in two prominent literary works: Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. By exploring the symbolic meaning and thematic implications of the color purple within these texts, this study seeks to elucidate how it contributes to the overarching narratives, character development, and cultural contexts presented by the authors. Specifically, the paper will examine how the

color purple represents themes of resilience, transformation, and identity in the face of adversity, and how it bridges the cultural and temporal gaps between the two novels.

The present paper aims to study the significance and importance of purple colour in Alice Walker's *The Colour Purple* and *Purple Hibiscus* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. In both the novels, colour remains symbolic and never really emerges. Since purple colour symbolizes bravery, femininity, spirituality, courage, etc. Purple colour is related to the life and development of Celie in The Colour Purple, how she is abused and dominated by her stepfather first and then by her husband. She is constantly fed on bad-mouthing and humiliation. She met an empowered and strong lady named, Shug and bonded with her, she realizes she can fight back and have a voice of her own. She tastes freedom and courage through her female friendship. Similarly, in *Purple Hibiscus*, Kambili, who lives a life of silence, as she doesn't speak deliberately to avoid physical abuse of her father. Her father is very strict and controlling. Every little decision in her family and home is taken by her father. She seems shy but chokes on words and stays invisible. She visits her aunty and experiences freedom and free will. She lives a normal life for the first time in her life which most of the teenagers live. This paper analyses complexities in lives of Celie and Kambili through their fathers, which remains a trauma but both of them rises confidently and bravely. Use of descriptive paragons helps us understand thoroughly.

Introduction to Color Symbolism in Literature

Color symbolism in literature is a widely studied topic, reflecting how colors convey deeper meanings and emotions beyond their visual appearance. Scholars have explored the significance of various colors in different cultural and literary contexts, noting that colors can symbolize themes, moods, and character traits. The color purple, in particular, has been associated with themes of spirituality, royalty, and transformation. This literature review examines the existing body of work on color symbolism, with a focus on the significance of the color purple in Alice

Walker's *The Color Purple* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*.

Alice Walker's The Color Purple

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* is a seminal work that has been extensively analyzed for its use of color symbolism. The novel, set in the early 20th century American South, follows the life of Celie, an African American woman who overcomes severe adversity. Scholars have interpreted the color purple in Walker's novel as a symbol of pain and suffering, as well as a representation of beauty and spiritual growth. According to *Jennifer Gillan (The Color Purple: The Color of Transformation. 1999, pp. 345-367.),* the color purple signifies the bruises and physical abuse Celie endures, while also symbolizing her spiritual awakening and personal growth as she learns to find beauty and love in her life .

Shirley Stave (The Colour Purple: A Reading of the Novel.2001.) argues that the color purple in Walker's novel represents a form of resistance and empowerment. The color emerges in moments of transformation and liberation, such as when Celie begins to assert her independence and self-worth. Stave suggests that the color purple acts as a narrative device that marks Celie's journey from victimhood to empowerment.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Purple Hibiscus

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Purple Hibiscus, set in postcolonial Nigeria, uses the color purple to explore themes of freedom and oppression within a complex socio-political context. Scholars have highlighted the symbolic importance of the purple hibiscus flower, which represents rare beauty and the possibility of change amidst a repressive environment. According to *Susan Andrade (The Purple Hibiscus: cultural and Political Symbolism. 2008, pp. 123-145.),* the purple hibiscus in Adichie's novel symbolizes the fragility and resilience of the characters, particularly Kambili and her family, as they navigate the tensions between tradition and modernity.

Andrew Armstrong (Floral Imagery in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Purple Hibiscus. 2010, pp. 89-105.) notes that the purple hibiscus flower serves as a metaphor for the protagonist's growth and maturation. The flower's rarity and beauty mirror Kambili's own journey towards self-discovery and liberation from her father's authoritarian rule. Armstrong suggests that the color purple in Adichie's novel is intricately linked to the theme of personal and political transformation.

Comparative Analyses of Purple Symbolism

Several scholars have undertaken comparative studies of the color purple in both The Color Purple and Purple Hibiscus. These studies often emphasize the thematic parallels and cultural specificities that shape the use of the color in each novel.

For instance, *Anne-Marie O'Connor (Comparative Colour Symbolism: Analyzing The Colour Purple and Purple Hibiscus. 2012, pp. 205-229)* compares the symbolic function of the color purple in both novels, noting that it serves as a marker of trauma and healing in different cultural contexts. O'Connor argues that while Walker uses the color to highlight personal and spiritual growth within the African American experience, Adichie employs it to comment on socio-political issues in Nigeria, such as the impact of colonialism and the struggle for personal autonomy.

Cultural and Historical Contexts

Understanding the cultural and historical contexts of The Color Purple and Purple Hibiscus is essential for a nuanced interpretation of the color symbolism in both novels. Scholars have explored how the authors' backgrounds and the socio-political environments of their respective settings influence their use of the color purple.

In the context of Walker's novel, critics like *Patricia Hill Collins (Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment. 2000,)* have examined the intersections of race, gender, and class in the American South, arguing that the color purple reflects the compounded oppression faced by African American women and

their resilience in overcoming it. Similarly, in Adichie's novel, scholars such as *Ato Quayson (Postcolonial Nigeria in Adichie's Purple Hibiscus. 2009, pp. 741-768.)* have analyzed the postcolonial Nigerian context, highlighting how the color purple symbolizes the complex interplay of tradition, modernity, and political instability.

The literature on color symbolism in The Color Purple and Purple Hibiscus reveals a rich tapestry of meanings associated with the color purple. Scholars have highlighted its dual role as a symbol of suffering and transformation, personal and political liberation, and spiritual and cultural resilience. This literature review underscores the importance of contextual and comparative analyses in understanding the multifaceted significance of the color purple in these two influential works. By situating the color within the broader themes and cultural contexts of each novel, this study aims to contribute to the ongoing scholarly conversation on the symbolic power of colors in literature.

Purple is a colour associated with royalty, nobility and wisdom, and it plays an important role in the novel *The Colour Purple*, by Alice Walker, and the novel *Purple Hibiscus*, by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. In both the novels, purple is used as a symbol of strength, power, and freedom, as well as a representation of beauty and hope. In *The Colour Purple*, the significance of the colour purple manifests in two main characters in particular, Celie and Shug Avery. Celie is described as wearing a "purple dress and a purple scarf," representing her inner strength and resilience in the face of her oppression. Walker uses the colour purple to represent Celie's strength and potential for liberation. Shug Avery is described as "wearing a purple dress," representing her power and influence in Celie's life. Shug is Celie's mentor and confidante, and her presence in Celie's life symbolizes a new beginning and a reclaiming of Celie's power and dignity.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, the colour purple is used to represent the main character Kambili's, growth, potential, and journey of self-discovery. Kambili is described as wearing a "purple T-shirt," which symbolizes her transformation from a timid girl into a brave, confident young woman.

Kambili's purple shirt represents her newly found freedom and courage as she begins to explore the world outside her home. In addition, the purple hibiscus in the novel is a symbol of hope, beauty, and new beginnings as Kambili's journey of self-discovery begins.

The colour purple holds great symbolic significance in both the novels. It is used to represent notions of power, liberation, spirituality, and transformation. Purple, a colour that straddles the line between red and blue, is often associated with royalty and luxury. In *Purple Hibiscus*, the significance of the colour purple can be seen in the form of a hibiscus flower. The hibiscus flower in *Purple Hibiscus* represents freedom, growth, and the protagonist's journey towards self-discovery whereas it is used as a symbol of female empowerment and resilience in The Colour Purple. It is worth noting that the significance of the colour in both the novels extends beyond its literal representation. It's not simply an aesthetic choice, but rather a powerful symbol that reflects the themes and struggles of the characters. Purple is a powerful colour that holds great significance in both these novels.

In *The Colour Purple*, purple is a symbol of empowerment and liberation. It represents the transformation and growth of Celie, the main character, as she finds her voice and asserts her identity. Purple also represents spirituality and connection to the divine, as Celie finds solace in her letters to God. Additionally, purple signifies the bond between women, as Celie forms deep connections with other female characters who support and uplift her. Similarly in *Purple Hibiscus,* purple represents rebellion and defiance against oppressive systems. The purple hibiscus flower which blooms despite harsh conditions, symbolizes the resilience and strength of the main character, Kambili. The purple colour is also associated with Kambili's aunt, Aunty Ifeoma, who challenges the strictly religious and political ideologies imposed by her father. Purple becomes a symbol of freedom and individuality as the characters break free from societal expectations. Both novels use purple to convey the idea of self-discovery and personal growth. The characters' journey towards finding their true selves and embracing their uniqueness signifies that one's identity should not be confined by societal norms or expectations.

Purple serves as a reminder of this important truth. Through the use of purple, both novels explore the themes of personal growth, artistic expression, and the power of individuality.

Furthermore, purple represents creativity and imagination. It is often associated with artistic expression and unconventional thinking. In both the novels, purple serves as a catalyst for the characters' artistic endeavours. Celie expresses herself through her letters, while Kambili discovers her passion for writing and storytelling. Celie uses purple ink to write her letters, which becomes a form of creative self-expression and a means of connecting with others. Purple represents the power of storytelling and the ability to shape one's narrative. On the other side, Kambili's passion for writing and storytelling is symbolized by the purple notebooks she uses to record her thoughts. Purple becomes a conduit for their imagination and a way to explore their identity. Purple inspires them to explore their creativity and find solace in their art. In *The Colour Purple*, literature becomes a form of liberation and self-expression for the protagonist, Celie. Through her letters, she finds her voice and shares her experiences, allowing her to reclaim her identity and assert her existence. The act of writing becomes a transformative and empowering form of art for Celie. Similarly, in *Purple Hibiscus*, art specifically painting, serves as a means of escape and self-discovery for the main character, Kambili. Through her aunt Ifeoma's encouragement, Kambili begins to explore her creative side and finds solace and freedom in painting. Art becomes a way for Kambili to express her emotions and challenge the oppressive environment in which she lives. These creative outlets become sources of empowerment, personal growth, and resistance against oppressive forces.

One of the special aspects of these novels is the connection between purple and spirituality. In *The Colour Purple*, purple colour is associated with Shug Avery, a character who embodies freedom, sensuality, and a non-traditional approach to religion. Purple represents the spiritual liberation that Celie finds through her relationship with Shug. Similarly, in *Purple Hibiscus*, purple is linked with Papa-Nnukwu, Kambili's grandfather, who practices a traditional Igbo religion. Purple symbolizes

the spiritual connection to ancestral traditions and the freedom to worship outside of the constraints of Catholicism. Another connection is from femininity. In *The colour Purple,* purple is closely tied to female empowerment and the reclamation of one's identity. Celie, Sofia, and Shug Avery all find strength and liberation through the colour purple. It represents their resilience and ability to rise above societal expectations.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, purple is associated with female strength and rebellion against patriarchal norms. Kambili and her mother, Beatrice, both challenge traditional gender roles. We see the symbolism of purple as a colour of royalty and power. In both novels, purple represents a sense of reality and authority. In *The colour Purple*, purple is associated with Sofia, a strong and independent character who refuses to conform to societal expectations. Her resilience and defiance against oppression are reflected in the colour purple, which symbolizes her royal spirit. Similarly, in Purple Hibiscus, purple is used to depict the wealth and influence of Eugene, Kambili's father. The purple robes he wears, and the opulence of his lifestyle represent his status and dominance within the family. Purple also symbolizes transformation and growth in these novels.

In *The Colour Purple*, purple flowers and plants are often mentioned, representing the beauty that can emerge from struggle and adversity. The colour purple becomes a metaphor for personal growth and the ability to overcome hardships. Similarly, in *Purple Hibiscus*, the purple hibiscus flower itself represents transformation. Despite the oppressive environment, the flower blooms, symbolizing the characters' ability to find beauty, potential for growth, and strength in difficult circumstances. Just like the hibiscus flower, Kambili and Jaja undergo a transformation despite their oppressive family environment.

In both novels, God and spirituality play significant roles in the characters' lives. They provide solace, and a sense of purpose. In *The Colour Purple*, God is depicted as a compassionate and loving presence. Celie, the protagonist, finds solace in her letters to God as a way to cope with the abuse and hardships she faces. Through her correspondence, Celie develops a personal relationship with God, which helps her navigate her

struggles and find inner strength. The novel also explores the power of female spirituality through the character of Shug Avery, who challenges traditional religious beliefs and encourages a more personal and inclusive understanding of God. In *Purple Hibiscus*, the portrayal of God and spirituality is influenced by Nigerian culture and Catholicism. The protagonist, Kambili, comes from a deeply religious family, and her father is a devout Catholic. However, as the story unfolds, Kambili begins to question the strict and oppressive nature of her father's religious beliefs. She discovers a different kind of spirituality through her aunt, Ifeoma, who embraces a more open-minded and inclusive approach to faith. Through Ifeoma's influence, Kambili learns that spirituality is not confined to rigid rules but can be found in acts of love, compassion, and personal freedom. Both novels explore the complexities of faith, highlighting the ways in which spirituality can be a source of healing, liberation, and personal growth. They challenge traditional religious institutions and encourage a more personal and inclusive understanding of God.

In both *The Colour Purple* and *Purple Hibiscus*, self-discovery is a central theme. In *The Colour Purple*, Celie embarks on a journey of self-discovery and empowerment. Through her letters to God and her growing relationship with Shug Avery, Celie begins to question societal expectations and finds her own voice. She learns to love herself and embrace her identity as a black woman, breaking free from the oppressive forces that have controlled her life. In *Purple Hibiscus*, Kambili also undergoes a process of self-discovery. Raised in a strict and abusive household, Kambili's worldview is initially limited. However, as she spends time with her aunt Ifeoma and her cousins, she begins to question her father's authority and the rigid beliefs that have governed her life. Kambili discovers her own voice and learns to express her thoughts and desires, ultimately finding the freedom to be herself. Both novels highlight the importance of self-discovery in overcoming adversity and finding personal liberation. They show that by questioning societal norms and exploring their own identities, the characters are able to reclaim their agency and live authentically.

The novels explore the dynamics of gender roles and the experiences of men and women. In *The Colour Purple*, the novel delves into the oppressive gender roles and power imbalances faced by women, particularly black women, in the early 20th century. Celie and other female characters endure physical, emotional, and sexual abuse at the hands of men. However, the novel also portrays the strength and resilience of women as they navigate these challenges. Through their relationships with each other and their own personal growth, the female characters challenge societal expectations and find empowerment. In *Purple Hibiscus*, the novel explores the patriarchal society of Nigeria and its impact on women. Kambili's father, Eugene, is a domineering figure who enforces strict gender roles and suppresses the voices and agency of women in his family. However, the novel also presents alternative perspectives through characters like Kambili's aunt, Ifeoma, and her cousin, Amaka, who challenge traditional gender norms and advocate for gender equality. Both novels shed light on the complexities of gender roles and the ways in which they can be oppressive and limiting. They also highlight the resilience and strength of women as they navigate and challenge these societal expectations.

The theme of separation plays a significant role in the narratives. In *The Colour Purple*, separation is explored through various relationships. Celie is separated from her sister Nettie when they are young, and this separation causes immense pain and longing throughout the novel. Additionally, Celie's separation from her children and her own sense of self isolates her emotionally. However, as the story progresses, these separations are gradually overcome through the power of love, forgiveness, and connection. In *Purple Hibiscus*, separation is depicted through the strained relationship between Kambili and her father, Eugene. Eugene's strict and abusive nature creates a divide between him and his family, leading to emotional separation. The novel also explores the separation between different social classes in Nigeria and the impact it has on relationships and understanding. Both the novels highlight the emotional and physical separations that character's experience and the ways in which these separations can be overcome or reconciled. They

emphasize the importance of connection, understanding, and reconciliation in overcoming the pain and isolation that separation can bring.

The novels explore the themes of violence and suffering. *The Colour Purple* depicts the harsh realities of physical, emotional, and sexual violence experienced by the characters, particularly women. Celie, for example, endures abuse from her stepfather and later her husband, which leads to immense suffering. The novel also addresses the systemic violence and racism faced by black people during the time period. However, amidst the suffering, the novel also portrays the resilience and strength of the characters as they find ways to heal and overcome their pain. Similarly, *Purple Hibiscus* delves into the theme of violence and suffering within a family context. Kambili and her brother, Jaja, suffer under the oppressive and abusive rule of their father, Eugene. The novel explores the consequences of this violence on their mental and emotional well-being. It also touches on the broader societal violence and political unrest in Nigeria, which further contributes to the suffering experienced by the characters. Both novels shed light on the impact of violence and suffering on individuals and communities. They also emphasize the importance of resilience, healing, and finding one's voice in the face of adversity.

Race and racism are important themes explored in both *The Colour Purple* and *Purple Hibiscus*. In *The Colour Purple*, the novel addresses the racial discrimination and prejudice faced by black individuals in the early 20th century. The characters navigate the challenges of racism and strive for self-empowerment and equality. The novel highlights the resilience and strength of the black community in the face of systemic oppression. Similarly, in *Purple Hibiscus*, the characters confront the effects of racial and ethnic tensions in Nigeria. The novel explores the discrimination faced by the Igbo people, as well as the consequences of these divisions within society. It delves into the complexities of identity and the impact of race on personal relationships. Both novels shed light on the destructive nature of racism and the importance of challenging and overcoming it. They emphasize the need

for empathy, understanding, and solidarity in creating a more inclusive and just society.

In both *Purple Hibiscus* and *The Colour Purple*, the authors intentionally incorporate language errors and grammatical mistakes to reflect the unique voices and perspectives of the characters. These errors and mistakes serve as a form of literary technique, showcasing the characters' backgrounds, education levels, and cultural influences. By portraying language in a raw and authentic manner, the authors capture the nuances of speech and add depth to the characters' narratives. It is important to note that these language errors and grammatical mistakes are intentional and should be understood within the context of the story and the characters' experiences. In *The Colour Purple*, the author, *Alice Walker,* uses language errors and grammatical mistakes to reflect the vernacular speech of the characters. For example, *Alice Walker* through Celie, the main character, often uses nonstandard grammar and spelling in her letters, such as saying "I ain't" instead of "I am not" or "I be" instead of "I am", "got" is "git", "ask" is "ast", "about" is "bout." (The Colour Purple. 2019.) These language choices give Celie's voice an authentic and relatable quality. Similarly, in *Purple Hibiscus*, the author, *Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*, incorporates language errors and grammatical mistakes to represent the characters' Nigerian dialects and backgrounds. For instance, Kambili's father, Eugene, speaks in a formal and precise manner, while her aunt Ifeoma's speech is more casual and colloquial. She is outspoken and open-minded. *Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie* writes a scene when Eugene visits Kambili's school, she points out the change of talking style of her father and says – "Papa changed his accent when he spoke, sounding British, just as he did when he spoke to Father Benedict. He was gracious, in the eager-to-please way that he always assumed with the religious, especially with the white religious." (Purple Hibiscus. 2003, pp. 46.) These variations in language usage help to distinguish the characters and reflect their unique perspectives. By using these language errors and grammatical mistakes, both novels capture the richness and diversity of language, showcasing the characters' identities and cultural backgrounds.

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Exploring the Intersection of Historical Memory and Cultural Post-Memory in *Ponniyin Selvan 1 & 2*

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Introduction

> "Memory is a way of holding on to the things you love, the things you are, the things you never want to lose."
>
> Kevin Arnold (L.D., 2018)

Catering to the dynamic human being, a complex process called memory takes place at both the micro and macro levels. At the micro level, it has to do with neural activity, and at the macro level, it has to do with cultural activity. Cultural activity through society's arts, rituals, and folklore maintains the memory of culture across generations. The protector of cultural memory is often historical memory. Historical memory is often shaped by oral traditions, monuments, and literature. Ranging from Sangam-era heroism and colonial resistance to Dravidian movements, historical narratives are retold and reconstructed in myriad ways. These narratives of myths and history are sustained in turn by cultural memory. This paper looks at the engagement of culture with historical memory because each is maintained and sustained by one another. *Ponniyin Selvan - 1* and *Ponniyin Selvan – 2, b*oth these films are a carrier of cultural memory and historical memory, and this paper intends to draw attention to the same.

Objectives and Methodology

The objective of this paper is to study how historical memory and cultural memory intersect in a film like *Ponniyin Selvan*. The interpretive framework of this paper stems from memory studies, which considers

fiction as "part of a social, cultural, and historical intertextual web, a distributed memory" (Simi Raj & Parui, 2025). This way, the *Ponniyin Selvan* series acts as one of those memory boxes that, when opened, has an abundance of culture and history in it. Gathering the distributed memory of this historical fiction abundant with cultural memory and showing the influence it has on the Tamil audience, because of the medium in which it is relayed, is what this paper does. To do this, 'narrative analysis,' 'New Historicism,' and 'ideological analysis' that explore the cultural messages of the story are taken. Further, 'cultivation theory' is also considered when looking at the influence films have on the Tamil audience.

Discussion

It's been a century and thirty years since the first moving picture was presented to a live audience by the Lumiere brothers (Science Media Museum, 2020). The influence of films started then and is inescapable now. Films are even capable of creating a hyperreality where the line between reality and fiction blurs. This amount of influence on a human being's perception and brain is quite intriguing. We shall see in this essay how far this influence has taken Tamil culture and history.

Ponniyin Selvan as a historical and cultural narrative

"To recreate the plot of *Ponniyin Selvan*, he (Kalki) had visited Sri Lanka twice and assimilated the nature, the temples, Buddhist thoughts, sculptures, and culture of those people. He accompanied S. Gopalan on the tour to visit many places that were once under Chozha's region." So, a lot of research has gone into this historical narrative. Mani Ratnam's plot, although trimmed here and there, bases every detail without diluting the history and culture of what Kalki intended the story to have. Mani Ratnam's film, although twice removed from what realistically happened, is only once removed from Kalki's art. So, the history as shown in the film is taken as a reference point because this paper is narrowed down to the influence *Ponniyin Selvan*, the two-part film, has on the Tamil audience. These reference points are taken hold of and fact-checked.

Set in the Chola dynasty of the 10th century, *Ponniyin Selvan* is a two-part Tamil historical film directed by Mani Ratnam. The film is based on Kalki's literary magnum opus, *Ponniyin Selvan*. The film brings to life the grandeur of the Chola dynasty through its history, culture, and an imagination that is consistent with the two. This is why Ken Follett says, "Historical fiction helps us imagine what history books leave out—the emotions, struggles, and dreams of ordinary people." (OPENAI, 2025). This job of capturing emotions, struggles, and dreams is done well both by Kalki and Mani Ratnam in different mediums, which is why the life of the narrative stays true to its essence.

The film opens with a description of the historic Chola lineage. A mention of the real 'Battle of Chevur' (Craig, 2017) happens throughout the film, where Aditya Karikalan, son of Sundara Chola, beheads Veera Pandiyan. This is not mere fiction. Inscriptions from centuries ago prove the same. 'An inscription about Aditya II uses the epithet "Vira Pandyan Thalai Konda Adithha Karikalan," which means Aditya Karikalan, who took the head of Vira Pandyan.' (Craig, 2017).

Sensing a conspiracy and a subsequent civil war, Aditya Karikalan sends Vallavaraiyan Vandiyathevan, a brave, witty warrior-friend, on a mission to deliver messages to his father, Sundara Chola, and his sister, Kundavai. The characters so far mentioned are all historic figures. Vandiyathevan (who is also a historic character) is masterfully exploited by both Kalki and Mani Ratnam in order to complete the narrative, which would otherwise lack coherence. The character of Vandiyathevan is half history and half fiction, which, as told before, helps the narrative present itself as a coherent and full-fledged epic. His being one among the famous chieftains of the Chola dynasty is recorded (Gokul, 2008), and this is what adds historic value to the character of Vandiyathevan in the movie.

Major characters like Nandini, Poonguzhali, Oomai Rani, and a clever, charismatic Vandiyathevan are all fictionalized to suit the plot. Their doings in actual history are little known in the case of Vandiyathevan and purely imaginary in the case of Poonguzhali, Oomai Rani, and Nandini. These fictionalized characters are not about falsifying the history

of Cholas; rather, they are all characters used to heighten its reality.

The naval capabilities of Cholas, as depicted in the novel and the films, are also historically proven,

"H. B. Sarkar [31], after discussing the so-called 'Leiden grant" of Rajaraja Chola (980-1014), delves into the inscriptional evidence of the Cholas, which asserts the conquest of Kadaram even by Virarajendra Cola (1069-1070), implying that the movement of Cholas or representatives of Cholas had been there for nearly 100 years from Rajaraja to Rajendra reign. Quoting Tibbets [32], Sarkar points out that Cholas knew SEA more than the Arabs. (Ramakrisna Rao, 2025)

This is shown in all its glory in the film, especially when Arulmozhi Varman is taken under arrest on a ship from Sri Lanka. Later, a mysterious figure saves Arulmozhi Varman from sinking in the narrative too, which accentuates the scene all the more.

Historical texts are often co-texts of historical fiction; this is what New Historicism says. Therefore, Kalki's reference to books like "K.A. Nilakanta Sastri's The Cholas, in Two Volumes, T.V. Sadasiva Pandarathar's *Pirkala Chozhar Charittiram* (History of Later Chozhas)," and "*Chozhar Varalaaru* written by R. Rasamanikanar" (Sofiya, 2024) is fact-checked. Kalki was able to capture wars, characterize historical figures, and mold them to fit into his magnum opus because of the aforementioned historical texts that he used. This benefited Mani Ratnam in crafting the written fiction into a film, which had a wider impact on the audience. It led the Tamil community to reminisce about a past that had relevance and relatability. Because the book has been in the public domain for years now, it has generated a plethora of imaginary sequences in the minds of the readers. One of the ways to explore the world, the past, the present, and the future is by reading. Therefore, when millions of imaginary sequences of the same story are generated, it leads to expectations that are grander than what is possible within the scope of the Indian film industry. This might lead to disappointment in the art that is created. Despite that, when the moving pictures imagine history on behalf of the viewers, who are at least new

to the narrative or Cholas' history itself, a fresh influence about their own identity is created.

This identity does not just end with history alone; the rich culture captured in the film weaves a beautiful texture into the film, which in turn fosters the identity of Tamils in another way. Religion and spirituality, art, literature, architecture, agriculture, and festivals are all part of an overarching entity called culture. Through the film's nuanced way of throwing insights into the same, lies the success of this influential film. The interactions between Azhwarkadiyan, Vandiyathevan, and the common people in the film show us how different religions and spirituality coexisted. From Akkaravadisal (that is still being served at Srirangam and other Vishnu temples) to the little details about Buddhism having its influence on Arulmozhi Varman's administrative ethics, the film has got the nuances right. Therefore, the peaceful diversity that the film showcases is delightful to watch. Pilgrimages and river worship (like the Ponni River) are integral to spiritual life, which is also shown in the film.

Art in the form of music and dance keeps the audience in touch with that of the Cholas' glorious and rich past. Festivals like Krishna Jayanthi are seen patronized by the royal Princess Kundavai in the song "Raatchasa Maamaney" (Ratchasa Maamaney, 2022). Such patrons help a culture thrive. The song '*Ponni Nadhi'* (Ponni Nadhi, 2024) gives us a spectacle of the green, fertile, and breathtaking landscapes. Tamil Nadu's unique festivals surrounding agriculture, like Aadi Perukku (Ponni Nadhi, 2024, 0:34), that is shown in the song, brings authenticity to the portrayal of culture. The river flows majestically; the agricultural land stands in all its glory, hinting at the golden age of the Cholas when people were happy and thriving:

> "I must see the River Ponni,
> Before the sun goes down,
> I must admire the lovely beauties,
> Silent as the breeze,
> Crossing barren lands,

Crossing dusty lands,
Crossing parched lands,
…
O land, as I lie upon your chest,
Desires stir in me,
Will time turn in my favor...?" (Ratnam, 2022, 0:11:14)

The "Devaralan Aatam" (Devaraalan Aatam, 2022) from the film that strikes Vandiyathevan with awe is yet another element of culture that is delightfully done because of the way its dark, intense, and haunting. This brings back a form of performance that was long dead. It was more like resurrecting a culture that went extinct.

"Aazhi Mazhai Kanna" (Aazhi Mazhai Kanna—Lyrical, 2022), which is orchestrated serenely by A.R. Rahman, evokes a sense of devotion and tranquility. This song is worded with Thiruppaavai Pasuram 4 that was originally written by Andal, the female Tamil poet. The song is an outstanding example of the deep-rooted temple culture of the Chola period. Usually, the beauty of women is kept as or occurs as the theme of a poem; here, a man's beauty is versified, comparing Lord Krishna to the life-giving monsoon rain. *Ponniyin Selvan - 2* begins with this soulful song drawn from the Chola's past. The translation of this song from the subtitles of the film goes like this:

"O Lord of Bountiful Rain,
Do not hold back,
Dive into the ocean,
Take your fill and soar to the sky.
Let your body turn dark like the king of the universe.
Held in Padmanabha's embrace,
May you dazzle like lightning,
May Your thunder echo like his sacred conch,
Fly like a hail of arrows from his sacred bow,
Moisten the world with abundant rainfall,
Let us celebrate" (Ratnam, 2023, 0:02:36).

The Chola-era architecture that is replicated by Thota Tharani in his production designs has taken Chola temples as examples. Thota Tharani says, "One major direction is the temples. Those are the best references we can get" (Behind the Sets of PS-1 Ft. Thota Tharrani, 2022, 0.56). The intricacies were also perfected in the sets such that the film immerses the viewers in its architectural splendor. Hereby, music, dance and architecture from the Chola's past are all recalled.

Ponniyin Selvan as a memory-narrative

The Chola empire is remembered as one of the greatest dynasties of India. The remembrance occurs even on a contemporary day like this because of films like *Ponniyin Selvan 1 & 2*. This movie acts as an important memory vessel for the contemporary audience. History that was once in the form of documents found its way to fiction, and it is never the same again; that is, it is easily remembered. The cultural aspects of ancient Tamils, on the other hand, are reconstructed in the minds of the viewers by way of moving pictures.

The archival history and cultural practices of the Tamils could have easily been forgotten, either because people have no time to look at the past or because they lack relevance. So, when given in a capsule called entertainment, it is not just cold, hard facts; they breathe with robust emotions, dreams, betrayal, revenge, and ambition. These emotions, dreams, betrayal, revenge, ambition, etc., are fictional framings in this context, but these are the very entities that penetrate the fissures of historiography and help history and culture to live. The art forms, religious practices, architectural knowledge, wars, and maritime excellence of Cholas still live in their reconstructed form because of this film. It is reconstructed because every recall of the past is an incomplete recall; there is no perfect recall. "The gaps in (several acts of) recall are filled with imagination" (Parui, 2020). This is how memory behaves. For instance,

"...episodic memory is continuous with a capacity I call 'actuality-oriented imagination.' Because of the deep epistemic affinities between episodic

memory and actuality-oriented imagination, it makes sense to think of them as cognitive processes of the same kind" (Munro, 2020).

So, even in a normal process of memory, imagination plays an important part. This is congruent with that of a fictitious narrative that reflects reality. Therefore, the imaginative part of *Ponniyin Selvan* cannot be brought down for 'actuality-oriented imagination.' All it does is heighten reality for it to live. So, historical memory and cultural post-memory of the Cholas stay put together. The reason for this is repetition. Repetition of memory keeps it from getting forgotten. "The repeated retrieval of information from memory has been shown to produce better long-term retention than a single retrieval attempt" (Roediger et al., 2009). So even for someone ignorant of the glorious past of the Cholas from history classes, for instance, the repeated exposure to the film itself can create historical memory and cultural post-memory.

This film, because of its massive scale, has a strong impact score; this lets the generations that come later inherit the past through it. The audience coming back to it again and again is due to the popular format of moving pictures in which it is presented; therefore, the repetition factor of post-memory remains valid. This inheritance lets the generations to come, or in fact, the contemporary generation like us, reimagine a significant past filled with rich history and culture. Post-memory takes its compulsive form that is worthy of discussion because of this. The post-memory created here is too precious. This is why fiction like this holds a significant place in the passage of time.

The influence of Ponniyin Selvan, the movie

"Popular movies grab and hold our attention. One reason for this is that storytelling is culturally important to us, but another is that general narrative formulae have been honed over millennia and that a derived but specific filmic form has developed and has been perfected over the last century. The result is a highly effective format that allows rapid processing of complex narratives." (Cutting, 2016)

This makes films and cinema-going ubiquitous. To conduct 'Cultivation Analysis,' Gerber suggests four steps to keep in mind: a. message system analysis b. assessing exposure time c. investigating people's views about the world d. establishing relationships (Mosharafa, 2015). Message system analysis is to analyze the standing-out content of the film. With *Ponniyin Selvan,* history and culture stand out. The songs "Raatchasa Maamaney," "Ponni Nadhi," and "Devaralan Aatam" have all crossed 52, 37, and 24 million views on YouTube. "Ponniyin Selvan - 1 is the second highest-grossing film in Tamil Nadu; Ponniyin Selvan - 2 finds itself in the tenth position (Jatinder Singh, 2023). These amount to the increased exposure time of the audience. When it comes to investigating people's worldviews about the films they like, their attention retention, their knowledge of history, their cultural awareness, and their aesthetic sense, they are seen in the review videos taken outside cinema halls straight after the film ends. For example, a commoner says, "It is not a mere movie; it is history" (Ponniyin Selvan Public Review, 2021, 01:07). Yet another says, "It is not artificial like Baahubali but realistic" (Ponniyin Selvan Public Review, 2021, 01:22). This establishes a relationship between the perspectives viewers have and the resultant post-memory that is created for this generation.

Conclusion

Films not only create post-memory but also keep it alive. For it to be alive, the medium in which it is expressed should be influential. Years of perfecting the filmic form have made the medium incredibly influential. One can whip out a mobile device and repeat the scenes or music of *Ponniyin Selvan 1* & *2*. Repeated exposure helps in recall; this repeated exposure is also long-term because the film is going to be forever there on its several streaming platforms. Repeated, long-term exposure gradually shapes people's perception. This is what 'Cultivation Theory' expounds. All the theories that this paper demands are used. Yet, this paper is limited to the movie that it has chosen to analyze. This paper can be furthered in the analysis of other films that have the potential to create post-memory.

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Ousmane Sembene: A Progressive Writer

Ajay Kumar and Dipa Chakrabarti

Introduction

Ousmane Sembene, described as "the father of African cinema" (Gadjigo 98) holds a pivotal place in both African literature and film and has had a significant cultural contribution in the world of arts and letters. Born in colonial Senegal, both Sembene's life journey and his large body of work correspond with the tumultuous socio-political climate of his time. It was through his works - in literature and cinema - that he was able to voice his progressive thoughts against the establishment and aspirations towards social equality.

The deep impact of his early life — of the struggles, of the atrocities, of the straddling of tradition and modernity and the crimes — would inform his perspective and his dedication to challenging the urgent issues of his time. Ugor also notes the same as:

> "African literature often navigates the tensions between tradition and modernity, offering rich, multifaceted narratives." (2020)

Having grown up in a colonial context in Senegal, where colonial rule was applied to him, he came in direct contact with the injustices and inequalities of the colonial rule. This was the background of the growing impetus that drove him towards the creation of narratives that belonged, on the one hand, to the world of real African experiences and which, on the other hand, tried to take a critical look at the systems of colonial oppression and its aftermath (Diawara 12; Barlet 45).

This research discusses the life, and the chronological development of the literature and the ideological influence while Ousmane Sembene was a progressive. Drawing upon close reading and analysis of his novels and films will help us to unveil the dramatic impact of his works

on African literature and cinema. Sembene, whose novels, *God's Bits of Wood* (1960), and *Xala* (1973) are about the struggles of West African societies against colonialism and after, shows characters who are trying to make sense of their condition and the condition of West Africa with all efforts to deconstruct colonial discursive practice (Diawara 12). His subsequent films, most notably *Black Girl* (1966) and *Moolaadé* (2004) are no exception to this rule, as they explore varying themes about gender inequality, cultural tradition, and social modernization in the worlds of contemporary Africa (Gadjigo, 98; Bekolo 25).

In addition, we also investigate the reception of Sembene (even more) revealing how his work has influenced the conversation on global social justice and the representation of culture within Africa and around the world. Bisschoff and Murphy in 2014 also point out here:

> "African cinema has been marginalized and often overlooked in global film discourse, yet it holds a wealth of cultural, historical, and artistic value that demands recognition and appreciation." (55)

Sembene's unique storytelling showed a system that not only entertained, but also educated and empowered people, by raising awareness of the themes of identity, liberation, and collective memory (Diawara 12; Apter 45).

At its core, an exploration into Ousmane Sembene illustrates the transformative abilities of progressive writers and artists to change history and advocate for societal change. While selecting our way through his literary and filmography, we are traveling into the heart of a great artist who challenged current rules and aspired for a better world through stories and cinema. (Andrade 20-22)

Early Life and Influences

It thus is very clear how Ousmane Sembene´s rather moderate beginnings of his life paired with his passion and need for information and knowledge formed an important basis for being a progressive author (Diawara 95). Sembene hailed from Ziguinchor, Senegal, where he was

born on January 1, 1923, to humble beginnings that would be forever shaped by the cultural bounty of his homeland (Diawara 100). Exposed to the stark injustices of subjugation and marginalization as a child while living in a post-colonial society, his early years in Hong Kong shaped his values, which became the foundation of the art he would create in the future. In Harrow (2008) it states, "Sembene's early encounters with the stark realities of colonialism left an enduring impression on his consciousness" (42). Despite his opportunities to attend school being limited and his ensuing lack of formal education, Sembene was predominately autodidactic, with an unrivaled passion for literature and storytelling (Diawara 101).

The myriad other factors that informed Sembene's point of view came from equally dissimilar sources—both his direct experiences and the historical environment of colonized Africa. The lasting legacy of colonialism haunted Senegal, and the first-hand exposure that Sembene had to the starkness of this epoch scarred his soul for life. Sembene was profoundly influenced by griots, traditional West African storytellers, as noted by Diawara (1992): "Sembene's encounters with local griots, traditional storytellers, profoundly influenced his understanding of the importance of narrative in preserving cultural identity" (102).

Looking back into the formative years of Sembene, it is clear that the events of his formative years and the lingering influences he received paved the way for a writer who would one-day author narratives more powerful than mere literary achievements, phenomenon that would serve as vital mediums to address the socio-political transitions of his time.

Literary Works

The literary legacy of Ousmane Sembene takes the form of a host of narratives buoyant with momentous themes as well as an enduring stridency to a progressive ethos. His canon of novels and short stories, including seminal texts like *God's Bits of Wood*, *Xala*, and *The Black Docker* attest to his skill as a storyteller and commitment to speaking truthfully to social injustices in society. Pfaff (1997) writes, "*God's Bits of Wood* vividly depicts the struggle of Senegalese railway workers

during a labor strike, serving as a poignant commentary on labour rights and the burdens of colonial oppression" (68). Likewise, *Xala* expertly satirizes post-colonial corruption concerning "the fate of the African bourgeoisie who suffer at the hands of impotency of a wealthy businessman that underscores the piece as an essential item in Sembene's literary catalogue" (Vieira 89).

Sembene writes complex characters and deals with the minutiae of decolonization, gender equality, and class conflict. Here, in *The Black Docker*, he narrates the experiences of an African dockworker in France providing a perspective of the grim realities experienced by African migrants in Europe. Sembene, a passionate defender of women's rights, was known to create female characters who were strong and subversive of gender norms. These thematic explorations reinforce his willingness to speak to issues not only of his era but of great significance to carries-over listeners. Therefore, Shama (2002) also correctly writes:

> "Sembene's portrayal of female characters often subverts traditional gender roles, presenting women as active agents of change within their societies." (53)

Moreover, Sembene wrote beyond the page, continually incorporating his position as a leading African filmmaker. This particular blending of literary and filmic sensibilities can be seen in his works like *La Noire de…* (1966) and *Mandazi* (1968), where his gift for storytelling diverges beyond the realm of prose to reach the masses with a tale on the silver screen. In other words, Sembene's literary and film work serve as riveting evidence of his legacy as a modern writer and engaged storyteller, devoted to the possibilities of advancing the social and political causes of his era.

Social and Political Context

The social and political circumstances in Senegal during Sembene's formative years and the height of his career provide the political and social context to understand the profound influences of Sembene´s progressive writings. Sembene grew up under the shadow of Senegal's colonial legacy, a French colony, and in his autobiography, "the traces of

this colonial history of had become indelible in his youth and his being (Harrow 44). In the same vein as many African nations, Senegal suffered the sort of cultural trauma imposed by European colonization and the resulting imposition of systemic disparities and exploitation. Ukadike (1994) also emphasizes the same, "The evolution of African cinema is deeply intertwined with the continent's history of colonization and the subsequent struggle for independence" (24). So was the case in Senegal.

In doing so, he tapped specifically from his own experiences which were a reflection of the living conditions faced by his comrades. Raised in a community still under the heavy hand of colonial rule, he knew firsthand the harsh realities associated with oppression and exploitation. Senegalese generally led a very repressed life in which politics and the economy were directly controlled by the French authorities. Masses of poor Senegalese were denied basic rights and an education, leading to discontent among the masses, and demands for independence.

These experiences were crucible for an eventual emergence on the world stage as a social and political leader, Sembene came to prominence. Traveling across the complexities of colonial Senegal, inspired in him a fierce impatience for transformation. Harrow (2008) notes that Sembene lived much of his formative life under colonial reign in Senegal, largely informing his experiences of the oppression of his people, their suffering, and their struggle for independence and dignity. It was these experiences with the colonial injustices and disparities that made Sembene develop his identity as a writer if he saw every last chance he had to use his art to fight back against it. It was in this crucible of colonial oppression that the seeds were sown of his progressive ideas and his irrepressible will to question the existing order of things.

The following paragraphs of this paper have examined how Sembene made use of his literary and film works as powerful tools in addressing these vital social and political concerns. They amplified the voices of the marginalized and did so passionately for change in Africa pre- and post-colonial. Nwankwo (2018) also highlights the same when he writes, "Postcolonial African filmmakers navigate a landscape marked by the

legacies of colonialism and the challenges of contemporary globalism." (12)

Progressive Themes in the Writing of Sembene

The literary and cinematic oeuvre of Ousmane Sembene symbolizes a living testament to his unwavering resolution in fighting for progressive values and social justice. Sembene weaves throughout his narrative pertinent themes that - challenging old social standards - also serve as indictments demanding justice and equality. That commitment to decolonization is paramount throughout his narrative, a thematic underpinning that becomes truly consistent throughout his works.

In *God's Bits of Wood*, Sembene powerfully depicts the unbroken will of the striking Senegalese railway workers up in arms against their abusive French colonial masters. In telling this story of the fight for workers' rights it also becomes a touching reflection on the wider march to African independence from colonialism. Bakayoko personifies the idea of resistance - he rouses his coworkers to fight against the exploitation and the injustice:

> "We are going to hit here, We've had enough! We want to enjoy the rights of men, workers, and citizens of the country!" (Sembene 112).

Growing up in colonial Senegal provided the bedrock of inspiration that would inform Sembene's politics of social justice and resistance to oppression. Harrow in 2008 states, "Sembene's early life was spent under colonial rule in Senegal, an experience which left an indelible mark on his [perception] of the oppression of his people" (45). Based on his on-the-ground experiences he concluded that he would leverage his abilities as a storyteller to uplift the stories of the oppressed and to chisel away at the dominant narratives of power.

A further common theme throughout Sembene's storytelling is the ongoing quest for gender equality. His female characters were resilient and proactive, breaking stereotypes of docile women and questioning patriarchal norms. The film *Xala* depicts the failure of the wealthy

businessman El Hadji Abdoukader Beye because since his wedding night, he has impotence (and therefore, of course, also on a symbolic level: powerlessness) and is a metaphor for the impotence and the moral bankruptcy of the post-decolonial African elite. Using the character of El Hadji's second wife, Oumi N'Doye, Sembene illustrates how women confront the violence generated by masculinity and discuss female experiences. As a very important point of that, Vieira (2008) summarizes:

> Sembene's larger theme of welled strength in a changing world is also evident in his female characters, most notably in the figure of Oumi N'Doye who displays a power that undercuts the complacency of the planned gender order in the patriarchal structure of society (89).

In addition, Sembene's subject matters also concern issues of class struggle. Thus, in *The Black Docker*, he reveals the lives of African migrants in France, and their struggles with the interlocking oppressions of race, class, and discrimination. Diouana, the main character of the film, endures exploitation and alienation as a housemaid, laying bare the gritty sense of post-colonial migration and the enduring shadow of colonial-capitalist exploitation (Pfaff 35).

Sembene's works also delve into the complexities of post-colonial identity and the clash between tradition and modernity in Africa. His film *Moolaade* portrays the struggle of women in a traditional African village against the practice of female genital mutilation, challenging entrenched cultural norms. (Gadjigo 75)

The recurring themes in Sembene's writing as we skim through his works draw a very apparent line between Being tales and Beings' tales. They transpire as some of the most powerful tools for social critique and change. Telling the stories of the characters he brings to life, Sembene does not merely pose a challenge to the reading and viewing public of his time; he also leaves questions hanging in the air, regarding how these principles translate into modern reality.

Impact and Reception

The literary and cinematic oeuvre of Ousmane Sembene is an indelible mark on African and global artistic landscapes that transcend the boundaries of their original audiences. His films have been both acclaimed and denounced for their progressive themes and unflinching indictments of his society; in the process, they have stirred discourse and action throughout the world.

In Africa, Sembene is hailed for being the voice of the voiceless and a mirror to forgotten societal injustice His daring interrogation of colonialism, female subjugation, and class divisions ignited vital conversations throughout the continent. *God's Bits of Wood* is one of Sembene's works that spoke to the lasting oppression of colonialism and the resilience of the railway workers of Senegal who were questioning justice and dignity. For instance, his reflection on gender relations, most notably embodied in *Xala,* challenged patriarchal assumptions and brought attention to the active participation of women in African societies (Vieira 45)

Harrow (2008) argues that "Sembene's works have become the critical lens through which Independent Africa examines its roots and its prospects for the future" (112), emphasising the centricity of his works to the shaping of the African cultural and political discourse today.

Sembene has also made an enormous impression on the global stage. His work — like *La Noire de…* — broke boundaries by delivering sophisticated African perspectives to a global audience. "The Cannes Film Festival confirmed this achievement, establishing Sembene as the international face of African cinema, both due to his pioneering narrative style and his serious intellectual content" (Diawara 98).

There has also been criticism of Sembene's work; some have challenged his didactic style — where women's roles are concerned in each of these films, his female characters are not given as deep or complex treatment as his male ones. Despite these critiques, Sembene's influence remains enduringly strong and continues to enrich contemporary

discourses on representation and questions of storytelling ethics in African and global diversity.

In all, Ousmane Sembene's literary and cinematic successes have been massive and lasting and have been received by and made an impact on a worldwide audience. His storytelling has become universally appealing, feeding into the broader tapestry of global cultural conversation and experience, inspiring discussion and reflection on issues of justice, equality, and humanity. The lasting impact of Sembene speaks to the catalyst effect art can have in creating empathy, understanding, and ultimately changing society.

Conclusion

Through our examination of the progressive writer and filmmaker, Ousmane Sembene, we have scratched the surface of the complex narrative of his life, the significant cultural forces that moulded his perspective, his substantive literary legacy, and his transformative impression on the world of African literature and cinema. Sembene was born in Senegal, raised with a story-telling grandmother, and shot to international stardom fully embodying the idea that a story can transform society. In an oeuvre that includes landmark novels like *God's Bits of Wood* and groundbreaking films like *Black Girl,* he remained committed to laying bare the most pressing social and political concerns of his country.

Sembene tells a powerful story of a Senegalese female entrepreneur struggling against the social norms, economic independence, and emancipation of herself in *Faat Kiné*. The first among many more to come in African cinema, this feminist lens remains relevant in current gender narratives, speaking to the radical and socially engaged spirit of Sembene the filmmaker ahead of his time. Vieira (2008) suggests that in his portrayal of *Faat Kiné*, Sembene "is foregrounding the agency of women in Senegalese society to disrupt customary roles and norms" (120). Likewise, Ceddo dramatizes the dehumanizing power of European imperialism, project-born to dramatize struggles that Africans would

face in a world where societies were crumbling and being reordered at an unprecedented rate.

Meanwhile, *Moolaadé* dares reckon with the horrors of female genital mutilation, holding traditions that violate the rights of girls and women to elaborate scrutiny and doing so by applauding the strength and resourcefulness of those who fight back. When analysing *Moolaadé*, Diawara (1992) argues that Sembene is depicted with a larger framework concerning the African-diasporic relations, which exposes three narratives: *Woman This, Woman That, and You* (p.85). This sophisticated tactic reflects his intent to foster cultural interchange and transformation even as he spurns cultural binaries, another side of his progressive coin.

Petty (2001) points out that Sembene's films are not just a medium of entertainment, but a powerful tool for education, information, and consciousness-raising. The films dare their audiences to face difficult realities and raise their voice for social justice and change. A pioneer of African cinema and literature, the legacy of Ousmane Sembene reveals a man who is stubborn in his ways, and relentless in his commitment to speaking to universal human experiences that transcend both the geography and the time in which it is set.

His unapologetic narratives challenge colonialism, gender disparity, and class struggle materialising palpably across the globe but also influencing future generations of artists, filmmakers, and activists. In the stories of resilience or resistance, he tells, embodied by complex characters and evocative themes, Sembene challenges us to confront the shortcomings of our era.

Amid Sembene's lasting contributions, it is worth remembering that his character as a conversational topic is of relevance now. The cultural shift of his storytelling stands as a universal model to navigate the challenges of a world still grappling with the legacies of colonialism, the fight for gender parity, and the backlash against economic equity. His productions reflect art's enduring capacity to stimulate critical thinking, inspire empathy, and spur constructive societal change.

Ousmane Sembene's life and works highlighted the power of storytelling in contributing to social change. The legacy of his time on this Earth, calls upon us, storytellers, scholars, and citizens of the world to meet the challenges of our time with courage, creativity, and unwavering justness. In the spirit of Sembene the revolutionary, let us use our art to explore, question, and advocate as we work to create a world that is fairer, more just, or more humane.

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The Waste Land Revisited: An Alchemical Journey through Jungian Perspective

Sajal Suneja and Gunja Patni

The rise of modern science has reduced myths to outdated folklore. Contemporary scientists, such as Richard Dawkins in *The God Delusion* (2006) and Sam Harris in *The Moral Landscape* (2010), maintain a sharp distinction between 'Myth' and 'Reality', denying any room for pragmatic overlap between the two. The interplay between "Myth" and "Reality" has fascinated humanity for centuries. These terms, fundamentally rooted in the collective psyche, raise profound questions about truth, perception, and the essence of human existence. Myth "is essentially a cultural construct, a common understanding of the world that binds individuals and communities together. This understanding may be religious or secular" (Pattanaik 7). In contrast, "Reality" encompasses the empirical, sensed world governed by reason and science. The interplay between these concepts underscores the malleable nature of human cognition and its influence on our comprehension of existence.

Contemporary scientists believe that "no indigenous myths from anywhere in the world, no matter how poetic or hauntingly beautiful, belong in science classes. Science classes are emphatically not the right place to teach scientific falsehoods alongside true science. Creationism is still bollocks even if it is indigenous bollocks" (Dawkins 2).

In defense of mythology, John Vaervaeke and Leo Ferraro (2013) in their article entitled "Relevance, Meaning and the Cognitive Science of Wisdom" emphasize the necessity of myth through the central feature of relevance realization, which is the ability to usefully ignore information in a contextually sensitive manner so as to enable our actions. This is

achieved by being able to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information and to ignore most of the irrelevant information.

The concept of relevance realization takes its cue from Carl Jung's theory of archetypes. Archetypes are universal, primordial symbols and images that reside in the collective unconscious of all human beings. "The archetype is essentially an unconscious content is altered by becoming conscious and being perceived, and it takes its colour from the individual consciousness in which it happens to appear" (Jung 5). According to Carl Jung, these archetypes manifest in myths, dreams, and art, represent fundamental human motifs. These universal prototypes shape human experiences and behaviours, providing a framework for understanding the psyche's structure and dynamics.

This paper attempts to analyse T.S. Eliot's (1888-1965) magnum opus, *The Wasteland* (1922) hereafter, *TWL*, wherein he draws on a wide range of myths from different cultures, including Greek, Roman, Hindu, Christian, and others representing cultural archetypes, universal human experiences, emotions, and struggles.

Thomas Stearns Eliot, one of the most influential poets of the 20th century, stands as a pivotal figure in the realm of modernist literature. He lived through the aftermath of World War I, a time marked by disillusionment and a deep sense of loss. His works resonate with the existential concerns and anxieties of his era. Lesley Wheeler in her journal article titled "Undead Eliot: How 'The Waste Land' Sounds Now", acknowledges that T.S. Eliot has had a profound and lasting impact on Anglo-American poetry to the extent that he has influenced poets like Craig Raine, Wendy Cope, Derek Walcott, and Seamus Heaney.

While employing Jungian perspectives, the aim will be to explore the transformative potential of ancient myths in the modern world; to gain new insights into the fundamental questions of truth, perception, and human existence; contribute to the ongoing conversation between myth and reality and offer fresh perspectives on our ever-evolving understanding of the world.

This research paper aims to explore how T.S. Eliot's use of mythology in *TWL* serves as a necessity for a pragmatic human perception, based on John Vaervaeke's hypothesis that mythology plays a critical role in our perception of reality. By examining Eliot's integration of mythology through the perspective of Jungian archetypes, the paper will offer insights into the poem's profound meanings and its connection to the human psyche. Eliot's use of myth not only revives the human situation and proposes treatments for moral bankruptcy but also provides order and coherence in the midst of chaos. The aim will be to explore the transformative potential of ancient myths in the modern world; to gain new insights into the fundamental questions of truth, perception, and human existence; contribute to the ongoing conversation between myth and reality and offer fresh perspectives on our ever-evolving understanding of the world. Thus, this analysis will be helpful in better understanding how Eliot's mythological references contribute to the poem's thematic richness and psychological depth, enhancing our overall understanding of its enduring impact.

Jungian Landscape

Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961), a Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, is well-known for his significant contributions to the understanding of the human mind. Jung established a comprehensive body of work that probed into the depths of the unconscious mind during his illustrious career, spanning the early to mid-twentieth century, resulting in his ground-breaking theory of archetypes. Ferva Aslam, et. al (2023) in their paper titled "Self-Actualization, Individuation and Self-Realization to Search the True Self: A Comparative Study of Siddhartha and a Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man" asserts that these inborn patterns influence our motivations and behaviours. Jung believed that understanding these archetypes, not through conscious reasoning but through intuition and introspection, is essential for self-discovery, a process he called individuation. In this process, all other archetypal influences ultimately serve to support the development of a strong sense of self.

Carl Jung's concept of the Collective Unconscious refers to a part of the unconscious mind shared by all humans, which contains universal archetypes and myths. According to him collective unconscious "has contents and modes of behaviour that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals. It is, in other words, identical in all men and thus constitutes a common psychic substrate of a supra-personal nature which is present in every one of us" (Jung, *The Archetypes and The Collective Unconscious* 4).

> Just as the single biological form may be treated as the manifestation of implicate order, so symbols, particularly those that endure, are seen by Jungians as the visual manifestation of archetypes, processed through the unconscious mind of the individual, into the conscious mind, and then represented in visual form in the world. Hence symbols, according to Jung, are the manifestation of the collective unconscious, the implicate order of human existence. The greater the appeal and attraction of such symbols, and the longer that attraction endures, the more likely it is that they are connected to the deepest levels of the collective unconscious (Westley and Folke 4).

Jung stretches beyond the conventional boundaries of society by introducing the concept of 'Anima' and 'Animus' in his book *Collected Works of C.G Jung*. He says,

> The complementary character of the anima also affects the sexual character, as I have proved to myself beyond a doubt. A very feminine woman has a masculine soul, and a very masculine man has a feminine soul. This contrast is due to the fact that a man is not in all things wholly masculine, but also has certain feminine traits. The more masculine his outer attitude is, the more his feminine traits are obliterated: instead, they appear in his unconscious (646).

Furthermore, the process of Individuation, which involves a quest for personal meaning and a journey through various states of consciousness, is defined by Carl Jung as "becoming an 'in-dividual,' and, in so far as 'individuality' embraces our innermost, last, and incomparable unique-

ness, it also implies becoming one's own self. We could therefore translate individuation as 'coming to selfhood' or 'self-realization'" (Jung, *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology* 238).

Critical Contentions

TWL is filled with mythological references. Louis Menand notes that the poem is a tapestry of references, quotes, echoes, appropriations, pastiches, imitations, and acts of ventriloquism. It incorporates seven different languages, including Sanskrit, and concludes with several pages of notes that parody academic citations.

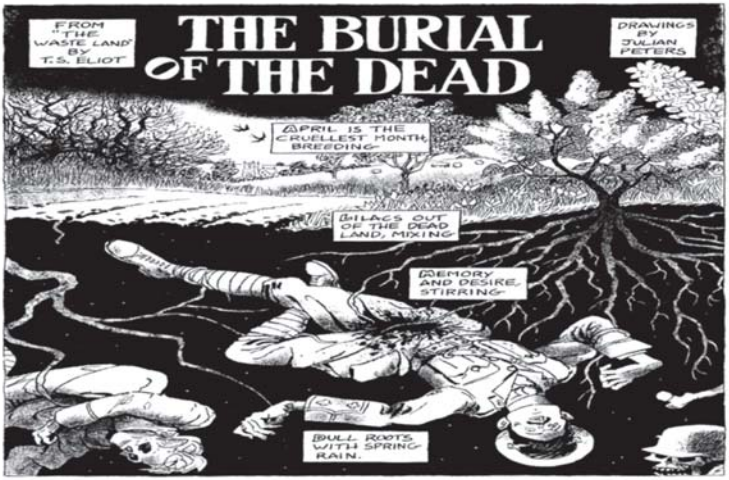
The epigraph of the poem references the poet Petronius and his book Satyricon, specifically the figure of the 'Sibyl of Cumae.' Sibyl was suspended in a container and when asked what she desired, she replied "I want to die." The inclusion of Sibyl in the poem is important for a feminist interpretation of the work, as her desire to die can be seen as a commentary on the pointlessness of life in a world that is falling apart. Her words can be interpreted as a rejection of the world and a desire to escape its decay and corruption.

Eliot's division of *TWL* into five parts echoes the structure of ancient myths and epics. Transformation is a recurring motif in mythic narratives. Many legends and epics follow the hero's journey, typically unfolding through distinct stages or trials. In *TWL*, each section represents a stage of transformation and trials akin to the hero's journey, as the poem explores themes of disillusionment, death, desire, and rebirth.

Sanchez (1999) in his thesis "The Public Dream: A Jungian Interpretation of 'The Waste Land'" argues that the repeated use of the number four as a motif, coupled with the poem's division into five sections, implies that the speaker is approaching self-realization but has not yet fully attained it. This unresolved state contributes to the surreal, dreamlike atmosphere that pervades the poem. Consequently, through the act of composing this poetic exploration of 'the stages of his age and youth,' the speaker progresses one step nearer to the metaphorical grail – that elusive part of himself that remains unfound because it exists within his psyche. Sanchez opines that,

> The Jungian archetypes of the shadow, the anima, and the Self are especially prominent in *The Waste Land*. Furthermore, the sequence and arrangement of these archetypes and their related imagery associatively correlate with the Jungian process of individuation. Moreover, each successive segment of the poem reflects a stage in the pattern of psychic growth delineated by Jung in the individuation process (7).

One of the central archetypes in 'The Burial of the Dead' is 'Death' and 'Rebirth'. This is explicit from the title, which refers to the Anglican burial service. In this context, death is not only bodily but also spiritual and cultural. The eradication of old values and ways of life can be seen as a necessary prelude to the rebirth of new ones. This is an all-encompassing literary archetype that represents transformation and the cyclical nature of life. The natural cycle of death and rebirth traditionally associated with the month of April appears tragic to Eliot's speaker when he says, "April is the cruellest month, breeding / Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing / Memory and desire, stirring / Dull roots with spring rain" (lines 1-4). The use of images and allusions in literary works was in trend in the twentieth century which is beautifully captured by a comic artist in the below picture:



(Peter 2024)

In tandem with other mythical allusions, the myth of the Fisher King symbolizes the morally barren society. This infertility is partly due to a crime: the assault of maidens within the King's court. The land only becomes fertile again when a pure-hearted stranger arrives, such as Perceval, Gawain, or Galahad in various versions of the Arthurian legends. In this section, the archetype of the journey or quest is also introduced. The character in question describes a journey through a desert landscape, which is a prevalent literary symbol for spiritual trials and tribulations. The whole process can be perceived as a quest for spiritual enlightenment or redemption in the face of the modern world's spiritual desolation. Eliot captures this journey with lines such as:

> What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
> Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
> You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
> A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
> And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
> And the dry stone no sound of water (lines 19-24).

Eliot's use of the Tristan and Isolde myth to explore themes of love, desire, and the human condition is beautifully elucidated in the second episode. Tristan and Isolde are eternal lovers united by a love that defies societal norms and moral boundaries. Their love is both destructive and transformative, as it ultimately leads to their demise while also serving as a symbol of the power of love to overcome obstacles and challenge the status quo. The archetypal significance of Tristan and Isolde can also be seen in their connection to the oppositions of the forest and the sea.

> . . . an unnamed character visits a fortune-teller, and the cards of the Tarot pack that she uses serve to introduce the important characters of the poem-the Phoenician Sailor, who is drowned in Part IV of the poem; the man with three staves, who corresponds to the Fisher King; and the one-eyed merchant, who appears in Part III. There is also "Belladonna, the Lady of the Rocks, The lady of situations," who seems not to appear again in the poem except as a presiding deity (unless she is represented by the typist

> in Part III), but who is destined to appear, transformed, in much of Eliot's later work. The fourth episode shows us the crowd moving over London Bridge, a crowd of the living dead. Among them, the poet spies an acquaintance, a man whose name is Stetson, but whose relation to the author is timeless (Foster 571).

In Section II titled 'A Game of Chess', the archetype of the lover is portrayed through the interactions between the two women and their respective male partners. However, these interactions are devoid of love and filled with disappointment, mirroring the overarching themes of the poem. In the first section of the poem, a woman waits for her lover in a lavish setting. The lover, who appears to be linked to the narrator of the poem, is preoccupied with drowning and rats among the bones of deceased men, indicating a sense of despair and disillusionment in their relationship. The woman is likened to Philomela, a character from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (8 AD) who is violated by her brother-in-law, highlighting the relationship's themes of lifelessness and violation.

> The change of Philomel, by the barbarous king
> So rudely forced; yet there the nightingale
> Filled all the desert with inviolable voice
> And still she cried, and still the world pursues,
> 'Jug Jug' to dirty ears (lines 99-103).

Warwood in his thesis titled *Wasted Women: Modern Oppression in T. S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land'* examines how the parallel narratives of a high-society woman and Philomel expose the modern world's tragedy of apathy through the lens of female disempowerment. Both characters experience a loss of agency due to male dominance. Tereus silences Philomel by brutalizing her, while the woman's partner confines her to a superficial world. Philomel becomes a symbol of rebellion against such oppression, demanding her identity back. In contrast, the woman in 'A Game of Chess' seemingly succumbs to the patriarchal system, perhaps due to its pervasiveness and the perceived futility of resistance.

The title of the next section alludes to a famous sermon delivered by Buddha known as the Fire Sermon. Interestingly, this significant sermon

given by Buddha parallels the Christian Sermon on the Mount. Therefore, within *TWL*, we see the pervasive cross-cultural connections of myth come to light. This sermon is recorded in the Buddhist scriptures and is regarded as one of Buddha's most important teachings. In this sermon, Buddha warns about the perils of sensual cravings and emphasizes the importance of disengaging from them to attain spiritual awakening. "Burning burning burning burning / O Lord Thou pluckest me out / Burning" (lines 308-310). This could be seen as an archetype of spiritual enlightenment or liberation. Here, much like in Buddha's sermon, everything is engulfed in flames. The speaker implores God to rescue him from this fiery torment, akin to how Joshua was saved in the book of Zechariah, another Biblical reference. This allusion aptly critiques the moral decay of European society, possibly driven by burning hatred and misguided passion.

The typist scene can be defined as an archetype of the 'Everyman' or 'Everywoman,' a character who reflects the common man or woman and their experiences. The typist's mundane routine and lack of fulfillment or purpose in her work reflect the dehumanizing effects of industrialization. Her repetitive actions, described as 'mechanical' and compared to a 'machine,' showcase the ways in which human individuality and creativity are suppressed by the demands of industry "The typist home at teatime, clears her breakfast, lights / Her stove, and lays out food in tins" (lines 222-223).

The narrative also introduces the archetype of the 'Trickster' embodied by the character of the young man, who exploits the typist's apathy and passivity. The Trickster is known for upsetting the established order and defying norms and conventions, frequently through dishonesty or mischievous behaviour.

> The young man carbuncular arrives,
> A small house agent's clerk, with one bold stare,
> One of the low on whom assurance sits
> As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire (lines 231-234).

Furthermore, the typewriter scene embodies the 'Underworld' archetype. The Underworld is a symbol of death, decay, and spiritual emptiness in mythology and literature, and it is frequently used as a metaphor for despair or hopelessness. Eliot's depiction of the typist's dreary life, as well as the illicit details of her encounter with the young man, evokes a sense of moral and spiritual decay. This is reminiscent of the desolation associated with the Underworld. The lines read "She smooths her hair with automatic hand, / And puts a record on the gramophone" (lines 255-256).

TWL incorporates a panoply of myths and allusions; another in the series is the figure of 'Tiresias' introduced in this section who serves as a prophetic figure and a unifying thread in the fragmented narrative of the poem. Eliot described Tiresias as 'the most important personage in the poem, uniting all the rest' in his notes to *TWL*. Tiresias's unique experience of having lived as both a man and a woman gives him a comprehensive perspective, allowing him to observe and comment on the sordid sexual encounter in 'The Fire Sermon' with a detached, almost clinical gaze. His blindness also serves as a symbol of spiritual and moral blindness, a recurring theme in the poem. To illustrate the pervasive sense of disconnection and meaninglessness in modern life, Eliot writes,

> I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives,
> Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see
> At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives
> Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea,
> The typist home at teatime, clears her breakfast, lights
> Her stove, and lays out food in tins (lines 218-223).

Genevieve W. Foster in this regard contends that,

> . . . What Tiresias sees, in fact, "the bored, meaningless encounter between the typist and the clerk, is the substance of the poem." For the modern intellectual, feeling is what Jung designates the "inferior function," the undervalued, often repressed function the conscious development of which is an essential to psychological wholeness. As a social document the poem suggests the same unbalance in our

> civilization-fact and logic have a high valuation while feeling-judgments are too often dismissed as irrelevant (575).

As a character who has lived as both a man and a woman, Tiresias embodies the duality and integration of these archetypal forces within the human psyche. According to Jung, the Anima represents the feminine aspects within a man's unconscious, while the Animus represents the masculine aspects within a woman's unconscious. Tiresias's androgynous nature and his ability to perceive experiences from both gender perspectives align with Jung's idea of achieving psychological wholeness through the reconciliation of these inner opposites.

> Interestingly, when Eliot chooses to blur the lines of male/female, the meeting of the two sexes in Tiresias is similar to the dual genders of the hermaphrodite, for which Judith Butler in her book Gender Trouble uses the term intersex. As an intersex individual, Eliot's Tiresias appears neither fully male nor female, but is a male with a physical reminder of his time as a woman (Sergi 15).

Mebuke in his paper titled "T.S. Eliot's Way Out of 'The Waste Land'" notes that Eliot uses the image of Phlebas, a drowned Phoenician sailor, to depict the loss of identity and purpose in death. Phlebas, having been dead for two weeks, has forgotten everything that defined his life – the sounds of the sea, the thrill of profit and loss. He is adrift in oblivion, his bones tossed by the current, symbolizing the passage of time and the decay of the physical body. The cyclical movement through the whirlpool hints at a potential for memory, but ultimately, Phlebas serves as a cautionary tale, reminding the reader of mortality and the importance of cherishing life's purpose. The lines read as:

> A current under sea
> Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell
> He passed the stages of his age and youth
> Entering the whirlpool (lines 315-318).

An influential key archetype of the Fisher King is introduced in the section 'What the Thunder Said.' His character is a reference to the wounded king in Arthurian legend, who is unable to perform his

duties and whose kingdom suffers as a result. The only activity he can undertake is fishing, hence his name.

Halley in her paper titled "T. S. Eliot and the Holy Grail" notes that the Fisher King – a figure of spiritual barrenness – symbolizes the modern world's emptiness. The poem subtly references the Fisher King through allusions, such as the 'tedious' fisherman in 'The Fire Sermon', unable to catch fish in a 'torrid' river, reflecting the widespread spiritual drought. Even the seemingly unrelated image of the 'man with three staves' in the first section can be interpreted as the Fisher King, highlighting the pervasiveness of this motif. Eliot writes "Fishing, with the arid plain behind me / Shall I at least set my lands in order" (lines 424-425).

One of the most prominent archetypes in Eliot's poem is the Fisher King – a figure from Arthurian legend – who is wounded and whose kingdom becomes a barren wasteland. This archetype represents the connection between the vitality of the king and the fertility of the land. Eliot uses this motif to comment on the spiritual and cultural desolation of the modern world, suggesting a need for renewal and healing.

Another significant archetype is 'The thunder', which is drawn from the *Upanishads*. In the *Upanishads*, the divine proclamation of thunder is conveyed by Prajapati, the deity of creation, to three distinct entities: deities, mortals, and evil spirits. Each of these groups sought wisdom from Prajapati, who responded to each with the identical monosyllabic utterance, 'DA.' The deities interpreted this as 'Damyata' (restrain yourself), humans perceived it as 'Datta' (be generous), and the evil spirits comprehended it as 'Dayadhvam' (be merciful). Prajapati affirmed that all three groups had genuinely grasped his communication.

> DA
> Datta: what have we given?
> My friend, blood shaking my heart
> The awful daring of a moment's surrender
> Which an age of prudence can never retract
> By this, and this only, we have existed
> Which is not to be found in our obituaries

> Or in memories draped by the beneficent spider
> Or under seals broken by the lean solicitor
> In our empty rooms (lines 402-410).

The symbol of thunder is in harmony with yogic philosophy, symbolizing a spiritual transformation from suffering and ignorance towards a state of inner peace and enlightenment. This transformative journey is portrayed through the five sections of the poem, reaching its culmination in the concluding section 'What the Thunder Said', which offers an extensive contemplation on the path to attaining everyday tranquillity.

The concluding line "Shantih shantih shantih," (line 433), a term from Sanskrit meaning peace, encapsulates the poem's aspiration for spiritual serenity. This invocation of tranquility contrasts sharply with the preceding tumult and fragmentation depicted throughout the poem. It symbolizes a yearning for resolution and harmony amidst the prevailing chaos and cultural disintegration. Thus, through *TWL*, Eliot expresses his worries about society's fragmented and decaying moral fabric, calling for its renewal. By reintroducing myth into literature – as Homer did in *Ulysses* – he provides a path for societal revival, looking back to the roots of myth for solutions to contemporary issues. It is imperative to quote Joyce Leavell assertion that:

> The assumption of the mythical method is that our culture and language once had a pervasive meaningfulness which has been lost in our increasingly rational and discontinuous society, but that by recovering the lost myth from within our culture, poets can restore mythic unity to literature (Haas 31).

Besides several Greek mythical and Biblical allusions, the poem also reveals a specific indebtedness to Indian religious and philosophical thoughts, specifically certain *shlokas* (stanzas) of the *Bhagavad Gita*. The poem thus, depicts a broken society, with Eliot illustrating a Europe urgently seeking spiritual guidance to restore order after the devastation of war.

Eliot's writing style in the poem is characterized by his modernist approach, employing a fragmented structure that mirrors the chaos and

disillusionment of post-war Europe. The poem incorporates a wide array of literary allusions and references, blending mythology, religion, and various cultural texts to underscore its themes. Eliot utilizes shifting perspectives and voices, creating a collage of different experiences and viewpoints. His use of free verse, intricate symbolism, and rich imagery further adds to the complexity and depth of the work, challenging readers to piece together meaning from the disjointed narrative.

Conclusion

Mythological structures play a crucial role in shaping our understanding of reality. As humans, we are inherently drawn to narratives as a means of making sense of the world around us. These narratives, when shared and repeated across cultures, evolve into meta-myths that transcend geographical and temporal boundaries. The characters within these meta-myths embody archetypal figures, which serve as universal symbols that resonate with our collective unconscious. Eliot, in his poem, utilized these archetypes to explore the fragmented and disillusioned state of the modern world.

> Rooted in Logos, in language and order, myth is born of humanity and through its common denominator offers unity for humanity as for individual societies. In each character, in each classic novel or myth, some certain human qualities emerge. Somehow, they all speak of that human condition from within (*Ibid* 32).

In conclusion, mythological structures and archetypes are essential components of the human experience, providing a framework through which we can interpret and navigate the complexities of reality. By engaging with these timeless narratives, we are able to connect with our shared human heritage and gain a deeper understanding of the world and our place within it.

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Owning the Past and Claiming the Present: Recalling and Reacting to Reconstruct Memories in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

M. Shanthi and Deepa Prajith

Black writing challenges the omnipresent white weltanschauung; in foregrounding the marginalised voices of African American women writers, space is the crux: the focus on oppressed characters and their particular experience of violence and trauma. This space is reclaimed by sifting memory to repossess the physical, emotional, social, psychological, and discursive spaces via media representation of African American narratives. Questions of identity, place, and belonging are then inquiries into who we are, where from we have come, and where we belong. These questions persist in Literature where humanity's upheavals are recorded. Toni Morrison's poetic parlay intersects the tidy silos of African-American storytelling—where the violence is muted lest it disturb the reader (mostly white), prompting a sense of improbable disbelief that such events ever came to pass and for fear that such a response would jettison the cause of the Abolitionists. Morrison's *Beloved* wrests the attention of the reader to the resistance portrayed and the price it exacted.

Morrison's *Beloved* is a spiralling nautilus that emanated from a real-life incident at its core. In Morrison's 'Foreword' to *Beloved,* she speaks of being assailed by a debilitating sense of anxiety and panic before realisation dawns upon her that having quit her job and being *free* had different connotations for women. She recalls,

> A newspaper clipping in *The Black Book* summarised the story of Margaret Garner, a young mother who, having escaped slavery, was arrested for killing one of her children (and trying to kill the others) rather than let them be returned to the owner's plantation.

> She became a cause célèbre in the fight against the Fugitive Slave laws, which mandated the return of escapees to their owners. She was certainly single-minded and, judging by her comments, she had the intellect, the ferocity, and the willingness to risk everything for what was to her the necessity of freedom (xi).

This then is a clear indication that Morrison would plumb the depths of the historic event by fictionalising the discourse, "So I would invent her thoughts, plumb them for a subtext that was historically true in essence, but not strictly factual in order to relate her history to contemporary issues about freedom, responsibility, and women's 'place'" (Morrison, *Beloved* xi). Morrison draws on memory for the centrality of African-American writing was taken over by slave narratives—sagas of intense dehumanization, emblematic of the individual experience of victimisation and trauma. What Maurice Halbwachs calls the socially circulating signs is an appellation for memory. The power of this memory is elucidated in African-American writing. African American narratives represent the underbelly of colonial history—as slaves, the connections to their native communities were severed, racial identity was foisted upon them, their sense of history was attenuated, and they were reduced to utilitarian functionality. The role of memory in piecing together the jigsaw puzzle of collective history and the individual's place in it is what animates this paper.

Slave narratives drew on the displacement they faced, and the consequent isolation, which made them victims of oppression that eventually led to violence. Such sagas, though based on individual experience, are simultaneously representative of all victims of slavery and allude to generational trauma—wherein, the victim-survivors' unresolved trauma is carried by their descendants. Slave narratives were propelled by memory because they were structured as autobiographies, memoirs, or witness accounts. Morrison hastens to point out that this genre is the written legacy of African Americans and is different from oral literary traditions. Toni Morrison privileges personal narratives to remember, re-claim, and re-construct the traumatised self. *Beloved* succeeds in fulfilling Morrison's averred intent: "I wanted the

reader to be kidnapped, thrown ruthlessly into an alien environment as the first step into a shared experience with the book's population—just as the characters were snatched from one place to another, from any place to any other, without preparation or defence" (xii). Reading *Beloved* is a harrowing experience of the invisibility of human beings becoming chattels (Chang 24).

The introduction is by way of a background to the oeuvre of Toni Morrison, an acclaimed and awarded writer of the African-American experience. The introduction has already paved the way for history to be foregrounded, and the paper will use the frames of memory studies to eviscerate memory as a technique as delicately and powerfully employed by Morrison. The return to the past and its continued iterations in the present is a concerted effort on Morrison's part to transform the past (history) into a site for a socio-cultural critique. Morrison's essay titled "Sites of Memory" is another source to suppurate the act of narration as in *Beloved* where the telling of remembered events is simultaneously private and public. Memory is an episteme in activating re-covery—remembering the past, coming to terms with it, and thereby attempting to release the hauntings of the past. This paper analyses Morrison's use of memory to grapple with past injustices and present inequities. This paper has taken up Toni Morrison's *Beloved* to explore themes and techniques of representing the past through recalled memory. The express intent is a quest to excavate and record recalled memory as a reclamation of social trauma to assess the past and lay claim to space and history by challenging received notions of history which is but one side of the narrative.

Beloved is Sethe's journey from rupture, trauma, release, and repair. Sethe, a former slave at Sweet Home, Kentucky, attempts a daring escape along with her family to freedom, which is aborted when the Schoolteacher catches up with them. The imminent re-captivity sharpens Sethe's will and she opts to kill her children in a valiant attempt to spare her children the shackles of slavery. She ends up killing the youngest, a mere babe, an event that has the Schoolteacher judge her as insane and he abandons them. She wished to have 'Dearly Beloved' engraved on

her daughter's tombstone, but could only manage 'Beloved'. Kathleen Marks verifies and labels it 'apotropaic' which she elucidates as "The apotropaic, then, are those gestures aimed at warding off, or resisting a danger, a threat, or an imperative. More exactly, apotropaic gestures anticipate, mirror, and put into effect that which they seek to avoid: one does what one finds horrible so as to mitigate its horror" (2). Eighteen years later, 124 Bluestone Road, Cincinnati, Ohio is home to Sethe and Denver and it is also home to Beloved's ghost. The coming of Paul D, a fellow slave at Sweet Home, somewhat mitigates the angry haunting. Sethe and Paul D initiate a relationship, only to have it destroyed by the arrival of Beloved, whose knowledge of things past suggests a reincarnation of Sethe's dead daughter. Sethe does everything in her power to soothe the manipulative Beloved for she perceives it as an opportunity to ameliorate her guilt.

Beloved seduces Paul D. Paul is appalled to learn that Sethe had murdered her daughter and, afterward. Beloved is pregnant. Denver, who had befriended Beloved, is rattled enough to seek out her community for help. Sethe has lost her job and is completely in the thrall of Beloved. The community stages an exorcism, when Denver's employer arrives to take her. Mistaking him to be Schoolteacher, Sethe attempts to assault him with an ice pick. In the ensuing commotion, Beloved disappears. Paul D arrives and seeing the broken Sethe promises to care for her. Meanwhile, Denver relishes her new-found freedom and flourishes in the outside world.

Memory Studies

Maurice Halbwachs in "The Reconstruction of the Past" offers an interesting insight when he opines, "We preserve memories of each epoch in our lives, and these are continually reproduced; through them, as by a continual relationship, a sense of our identity is perpetuated" (47). Halbwachs proffers a disclaimer when he says that present priorities tend to compete for immediate attention; these memories surface when time and leisure permit their recollection. Unlike a penchant for nostalgia for a time past that Halbwachs speaks of in this

essay, Black writers assert the imposition of the traumatic past on the present. Memory is about a time and place that no longer exist in the present; despite this, African Americans narrativize memory that has borne witness to their degradation and endless suffering. The questions of identity, place, and belonging are anchored in the diaphanous strands of memory. Place as the locus of identity and belonging is the conventional approach for it foregrounds communitarian ties. "Of course, extraordinary events are also fitted within this spatial framework, because they occasion in the group a more intense awareness of its past and present, the bonds attaching it to physical locale gaining greater clarity in the very moment of their destruction" (*Ibid* 2). For African-American slaves, a place constantly shifted, and identity was erased along with the sense of belonging. Halbwachs views memory as a process of social activity and circulating signs of memory keep the past alive in the present; the investing of energy to make meaning, and thereby oscillate back and forth to achieve this.

Jan Assmann in "Communicative and Cultural Memory", arrives at a distinction: specific functions lead him to 'communicative' wherein personal accounts are shared to facilitate functioning within a group, and 'cultural' memory which invokes the spatiotemporal axis represented by material objects which spur memorialization. He clarifies, "We preserve Halbwachs' distinction by breaking up his concept of collective memory into "communicative" and "cultural memory," but we insist on including the cultural sphere, which he excluded, in the study of memory" (110). Assmann warns that memory is "…***not a memory but a metonym"*** (*Ibid* 111, emphasis added). As conceptualised by Assmann, cultural memory evokes memorialisation through objects that evoke collective meanings for the social group involved. He further elaborates on those assimilative strategies (in the case of migration) and claims "…forget(ting) the memories connected with the original identity" (*Ibid* 114). The inverse also holds strong as it proscribes a 'forgetting of the original identity' which is assessed in terms of a 'fear of loss.' The institutional structure of cultural memory is validated through participation.

Toni Morrison, in the essay "The Site of Memory," quotes the validation of memory issues from the autobiography (85). While Halbwachs and Assmann template their research on memory from a Eurocentric experiential plane, Morrison advocates a deeply personal remembrance that recollects and narrativizes personal experience of rupture, erasure, and degradation that denies identity, place, or belonging to the African-American slaves. There is no antecedent to such depredation based on racial privileging—the auto-narrative is the archive and the episteme. Reversing prejudice, seeking empathy, and raising consciousness to the embattled self of the slaves, slave narratives were a mode of memory that provoked the readers to spare thought on the issue of freedom from slavery. Education became a tool for empowering themselves, and writing, the modus operandi of writing the self into existence. Morrison notes with insight, "But most importantly – at least for me – there was no mention of their interior life" (*Ibid* 91). Morrison intends to make her fiction an exploration of the inherent silences in the slave sagas—an exposition of the personal harrowing experiences that restrict themselves to the iteration of incidents minus the emotional memory. Morrison has a compelling justification,

> Moving that veil aside requires, therefore, certain things. First of all, I must trust my own recollections. I must also depend on the recollections of others. Thus, memory weighs heavily in what I write, in how I begin and in what I find to be significant. Zora Neale Hurston said, "Like the dead-seeming cold rocks, I have memories within that came out of the material that went to make me." These "memories within" are the subsoil of my work. But memories and recollections won't give me total access to the unwritten interior life of these people. only the act of imagination can help me" (*Ibid* 91-92).

Through an empathic position, Morrison breathes life and character into the historical time and people that her fiction celebrates. Kimberly C. Davis assesses Morrison's Beloved as 'historical archaeology' and opines that Morrison's fiction, "(Is) an overt and passionate quest to fill a gap neglected by historians…" (78). The conviction of her writing

springs from her ability to read into the gaps, to listen to the silences, to pick on the excisions, and to precisely tell the tale in complete, wilful emotive disarray. The deliberate adherence to factual truth validates the debilitating and exhausting ways they were exposed to that erased their filial bonds and thereby, any access to making meaning of their self, place, and belonging. Piecing identity together is by conjuring an image and then imaginatively reconstructing the text. As Morrison opines, "What I want to do in this talk is to track an image from picture to meaning to text – a journey which appears in the novel I'm writing now, which is called *Beloved*" (*Ibid* 97).

Beloved is a candid engagement with the trauma of subjugation and victimisation experienced by slaves in the atrocities visited upon them. The novel doesn't elide into an easy categorisation of a slave narrative; *Beloved* is engineered as a follow-on of the slave narrative in the way it endeavours to perform the afterlife of a slave. While slave narratives avoided visiting the gruesome and macabre aspects of their life histories upon the readers, they did this in two ways: they either chose to conform to the existing norms for writing or enfolded these unpalatable recollections in self-censorship. Slave narratives had an agenda: to badger a reversal of the prevalent and pervasive opinion of the lack of intelligence among the African-Americans, to provoke the conscience of the reader, and thereby, enlist their empathy to the abolitionist cause. The extenuating circumstances of powerlessness excite further depredations; revealing this could result in evoking fierce hostility among the readers or they may dismiss the narrative as fantastic and not anchored to the terrain of realism.

Morrison advances the slave narrative from the moralising fervour of a morality play to force the reader to confront the silences as she provides Sethe the discursive space to re-visit her act of desperate courage, permit the trauma to sift through her guilt, assuages her guilt by making amends, being manipulated in the retributive vengeance of Beloved, and having been wrung out, she repossesses herself. This convoluted journey disembarks the past in the nemesis of consequences that sanctions the suffering to be unfolded without thought to the readers'

discomfort or disorientation. *Beloved* is afflicted by the ghosts of 'realism' and 'representation', of 'appropriation' and 'plagiarism'. The degree of victim trauma depicted ensures a constant sense of being pulled into the overwhelming vortex of an emotional whirlpool. This destabilises the readers, who are assailed by a keen sense of helplessness and disbelief and are thrown off kilter. The serrations incisively cut through the surfeit and closed world of the readers to draw them into the suppurative telling as they witness the brutalities in the recurrence of psychological dissociation. The resident ghost of Beloved has driven away Sethe's two sons, and when Paul D walks back into her life, he is assaulted by its malevolent presence. His continued presence dilutes the ghost's overpowering malevolence and life for Sethe, Paul D, and Denver move on an even note of stability.

124, Bluestone Road, Ohio, Cincinnati was haunted. Moving would perhaps present them a shot at living in a semblance of peace. Baby Suggs, Sethe's mother-in-law, was averse to moving. "What'd be the point?" (Morrison, *Beloved* 6) asked Baby Suggs. "Not a house in the country ain't packed to its rafters with some dead Negro's grief…" (*Ibid* 6). She knows each house has its share of ghosts who haunt the place and the people. Baby Suggs recounts, "I had eight. Every one of them gone away from me. Four taken, four chased, and all, I expect, worrying somebody's house into evil" (*Ibid* 6). Baby Suggs rubbed her eyebrows. "My firstborn. All I can remember of her is how she loved the burned bottom of bread. Can you beat that? Eight children and that's all I remember" (*Ibid* 6). Sethe's retort that that is all Baby Suggs permits herself to remember echoes the vanishing traces of how Buglar appeared. Perhaps with time, Howard too may evaporate from memory. For Sethe, the ghost is merely sad. The *tree* on Sethe's back is another sorrow and conjures the ghost of the past. Paul D chases it and it leaves.

Baby Suggs' funeral is the cite where the intransigent neighbours and Sethe with Denver arraigned on either side in tableau pose, depict the unbending stance where neither party is willing to reach forward to sew rends that held betrayal and deceit in captive imagination.

'Rememory' uncoils the serpentine sequence of incidents and meshes the events with the narrative to extrude the power of loss. Sethe had revived in the benign generosity of Paul D and her self-sufficiency has transformed into a familial set-up of memories and presence. Halle's absence is over, and the ghost of Sethe's daughter is accepted. However, this knowledge is confided by Stamp Paid to Paul D., and the unravelling of horror pushes him away. Denver is sad for her mother. The need for explanation and justification is long past. "BELOVED, she is my daughter. She mine. See. She comes back to me of her own free will and I don't have to explain a thing. I didn't have time to explain before because it had to be done quickly. Quick. She had to be safe and I put her where she would be. But my love was tough and she back now. I knew she would be" (*Ibid* 236). In the words of Esther Ohito, episodic and autobiographical memory performs "…(the) recounting or telling memory-stories, in both private and public contexts (29). Memory has a way of intruding; each invasion startles anew; none of the memories allay fear or comfort the soul. Much blame is laid at Sethe's feet and she is wounded in the choices she craved by carving her flesh. "And look how he ran when he found out about me and you in the shed. Too rough for him to listen to. Too thick, he said. My love was too thick" (Morrison, *Beloved* 239). The patriarchal value scale tipped against her; what slavery did to women was to render them invisible. J. A. Rogers offers this insight, "These are the many examples of Black feminist writings that, in their insistence on the political significance of communal and self-love, dismantle the subject-object dualism that acts as the philosophical basis of Western modernity, and as the alibi for its history of dehumanization of gendered and raced subjects" (202). Sethe's defiance and stubborn insistence on serving a helping hand in preventing the enslavement of her children is beyond comprehension; most people just avoided her.

The darkness of the past intrudes into the present when Beloved arrives. The possibility of escape and the despair of being caught strengthened Sethe's resolve. To taste freedom but not savour it; to be threatened by imminent capture and return to the old life was abhorrent to her. A

woman has deep resourcefulness and if she decides against a particular thing, nothing will swing her from that resolve, she will find a way to succeed in her resolve, ready to pay the price. Mired in honouring the dead, Sethe's relationship with the reincarnated Beloved leads her to a tipping point. Denver ventures out for help and keeps an eagle eye on her mother. "Denver thought she understood the connection between her mother and Beloved: Sethe was trying to make up for the handsaw; Beloved was making her pay for it" (Morrison, *Beloved* 295). The concern pushes her to seek the help of the community and the women stage a prayer meet to evict Beloved. Beloved disappears and Sethe is exhausted. Denver has matured and is finding life cheerful. Paul D returns and she admonishes him to treat her mother right. *Beloved* ends on a recuperative note as Sethe regains herself. Morrison's repeated chant of, "It was not a story to pass on" (*Ibid* 323-24) shows the stages of forgetting and letting go. How many stories have people lived but remain unknown and therefore untold?

Conclusion

The recent contentious judgement of the US Supreme Court terms—what was once labelled judicial activism to ameliorate race inequalities through educational scholarships for Black students and other minorities—as unconstitutional as it is perceived as going against the spirit of American democracy and its cornerstone of merit. Roald Dahl's estate has pulled out certain books that do not agree with the current sensibility concerning racial issues. Margaret Mitchell's Estate is keen on erasing the casual aspect of slave presence as was entrenched in that milieu. Both these instances are of immense concern. This put paid to the slave experience and the archive that preserved their invisible presence. 'White-washing' narratives by white authors/their estates to cushion the generations to come of the ugly and discomfiting truths sends a chilling warning about preserving privilege while doing away with the associated criminality. Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka elaborate on the notion of cultural memory in their paper 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity' to offer the idea that "…cultural memory is characterised by its distance from every day" (129). This is defined

by Morrison's *Beloved* where the distanced past is communicated through interactive re-memorisation to bridge the gap between the past and the present.

Beloved amplifies the social construction of memory; Morrison forwards the slave narrative by reviving the persona and performance of the past to narrativize history. If we consider Assmann's belief that memory is transformed into history, then Morrison centralises the historicity of memory. Toni Morrison concludes her essay "The Site of Memory" by recalling a memory and using it as a metaphor for her writing,

> …the act of imagination is bound up with memory. You know they straightened out the Mississippi River in places, to make room for the houses and liveable acreage. Occasionally the river floods these places. "Floods" is the word they use, but in fact, it is not flooding; it is remembering. Remembering where it used to be. All water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was. Writers are like that: remembering where we were, what valley we ran through, what the banks were like, the light that was there, and the route back to our original place. It is emotional memory—what the nerves and the skin remember as well as how it appeared. And a rush of imagination is our "flooding" (99).

African-American writing emphasises visual memory as a mode of remembering. African-American women writers' locus operandi is to lay siege on memory to promote a visual telling of emotive experience presenting readers with an epiphanic insight into their reality.

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Reimagining Sahu's *Sita*: A Postmodern Exploration through Bhaktin's Lens

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The human race is often perceived as a race of difference, a race of profound heterogeneity where no two humans would be entirely the same. We see diverseness in various forms - cultural, religious, biological etc. The reflection of the similar humane feature is found in literature. It shows the multiplicity of voices, perspectives and ideologies springing up from cultural diversity and individual differences. The seeds of humanity are sown in difference. The difference is what makes human beings humane. Since we have multivocality in the lives of human beings, coloured by variation in action, we observe that there is no linearity in narratives. Narratives have the power to shape and construct human understanding, but at the same time, narratives vary according to circumstances, social institutions, religious establishments, political organizations, etc.

Myths are symbolic narratives that shape the perceptual framework of a society. Myths establish gender roles and identities, they explain the human world through stories and tales, they play a crucial role in conveying morals and values, and they build social structures. Since the start of human civilization, myths have been the foundation of cultural identity, influencing the beliefs, values, and societal norms with their classic stories and deep symbolism. The mythical narratives and stories in India nurture the cultural fabric with deep hues. Because of the oral nature of myths, we see that the myths have multiple perspectives, narrators, and points of view. Ramayana and Mahabharata are two great epics in Indian Mythology. Although there has been an accepted version of both texts which naturally runs parallel with the mindset of the privileged set, we

see that there are multiple sub-texts and retellings which challenge the one grand narrative.

One such narrative or we might say a sub-text is *Sita* by Nandini Sahu. Sahu's *Sita* is "penned as a poetic memoir of the heroine of the epic, Sita, told in the first-person narrative" (Sahu v). Sahu's Sita is a decentred character, who is challenging and breaking the grand-narratives. She is also a multi-layered Postmodern character who gets a contextual relevance and worth, every time the cultural understanding changes. Another fact that makes Sita, a prominent Postmodern character is the presence of multiple retellings and various versions of Ramayana.

Sahu's Sita is skilled and adept at breaking and remaking the grand narratives. Sahu makes an effort to make Sita a classic character, she wants to eternalise her by emphasizing on "Forgetting and forgiving, the two eternal qualities of any human being" (Sahu v). She says that contemporary readers are forgetting who Sita is and what her message is to humanity. She is forgotten but every generation that forgets Sita finds a new applicability and inspiration in her intricately complex character.

Thus, the paper will deal with Nandini Sahu's *Sita* as a Postmodern work, reflecting the theories of Bhaktin. It would analyze how:

Sita is a Dialogic character, who has the potential to challenge monologic discourses by having a firm foundation within herself through inner dialogues

- *Sita* reflects Heteroglossia and Polyphony by incorporating many elements like multiple forms, narrative voices and intertextual voices
- Sita is Chrontopic, as it underlines the significance of time-place intersection in the moulding of Sita (text and character)
- Sita breaks the grand narratives, shows fragmentation and is intertextual leading to her Unfinalizability
- Sita, by reflecting Bakhtin's theory, transfigures into a Postmodern text and character

Every culture is an unfinalized and evolved structure, in which every unit plays a significant role in making meaning. Along with its arbitrary aspects, certain conventions provide a foundational framework for it. It has multiple entangled units, which interact to give a shape for interpretation and understanding. It includes language, religion, art, customs, laws, etc. and these elements shape and reshape the cultural mosaic.

Myth is one such doxical unit. Myth is a preserver of cultural values, and at the same time, it is a discourse. The metaphysical quality of myth makes it all the more valued in Indian culture, and therefore, it has an impact on the physical realm. In the acculturation of people, their exposure to myth defines their understanding. It also decides the cultural literacy of people and provides a context for contemporary rituals. Myths are the archetypes that form the collective unconscious and collective memory of a group. For Joseph Campbell, "Myths are stories of our search through the ages for truth, for meaning, for significance" and he says that we "all need to tell our story and to understand our story" (Campbell 17).

In the Indian context, myths are living units. The Gods and Goddesses are actively worshipped and their actions are imitated and imbibed. Myths are an intrinsic part of vocabulary and language, and as we can understand, they shape the experiences of people. In metaphors, addresses, accusations, appreciation, lessons etc., myths are conscientiously involved.

One example of a dialectical myth is the story of Sita. She is the mythical daughter of King Janaka and she is the dutiful wife of Rama, king of Ayodhya. Sita is seen ideally when we analyze her in context. But she doesn't lose her feminine essence, even when read as an independent unit placing her in different contexts. Sita is in the questions, and she is in the answers. She is referred to and revered. Nandini Sahu's *Sita* is "a poetic memoir of the heroine of the epic Sita, told in the first-person narrative (Sahu 11).

Sita is an apt example of the conceptual framework postulated by Bakhtin. M. M. Bakhtin is a Russian philosopher, critic and scholar. He was intensively engaged with the works of Fyodor Dostoevsky. Bakhtin believed that no text or utterance goes in isolation; rather everything that flows in as a thought, idea or text is always in a dialogue. Dialogue is essential for humanity's existence and there's dialogue happening all the time. If there was a possibility of human survival in isolation, there would have been no Adam and Eve and there would have been no dialogue. The Bible also emphasizes the importance of dialogue as it says "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (New International Version 2011).

Because Bakhtin had expertise in diverse fields ranging from philosophy to scholarship, he approached theory from a humane perspective and the application of his theoretical concepts on myths proves to be appropriate as myths are intrinsically dialogic. He is critical of the monologic tradition of western philosophy which tries to define and describe and eventually becomes reductionist in approach. He believes, "such approaches deny freedom, responsibility, and creativity - in short, they leave no place for everything that constitutes what he called the "living core" of personality" (Morson 208).

The inception of myths is based on orality and it adds a dialogic quality to it. Roland Barthes defines myth as "a type of speech" and it "is a system of communication, that it is a message" (Barthes 107). The symbolic or deeper significance that permeates myths is, because it works through "second order semiological system" and Barthes eventually names myth as a 'metalanguage' (Barthes 113-114).

Myths were usually performed in communistic settings, either in the form of poetry or play, where people participated by being vocal about their reactions and opinions. The interactions also involved a system of feedback and questioning. Moreover, myths were used as a tool for teaching principles of morality and ethical doctrines, we see that dialogicity in myths is natural, because teaching cannot be a monologic or a unidirectional process. "Orality takes you beyond those limiting

textual expressions into more powerful ways and means of communication - where teachers see their students remember and practice more…" (Madinger and Ponraj 6).

The idea of Dialogue, without two speakers or an assumed listener, is explained by Bakhtin in Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics. According to Bakhtin, who explains this concept with concern to Dostoevsky, says that no speech can be a monologue. Every speech since a human being comes into consciousness is dialogic. Bakhtin says, "All else is the means; dialogue is the end. A single voice ends nothing and resolves nothing. Two voices is the minimum for life, the minimum for existence" (Bakhtin 252). While postulating Dialogism, Bakhtin gave weight to speech. The speech is a cultural phenomenon and individuals participate in speech or language to be a part of a culture or society, which makes speech a composite of social linguistics and cultural studies. Therefore, Dialogism emphasizes the inherently social nature of language and meaning. Language "is brought into existence by the women and men who make their culture in society" (Shevtsova 750). Unlike Saussure's langue and parole, (where langue is a system of speech laws and parole is individual speech), Bakhtin's language "is a creative-communicative action…which is shared by speakers who, together, act in and upon society" (Shevtsova 751).

Sita affirms her natural character by constantly reconstructing her part beyond the stereotypical conventions. She meditates on her identity and agency when she says:

> I am entwined by many a women of substance:
> Anasuya, Sage Atri's wife; and then, my
> concords with the legendary Gargi, Maitreyi,
> Katyayani, Arundhati, Lopamudra, Ahalya (Sahu 5).

Sahu understands that her role model Sita, the one who has been sung by various poets across centuries, has not been rightly interpreted and constructed. She constantly mentions how Kalidasa, Valmiki, Bhavbhutti etc. had failed to interpret Sita. For Sahu, she is the embodiment of

forgiveness and strength, she has agency and she is certainly not subordinated to Rama. She is more contemporary than any modern woman, as 'Sitaness' is seen in many empowered women. *Sita* is dialogic as its intent lies in rejecting the traditional pitiful image of Sita, as Sahu says:

> Today, Kalidasa's Raghuvansha and
> Bhavabhuti's Uttara Ramayana on Sita's life aren't prolific
> for me. Through poetry, I celebrate womanhood;
> the living and the loving spirit of Sita in
> me asserts herself in my heroic verse, through my
> story of kinship, affection, loyalty, sacrifice and the social codes
> (Sahu 4).

Dialogism shows an effort on the part of the reader too, who does not blindly accept the interpretation of the text, but rather questions it, interprets and reinterprets it. The text in a dialogue with all the texts written before and after it, as Tzvetan Todorov says, "... we shall not stop, then, with this search for meaning, we shall pursue it through a discussion about truth; not only "what did he say?" but also "is he right"" (Todorov 162)?

Another example of Sita using her agency is her consistent questioning of the injustices she has to go through. Her repeated questioning makes the text dialogic, as she is expecting answers. Interrogating was crucial to understand the mechanism of her ecosystem and though women are taught to accept and be submissive, we see that Sita asks questions. She wisely questions the ritual of selecting a groom for a woman who is herself accomplished and adept, by the test of strength called '*Swayamvar'*. She feels strength cannot be a benchmark for companionship, when she says:

> …Shouldn't love
> be the agent to map the interplay of the future, text and context
> of a complete connubial? Does strength qualify one to win a
> woman's heart (Sahu 11)?

The dialogic nature of a character results in its multiplicity. "It is this independent, interdependent battle and play of different dialogue that gives every text a variety of meanings, interpretations, levels and layers of interested subtext" (Hoy 781). A character shows unfinalizabilty by being multilayered and incomprehensible. In the preface, Sahu says, "Sita (A Poem) presents my assertion and assessment of Sita that reconnoitres multiple traits of her life and personality" (Sahu 16) and Sita herself says, "I have seen many lives in one life." (Sahu 24)

Sita had multiple names, one another fact that shows she could not be confined to an age, space or a person. The poet shows the multiplicity of her character in the following lines:

> Call her what you may – Sita, Janaki,
> Vaidehi, Ramaa – she is Woman.
> She is every woman, the propagated, interpolated role model
> (Sahu 1).

Both characters portrayed by Nandini Sahu and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni provide different versions of the same character that brings out different facets of Sita. The stereotype of Sita has been broken by Nandini Sahu and she portrays her as a strong, independent woman on the path to discovering herself. Sahu's story revolves around Sita's transformation and triumph; Sita is not merely a passive victim to be rescued by her husband Rama, but a strong-willed character fighting for her liberation. However, in The Forest of Enchantments by Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Sita is portrayed as a very realistic character who goes through a great deal of emotional struggle and hardship. Divakaruni has endowed Sita with a profound psychological portrayal which depicts her turmoil and transformation as a woman, thus making her character more convincing and emotionally appealing. While Sahu creates an assertive and new generation of feminism Sita, Divakaruni presents an authentic and realistic Sita who resembles all the complexities of a woman and her struggles and decisions.

In Amish Tripathi's portrayal in Sita: Warrior of Mithila Sita is depicted as a leader and a warrior, the narrative describing her character stresses

her strength and intelligence. Tripathi's Sita is much more assertive than the character created by Tulsidas: she is also a brave warrior who will not hesitate to draw her sword to defend her people. As for Sahu's Sita, the female protagonist gets empowered through her voice and involvement in intellectual activities while in Tripathi's production, Sita gets empowered through her fighting skills and by leading the Vanaras, thereby coming up with a more energetic and active depiction of the character.

Bakhtin proposes the concept of Unfinalizability, where he considers a text and a character 'unfinalizable' when there is resistance to complete interpretation and closure. A text and a character are in the process of constant evolution and to have a specific interpretation given to it is to go against the natural growth and the possibility of infinite interpretation. Bhaktin explain the concept:

> Nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future and will always be in the future (Bakhtin 166).

Sita is so revered in the Indian mythological system because she is sung and interpreted in multiple languages and cultures. The cultural tangent of Mithila reveres Sita more than Rama and various folktales touch upon different aspects of her life. A. K. Ramanujan in his essay, Three Hundred Ramayanas: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation, speaks about so many Ramayanas present in different languages when he says:

> The number of Ramayanas and the range of their influence in South and Southeast Asia over the past twenty-five hundred years or more are astonishing. Just a list of languages in which the Rama story is found makes one gasp: Annamese, Balinese, Bengali, Cambodian, Chinese, Gujarati, Javanese, Kannada, Kashmiri, Khotanese, Laotian, Malaysian, Marathi, Oriya, Prakrit, Sanskrit, Santali, Sinhalese, Tamil. Telugu, Thai, Tibetan-to say nothing of Western languages (Ramanujan 133).

Sita is unfinalizable, as she finds relevance in contemporary issues. Sita is so diversely interpreted that she has become an essential part of any Indian culture which is itself unfinalized. Sita is readerly as well as writerly, in the sense that it gets uniquely and subjectively moulded with every read. An important feature of a character who is unfinalized is that it is difficult to get a hold of their rationale in the actions they perform. Sita says:

> Oh men and women, oh trees, rocks, rivers, clouds,
> the sky, the sun, the moon, the stars and the comets!
> I am ageless, timeless, beneficent and compassionate (Sahu 25).

Another notable concept of Bakhtin that is evident in 'Sita' is the chronotope. Bakhtin describes chronotope as, "the name chronotope (literally, "time space") to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature." (Bakhtin 84). Chronotope is a mathematical term and is fused with the Theory of Relativity by Einstein. Bakhtin designates chronotpe as a special quality of time where, "Time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible, likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history. This intersection of axis and fusion of indicators characterizes the artistic chronotope" (Bakhtin 84). The understanding of this special time and place infusion helps in deeper narrative analyses and it also helps us to be conscious of the framework and the intersection where character developed in a specific way. Sahu has intricately weaved the time and space, to provide contemporary relevance. There is an intertwining of mythical and present-day time when Sahu says:

> She is the erstwhile woman Prime Minister
> of India, and the woman President; the
> multi-tasking working mother and the
> homemaker; the gang-raped girl
> in the Delhi bus at night, and the
> battered baby girl in the AIIMS trauma center (Sahu 5-6).

Sita defines herself as a medium through which good conquers evil. Though she is said to be a woman whose feminine essence can be seen in every woman, her, "...heartrending history momentously links the Rama-Ravana / stories." (Sahu 97)

Sita is performative when there is an extremity of evil and there is a good that is supposed to overpower the prevalent evil through Sita. Sita is also the one, who empowers the proactive preservation of the ecosystem. Sahu claims that:

> Sita, who was humanizing herself in the
> art of loneliness, solitude, and love of
> the flora and fauna, of ecology pure (Sahu 30).

Sita spent most of her life in nature and when she was abandoned or kidnapped by humans, she sought safety in it. She was born out of nature, and she chose to leave her physical body through nature. Even in exile with Rama when she was abducted by Ravana or when she was abandoned by Rama again, she was being taken off by nature. Her children Lava-Kusha were taken born and brought up in nature's care before they proceeded to the palace of Rama. From her view, nature was the one that nurtured her, and therefore she says:

> Ecology was my home now, free from the
> wistful four walls of the stately mansions and palaces.
> The daughter of Mother Earth, I was ultimately in her lap
> (Sahu 93).

Sita is a character adopted from the Indian epic called Mahabharata, where we see multiple voices and narratives. Even though the form chosen by Sahu is a memoir, we see the similar feature of multiple voices through the interior monologues of Sita. Sita questions various characters and through the monologue, we decipher the reflection of their voices in her dialogues. Also, because the form is a memoir in the form of a monologue, we see Sita herself has various voices. Sometimes, she is a kind and forgiving woman and sometimes a woman who is seeking justice for herself and others who go through similar tests in

life. Sometimes she is a dutiful wife and a doting mother, but at other times she is a warrior and protector.

The concept of multiple voices or Heteroglossia was a concept devised by Bakhtin in The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin. Heteroglossia is multiplicity in "points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its objects, meanings and values." Heteroglossia and Polyphony are related concepts, but there is a slight difference: While heteroglossia denotes the presence of multiple linguistic forms, polyphony refers to the coexistence of various perspectives, voices, or interpretations within a literary work or discourse. The poem is written in the form of poetic memoir, but it also includes dialogues, references to history, cantos and interior monologues. The culture is poetically absorbed in the poem to make it textually heteroglossic.

A polyphonic text opens a lot of space for the character, reader and author for engagement. It appreciates "an open discussion of unresolvable questions" and infuses a richness in the text (Emerson 5). The polyphonic text also "call into question authoritative discourse" and it also allows characters to speak in their own voices (Cuddon and Habib 344). It focuses only on the verbal and the "eloquence and ambiguities" created by words (Emerson 7).

Any utterance that takes place is a product of the convergence of time and place. These utterances might align or vary from the mainstream voice, but in any case, they are not insignificant. Especially when we analyze multiplicity in the voices around Sita, we understand that in her story words have a lot of significance.

The word Rama's father, Dashratha gave to Kaikeyi, influenced Sita's course of life. The words 'washer man' spoke to Rama ruined Sita's momentarily gained, blissful life. The cruellest voice in the poem comes from Ravana, who says:

> Haughty woman! I give you twelve months
> time to accept and marry me. Else my cook
> will slaughter you and prepare my meal (Sahu 37).

We realize that there were multiple words which were used with multiple emotions and perspectives and therefore we see Sita could not have a life according to the word (promise) given to her by Rama, as her husband. Whenever there is a multiplicity in voices, there is a subversion of power. The subversion of power leads to another concept of Bakhtin, i.e. Carnival. Carnival is an amazing, emancipated concept, which leads to the subversion of hierarchies. In Carnival, "there is a weakening of its one-sided rhetorical seriousness, its rationality, its singular meaning, its dogmatism" (Bakhtin 107). Bakhtin explains it as, "the place for working out, in a concretely sensuous, half-real and half-play-acted form, a new mode of interrelationship between individuals, counterposed to the all-powerful socio-hierarchical relationships of noncarnival life" (Bakhtin 123).

The breaking of hierarchy, eccentricity, laughter, excess, and inappropriateness are qualities of Carnival. The discourse flows freely, without any constraints from authoritative hierarchies. "Carnival brings together, unifies, weds, and combines the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid" (Bakhtin 123). Theories of Bakhtin helps folklorists to understand the semantic nature of folklore.

Every folklore tells Sita's tale which a different angle. Sahu has mentioned multiple texts in poem itself to explicitly explain the decentring of one *Ramayana*. She talks about: '*Muni Valmiki' Ramayana*, 'Bhavabhuti's *Uttararamacharita, Kundamala*, *Dashavatarcharita, Ananda Ramayana, Adhyatma Ramayana*, etc. A similar incident of Rama doubting Sita because she drew a portrait of Ravana because her step sister insisted her to do so, is mentioned in various folktales like *Kashmiri Ramayana, Gujrati Ramayana*, *Thai Ramayana*, *Bengali Ramayana*, etc. (Sahu 114-115). Interestingly, Sahu's Sita is not limited to Indian folklore tradition, she is Greek myths, contemporary women, women from Shakespeare's play, etc., as we can exemplify through the following lines:

Nightingale, Lucy Grey, Helen of Troy, Cleopatra,
Atlanta, Cordelia, Desdemona, Penelope, Sylvia Plath,
Athena, Kunti, Draupadi, Gandhari, Shakuntala,
Radha, Meerabai, Kalpana Chawla, Kiran Bedi,
Indira, Nirbhaya, Damini, Lata ,Nandini, Rebati or Anandi.
I live numerous lives, in women, bold and beautiful (Sahu 117).

Conclusion

Sahu's Sita can be seen as a Postmodern gendered figure and text that Postmodernist effectively disrupts the metanarratives. Drawing on Bakhtin's theory Sahu's Sita may be conceptualized as dialogic, heteroglossic, chronotopic, and unfinalized to counter the monological discourses. Through the use of multiple voices, intertextuality, and a profound engagement of historical and geographical locations Sahu rewrites Sita, thus bringing her to the contemporary world. Sita challenges the stereotypic, frequently misogynistic representations and offers a complex, far from monochromic picture that is consonant with Postmodernist plurality and indeterminacy. Therefore, Sahu's Sita initiates not only a rewriting of a mythic character but also a constant development of a text that will remain thought-provoking for a society and a culture, as are the human perceptions and representations, dynamic and multifaceted.

The postmodern literature has found Mikhail Bakhtin's discussion on language, culture, and society pertinent to its study because of his ideas on dialogue, heteroglossia, and socio-culture. Heteroglossia: the idea that even a single work has multiple discourses or media accessible within it, has a particular relevance to contemporary literature that aims to provide the voice of different subjects and rejects the monologic approach. As a linguistic anthropologist, his understanding towards dialogic understanding of language is exemplary, meaning that language is a social product of interactions, and stretched postmodern authors towards recognizing the fluidity and interconnection of meaning. Furthermore, the carnivalistic element that Bakhtin dwells upon – riot

and parody of the authorities – resonates with the postmodernist's desire to deconstruct borders and disturb stabilities. This theoretical framework disburses writers to discuss and investigate issues of identity, power relations, and multiculturalism, which is more nuanced compared to previous theoretical approaches. For this reason, Bakhtin's notions remain the conceptual cornerstone upon which theory and interpretation can remain grounded while also offering a method for generating new literature that addresses the complexity and specificity of Postmodern existence.

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Religion and Culture in Literature

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Introduction

> "The most essential and fundamental aspect of culture is the study of literature since this is an education in how to picture and understand human situations". (Cook 192)

Religion has been a unifying force among humans throughout the ages. The term "religion" originated from Old French and Anglo-Norman in the 1200s AD, and it signifies a sense of right, moral obligation, sanctity, what is sacred, and reverence for the gods. ("Religion") Since then humans are acquainted with this concept and have used it to guide their understanding of what is right, moral, and respectful. The modern term "culture" can be traced back to the ancient Roman orator Cicero, who used it in his Tusculanae Disputationes (Cicero 231).

The word "Religion" indeed has a longer history than "Culture" in human society, although both concepts are equally important. However, issues can arise when individuals misunderstand and conflate Religion and Culture, mistaking them for the same thing. The question arises: What and who has prompted us to contemplate the distinctions between 'Religion & Culture' and 'Religion vs Culture'? How do these two concepts influence literature and humanity as a whole? Additionally, what are some historical, medieval, and modern works that serve as reflections of the interplay between Religion and Culture?

There isn't any particular answer to these questions, as the exploration of Religion and Culture has been a complex and ongoing process throughout human history. Various philosophers, theologians, scholars, and artists – often influenced by their cultural and historical contexts – have contributed to these discussions. Works from different periods in

history provide insights into how Religion and Culture have influenced societies. Religion and culture, like characters in a novel, breathe life into the pages of literature, shaping the stories we tell and the stories that shape us. In ancient times, Dante's *Divine Comedy* stands as a prominent work filled with religious references, mythical narratives, and Biblical stories. It serves as a vivid illustration of the interplay between Religion and Culture. (Blauvelt n.p.) In the Middle Ages, the hybridity of Religion and Culture can be exemplified in John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (Wittreich 569-589) This epic poem delves deeply into theological and cultural themes, exploring the fall of man and the clash of divine forces. As we progress into the 20th century, *The Waste Land* by T.S. Eliot captures our attention with its profound exploration and questioning quest. (Bloom 102) This modern masterpiece raises thought-provoking inquiries about the human condition and the complexities of existence, further reflecting the intricate relationship between Religion and Culture. They have left an indelible mark on literature and human society, serving as a source of inspiration, reflection, and sometimes conflict.

Definitions and Interpretations of Religion and Culture

Defining religion and culture is challenging due to their complexity and the diversity of human beliefs and practices. There is no universally accepted definition for either concept. Additionally, these definitions are often context dependent. Some definitions of religion emphasize belief in the supernatural, while others focus on rituals, community, or moral codes. Culture definitions range from all-encompassing worldviews to more specific aspects like language and customs. Different cultures and religions have their unique expressions and interpretations, making it challenging to create universally applicable definitions. Here are some of the Definitions of Religion and Culture.

Emile Durkheim defined Religion as "Religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say things set apart and forbidden - beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a church, all those who adhere to them" (Taves 16).

Max Lynn Stackhouse defined Religion as a ". . . comprehensive worldview or 'metaphysical moral vision' that is accepted as binding because it is held to be in itself basically true and just even if all dimensions of it cannot be either fully confirmed or refuted" (Nelson n.p.).

Edward Burnett Tylor defined Culture as ". . . that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (White n.p.).

The concepts of religion and culture are complex, evolving, and context-dependent. They have undergone significant historical shifts, and scholars like Max Stackhouse, Edward Burnett Tylor, and Emile Durkheim have contributed to our understanding of these concepts by emphasizing the importance of cultural context and the need for nuanced interpretations.

Clifford Geertz, an influential anthropologist, is known for his symbolic interpretation of religion. He argued that religion is not just a set of beliefs and practices but a system of symbols that conveys meaning. Geertz emphasized the importance of understanding these symbols within their cultural context to grasp the deeper significance of religious practices. Talal Asad, a prominent anthropologist of religion, has critiqued the Western-centric concept of religion. He argues that " the term "religion" itself is a product of Western history and thought and does not adequately capture non-Western belief systems. Asad calls for a more culturally sensitive approach to studying religious phenomena, taking into account the historical and social contexts in which they occur" (Asad 237-259).

How did Religion and Culture spread through Literature?

Certainly, when discussing the dissemination of culture and religion, Literature plays a significant role. Religious texts such as the Bible, Mahabharata, Ramayana, and the Quran are exemplary in conveying information about religion and, by extension, culture. These texts have historically been instrumental in educating humanity about religious beliefs

and cultural practices. Throughout history, various literary works have also played a pivotal role in influencing people's understanding of religion and culture. Works such as Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales (1476)*, Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov (1879-80)*, Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis (1915)*, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children (1981)*, and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) hold the power to shape individuals' perspectives on both religious and cultural matters. These literary masterpieces serve as vehicles for exploring complex themes, fostering critical thinking, and deepening our insights into the intricate interplay between religion and culture. While delving further into the realm of culture, one can take note of what Ray Bradbury articulated in his work *Fahrenheit 451*, "You don't have to burn books to destroy a culture. Just get people to stop reading them" (Bradbury 199-202).

Relationship between Religion and Culture in Literature

Particularly, discussing one or two works under the section of Religion and Culture is a bit challenging, but I will try to explain it by taking the best examples from each era when the works were written. First, there is Dante's *Divine Comedy*, second is John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and third is T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. Certainly, discussing the intersection of religion and culture in the context of these three literary works is a fascinating endeavor. Each of these works represents a significant exploration of religious themes within the cultural and historical contexts of their respective times.

Divine Comedy by Dante Alighieri (14th Century)

The *Divine Comedy*, known as 'La divina commedia' in Italian, is an epic three-part poem - Inferno, Purgatorio, and Paradiso - authored by Dante Alighieri, and it was published in the year 1320 (Blauvelt n.p.). This work is deeply rooted in the Christian faith and reflects the medieval Catholic worldview. It explores themes of sin, redemption, and divine justice. Dante's depiction of Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven offers a vivid portrayal of the moral and religious beliefs of his time. This work has

had a profound influence on Western literature and culture. Dante wrote the *Divine Comedy* in Italian rather than Latin, which was the dominant language for serious literature at the time. This choice played a crucial role in the development of the Italian language and culture, helping to establish it as a literary language. Dante's use of the vernacular made his work accessible to a broader audience, contributing to the cultural identity of Italy (Alighieri 307).

Dante's *Divine Comedy* is deeply rooted in Catholic theology. It reflects the religious beliefs and practices of the time, and Dante's journey through the afterlife serves as a spiritual allegory. Dante's encounters with various figures, including saints, sinners, and biblical characters, illustrate his understanding of the Christian faith and the consequences of one's actions in life. It remains a timeless exploration of the human soul's journey toward God. He skillfully blends Christian theology with pagan Greco-Roman mythology, presenting them as if both coexist in a harmonious narrative. To employ a term often found in modern science fiction and fantasy literature, he seamlessly interweaves these traditions (Blauvelt n.p.).

The poem's enduring significance lies in its ability to provide insights into the complex relationship between religion and culture during that era, making it a timeless work of literature that continues to be studied and appreciated today.

Paradise Lost by John Milton (17th Century)

Paradise Lost, authored by the 17th-century English poet John Milton (1608–1674), is an epic poem written in blank verse. This is an epic poem that retells the biblical story of the Fall of Man, focusing on Satan's rebellion, the temptation of Adam and Eve, and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, often considered the greatest epic poem in the English language, has been a subject of debate among critics. Its impact on English literature ranks second only to Shakespeare's, as noted by Benjamin Ramm. Milton's religious vocabulary, intended to elucidate a world in decline, has faded into obscurity. However, it's essential not to diminish the poem's profound

theological core. As Christopher Ricks, the critic, aptly expressed regarding Paradise Lost, "Art for art's sake? Art for God's sake" (Ramm n.p.). Milton's work grapples with complex theological questions, such as the nature of free will, theodicy (the problem of evil), and the concept of redemption. It reflects the Protestant beliefs of the time and explores the relationship between humanity and divinity.

Milton crafts a poem that engages deeply with religion, challenging our faith in a thought-provoking manner. While not overtly stated, Defoe does seem to ultimately acknowledge Milton for portraying "a fully formed Devil, harboring Hell within his own heart," in alignment with Satan's renowned proclamation from Paradise Lost, where he declares, "the mind is its own place," and "my self am Hell."(Wittreich 569-589) It seems to be true what William Blake said, "Milton was a true Poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it"(Ramm n.p.). *Paradise Lost* has been interpreted in various ways over the centuries. Some readers focus on its religious and theological aspects, while others emphasize its cultural and literary significance. The poem can be seen as a cultural response to the political and religious conflicts of his time. It explores themes of authority, tyranny, and the struggle for freedom - themes that resonated with the cultural and political climate of the English Civil War. The poem's portrayal of Satan as a charismatic and tragic figure has invited cultural interpretations that explore themes of rebellion, individualism, and the complexity of evil too. This work illustrates the intricate relationship between religion and culture in a 17th-century English context. While it is fundamentally a religious work, it also reflects the cultural and political dynamics of its time, making it a multifaceted epic that continues to be studied for its religious, literary, and cultural significance. The poem's ability to bridge religious and cultural dimensions makes it a rich and enduring work of literature.

The Waste Land by T.S. Eliot (20th Century)

'Human kind cannot bear very much reality'. (Eliot lines 44-45)

The Waste Land by T. S. Eliot Published in the autumn of 1922, the poem was regarded as revolutionary, emerging in the aftermath of the

First World War and a worldwide pandemic. It has also earned the distinguished title of "the preeminent poem of the 20th century" according to Literary Hub (Ahlborn n.p.). *The Waste Land* is a modernist poem that reflects the disillusionment and It weaves together various voices and cultural references in a fragmented narrative. It reflects the cultural upheaval of its time and is often interpreted as a commentary on the spiritual and moral crisis of modernity. Its exploration of religious themes in a secular age is emblematic of the cultural shifts of the early 20th century.

If one has to talk about what is in the poem, "The Waste Land" is rich with religious imagery and references, encompassing diverse religious traditions such as Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and the mythos of the Fisher King. These elements are interwoven throughout the five parts of the poem, which are titled: "The Burial of the Dead," "A Game of Chess," "The Fire Sermon," "Death by Water," and "What the Thunder Said." The poem incorporates mythological figures like Tiresias, Tristan, and Isolde, as well as lines from various poems, operas, and literary works that traverse a wide array of genres and cultural origins (Frey n.p.).

Patricia Sloane writes about Fisher King in Richard Wagner's Arthurian Sources, Jessie L. Weston, and T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, "Eliot's Fisher King may appear not only as any hero of myth or romance but also as any hero or anti-hero of literature, history, or real life" (Sloane 30-53).

The poem opens with the famous line "April is the cruellest month," juxtaposing the renewal of spring with a sense of spiritual desolation, suggesting a loss of religious and cultural meaning. Throughout the poem, there is a pervasive sense of spiritual desolation and alienation. The characters and voices in the poem grapple with a world that has lost its religious and cultural moorings. This reflects the broader cultural disillusionment of the post-World War I era, where traditional values and beliefs were shattered by the horrors of war and the rapid changes of the modern age. Eliot's use of religious motifs suggests that even in

a culturally fragmented world, there may be a path to redemption through spiritual exploration and rediscovery.

"When examining a few of the original lines to describe it..."

> April is the cruellest month, breeding
> Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
> Memory and desire, stirring
> Dull roots with spring rain. (Eliot line 4)

These lines introduce the theme of renewal and rebirth, which has religious undertones, as April traditionally represents a time of new life and resurrection in Christian culture.

> Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,
> Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell
> And the profit and loss. (Eliot line 313)

While not explicitly religious, the mention of Phlebas, a character who has experienced death and perhaps some form of afterlife, touches on themes of mortality and the unknown, which often intersect with religious ideas about the afterlife.

> "Shantih shantih shantih" (Eliot line 430).

These lines conclude the poem and are a reference to the Sanskrit word "shanti," which means "peace." It is a repeated chant and a form of benediction, reflecting a sense of spiritual or divine peace.

The inclusion of religious references highlights the enduring presence of religious themes and symbols in the cultural consciousness, even in a secular and disillusioned age. "The Waste Land" is a complex and allusive poem that explores various themes, including cultural and spiritual desolation; the above lines demonstrate how religious references and themes are woven into the poem's fabric. In *The Waste Land*, T.S. Eliot offers a bleak yet deeply reflective portrayal of the relationship between religion and culture in the early 20th century. His work stands as evidence of the enduring significance of religious and cultural concern in an ever-evolving world.

Religion is the Opium

The concept of Religion and Culture as "opium" is closely associated with the work of Karl Marx, who famously stated, "Religion is the opium of the people." Marx's statement implies that religion, like a drug, can be used to dull the pain and suffering experienced by individuals in a capitalist society. It can also serve as a tool of social control, keeping the working class content and submissive (Pedersen 354-387).

Dante's work is a complex allegorical journey through Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven. It explores themes of sin, redemption, and the afterlife within a Christian framework. In the context of Marx's statement, one could argue that Dante's portrayal of the Church and its teachings could be seen as a form of "opium" that provides solace to individuals in the midst of their suffering. The promise of salvation and eternal life might be viewed as a means of coping with the hardships of life. Dante also critiques the corruption within the Church, suggesting that the institution may sometimes exploit people's faith for its own gain, which aligns with Marx's criticism of religion as a tool of control.

Similar to Dante, one can argue that Milton's work presents religion as a powerful force that shapes human behavior and understanding of the world. The promise of paradise and the threat of damnation can be seen as a form of "opium" that influences characters' decisions. Additionally, Milton grapples with the idea of free will and the consequences of individual choices, which can be related to Marx's critique of religion as a means of control. In this case, it's the fear of divine punishment that serves as a form of social control.

Eliot's work can be seen as reflecting the idea that religion and culture, which may have served as "opium" in the past, are no longer effective in addressing the existential crises of the modern era.

In summary, while the works of Dante, Milton, and Eliot do not explicitly endorse or reject Marx's assertion about religion as "opium," they do engage with religious and cultural themes in ways that allow for interpretation in light of this concept. Each work explores the role of

religion and culture in providing solace, control, or meaning in the lives of individuals and societies.

Why these Three Works for Religion and Cultural Reference?

Religion and culture serve as two central aspects that function like threads in human relationships, binding us together while also possessing the potential to divide us. These dynamics are vividly exemplified in literature. Dante's *Divine Comedy*, John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* all serve as reflections of the cultural and religious beliefs of their respective eras. In *Divine Comedy*, there is a vivid depiction of Hell, and both Hell and Heaven are central themes in *Paradise Lost*, while *The Waste Land* brims with religious, cultural, historical references, and ideas. The blending of these three works and their exploration of themes such as Hell, Heaven, history, culture, and religion are the primary reasons why they stand as works that reflect the thoughts, ideas, and epochs in which they were created.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the exploration of religion and culture in literature is a profound journey that spans centuries and reflects the ever-evolving relationship between these two central aspects of human existence. Dante's *Divine Comedy*, John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* stand as monumental pillars in this exploration, each offering a unique perspective on the interplay between religion and culture within their respective historical contexts. These works illuminate the enduring significance of religious and cultural themes in literature, revealing how they shape and reflect the values, beliefs, and anxieties of their times. Dante's journey through Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven in *Divine Comedy* provides a timeless allegory of the human soul's quest for redemption, while Milton's epic poem *Paradise Lost* grapples with theological questions and political allegory, offering a rich tapestry of religious and cultural ideas. T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, a masterpiece of modernist literature, captures the disintegration of traditional values and beliefs in the 20th century, raising profound questions about the role

of religion and culture in an increasingly fragmented world. In essence, these works serve as windows into the intricate web of human thought, belief, and identity, showcasing the enduring relevance of religion and culture in the realm of literature. They remind us that these two central systems continue to shape our understanding of the world and ourselves, making the study of their interplay a timeless and invaluable pursuit in the exploration of human experience.

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Revisiting Mahabharata through Hermeneutical Prism

Shiwangi Shailja and Manoj Kumar

Introduction

Mahabharata is a complex composition spread over several layers across varied periods, and its core elements are extracted from distinct parts of the ancient Indian land. It is not one story but many stories overlapping and running into each other. It has grown in stages across many historic conventions. Like the Indian jungle, it unfolds itself in a vast wilderness of trees entwined with creepers and colourful flowers of mystifying categories, inhabited by numerous as well as an astonishing variety of creatures, birds, and beasts. It is a wonder piled upon wonders. There are several contradictions and criticisms flocked together for this grand Epic. A candid and unbiased glance at the phenomena around us gives us a specific picture and perspective. A new vision and perspective emerge when we discern the same through a prism of investigation. The hermeneutical approach articulates the understanding of a text by placing it in the frame of reference of its times and the society in which it was located and also appreciating the cultural, social, and political forces that might have influenced its outlook. The epic Mahabharata is full of players and situations that mesmerise readers. The plot is embedded with kings, ministers, commanders, courtesans, mentors, soldiers, etc. Birth, lineage, and warfare techniques have a role to play in deciding one's status in that setting. Many characters in Mahabharata are seen, judged, and criticised vehemently for their actions in the ancient era. One such character is Madhavi, daughter of King Yayati, whose story appears in the Udyog Parva of Mahabharata. The report raises many uncomfortable questions about the status and conduct towards women in a society of a bygone era, which was guided by its own set of

values, rules and laws. The fascinating yet disturbing episode has been studied in-depth by scholars, feminists, and dramatists using social, psychological, and Post-Modern lenses.

The Story

Galava, a devoted pupil of sage Vishwamitra, stayed and served his teacher with utmost loyalty and sincerity, even under challenging circumstances. At the end of the academic year, pleased with Galava, Vishwamitra blessed him and let him go; still, Galava insisted on stating the Gurudakshina, paid as a token of gratitude in return for the knowledge gained so far. Finally, Guru Vishwamitra asked Galava to present him eight hundred white seeds of good pedigree horses as white as the rays of the radiant moon, and every horse must have a black ear.

Ektaha shamkarna hayana chandravarchasam,
Ashto shatani me dehi gaccha Galav ma Chiram- (27)

Galava set out on a journey in quest of such rare types of horses but could not find any. While Galava was brooding in desperation, Suparna, his friend, helped Galava by taking him to many kings who might possess such rare species of horses. At first, the duo reached the court of Yayati, King of Prasthana, with their ask of eight hundred such horses. King Yayati, whose wealth was depleted, had no horses having such specifications. Nevertheless, the King would never return a mendicant empty-handed in that era. Therefore, Yayati gifted, instead, his beautiful daughter Madhavi and suggested that by setting her a price, they could get hold of the horses of their required specifications. Yayati added that her daughter could promote every virtue, and any king would gladly pay any price to be with her, even for a short time.

asyâh œulkam pradâsyanti nrpâ râjyam api dhruvam
*kim punah œyâmakarnânâm hayânâm dve catuhœate – (*13*)*

Galava and Madhvi first met the King of Ayodhya, Haryasva, renowned for his valour, wealth, and a large army. Galava offered Madhavi for marriage to the childless King Haryasva in exchange for eight hundred purebred lunar white horses, each one having one black ear in hue. The

King was awestruck by the beauty of Madhavi, but he only had two hundred horses of such specifications. So, King Haryasva made a counter-deal of giving the entire two hundred horses of the desired stipulation to Galava instead of a son with Madhavi. The proposed offer was awkward, but Madhavi intervened and told Galava that a sage blessed her with the exceptional faculty of regaining her virginity each time after childbirth. Madhavi suggested Galava accept the offer, and after the birth, he could take her to the next King and another until a total of eight hundred horses was collected.

mama datto varah kaœcit kena cid brahmavâdinâ
prasûtyante prasûtyante kanyaiva tvam bhavicyasi
sa tvam dadasva mâm râjñe pratigrhya hayottamân
nrpebhyo hi caturbhyas te pûrnâny astau œatâni vai
bhavicyanti tathâ putrâ mama catvâra eva ca
kriyatâm mama samhâro gurvartham dvija sattama (114)

The idea seemed to be workable management; hence, Galava agreed to this counter-offer. In due course of time, Haryasva had a son by Madhavi, who was named Vasumanasa. The newborn grew up to be a splendid king, the wealthiest and greatest benefactor among all the contemporary kings.

Galava took Madhavi to the next King, Divodas, King of Kashi, famous for his valour and wealth. Divodas being well aware of Madhavi's story and beauty, gladly agreed to give two hundred horses of prerequisite qualifications that he had. Madhavi lived with Divodasa until a son was born to her. He was named Pratardana, who later became a worthy heir to the throne of Kashi. Having regained her virginity again, Madhavi left her son with his father and returned to Galava. The next King was Ushinara of Bhojanagari, who had only two hundred horses. He handed them over to Galava and resided with Madhavi till a son named Sibi was born. Sibi later got renowned as the upholder of truth and justice. Madhavi became a virgin once again. Until then, Galava collected six hundred horses of such unusual features and needed two hundred more to fulfil his commitment. Suparna informs Galava that there were no more such horses other than those already collected from different

kings. On the suggestion of Suparna, Galava submits six hundred horses to his teacher Vishwamitra and requests to accept Madhavi in lieu of the remaining two hundred horses and absolve him of Guru Dakshina. Vishwamita accepted the proposal and discharged Galava of his obligations.

viśvâmitras tu tam drstvâ gâlavam saha paksinâ
kanyâm ca tâm varârohâm idam ity abravîd vacah
*kim iyam pûrvam eveha na dattâ mama gâlava (*117*)*

Madhavi bore to Vishwamita a son named Ashtaka. Ashtaka, later favourably known as the King, performed Ashva-medha yajnas. Galava thanked Madhavi, Yayati, and all the three Kings who extended their support and helped Galava be freed from his debt. He was grateful to Madhavi for her selfless support and for bearing three magnificent heirs for three childless kings. Taking leave from his Guru, Galava retired to the forest.

jâto dânapatih putras tvayâ śûras tathâparah
satyadharmarataú cânyo yajvâ câpi tathâparah
tad âgaccha varârohe târitas te pitâ sutaih
catvâraú caiva râjânas tathâham ca sumadhyame (117)

After some time, Visvamitra retreated to the forest and handed over the six hundred horses to his son Ashtaka. He also sent Madhavi back to her father, Yayati. Yayati tried to arrange her daughter's wedding, as many suitors, including the three kings who had sons from Madhavi, were eager to marry her. However, Madhavi refused all the offers as she was no more interested in marriage or childbearing. Madhavi retired to the forest and lived a peaceful life of a hermit.

Looking Through Hermeneutical Lenses

The story of Madhavi surfaces in Mahabharata, but it belongs to the Pre-Mahabharata period or the Vedic era. The story depicts the problematic journey of Madhavi from being a princess to a short-term wife to three kings and a sage and, after that becoming a provisional mother to her four sons. Everyone except Madhavi, has something to gain. Yayati has the satisfaction of helping a mendicant; the three

childless kings beget worthy heirs for their kingdom; Vishwamitra gains six hundred horses of such rare specifications and the pleasure of living with beautiful Madhavi and lastly, Galava gets extolled for guru-dakshina and hence relieved of his obligations towards his teacher.

The episode of Madhavi has been vehemently criticised and labelled as misogynist in recent times. The circumstances in the story showcase insensitivity to a woman's feelings, depriving her of any personal space or desire and wiping out her individuality. Madhavi has been ripped from any control over her life. It appears horses are more significant than a woman, and women are being traded to get hold of good horses. Madhavi is portrayed as a scapegoat being passed on from one male to another, leaving behind her newborn each time. In the end, this character neither turns out to be a wife nor a mother, despite having lived with four men and delivering four sons. This viewpoint is valid to a certain extent when viewed through post-modern or feminist lenses. An alternate view also falls under the umbrella term "Hermeneutics." Hermeneutics is the art of understanding and interpreting a particular story considering its time of existence, and appreciating the cultural and social norms that must have impacted it. This approach provides a new lens to look at the same story differently, unlocking a broad spectrum of new standpoints and perceptions. So, before we impose our own set of perceptions or apply the present-day benchmarks of the rights and privileges accorded to women in our society to judge Madhavi, let us pause and place her story in the context of her time and look at the then-established norms prevalent and accepted by the community. There is nothing lewd about this episode, as depicted in the Epic. Every character of the story is earnest and does one's utmost to live honestly with righteous intent.

Galava does all he can to fulfil his obligation to his teacher. The teacher does not want anything from Galava in return for what he has taught him for several years. Nevertheless, Galava, an honest and sincere student, is adamant about giving Guru Dakshina and getting free from obligations. Galava portrays his immense dedication and reverence towards his teacher. His commitment guides him throughout his journey of getting such rare horses.

Yayati discharges his duty as a King by providing a mendicant who seeks help. His wealth has been depleted, and he has no such horses with the required parameters, but he does not turn his back on the seekers. The saints and their disciples were worshipped as gods in that era. The kings, reverent towards saints and mendicants, try never to disappoint them. So, Yayati offers his daughter. Girls were supposed to be the highly precious possession a father could have. Hence, offering his much beloved and adored daughter Yayati showcases his conviction and dedication as a king towards a mendicant. While handing over his daughter to Galava, Yayati praises the virtues of his daughter and remarks that anybody would give his entire kingdom to be with his daughter, even for a short interval. Yayati is aware of her daughter's merit and announces it with pride in front of the seekers.

The character Madhavi has been criticised on three significant issues.

1. Women were objectified in Vedic or Pre-Vedic era. They were used as bartering objects, as depicted in the case of Madhavi.
2. Women were deprived of motherhood like Madhavi had been denied the pleasure of motherhood even after giving birth to four sons.
3. Sexual pleasures were enjoyed solely by men. Polygamy was accepted, but polyandry was made fun of.

There is no reference in Mahabharata that Madhavi is forced to go with Galava to different kings. When Yayati is approached by Galava for a favour, being incapable of helping the seekers, Madhavi is given to Galava. Yayati does not have enough money to salvage Galava, so Madhavi goes with Galava of her volition to save her father from infamy.

Madhavi considers her filial duty to save her father from the disgrace of not helping a mendicant who comes to his kingdom seeking help. To assist a dedicated pupil in fulfilling his promise to his teacher, Madhavi suggests earnestly arranging her exchange for the horses. The Kings who have Madhavi in their lives, even briefly, never consider this relationship scandalous. All the relationships that Madhavi has gone through are open out there. There is nothing disgraceful or reprehensible.

Madhavi is denied motherhood and gets transferred from one King to another. This is true. This denial of motherhood has to be understood in

the backdrop of specific circumstances that Madhavi is into. Galava has to get those horses from different kings, and Madhavi has gone along with Galava only to help him get those horses. She cannot afford to spend any extra period in a kingdom. So, after giving birth, she has to push off leaving the baby under the care of its father. Moreover, men also have to face these situations in life. Bhima was deprived of fatherhood when he had to leave his son, Ghatotkacha. Arjuna had to leave his sons Abhimanyu and Babruvahana for a cause. The force of circumstances denies certain privileges to certain people at certain periods regardless of gender. So, it is not fair to judge Vedic society on the grounds of marginalisation based on gender, at least not in the case of Madhavi. Besides, her society treats her with great respect for rescuing three royal lines from dynastic extinction. Madhavi's sons are well aware of their birth antecedents. They gladly call themselves the sons of Madhavi. The fact that they are the sons of the common wife of four kings does not prevent them from ascending to the throne of their respective fathers. Sibi and Ashtaka are preferred over the other sons of their father's respective wives. When Madhavi gets a chance to meet her grown-up sons, she is greeted with reverence and immense respect by her sons.

mâdhavîm preksya râjânas te 'abhivâdyedam abruvan
kim âgamanakrtyam te kim kurvah úâsanam tava
âjñâpyâ hi vayam sarve tava putrâs tapodhane (2)

At the end of the story, Madhavi meets her father in the forest, and at her command, her four sons help their maternal grandfather to ascend to heaven again. Madhavi's journey portrays an air of ruffled dignity. She has been faithful to her independent and bold nature, fulfilling her womanhood in a manner she found apt in each predicament. Her detached and indifferent attitude to her unique encounters with four men defines her virgin status. At the end of the story, Madhavi exercises her choice of retiring into the woods without remorse.

The third criticism is about sexual pleasures being given to men and not women. Polyandry is not uncommon in the tales of Mahabharata. Kunti and Draupadi are strong characters that pertain to polyandric

relationships. Besides, women get a chance to select their partners in Swamvarams. Polyandry was not uncommon; it was just not that rampant compared to polygamy. This was due to the frequent wars that resulted in men's demise more than women's. In that era, the kings who won the war took care of the wives and daughters of the rivals by getting married to them and providing them with food and shelter.

Madhavi's story emerges in Mahabharata, but she belongs to the Vedic Era. The social ethos, culture and customs, the idea of marriage, and the behaviour towards women from that era differ from the periods afterwards. The society never remains static. It goes through a continuous and prolonged process of evolution and transformation. The event period belonging to Mahabharata is very much different from the one before Mahabharata. Mahabharata society is way more diverse than Vedic society. The values, norms, culture, customs, and social conduct do not merely differ between the two eras; it shows remarkable variance during Mahabharata. This is why the social values and customs reflected in the early parts of the Epic are non-identical from the prevalence followed by the later period. So, the social ethos or customs variance must not be seen as transgression. It is just the dichotomy that remarks the finale of one era and the dawn of the other. It is interesting how perceptions and values change in a society in due course of time. This shift is usually the result of the challenges or demands of a particular era. In certain affairs, the Pre-Vedic or Vedic women are favoured with liberty and social approval, which is missing in the present age. Today women get easily judged by the parameters of a patriarchal society. There are a set of norms that suggests what women should do and, more importantly, what they should not do. Women in the Vedic era need not be vocal about their rights because these rights are utterly known and followed by society. They were given due respect, and their bold and unconventional steps were considered and accepted by society. Today women are tagged as feminists for being vocal about their rights and for grasping their position in society. Mahabharata depicts a steady degradation of what was once a cohesive society that adored liberal values. The society in the early period of Mahabharata was more open-minded, non-

judgemental, and accepting than our present-day society. As we proceed with the stories of later generations narrated by the Epic, we realise the views and values of society get rigid, showing a downward trend that has continued for centuries.

Virginity was regarded as an inculcable value in the Epics. Only a few virtuous women were blessed with the potentiality of retaining or regaining maidenhood. Madhavi mentions her boon of virginity by which she can regain her virginity each time she gives birth to a child. There are several instances in Epics where women possess the unique quality of recurring virginity. Satyavati became a virgin after giving birth to Vyasa. Kunti also became a maiden each time after delivering a son. Virginity does not refer to the state of their bodies but to the state of their being. Virginity alludes to the unsullied mind and attitudes of those incredible and bold women who face trials and tribulations yet choose detachment over attachment and independence over bondage. The women who pertained to polyandrous relationships were respected by the ancients and called Kanyas, which meant they were psychologically pure and untainted. Kanya's status also referred to how they fiercely asserted their independence. Each did whatever needed to be done based on their sense of duty, being true to themselves and their nature. These Kanyas of Mahabharata had to endure countless spanners in their work and life, yet these "women of substance" were not broken down by such hardships. Each went on to live with pride and dignity.

Mary Esther Harding**,** in her book "Woman's Mysteries" writes,

> "The woman who is psychologically a virgin is not dependent; she is what she is because that is what she is one-in-herself (and) does what she does not because of any desire to please, not to be liked or to be approved even by herself but because what she does is true. Her actions may, indeed, be unconventional." (125-126).

She further remarks:

> "He does not know the difference before love and after love, before motherhood, and after motherhood…Only a woman can know that and speak of that. She must always be as her nature is. She must

> always be a maiden and always be a mother. Before every love she is a maiden; after every love, she is a mother." She elsewhere, while talking of purity of love says "Every Mother is a virgin. She is pure in love to her child. Every child comes out of pure love."(134-135).

These lines perfectly illustrate Madhavi's life and her experiences with men. Her recurring marriage and childbearing were unconventional actions taken to fulfil the duty of saving a father from disgrace. Madhavi's decision resulted in life saviour steps for Galava and the three kings. Like Madhavi, many women sacrificed their life for the welfare of others, and hence these women were regarded and adorned by society. Very few people dare to do something for the others. Johann Jacob Meyer, in his "Sexual Life in Ancient India", remarks, "As is well known, the polygamy of the man in Aryan India is as old as the hills and does not form the slighted offence in the Brahminic system, although since Vedic times, indeed, one wife is seen to be the usual, often the obvious thing. On the other hand, polyandry is utterly repugnant to Indian feelings. In the Epic, only one or two cases of it are found, and these are exclusively cases of a community of wives among brothers" (108).

The tales that belong to the early part of the Epic Mahabharata indicate that women enjoyed a greater degree of freedom compared to the period afterwards. Women took decisions on crucial matters and were respected even after their unconventional and bold decisions. They were usually not discriminated based on gender. Their viewpoints were highly regarded on education, marriage, re-marriage, household management, and property. There were many instances of women fighting on the battlefield along with the men. No society is perfect; even Plato's Utopian society was not perfect. Women of the bygone era had to endure sorrows and sufferings, but these were not because they were women. Depravity, social injustice, and evil exist in all societies, whether ancient or modern. The Vedic societies must also have flaws, but they appeared tolerant and moderately unbiased.

Conclusion

Myth is a symbolic way of representing truth, while its misinterpretation creates confusion in the minds of budding readers. The upsurge in the readability of mythological content is because today's youth is keen to get acquainted with their cultural roots. The inclination towards this genre has sparked because of the emergence of new readers who have grown up listening to mythological tales from their ancestors. Knowing about the bygone era creates pride, especially in Indian culture. This paper attempts to depict people's viewpoints, thinking, and customs through tales of the era to which Mahabharata belongs and which was very different from the one we live in today.

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