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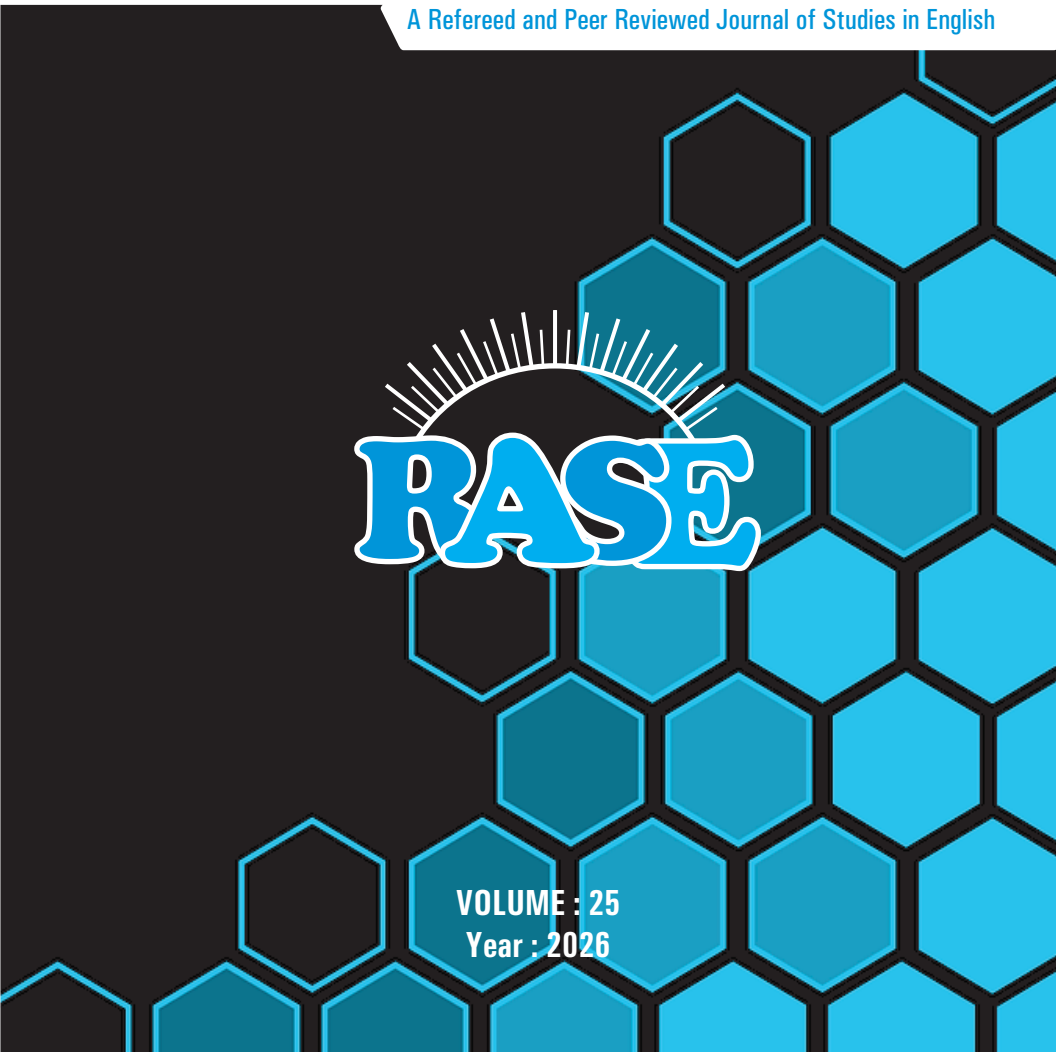

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Editorial

Literature, Society, and Political Consciousness, the theme of the XXII Annual International Conference of the Rajasthan Association for Studies in English, brings into focus one of the most enduring and vital relationships in the history of human thought. Literature has never existed in isolation from the social and political worlds that produce it. It has always been shaped by structures of power, and has always, in turn, shaped the consciousness of those who read it. It is to this rich and complex relationship that the present issue of the *RASE Journal* is devoted; the journal that has consistently served as a platform for rigorous scholarly inquiry into the intersections of language, literature, and the wider human condition. This issue gathers the peer-reviewed outcome of two days of sustained intellectual debate and represents the Association's collective effort to understand how the literary imagination has responded to and participated in the political life of its time.

Freedom in a democracy is the glory of the state, and, therefore, in a democracy only will the freeman of nature deign to dwell, said Plato. The world today is majorly, at least structurally, a democratic world. The post-colonial world has seen the rise of democracies everywhere. New countries emerged with their constitutions and electoral forms. In the post-modern world, the smaller voices got prominence, and a tendency to de-centre the centre and bring the marginalised to the centre was observed in many parts of the world. But democratic structures can survive the forces of suppression and autocracy only when people at large leave aside their indifference and participate in the processes and institutions of democracy. A glowing political consciousness among the populace is a prerequisite of a throbbing democracy. Plato said that one of the penalties of refusing to participate in politics is that you end up being governed by your inferiors. The measure of a man is what he does with power. This opinion, expressed around three thousand years ago, stands the test of time and deserves a lot of reflection in the contemporary moment.

Literature of the world has always been a mirror to the transformations taking place in the surrounding world. It has portrayed not only what appears outside but also what transpires within the human mind. Much before the appearance of the written word, literature existed in the oral form and did convey the emotions, sentiments, experiences, and observances of the people. This literature remains in public memory even today and reverberates in day-to-day conversations. In literature, political consciousness relates to a very broad understanding of the world. Sometimes it goes beyond the temporal to encompass the ethereal and the supernatural. It relates to a world order which includes the real, the tangible, and even the intangible dream world of human imagination. The epic poets can be cited as creators of a different cosmos with their unique power politics. Already, writers have started advocating intercultural communication and cross-border interaction to enable better understanding between different races and nationalities. The last century witnessed two bloody wars and the most unfair lust for power. The greed for capturing natural resources continues even after that, resulting in the creation of power blocs, lobbies, and pressure groups.

When we talk of political consciousness, we aim at creating an understanding of the relationship between the human and the natural world. What kind of world do we want to build for ourselves? It is a consciousness of the concepts of justice, power, and equality. In today's world, where Artificial Intelligence seems to have opened up a new world of opportunities and challenges, we need to understand the Man-machine interface and guard against the mechanisation of human intellect and emotions. The machine has entered the political sphere in manifold ways, influencing human behaviour and power relationships. It has transformed our bedrooms, dining tables, and community halls. In what subtle ways the machine has started governing us is also a question to ponder. Has all this happened because of man's over-emphasis on his own centrality in the universe? The fallacious understanding that man is the crown of all creation and that everything in nature is for human consumption has created a world of endless greed. Can maximisation of production and consumption and accumulation of wealth through this process in the name of development lead us to a sustainable world? These are the questions that

the present conference sought to debate — and that literature, across centuries and forms, has never stopped asking.

The conference brought together scholars, research students, and teachers from across institutions and disciplines to engage with this guiding concern: how literature registers, interrogates, resists, and sometimes reimagines the political conditions of its time. The sub-themes proposed political consciousness in colonial literature, the classics, the literature of social class, machine literature, anti-war writing, cross-cultural communication, myth and the politics of power, post-humanism, the literature of the marginalised, Black literature and identity, indigenous struggle, and the visual arts as instruments of political awakening — were offered as suggestive starting points, yet the response they generated exceeded that modest brief. The range of papers presented demonstrates that political consciousness in literature is neither confined to a particular period nor restricted to a particular genre, geography, or theoretical framework. As Italo Calvino observed, literature is necessary to politics above all when it gives a voice to those who do not have a voice, and gives a name to those who do not have a name — acting like an ear that can hear more than politics, and an eye that can perceive beyond the chromatic scale to which politics is sensitive. It is in this spirit that the present volume has been assembled.

Several contributions focus on the relationship between literature and colonial power, examining the racial divide and its political ramifications, the aesthetics of multiculturalism and the politics of difference, and the representation of ideology, power, and social control in contemporary popular media such as cinema. These contributions collectively demonstrate that the question of colonialism, its mechanisms, its afterlives, and the forms of resistance it generates remains central to literary and cultural studies.

A strong cluster of papers addresses the politics of the marginalised caste, gender, race, disability, and indigeneity. Dalit experience and the struggles of Dalit women receive sustained critical attention, explored through both fiction and autobiography. The environmental and political dimensions of tribal and Adivasi literature are examined with care, as is the intersection of Black literature with questions of historical trauma and the politics of

identity. Feminist dimensions of political consciousness are foregrounded in readings of women's writing from across South Asia and beyond. Together, these essays argue persuasively that literary studies can and must attend to the voices of those whom mainstream political discourse has historically silenced.

The mythological and classical traditions are revisited in several innovative contributions. Feminist reimaginings of Indian epics are subjected to bold interrogation of the political uses of the sacred. The gender politics embedded in classical Sanskrit narrative are examined through a nuanced critical lens, and psychoanalytical approaches are brought to bear on mythological drama. The ecological violence implicit in ancient mythologies is also explored. Rajasthani folk narrative, rich with social critique of greed, caste, class, and the politics of labour, receives remarkable critical attention in multiple essays. These papers demonstrate that the classical and the folk are not relics of the past but living resources for political and ethical reflection.

One of the most timely clusters of essays addresses the relationship between technology, artificial intelligence, and the literary imagination, a concern the concept note placed at the very heart of the conference. Explorations of the posthuman condition, the politics of scientific knowledge, and the question of machine literature and human intellect in the age of generative AI feature prominently. These contributions engage seriously with how digital and algorithmic systems have entered the political sphere, reshaping human behaviour, power relationships, and the very conditions of creativity and thought. At a moment when the boundaries between human intelligence and artificial intelligence are being actively contested, literary studies has an indispensable role to play in helping us understand what is at stake.

The volume also contains noteworthy contributions on war, ecology, and cross-cultural communication. The moral and political dimensions of guilt, conscience, and resistance are examined through fiction drawn from diverse national traditions. Dehumanisation and existential responsibility are explored in studies of dramatic literature, while an empirical study on oral fluency development adds a pedagogical dimension, reminding us that the study of literature is inseparable from the teaching and learning of language. The call for cross-cultural communication strategies and

intercultural dialogue finds a fitting response in these essays, which themselves cross borders of language, geography, and genre in their pursuit of shared understanding.

The breadth of this volume, its movement across periods, genres, cultures, and critical methodologies, is itself a form of argument. It suggests that political consciousness is not the property of any single literary tradition or critical school, but a quality that can be traced in the epics of the ancient world and in the folk tales of Rajasthan, in the canonical novels of the British tradition and in the contemporary fictions of Dalit, tribal, feminist, and diasporic writers. It is found in cinema and theatre as much as in poetry and prose. What unites the papers collected here is a shared conviction that literature matters, that it shapes the way people understand power, justice, and their place in the world and that the study of literature, society, and political consciousness is therefore an act of intellectual as well as civic responsibility.

We offer this collection not as a closed argument but as an invitation to continue reading literature as the space in which political consciousness is rehearsed, questioned, and renewed, and to carry these conversations forward into the Association's future gatherings. We hope that these essays will provoke further research, sharper debate, and a more sustained attentiveness to the political life that literature, in all its forms, continues faithfully to record.

Dr. Seema Soni
Guest Editor
14–15 November 2025,
Government College,
Jayal, Nagaur, Rajasthan

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Indigenous Resistance and Spiritual Renewal in Arun Joshi's *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*

Abrar Ahmed and Aastha Bhatt

1. Introduction

Background of the Study

The emergence of Indian English fiction after Independence marked a decisive shift from nationalist concerns to the psychological, philosophical, and ethical complexities of modern existence. Within this tradition, Arun Joshi distinguished himself by examining alienation, spiritual discontent, and the moral dilemmas of individuals who remain materially successful yet emotionally unfulfilled. Rather than foregrounding political events, his fiction interrogates the limitations of modern civilisation and questions whether economic progress can ensure genuine human fulfilment.

Published in 1971, *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* is conventionally interpreted as an existential novel portraying the protagonist's rejection of urban materialism. Billy, an educated anthropologist from Delhi's privileged elite, abandons metropolitan life to live among a tribal community. Although this transformation has largely been examined through existential philosophy, such readings often overlook the novel's engagement with indigenous knowledge, ecological ethics, and alternative cultural worldviews. Set against post-Independence India's rapid industrialisation and developmental modernity, Billy's journey symbolically challenges Westernised models of progress that marginalise indigenous cultures, environmental harmony, and spiritual values.

Contemporary postcolonial and ecocritical scholarship provides a broader framework for reassessing the novel. Indigenous communities are presented not as primitive but as custodians of ecological wisdom, collective identity, and spiritual balance. The forest becomes a space of

ethical coexistence where humanity and nature remain interconnected. Billy's transformation therefore represents more than an existential quest; it embodies resistance to cultural homogenisation and affirms indigenous philosophies grounded in reciprocity, community, and environmental stewardship. In the context of current debates on climate change, sustainability, and indigenous rights, Joshi's novel anticipates concerns that have become central to environmental humanities and decolonial studies. Consequently, *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* gains renewed attention as an interdisciplinary text that enriches discussions of cultural identity, ecological consciousness, and spiritual regeneration within Indian English literature.

Problem Statement

Although *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* has attracted attention for over five decades, criticism has largely centred on existentialism, psychological alienation, and spiritual crisis. While these perspectives illuminate Billy's inner conflict, they often marginalise the novel's engagement with indigenous consciousness, ecological ethics, and cultural resistance. Consequently, its representation of tribal knowledge systems and environmental philosophy remains insufficiently examined.

Most existing studies interpret Billy's transition to tribal life as a personal escape from urban materialism rather than as a critique of postcolonial modernity and its developmental ideology. The tribal community is frequently viewed as a backdrop to Billy's psychological transformation instead of an autonomous cultural tradition embodying ecological wisdom, collective ethics, and spiritual harmony. Likewise, contemporary frameworks such as indigenous resistance, eco-spirituality, decolonial ecology, and environmental justice have rarely been employed to analyse the novel in a systematic manner.

This paper addresses these critical limitations by interpreting Billy's transformation as both an act of resistance to hegemonic modernity and a process of spiritual renewal achieved through indigenous culture and ecological coexistence. By integrating insights from indigenous studies and postcolonial ecocriticism, the paper broadens the

interpretative scope of the novel and highlights its continuing relevance to debates on cultural identity, environmental sustainability, and decolonial thought.

Research Objectives

The present paper seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine the representation of indigenous resistance in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* through postcolonial and decolonial perspectives.
2. To investigate how Billy Biswas's rejection of urban civilisation functions as a critique of cultural colonisation, materialism, and developmental modernity.
3. To analyse the relationship between tribal consciousness, ecological harmony, and spiritual renewal within the narrative.
4. To explore the significance of indigenous epistemologies and environmental ethics in shaping Billy's moral and philosophical transformation.
5. To reassess Arun Joshi's contribution to Indian English fiction by positioning the novel within contemporary debates on indigenous studies, eco-spirituality, and postcolonial ecocriticism.

Research Questions

The paper addresses the following research questions:

- Is it still relevant in NEP 2020 scenario?
- How does *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* represent indigenous resistance to the ideological structures of postcolonial modernity?
- In what ways does Billy's transformation challenge dominant assumptions regarding civilisation, progress, and material success?
- How are tribal consciousness and ecological harmony represented as sources of spiritual renewal?
- What role do indigenous knowledge systems play in reshaping Billy's ethical and existential identity?
- How does an interdisciplinary reading informed by indigenous studies and postcolonial ecocriticism expand existing interpretations of the novel?

Scope and Significance of the Study

The present study is particularly relevant in the context of the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which advocates an education system rooted in Indian knowledge systems, environmental sustainability, ethical values, cultural diversity, and holistic human development. By foregrounding indigenous resistance, ecological consciousness, and spiritual renewal in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, this study aligns with NEP 2020's emphasis on integrating indigenous knowledge and local traditions into contemporary intellectual discourse. Billy's journey from metropolitan alienation to tribal belonging symbolises the rediscovery of India's rich indigenous heritage, reinforcing the policy's objective of preserving and promoting traditional ecological wisdom and cultural plurality. Furthermore, the paper's interdisciplinary approach, combining postcolonial theory, eco-criticism, indigenous studies, and existential philosophy, reflects NEP 2020's vision of multidisciplinary research and critical inquiry. In an era marked by environmental crises, cultural homogenisation, and ethical challenges, the study demonstrates how literature can contribute to developing socially responsible, environmentally conscious, and culturally rooted perspectives, thereby supporting the broader educational goals envisioned by NEP 2020. It argues that Joshi's novel extends beyond existential concerns by foregrounding indigenous knowledge, cultural plurality, and ethical coexistence with nature. In doing so, the paper offers a fresh interdisciplinary reading that positions the novel as a significant contribution to discussions of indigenous resistance, environmental ethics, and postcolonial literary thought.

2. Systematic Literature Review

2.1 Mapping Arun Joshi Scholarship: Existentialism, Alienation, and the Search for Authentic Selfhood

Arun Joshi is widely regarded as one of the most philosophically important novelists in post-Independence Indian English literature. His novels, particularly *The Foreigner* (1968) and *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971), have primarily been interpreted through existentialism,

alienation, identity crisis, and moral conflict (Naik; Iyengar 61). Early critics such as C. D. Narasimhaiah, K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, and M. K. Naik established Joshi as a writer who adapted existential philosophy to the Indian context by exploring the spiritual and psychological dilemmas of modern individuals (Narasimhaiah, Iyengar and Naik 62).

Later scholars, including R. K. Dhawan, Kumar, and Prasad, extended these interpretations by examining the relationship between urban modernity, materialism, and existential dissatisfaction (Dhawan, Kumar and Prasad 32). Billy Biswas was widely viewed as a symbolic rebel seeking authenticity beyond the moral emptiness of metropolitan society (Dhawan and Prasad). While these studies deepened understanding of Joshi's philosophical concerns, they remained largely focused on Billy's psychological journey.

Recent scholarship has incorporated postcolonial and psychological perspectives; yet Billy's engagement with tribal life is still treated mainly as a metaphor for personal liberation (Prasad 15). As a result, the novel's representations of indigenous consciousness, ecological ethics, and alternative knowledge systems remain comparatively underexplored, creating scope for an interdisciplinary reassessment.

2.2 Indigenous Studies and Tribal Consciousness: Reclaiming Alternative Epistemologies

Over the past three decades, indigenous studies have become a major interdisciplinary field, challenging colonial views of indigenous communities as primitive. Scholars now recognise these societies as custodians of ecological knowledge, communal ethics, spiritual traditions, and sustainable ways of life (Battiste, Cajete and Simpson 43).

Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies* argues that colonial knowledge systems marginalised indigenous epistemologies while privileging Western intellectual traditions (Smith 56). Her work provides an important framework for interpreting Billy's movement toward tribal society as an engagement with an alternative system of knowledge rather than a rejection of civilisation.

Similarly, scholars such as Marie Battiste, Gregory Cajete, and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson emphasise that indigenous knowledge is rooted in ecological relationships, collective memory, and cultural continuity (Battiste, Cajete and Simpson 34). Viewed through this perspective, *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* reveals that Billy's attraction to tribal life is not merely an existential escape but an epistemological shift toward indigenous ethics, communal identity, and ecological harmony (Smith and Cajete 13).

2.3 Postcolonial Ecocriticism and Environmental Ethics

Postcolonial ecocriticism examines the links between colonialism, environmental exploitation, and cultural displacement, arguing that ecological degradation is inseparable from questions of power, identity, and justice (Huggan and Tiffin). Unlike traditional ecocriticism, it highlights how colonial and capitalist systems transformed indigenous relationships with nature.

Scholars such as Graham Huggan, Helen Tiffin, and Rob Nixon show that colonial development promoted ecological exploitation while marginalising indigenous communities (Huggan & Tiffin and Nixon 23). Indian thinkers including Vandana Shiva and Ramachandra Guha further emphasise that indigenous ecological knowledge offers sustainable alternatives based on reciprocity with nature and environmental stewardship (Shiva and Guha 1).

Viewed through this framework, *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* critiques developmental modernity by contrasting urban materialism with indigenous ecological ethics. The forest functions as an ethical and spiritual landscape, and Billy's transformation reflects resistance to exploitative models of civilisation while anticipating contemporary concerns with sustainability, biodiversity, and ecological justice (Huggan & Tiffin, Nixon, Shiva and Guha 2).

2.4 Eco-spirituality, Deep Ecology, and Spiritual Renewal

Recent scholarship increasingly links spirituality with environmental ethics through the framework of eco-spirituality, arguing that ecological crises

stem from humanity's alienation from nature rather than technology alone (Næss 23). Arne Næss, through the theory of Deep Ecology, contends that all life possesses intrinsic value and that ecological responsibility requires a transformation of human consciousness (Næss 22). Similarly, Val Plumwood critiques Western dualisms separating humanity from nature, demonstrating how such binaries have legitimised both environmental exploitation and colonial domination (Plumwood 7). Within Indian philosophical traditions, ecological ethics are rooted in the sacred interconnectedness of forests, rivers, and all living beings (Shiva 9). Viewed from this perspective, Billy's immersion in tribal life signifies not merely psychological renewal but an eco-spiritual transformation in which authentic selfhood emerges through harmonious relationships with nature, community, and indigenous wisdom (Næss, Plumwood and Shiva 82).

2.5 Decolonial Perspectives: Cultural Resistance and Indigenous Identity

Decolonial theory provides another productive framework for understanding *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*. While postcolonial criticism frequently analyses the political consequences of colonial rule, decolonial scholars emphasise the continuing influence of colonial knowledge systems upon contemporary social institutions, educational structures, and cultural values (Smith). They argue that formal political independence does not necessarily eliminate colonial patterns of thinking, particularly when modernisation reproduces Western epistemological assumptions.

Frantz Fanon's analysis of colonial psychology demonstrates how colonised societies frequently internalise Western standards of civilisation while devaluing indigenous cultural traditions (Fanon 2). Edward Said similarly illustrates how colonial discourse constructs non-Western cultures as irrational, primitive, or inferior in order to legitimise imperial domination. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak extends these arguments by questioning whether marginalised communities are permitted to represent

themselves within dominant intellectual structures or whether they remain spoken for by colonial discourse (Spivak 7).

Applying these theoretical perspectives to Billy Biswas reveals that his rejection of metropolitan life simultaneously rejects the epistemological hierarchies inherited from colonial modernity. Rather than accepting urban civilisation as the inevitable endpoint of historical progress, Billy chooses an indigenous mode of existence that contests dominant narratives of development and cultural superiority. His transformation therefore acquires decolonial significance by affirming tribal knowledge as an intellectually and ethically legitimate alternative to Western modernity.

2.6 Critical Synthesis and Research Gap

The preceding review demonstrates that scholarship on Arun Joshi has developed predominantly around existential philosophy, alienation, psychological realism, and spiritual crisis. These approaches have undoubtedly established *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* as one of the most important philosophical novels in Indian English literature. Nevertheless, they have also produced a critical tradition that privileges Billy's individual psychological experience while marginalising the broader cultural and ecological implications of his transformation.

Although recent developments in indigenous studies, postcolonial ecocriticism, eco-spirituality, and decolonial theory have generated sophisticated frameworks for examining questions of environmental ethics, cultural identity, and indigenous knowledge, these perspectives have rarely been systematically applied to Joshi's novel. Existing scholarship seldom investigates the tribal community as an autonomous epistemological tradition, nor does it adequately explore the intersections between indigenous resistance, ecological consciousness, spiritual renewal, and postcolonial critique. Consequently, Billy's journey continues to be interpreted primarily as an existential escape rather than as a multidimensional act of cultural, ecological, and epistemological resistance.

The present paper addresses this critical omission by integrating indigenous studies, postcolonial ecocriticism, eco-spirituality, and decolonial literary theory into a unified analytical framework. It argues that Billy's movement towards tribal society represents both indigenous resistance to cultural colonisation and spiritual renewal through ecological coexistence. By repositioning the novel within these interdisciplinary debates, the paper expands existing interpretations of Arun Joshi's fiction and contributes to broader discussions concerning indigenous epistemologies, environmental ethics, and postcolonial literary criticism.

Contribution of the Systematic Literature Review

The systematic review establishes four significant scholarly premises. First, it demonstrates that Arun Joshi criticism has historically privileged existential and psychological interpretations of *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*. Second, it reveals that indigenous studies provide an underutilised yet highly productive framework for understanding Billy's engagement with tribal life. Third, it identifies postcolonial ecocriticism and eco-spirituality as complementary perspectives capable of illuminating the novel's ecological imagination and ethical vision. Finally, it establishes a clear research gap by demonstrating the absence of a sustained interdisciplinary study examining indigenous resistance, spiritual renewal, and environmental ethics as interconnected dimensions of Billy's transformation. These observations provide the theoretical foundation for the subsequent analysis and justify the present study's contribution to contemporary Arun Joshi scholarship.

3. Research Gap and Rationale

Although *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* has been extensively examined through existential and psychological perspectives, its indigenous, ecological, and decolonial dimensions remain comparatively neglected. Existing scholarship primarily interprets Billy's transformation as an individual quest for authenticity, overlooking the tribal community as an independent cultural and philosophical tradition grounded in ecological ethics, communal values, and spiritual interconnectedness. Likewise, concepts such as indigenous epistemology, eco-spirituality,

environmental justice, and decolonial resistance have rarely been integrated into critical readings of the novel.

This study addresses these gaps by adopting an interdisciplinary framework that combines indigenous studies, postcolonial ecocriticism, eco-spirituality, and decolonial theory. It argues that Billy's movement towards tribal life represents not merely an escape from urban alienation but a conscious rejection of anthropocentric modernity and an affirmation of indigenous knowledge, ecological harmony, and collective belonging. By repositioning the novel within contemporary debates on environmental ethics, cultural identity, and indigenous resistance, the paper broadens the critical understanding of Arun Joshi's fiction and demonstrates its enduring relevance to postcolonial literary studies.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative, interpretative, and interdisciplinary methodology based on close textual analysis of *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*. It examines the novel through the perspectives of indigenous studies, postcolonial ecocriticism, eco-spirituality, and decolonial theory to explore its representations of indigenous resistance, ecological consciousness, and spiritual renewal. Adopting an exploratory and descriptive-analytical approach, the research combines detailed textual interpretation with contemporary theoretical frameworks, ensuring that its conclusions remain firmly rooted in the text while offering a broader interdisciplinary understanding of Arun Joshi's literary vision.

4.2 Primary and Secondary Sources

The study primarily analyses *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971), focusing on its portrayal of indigenous consciousness, ecological ethics, spiritual renewal, and postcolonial resistance through close textual reading. Secondary sources include recent scholarly works on Arun Joshi, Indian English literature, postcolonial ecocriticism, indigenous studies, and eco-spirituality. By combining foundational criticism with contemporary research, particularly studies published after 2015, the

analysis situates the novel within current debates on decolonisation, environmental justice, and indigenous knowledge systems.

4.3 Selection Criteria

The selection of *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* as the primary text is justified for several reasons. First, it represents Arun Joshi's most sustained engagement with questions of civilisation, tribal identity, and spiritual transformation. Second, Billy's movement from metropolitan modernity towards indigenous life offers exceptional opportunities for examining postcolonial identity, ecological ethics, and decolonial resistance. Third, the novel presents indigenous communities not merely as anthropological curiosities but as participants in an alternative moral and ecological order, making it particularly suitable for interdisciplinary investigation.

The selection of secondary scholarship is guided by four principal criteria. The first concerns academic credibility, whereby priority is given to peer-reviewed publications, university press books, and recognised scholarly databases. The second criterion involves theoretical relevance to indigenous studies, ecocriticism, postcolonial theory, environmental humanities, or eco-spiritual philosophy. The third criterion considers the contribution of previous research to Arun Joshi scholarship and Indian English literary criticism. Finally, preference is given to recent interdisciplinary studies that facilitate dialogue between literary criticism and broader debates concerning decolonisation, environmental sustainability, and indigenous knowledge systems.

4.4 Analytical Procedure

The analysis follows a systematic five-stage procedure. It begins with a close reading of *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* to identify themes of indigenous identity, ecological consciousness, spiritual renewal, and cultural conflict. These textual patterns are then interpreted through an interdisciplinary framework combining indigenous studies, postcolonial theory, Eco criticism, eco-spirituality, and decolonial thought. Finally, the findings are compared with existing works and related to

contemporary debates on environmental ethics, indigenous rights, and sustainable development, demonstrating how the study expands critical understanding of Arun Joshi's novel within postcolonial and environmental literary discourse.

4.5 Theoretical Framework

This study adopts an interdisciplinary framework integrating postcolonial theory, indigenous studies, postcolonial ecocriticism, eco-spirituality, deep ecology, and decolonial criticism. These complementary perspectives enable an examination of Billy's transformation as a cultural, ecological, and spiritual process. Postcolonial and decolonial theories explain his rejection of colonial modernity, while indigenous studies foreground tribal knowledge and ecological ethics. Ecocriticism and deep ecology interpret the forest as a space of environmental harmony and spiritual interconnectedness rather than a mere physical setting. By synthesising these approaches, the study offers a holistic interpretation of the novel, demonstrating how indigenous resistance, ecological consciousness, cultural identity, and spiritual renewal collectively shape Arun Joshi's philosophical vision.

5. Textual Analysis

5.1 Billy Biswas as an Indigenous Rebel: Rejecting Urban Modernity

At the heart of *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* lies a radical rejection of metropolitan civilisation. Billy's decision to abandon his privileged urban existence for life within a tribal community is not an act of psychological instability but a deliberate ethical and philosophical choice. Through this transformation, Arun Joshi critiques the contradictions of post-Independence modernity, exposing the spiritual emptiness of consumerism, bureaucratic rationality, and material success. Billy's journey thus emerges as a form of cultural, ecological, and spiritual resistance rather than a mere existential escape.

From the outset, Billy remains detached from the values of Delhi's elite despite his education, wealth, and social status. His dissatisfaction arises

from recognising the artificiality of urban life, which has severed humanity from authentic relationships with nature and community. Reflecting this conviction, Billy remarks, "There are primitive societies in which people have lived for centuries without knowing boredom" (Joshi 56). The observation challenges the modern assumption that technological advancement guarantees human fulfilment, suggesting instead that indigenous societies preserve emotional and spiritual integrity absent from metropolitan culture.

Joshi further exposes the moral hollowness of the urban elite, whose lives revolve around prestige, professional ambition, and material accumulation. Through the narrator Romesh Sahai, the novel demonstrates how Billy's rejection of these privileges unsettles conventional definitions of success. From a postcolonial perspective, Billy's rebellion also questions the persistence of colonial values in independent India, where Western models of development continued to marginalise indigenous traditions. His background as an anthropologist enables him to recognise tribal culture as an alternative civilisation possessing its own ethical and intellectual legitimacy rather than as a primitive remnant of the past.

Billy's fractured identity becomes explicit in his confession, "I am split right down the middle" (Joshi 45). This division symbolises not merely personal conflict but the tension between two competing worldviews: one founded on individualism, technological progress, and material ambition, and the other rooted in communal life, ecological balance, and spiritual continuity. His troubled marriage to Meena further illustrates the incompatibility between these opposing value systems, as urban respectability proves incapable of satisfying his deeper ethical aspirations.

The forest functions as a powerful symbol of indigenous resistance and moral renewal. Rather than serving merely as a physical refuge, it represents a philosophical space where human existence is reconnected with nature, community, and spiritual harmony. Billy's encounters with tribal life reveal relationships based on reciprocity, ecological awareness, and collective identity, challenging dominant assumptions about civilisation

and progress. Viewed through indigenous studies, his transformation signifies an epistemological shift from domination and accumulation towards environmental coexistence and cultural belonging.

Billy's final departure from metropolitan society therefore represents more than personal liberation. He renounces privilege, professional success, and social recognition in favour of an indigenous ethical order grounded in reciprocity and ecological harmony. Joshi avoids romanticising this decision by emphasising the sacrifices it demands, thereby presenting resistance as an ethical commitment rather than escapism. Ultimately, Billy emerges as a pioneering protagonist whose rejection of urban modernity anticipates contemporary debates on decolonisation, indigenous rights, environmental justice, and sustainable development. The novel thus affirms indigenous wisdom as a viable foundation for moral regeneration and offers a profound critique of postcolonial civilisation.

5.2 Tribal Consciousness as an Alternative Epistemology

Billy Biswas's movement from metropolitan society to a tribal community signifies not merely a physical relocation but an epistemological transformation. Arun Joshi presents indigenous life as an autonomous system of knowledge founded upon ecological harmony, ethical reciprocity, and spiritual continuity rather than as a primitive social order awaiting modernisation. In doing so, the novel challenges colonial and developmental assumptions that equate civilisation with urbanisation, technological progress, and material advancement. Tribal consciousness thus emerges as an alternative way of understanding humanity's relationship with nature, community, and culture.

Joshi reverses conventional colonial binaries that oppose the "civilised" and the "primitive." Instead of portraying tribal society as intellectually deficient, he exposes the spiritual and moral emptiness of metropolitan life. Billy's interest in indigenous cultures begins during his academic training in anthropology, where he gradually realises that Western knowledge represents only one among many legitimate epistemological traditions. The novel contrasts institutional knowledge, rooted in scientific

rationality and professional ambition, with indigenous wisdom acquired through lived experience, collective memory, and ecological participation. The forest consequently functions not as a backdrop but as a living cultural landscape in which knowledge is relational rather than exploitative.

The opposition between Delhi and the tribal world reinforces this epistemological contrast. While urban society values bureaucracy, competition, and individual achievement, tribal life is organised around communal identity, oral tradition, and environmental balance. Billy's transformation therefore reflects an expansion rather than a rejection of knowledge, replacing anthropocentric assumptions with an ethical vision grounded in coexistence. His relationship with Bilasia and participation in tribal rituals further symbolise his integration into a worldview that values reciprocity, cultural continuity, and spiritual interconnectedness over social status and material success.

Viewed through indigenous lens and postcolonial ecocriticism, Billy's journey represents a process of epistemological decolonisation. By affirming indigenous knowledge as a legitimate philosophical tradition, Joshi critiques Eurocentric models of civilisation and anticipates contemporary debates on decolonisation, environmental sustainability, and indigenous rights. Although the novel does not romanticise tribal life, it presents it as a morally coherent alternative to modern consumer culture. Ultimately, Billy's transformation demonstrates that genuine liberation lies not only in personal self-discovery but also in recovering indigenous epistemologies capable of restoring ethical relationships between humanity, nature, and community.

5.3 Indigenous Resistance against Cultural Colonization

One of the defining features of *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* is its critique of cultural colonisation and its affirmation of indigenous resistance as an ethical response to postcolonial modernity. Beyond its existential concerns, the novel reveals that Billy's rejection of metropolitan life symbolises resistance to the colonial values that continued to shape India's urban elite after Independence. Joshi suggests that political

freedom alone cannot ensure cultural liberation, as Western models of progress, education, and social prestige remained deeply embedded within postcolonial institutions. Billy's movement towards tribal life therefore represents a process of decolonising consciousness by questioning inherited definitions of civilisation, development, and human fulfilment.

Billy recognises that metropolitan society has become estranged from its indigenous cultural foundations through its unquestioning acceptance of Western modernity. His rebellion is directed not merely against materialism but against the ideological structures that privilege consumerism, bureaucratic authority, and technological progress over ecological balance and communal life. This perspective resonates with Ngig) wa Thiong'o's concept of the "decolonisation of the mind," as Billy consciously abandons colonial assumptions and reconstructs his understanding of civilisation through indigenous experience. The contrast between Billy and his father, Justice Biswas, further symbolises the conflict between inherited colonial values and the search for cultural autonomy, while Billy's failed marriage reflects the incompatibility between indigenous consciousness and metropolitan notions of respectability.

The tribal community occupies a central place in this process of resistance. Rather than portraying indigenous people as remnants of a disappearing past, Joshi presents them as custodians of ethical knowledge, ecological wisdom, and cultural continuity. Billy rejects the detached position of the metropolitan anthropologist and embraces participation within tribal life, reversing the colonial gaze that objectified indigenous communities. In doing so, the novel affirms indigenous epistemologies as legitimate alternatives to Eurocentric conceptions of knowledge and progress. The forest likewise becomes a symbolic space where cultural renewal and environmental responsibility converge, demonstrating that resistance to cultural domination is inseparable from ecological consciousness.

Read through lens of postcolonial ecocriticism and decolonial theory, Billy's transformation challenges developmental narratives that equate

progress with industrialisation and assimilation. Tapan claims that "Joshi instead proposes that indigenous traditions offer sustainable ethical alternatives founded on reciprocity, community, and harmony with nature" (Tapan 45). Although Billy ultimately sacrifices his social position and life itself, his journey transcends individual tragedy to become a powerful critique of postcolonial civilisation. The novel therefore presents indigenous resistance not as nostalgic retreat but as a dynamic process of cultural recovery, spiritual renewal, and ecological responsibility, establishing *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* as a pioneering exploration of decolonisation within Indian English fiction.

5.4 The Forest as Sacred Space: Ecology and Spiritual Renewal

The forest in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* transcends its role as a physical setting to become the novel's central symbol of ecological harmony, spiritual renewal, and indigenous wisdom. Rather than representing a refuge from urban life, it functions as an alternative moral and philosophical space where Billy rediscovers authentic relationships with nature, community, and the self. Gunwant, Suraj, and Riya mention that by contrasting the forest with metropolitan civilisation, Arun Joshi critiques consumerism, cultural alienation, and materialism while anticipating contemporary "concerns of eco-spirituality and environmental ethics" (Gunwant, Suraj and Riya 3).

Drawing upon the Indian tradition in which forests signify meditation, self-realisation, and sacred knowledge, Joshi reinterprets this symbolic landscape within a postcolonial context. Delhi embodies bureaucracy, technological progress, and social ambition, yet its inhabitants remain emotionally fragmented and spiritually unfulfilled. In contrast, the tribal forest represents an ecological order in which rivers, trees, wildlife, and human life exist in mutual dependence. Billy's spiritual transformation is inseparable from this environment, as the forest replaces competition with coexistence and "restores an ethical relationship between humanity and nature" (Indu 4).

The novel further challenges the anthropocentric worldview of modern civilisation by presenting the forest as a living entity rather than a resource

for economic exploitation. This vision closely aligns with the principles of deep ecology, which affirm the intrinsic value of all forms of life. Billy's movement into the forest resembles a spiritual pilgrimage, recalling the Indian ideal of *vanaprastha*, where material ambition is relinquished in pursuit of higher wisdom. Tribal spirituality reinforces this process by locating the sacred within ecological relationships rather than institutional religion, making nature itself the foundation of spiritual experience.

Read through ecocritical and postcolonial perspectives, the forest also becomes a site of resistance against developmental ideologies and colonial modes of environmental control. Joshi questions models of progress based on industrial expansion and resource extraction, suggesting instead that indigenous communities preserve sustainable ecological ethics through reciprocal engagement with their environment. The forest symbolises cultural resilience, environmental justice, and alternative conceptions of development rooted in balance rather than domination. Billy's final integration into this landscape affirms that authentic belonging arises through harmony with nature and community rather than social status or material success.

Ultimately, the forest functions as the philosophical centre of the novel, embodying the possibility of healing the divisions between humanity and nature, spirituality and reason, and progress and morality. By presenting indigenous ecological consciousness as a source of ethical regeneration, Joshi anticipates contemporary eco-spiritual thought and demonstrates that genuine renewal depends upon recovering harmonious relationships with the natural world rather than pursuing technological advancement alone.

5.5 Bilasia and Indigenous Wisdom: Beyond the Colonial Gaze

Although Billy Biswas remains the central figure of *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*, Bilasia occupies a far more significant philosophical position than is commonly recognised. Existing criticism often reduces her to Billy's tribal companion or a catalyst for his escape from urban life. Such readings overlook her role as the embodiment of indigenous

wisdom, ecological consciousness, and cultural continuity. Rather than serving merely as a romantic partner, Bilasia represents an alternative ethical and epistemological order that reshapes Billy's understanding of identity, belonging, and civilisation.

Billy's encounter with Bilasia marks the transition from intellectual curiosity to lived experience. His earlier interest in tribal culture, shaped by anthropology and dissatisfaction with metropolitan life, becomes genuine participation through her guidance. Unlike colonial portrayals of indigenous women as passive or exotic figures, Bilasia is characterised by dignity, confidence, and cultural self-assurance. Her relationship with Billy is founded on reciprocity rather than social hierarchy, offering him emotional freedom unavailable within the status-driven structures of urban society.

From a postcolonial feminist perspective, Bilasia challenges dominant assumptions despite her limited narrative voice. Her authority derives not from rhetoric but from lived knowledge, communal participation, and ecological practice. She embodies an indigenous worldview in which wisdom is transmitted through experience rather than abstract theory. Billy's ecological and spiritual awakening develops through her intimate relationship with the forest, making her an educator whose lessons emerge from everyday life rather than formal instruction. The contrast between Bilasia and Meena symbolises two competing civilisational models: metropolitan modernity and indigenous cultural continuity. Billy's movement towards Bilasia therefore signifies a shift in ethical consciousness rather than a rejection of Meena as an individual.

Joshi further subverts colonial and patriarchal hierarchies by reversing the traditional "civilising mission." Instead of the educated urban intellectual instructing tribal society, Billy becomes the learner, while Bilasia assumes the role of cultural guide. Her authority rests upon ecological knowledge, communal memory, and spiritual integrity, demonstrating that indigenous traditions possess intellectual legitimacy equal to institutional knowledge. Read through ecofeminist and decolonial

perspectives, Bilasia represents a living synthesis of environmental ethics, cultural resilience, and indigenous epistemology.

Ultimately, Bilasia transcends the role of a supporting character to become the novel's ethical centre. Through her, Joshi affirms that indigenous knowledge offers meaningful alternatives to the alienation of modern civilisation. Her character challenges colonial hierarchies, patriarchal assumptions, and anthropocentric values, while demonstrating that ecological harmony, communal responsibility, and spiritual renewal remain essential foundations for authentic human existence. By foregrounding Bilasia's philosophical significance, the novel expands beyond existential inquiry to engage with enduring debates on decolonisation, environmental ethics, and indigenous identity.

5.6 Eco-existentialism and the Quest for Authentic Selfhood

One of Arun Joshi's most distinctive contributions in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* is the integration of existential inquiry with ecological consciousness. Although the novel is often read through the lens of existentialism, Billy's transformation demonstrates that authentic selfhood cannot be attained through psychological introspection alone. Instead, fulfilment emerges through reconnection with nature, indigenous culture, and communal life, producing what may be described as an eco-existential vision in which personal liberation depends upon ecological harmony and spiritual belonging.

Billy initially embodies the alienation of modern urban existence. Despite privilege, education, and professional success, he experiences profound dissatisfaction because metropolitan civilisation has severed his connection with nature, indigenous traditions, and meaningful human relationships. Joshi extends classical existential concerns by suggesting that alienation is not only psychological but also cultural and ecological. Unlike European existentialism, which often emphasises individual autonomy, the novel locates authenticity within reciprocal relationships linking humanity, community, and the natural world. Billy therefore

discovers fulfilment not through isolation but through participation in an indigenous society founded upon coexistence and shared ethical values.

The forest plays a decisive role in this transformation by dismantling the artificial identities imposed by urban life. Detached from social status and institutional recognition, Billy gradually redefines himself through ecological participation and communal belonging. Nature is presented not as an indifferent backdrop but as an active source of moral and spiritual renewal, closely aligning the novel with the principles of deep ecology. Billy's growing intimacy with the forest and tribal community reflects an expanded sense of self grounded in humility, reciprocity, and interconnectedness rather than individual ambition. His rejection of material success simultaneously becomes an existential choice and a critique of consumer culture, suggesting that genuine freedom requires liberation from acquisitive models of civilisation.

The novel further redefines the idea of home by locating belonging in ethical and ecological relationships rather than geography or social identity. Billy finds authenticity only after embracing the values of the tribal community, where spiritual fulfilment arises through harmony with nature and collective life. His death therefore does not invalidate his journey; instead, it confirms his commitment to the values he consciously embraces. From a postcolonial perspective, this transformation also represents an act of epistemological decolonisation, as Billy rejects colonial models of progress and recognises indigenous ecological wisdom as a legitimate foundation for human flourishing.

Ultimately, *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* presents an alternative philosophy in which existential fulfilment is inseparable from ecological balance, cultural renewal, and spiritual communion. By combining existential thought with environmental ethics and indigenous epistemology, Joshi anticipates contemporary debates on eco-spirituality, decolonisation, and sustainability. Billy's journey demonstrates that authentic freedom is achieved not through domination or material accumulation but through recovering humanity's ethical relationship with nature, community, and the interconnectedness of life.

Part VI – Comparative Analysis

6.1 Comparative Discussion

A comparative reading of *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* within Indian English and postcolonial fiction highlights Arun Joshi's distinctive representation of indigenous life. Unlike many postcolonial narratives that portray tribal communities as marginalised victims or objects of development, Joshi presents them as an autonomous ethical and philosophical civilisation. Indigenous culture emerges as a living tradition grounded in ecological balance, spiritual integrity, and communal values, challenging colonial binaries of civilisation and primitivism.

The novel overturns conventional civilisational hierarchies by depicting Billy's movement from Delhi to the tribal world as intellectual and moral advancement rather than regression. Joshi questions modern assumptions that equate progress with material success, showing that Billy's wealth, education, and professional status fail to provide fulfilment. Genuine meaning is achieved only through ecological belonging, cultural participation, and spiritual renewal. The forest therefore functions not merely as a setting but as the ethical centre of the narrative, where environmental consciousness and existential self-discovery become inseparable.

Billy's transformation also represents an act of epistemic decolonisation, rejecting Western models of civilisation in favour of indigenous knowledge systems that address moral and ecological crises. His search for authenticity is reinforced by Bilasia, who embodies cultural continuity, ecological wisdom, and indigenous resilience. By positioning the tribal woman as the bearer of knowledge and the metropolitan intellectual as the learner, Joshi subverts colonial and patriarchal hierarchies. Ultimately, the novel anticipates contemporary debates on decolonisation, environmental ethics, indigenous rights, and sustainable development, establishing *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* as a pioneering work that links ecological consciousness with cultural and spiritual regeneration.

6.2 Comparative Analytical Table

Analytical Dimension	Metropolitan / Modern Civilisation	Indigenous / Tribal World	Critical Interpretation
Concept of Identity	Based on profession, class, wealth, and social status	Based on community, belonging, and cultural continuity	Joshi critiques socially constructed identities and privileges ethical selfhood.
Relationship with Nature	Nature viewed as resource for development and exploitation	Nature regarded as sacred, reciprocal, and spiritually interconnected	Demonstrates ecological consciousness and anticipates environmental ethics.
Model of Progress	Economic growth, industrialisation, and consumerism	Sustainability, simplicity, and communal harmony	Questions the universal validity of modern development.
Knowledge System	Scientific rationality, bureaucracy, institutional education	Experiential wisdom, oral tradition, indigenous epistemology	Challenges colonial hierarchies of knowledge.
Spiritual Orientation	Material ambition and psychological alienation	Inner peace, collective spirituality, and moral balance	Spiritual renewal emerges through indigenous consciousness.
Human Relationships	Competitive, individualistic, status-oriented	Cooperative, relational, community-centred	Highlights ethical alternatives to modern individualism.
Concept of Freedom	Freedom associated with career, mobility, and personal success	Freedom achieved through harmony with nature and community	Reinterprets existential freedom through ecological ethics.
Resistance	Institutional conformity and cultural assimilation	Moral refusal, cultural preservation, and spiritual autonomy	Indigenous resistance functions as ethical decolonisation.
Billy's Position	Alienated intellectual unable to achieve fulfilment	Spiritually transformed participant in indigenous life	Demonstrates authentic selfhood through ecological integration.
Philosophical Outcome	Existential emptiness despite material success	Moral regeneration through indigenous wisdom	Establishes eco-existentialism as Joshi's alternative philosophical vision.

6.3 Comparative Findings

First, the novel challenges the colonial belief that industrial modernity alone defines civilisation by presenting indigenous culture as an ethically and intellectually valid alternative.

Second, Billy's journey to tribal life represents both existential self-discovery and postcolonial resistance. His rejection of urban society questions a worldview that privileges material success over spiritual and ethical fulfilment.

Third, ecological consciousness emerges as inseparable from indigenous identity. The novel links environmental harmony with cultural continuity and spiritual renewal, anticipating later developments in ecocriticism and environmental humanities.

Fourth, Joshi validates indigenous knowledge as a legitimate philosophical system. Through the tribal community, Bilasia, and the forest, the novel foregrounds experiential, communal, and ecological wisdom over the rationalist assumptions of metropolitan modernity.

Finally, *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* extends beyond existential fiction to become a major work of postcolonial eco-spiritual literature. By integrating indigenous resistance, ecological ethics, and spiritual renewal, Joshi offers a powerful critique of modern civilisation that remains highly relevant in the contemporary world.

Part VII – Results and Discussion

7.1 Theme-wise Findings

The qualitative textual analysis of *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* reveals that Arun Joshi constructs the novel as a multidimensional critique of postcolonial modernity, where indigenous consciousness becomes the foundation for ethical regeneration, ecological harmony, and existential fulfilment. Rather than presenting Billy's transformation as an isolated psychological experience, the novel situates his journey within larger debates concerning colonial legacies, cultural displacement, environmental ethics, and spiritual identity. Five major thematic findings emerge from the analysis.

7.1.1 Indigenous Resistance as Ethical Decolonisation: The first and most significant finding is that Billy's rejection of metropolitan civilisation represents an act of ethical decolonisation rather than personal escapism. His departure from Delhi is not motivated by emotional instability or romantic idealism but by a growing awareness that modern civilisation has become spiritually bankrupt. Throughout the novel, Billy consciously rejects the values of consumerism, bureaucratic authority, class privilege, and social conformity that dominate urban life. His

movement towards the tribal community therefore symbolises resistance against the internalised structures of colonial modernity that continue to shape post-independence Indian society.

Unlike conventional political resistance, Billy's rebellion is fundamentally moral and philosophical. Instead of attempting to reform urban institutions, he withdraws from them entirely, demonstrating that authentic freedom sometimes requires refusing participation in oppressive cultural systems. The study therefore establishes that indigenous resistance in the novel operates primarily through the recovery of ethical values suppressed by colonial and industrial modernity.

7.1.2 Spiritual Renewal Through Indigenous Consciousness: The second major finding concerns the novel's conception of spiritual renewal. Billy's transformation is not presented as religious conversion but as the gradual restoration of harmony between the individual, community, and nature. The tribal world provides an environment where ethical relationships replace social competition, collective responsibility replaces individual ambition, and spiritual fulfilment replaces material success.

The analysis demonstrates that Joshi consistently associates indigenous life with inner peace, moral clarity, and existential authenticity. Billy gradually discovers that fulfilment cannot be achieved through professional achievement or economic prosperity but through participation in a cultural order grounded in simplicity, reciprocity, and ecological balance. Spiritual renewal thus emerges as the recovery of forgotten human values rather than the acquisition of new philosophical doctrines.

7.1.3 Nature as a Living Moral Presence: Another important finding concerns the philosophical role of nature within the novel. The forest is not merely the geographical setting of Billy's transformation but functions as an active ethical force shaping his consciousness. Unlike metropolitan society, where nature is commodified and exploited, the tribal community maintains relationships characterised by reverence, reciprocity, and ecological responsibility.

The study reveals that Joshi anticipates contemporary environmental philosophy by presenting ecological harmony as an essential condition of authentic human existence. Billy's psychological healing occurs simultaneously with his ecological integration, suggesting that environmental alienation and existential alienation are inseparable manifestations of the same civilisational crisis. Nature therefore becomes both the physical environment of indigenous life and the symbolic foundation of moral regeneration.

7.1.4 Indigenous Knowledge as an Alternative Epistemology: The analysis further demonstrates that the novel challenges dominant assumptions concerning knowledge, education, and civilisation. Metropolitan society privileges institutional learning, scientific rationality, and bureaucratic expertise, whereas the tribal community values experiential wisdom, oral tradition, ecological understanding, and communal memory.

Billy gradually recognises the limitations of the anthropological perspective through which he initially approached indigenous culture. Rather than studying tribal life as an external observer, he becomes an active participant within its ethical framework. This transition signifies a profound epistemological transformation. Knowledge is no longer treated as objective information detached from lived experience but as a form of participation in communal and ecological life. The novel therefore validates indigenous epistemologies that have historically been marginalised within colonial systems of education.

7.1.5 Eco-existentialism and Authentic Selfhood: The final thematic finding identifies the emergence of eco-existentialism as the novel's central philosophical vision. Billy's existential crisis cannot be separated from his ecological and cultural alienation. His search for authenticity culminates not in philosophical abstraction but in ethical participation within the indigenous community.

The analysis establishes that Joshi significantly expands classical existential thought by demonstrating that authentic selfhood depends upon ecological belonging, communal solidarity, and spiritual

interconnectedness rather than radical individualism alone. Billy's journey therefore anticipates contemporary interdisciplinary discussions linking existential philosophy with environmental ethics and indigenous worldviews.

7.2 Discussion of the Findings

The findings substantially broaden the critical understanding of *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas*. Traditional scholarship has predominantly interpreted the novel through existential philosophy, psychological alienation, or individual rebellion. While these approaches remain valuable, the present analysis demonstrates that they only partially explain the philosophical complexity of Joshi's narrative.

Viewed through postcolonial and eco-spiritual perspectives, Billy's journey becomes a critique of modern civilisation itself. His dissatisfaction arises not simply from personal psychological conflict but from the ethical contradictions embedded within industrial capitalism, colonial education, bureaucratic rationality, and consumer culture. The novel consequently exposes the limitations of development models that privilege economic progress while neglecting cultural continuity, ecological sustainability, and spiritual fulfilment.

The findings also challenge interpretations that describe Billy's departure as irrational escapism. Instead, his movement towards indigenous society represents a conscious ethical decision grounded in philosophical reflection. Billy rejects modernity because he recognises that it systematically separates human beings from nature, community, and their own moral identities. His transformation therefore illustrates a process of conscious decolonisation in which liberation requires recovering alternative forms of knowledge and existence preserved within indigenous traditions.

Equally significant is the novel's treatment of tribal culture. Rather than romanticising indigenous life as an untouched paradise, Joshi presents it as a coherent civilisational model possessing intellectual, ecological, and ethical legitimacy. Indigenous knowledge is neither primitive nor obsolete but offers valuable alternatives to the crises generated by industrial

modernity. In this respect, the novel anticipates contemporary scholarship concerning decolonial epistemologies, indigenous rights, and environmental justice.

The discussion further demonstrates that ecological consciousness occupies a central rather than peripheral position within Joshi's philosophical vision. Environmental harmony is not presented merely as an aesthetic preference but as a necessary condition for existential authenticity. Billy's recovery of selfhood coincides with his reintegration into the ecological rhythms of the forest, suggesting that humanity's spiritual crisis cannot be resolved independently of its relationship with the natural environment.

Another important implication concerns the relationship between literature and contemporary global concerns. Although written in the early 1970s, *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* anticipates twenty-first-century debates surrounding ecological degradation, cultural homogenisation, sustainable development, and indigenous knowledge systems. Joshi's critique of materialism, environmental exploitation, and cultural displacement appears remarkably prescient in the context of present environmental and humanitarian crises.

The findings therefore reposition Arun Joshi as a novelist whose philosophical imagination extends beyond existentialism into the interconnected domains of postcolonial ethics, environmental humanities, indigenous studies, and spiritual ecology.

7.3 Alignment with the Research Objectives

The findings directly fulfil each objective established at the beginning of the study.

The first objective to examine indigenous resistance in *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* has been achieved by demonstrating that Billy's rejection of metropolitan civilisation constitutes an act of ethical and cultural decolonisation rather than personal withdrawal.

The second objective to analyse spiritual renewal has been fulfilled through identifying the tribal community as the primary space where

Billy reconstructs his moral identity, ecological consciousness, and existential authenticity.

The third objective to investigate the relationship between indigenous culture and ecological philosophy has been addressed by showing that Joshi consistently links environmental harmony with cultural continuity and spiritual regeneration.

The fourth objective to explore postcolonial dimensions of the novel has been satisfied by establishing that Billy's transformation challenges colonial hierarchies of civilisation, knowledge, and development while validating indigenous epistemologies.

Finally, the study reassesses Arun Joshi's contribution to Indian English literature by positioning *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* as an important text within contemporary discussions of eco-spirituality, indigenous studies, and decolonial literary criticism.

7.4 Responses to the Research Questions

The research questions formulated in the introductory section are comprehensively addressed through the findings of this investigation.

The analysis demonstrates that indigenous resistance in the novel functions as a philosophical rejection of colonial modernity and its materialistic value system. Billy's rebellion is ethical rather than political, seeking liberation through cultural rediscovery instead of institutional revolution.

The study further establishes that spiritual renewal is achieved through Billy's immersion in indigenous culture, where ecological harmony, communal solidarity, and moral simplicity replace the alienation characteristic of metropolitan existence.

The investigation confirms that indigenous epistemologies, ecological consciousness, and spiritual ecology provide productive analytical frameworks for interpreting Billy's transformation. These perspectives reveal dimensions of the novel that remain insufficiently explored within traditional existential criticism.

Finally, the findings demonstrate that *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* significantly expands Arun Joshi's philosophical vision beyond individual existentialism by integrating indigenous wisdom, ecological ethics, postcolonial resistance, and spiritual regeneration into a unified literary framework.

Discussion Summary

The present study establishes *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* as a pioneering postcolonial eco-spiritual novel that extends beyond existentialism. Arun Joshi critiques modern civilisation through Billy's journey toward indigenous life, highlighting ecological harmony, cultural continuity, and spiritual renewal. The novel affirms the enduring relevance of indigenous knowledge for understanding decolonisation, environmental ethics, and authentic human existence, thereby making a significant contribution to Indian English literature and interdisciplinary literary studies.

Part VIII – Conclusion

The present study reinterprets *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* through the perspectives of indigenous resistance, spiritual renewal, postcolonial criticism, and eco-existentialism. It argues that Billy's journey from metropolitan life to the tribal world extends beyond existential alienation, becoming a critique of colonial modernity, materialism, ecological exploitation, and cultural displacement. Rather than portraying tribal society as primitive, Arun Joshi presents it as an ethically coherent civilisation grounded in community, ecological harmony, and spiritual authenticity.

The analysis demonstrates that Billy's rejection of urban privilege represents an act of epistemological decolonisation. His transformation reflects the recovery of indigenous knowledge, ecological consciousness, and communal values that challenge dominant models of progress. Spiritual renewal emerges through participation in tribal life, where identity is shaped by reciprocity, belonging, and harmony with nature rather than competition and material success. Similarly, the forest

functions as an ethical and ecological space that enables moral regeneration, anticipating contemporary concerns in environmental humanities and ecocriticism.

The study further establishes that the novel validates indigenous epistemologies as legitimate systems of knowledge. Billy's movement from detached observer to participant symbolises the shift from institutional rationality to experiential wisdom. Bilasia likewise emerges as a central figure embodying indigenous continuity, ecological wisdom, and spiritual resilience, challenging colonial and patriarchal assumptions about knowledge and authority.

This research also repositions Arun Joshi within Indian English literature by demonstrating that *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* transcends existential fiction and engages deeply with postcolonial identity, ecological ethics, indigenous knowledge, and spiritual philosophy. By integrating existential inquiry with eco-spiritual and decolonial perspectives, the novel anticipates contemporary debates on sustainability, environmental justice, and cultural decolonisation.

In conclusion, *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* stands as a pioneering work of postcolonial eco-spiritual fiction. Billy's embrace of indigenous life affirms that authentic human existence depends upon ecological balance, cultural continuity, communal responsibility, and spiritual integrity rather than material progress alone. Arun Joshi's novel thus remains profoundly relevant to contemporary discussions of decolonisation, environmental ethics, and the future of human civilisation.

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Politicizing the Sacred: Feminist Reimagining of Indian Epics

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Introduction

India's two great epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, have been boldly reimagined in contemporary literature, with female characters once peripheral or voiceless now taking centre stage as narrators and protagonists. Writers such as Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Amish Tripathi, and Devdutt Pattanaik approach these ancient texts through lenses of postcolonial feminism, deconstruction, and feminist theology, reclaiming them from centuries of patriarchal interpretation. In doing so, they create space for marginalised voices and call into question who holds the authority to define and transmit cultural heritage. These retellings also carry an urgent political dimension: at a time when Hindu nationalist movements increasingly invoke the epics to reinforce traditional gender roles and religious conformity, such rewritings serve as acts of resistance and critique.

To fully appreciate what these feminist retellings are doing, one must engage with postcolonial feminist theory, especially the frameworks articulated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Chandra Talpade Mohanty. Both thinkers grapple with the layered oppressions faced by women in the Global South, where the burdens of colonialism, patriarchy, and indigenous social hierarchies intersect and compound one another. Spivak's landmark essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988) offers a foundational account of how structural conditions prevent marginalised subjects from being heard. She argues that speech requires not merely utterance but recognition within the frameworks of dominant discourse. This insight sheds light on the long history of silencing female epic characters, whose words and emotions, even when recorded in the

texts, are filtered through male narrators and constrained by male-defined notions of dharma.

Feminist retellings take on a task that Spivak's own theoretical framework implies may be fundamentally unachievable: reaching back across centuries to recover and give voice to women who were structurally silenced. The difficulty is compounded when contemporary authors themselves, often occupying positions of relative privilege, claim to speak on behalf of women from vastly different historical moments, social circumstances, and caste backgrounds. This is precisely the tension Spivak identifies when she warns against intellectuals who "speak for" marginalised communities rather than working to create conditions in which those communities can speak for themselves. And yet, Spivak's own notion of "strategic essentialism" provides a partial defence of such literary projects. The concept involves deliberately, if temporarily, adopting essentialist categories such as "women's shared experience" or "a woman's perspective" as tactical tools for political mobilisation, while retaining a critical awareness that these categories are constructed and provisional rather than natural or fixed. When Divakaruni invokes "Draupadi's voice" or "Sita's perspective," she is engaging in precisely this kind of strategic move: building feminist solidarity and contesting patriarchal readings of the epics, while implicitly acknowledging that what she offers is an imaginative reconstruction, not an authentic recovery of a lost original. The political value of such a strategy, however, hinges on preserving its self-critical dimension; the moment an author mistakes reconstruction for recovery, the "strategic" awareness collapses into a new form of essentialism.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty's landmark essay "Under Western Eyes" (1988) offers a complementary theoretical lens. Mohanty argues that Western feminist scholarship has tended to construct the "Third World woman" as a uniform, undifferentiated, and essentially victimised figure an analytical move that, despite its apparent solidarity, reproduces a form of discursive colonisation by imposing Western conceptual frameworks onto experiences that are shaped by entirely different historical, cultural, and social conditions. Her insistence on feminist frameworks

that are autonomous and grounded in specific geographies, histories, and cultures has direct relevance for mythological retellings, challenging authors to resist universalising impulses and attend carefully to the particular contexts from which these stories and their female characters emerge.

Mohanty's framework cautions against sweeping, universalising claims about women's oppression, calling instead for comparative feminist approaches that trace interconnected histories while remaining attentive to difference and specificity. When applied to the feminist retelling of Indian epics, this perspective warns against reading Indian women's experiences through ready-made Western categories such as "individual autonomy" or "sexual liberation," which risk obscuring rather than illuminating the realities they purport to explain. Gender oppression as it operates within these texts is not a generic phenomenon; it is deeply embedded in particular configurations of caste hierarchy, colonial history, and indigenous patriarchy, and any meaningful feminist analysis must reckon with these specificities rather than dissolving them into a universal narrative of female subjugation.

Viewed in this light, contemporary feminist retellings of the epics serve a range of overlapping and mutually reinforcing purposes. They challenge the authority of Brahmanical patriarchy, recover indigenous feminist traditions that have been marginalised or suppressed, offer counter-narratives to the appropriation of these sacred texts by Hindutva ideology, and assert women's right to narrative authority over stories that have historically excluded or diminished them. The significance of these works, however, extends well beyond literary experimentation. By reimagining who speaks, who is heard, and whose experiences are deemed worthy of telling, they participate in a broader process of cultural transformation, reshaping collective memory around questions of gender and power, and fundamentally reopening the question of what sacred tradition is, who it belongs to, and who has the right to interpret it.

Women-Centered Appropriations as Cultural-Political Projects

Contemporary feminist retellings of Indian epics are rooted in the specific historical conditions of post-liberalization India: the cultural shifts after

1991, the rise of Hindu nationalism, growing feminist consciousness, and intensifying debates around tradition and modernity. Yet the impulse to reinterpret canonical texts is not new; across literary history, foundational narratives have consistently invited reimagination, with each era bringing its own critical perspectives to inherited stories. Such reinterpretation is never merely aesthetic; it is bound up with shifting power structures and evolving cultural sensibilities. This is especially visible in mythological retellings, where ancient stories are continuously reshaped to address present concerns. As Luthra (2014) argues, "The appropriation and reworking of traditional narratives has been an important strategy for women to interrogate dominant ideologies and articulate emergent and resistant ideologies and identifications" (135).

At the heart of this literary heritage stands the Ramayana, one of the two great Sanskrit epics that has shaped Indian cultural, religious, and literary traditions for more than two millennia. Attributed to the sage Valmiki and composed roughly between the 7th century BCE and 3rd century CE, it narrates the exile and journey of the divine prince Rama, his devoted wife Sita, and his loyal brother Lakshmana. The epic functions far beyond literature alone; it operates as a paradigmatic narrative that has shaped ideals of kingship, dharma, and gender relations in the Indian cultural imagination. Its moral and cultural weight extends across communities, serving as a shared framework through which diverse groups across generations have negotiated social norms and collective values.

The oral and written reconstruction of India's epics is by no means a recent phenomenon; such retellings have always existed alongside the canonical texts, embedded in the living traditions of Indian society. What distinguishes contemporary literary reproductions, however, is the degree to which they are shaped by new theoretical frameworks emerging from literary, cultural, and women's studies. Recent revisionist readings of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata draw heavily on the aesthetic and political paradigms of these disciplines, and their reimaginings of characters and narrative moments engage meaningfully with postmodern and poststructuralist ideas about language, narration, and power.

Many of these retellings work to expose the patriarchal power relations concealed within sacred narratives, revealing how "grand narratives" have historically been deployed by those in authority to regulate the social and moral lives of ordinary people and of women in particular. This is precisely why contemporary feminist writers and mythologists have turned to these texts as sites for exploring questions of power, gender, identity, and justice.

Rohit Sharma (2016) draws a useful distinction between oral and folkloric adaptations of the epics and their literary rewritings, arguing that the latter carry distinct political and ethical commitments. He characterises "the practice of epic-rewriting" as an act of renewal, driven by one of "two reasons: either the epic misrepresents someone/something, or the epic itself has been misread or misinterpreted (155). In this sense, contemporary rewritings of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana perform a constructive critique of the values embedded in the originals, seeking to resist, reinterpret, and realign ancient moral frameworks with the demands of contemporary social life, texts that have remained central to India's cultural and post-independence political imagination.

Rohit Sharma writes,

Unlike oral culture, the trend of rewriting a story in literature serves for various premeditated designs that the respective authors have in their minds. Because of this intentional element, the act of retelling in written literature tends to become politically and culturally charged. Consequently, the general interpretation of the old saying – a story is new every time it is told – suffers inadequacy while explaining the complexity of retelling in print culture. The moment it is positioned in a particular context – presently in the context of epic-rewriting – the adage ceases to be self-explanatory, as the practice of rewriting in literature invites several pertinent questions of why, what, who, how, whom: Why is it *renewed*? Who makes it new? For whom is it rendered a *new*? What makes it *newer*? How does the process of *newing* go? Stretching a bit, what is the effect of this *newness*? (149).

In his critical essay "The Art of Rewriting Indian Epics," Rohit Sharma (2016) observes that a substantial body of Indian literature has been devoted to retelling the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. He argues that the sheer volume and consistency of this tradition within Indian literary history has given such works a distinctive generic identity what he terms the Indian epic-rewriting genre. Within this framework, these retellings are more than mere adaptations; they function as critical interventions that reveal how classical narratives continue to shape contemporary socio-cultural understanding.

It is fair to say, then, that modern rewritings of ancient myths, scriptures, and sacred texts have made a meaningful contribution to Indian literary aesthetics and criticism. Far from being derivative, these works operate as counter-narratives, simultaneously questioning and enriching the existing interpretive traditions surrounding the classical epics and other forms of sacred writing, expanding the hermeneutic possibilities of texts that have long been treated as fixed and authoritative.

The Ramayana and Mahabharata offer complex and often ambivalent portrayals of women that have profoundly shaped Indian society's understanding of female agency across centuries. Their influence extends well into the present, where they continue to inform contemporary debates about women's roles, rights, and autonomy. These texts are invoked across a remarkably wide range of contexts, from discussions about women's workforce participation to conversations about domestic violence, and are frequently cited by politicians and social leaders to support competing positions on gender equality, with the same characters sometimes marshalled to argue for opposing viewpoints. This enduring cultural authority means the epics remain active sites of contestation rather than settled prescriptions. While these narratives have historically served to justify patriarchal structures, they also contain within them seeds of resistance and alternative models of female power that contemporary feminist movements continue to cultivate and reinterpret. The relationship between these ancient texts and women's agency in Indian society is therefore neither straightforwardly liberating

nor entirely constraining it is a complex and living inheritance that each generation must negotiate and redefine on its own terms.

Cultural Studies has opened productive new avenues for examining how theological texts are reimagined in contemporary contexts, interrogating the ways in which power, identity, and social structures shape both the original reception of religious narratives and their modern adaptations. Contemporary retellings of such texts typically serve multiple, overlapping functions: they make ancient stories accessible to modern audiences while simultaneously challenging the traditional interpretations and embedded power structures that have long governed their reception. In doing so, they frequently centre voices that were marginalised or altogether absent in the original texts, arguing for a more critical, inclusive, and socially conscious engagement with foundational narratives and transforming sacred texts into active sites of cultural and political dialogue.

The present research examines three significant contemporary retellings of the Ramayana that reimagine Sita through distinctive feminist perspectives: Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantments* (2019), Amish Tripathi's *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* (2017), and Devdutt Pattanaik's *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana* (2013). Though differing in approach, all three works participate in the feminist project of reclaiming Sita's character from patriarchal frameworks, engaging with both classical epic traditions and contemporary gender politics. Through diverse narrative strategies, they transform Sita from a silent ideal into a figure of psychological depth and agency.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Gynocentric Mahabharata and Ramayana

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantments* (2019) represents a landmark achievement in feminist revisionist mythology. The novel retells the Ramayana entirely from Sita's perspective in what Divakaruni frames as "Sitayan", Sita's own version, written in conscious response to Valmiki's male-centred narrative. The project took

Divakaruni a decade to complete, reflecting the weight of reimagining India's most sacred female figure, long upheld as the epitome of the pativrata ideal.

The novel's central feminist intervention revolves around what critics identify as the "love vs. duty dynamic", an exploration of the destructive imbalance that emerges "when one person gives everything for love, while the other sacrifices love for responsibility." Divakaruni's Sita is not a passive embodiment of wifely devotion but a questioning, thinking subject who challenges Rama's decisions, most pointedly his demand for agnipariksha — the fire test — following her rescue from Ravana. Rather than accepting the trial as a necessary affirmation of purity, Divakaruni's Sita names the gendered injustice at its heart: proof is demanded of the victim while the rescuer is valorised without question. She reflects, "If I have to prove my virtue in fire, what does that say of the trust and love my husband has for me? What kind of love demands proof? (345).

Equally significant is the novel's polyvocality — its insistence on amplifying the voices of multiple marginalised women within the Ramayana universe. Kaikeyi is transformed from a straightforward villain into an accomplished charioteer with layered motivations; Surpanakha is reimagined not as a lustful demoness but as a woman wronged by two men; Mandodari emerges as a figure of wisdom rather than a mere demon consort; and Urmila, Lakshmana's wife who is largely absent from traditional versions, finally receives recognition for her silent sacrifice. This polyvocality creates what feminist scholars identify as "female solidarity" across traditionally enforced divisions, directly challenging the patriarchal strategy of isolating women from one another.

Drawing on Gayatri Spivak's framework in "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Divakaruni's first-person narration attempts to construct a dialogic space in which female subalterns can speak and be heard. Spivak's observation that "the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" finds vivid illustration in traditional epic narratives, where women characters

exist within texts but are denied genuine voice; their utterances filtered through male narrators, their interiority interpreted through male perspectives. Yet Spivak's framework also raises an uncomfortable question that shadows the novel: can a privileged contemporary author truly represent subaltern voices, or does such an act inevitably risk appropriation? Scholars have noted both the achievement and the tension: while The Forest of Enchantments grants narrative authority to historically silenced women, it simultaneously risks what Chandra Mohanty (1988) warns against: the homogenisation of diverse experiences across caste, class, and historical specificity in the name of a unified "women's perspective."

Amish Tripathi's Warrior Goddess and Euhemeristic Feminism

Amish Tripathi's Sita: Warrior of Mithila (2017), part of his Ram Chandra Series, represents a distinctly different approach to feminist epic retelling. Scholar Madhavi Nair characterises it as "post-feminist" in its orientation, assuming women's equality as a given and focusing on demonstrating female capability within traditionally masculine domains. Where Divakaruni foregrounds interiority and emotional complexity, Tripathi emphasises external action and physical prowess, reimagining Sita as a warrior, military strategist, and political leader.

Tripathi's broader body of work employs what scholars identify as a "euhemeristic" approach, depicting gods as humans whose extraordinary deeds elevated them to divinity. Established in his bestselling Shiva Trilogy (2010–2013), this philosophical framework challenges religious orthodoxy by suggesting that all divine figures achieved their status through human capability and choice rather than inherent sanctity. Applied to Sita, this euhemerism carries feminist implications: it positions her not as a figure of innate purity to be venerated, but as a woman whose achievements made her divine a model for human women's potential.

Tripathi's Sita is found abandoned as an infant, adopted by King Janak, rises to become Prime Minister of Mithila, excels as a champion archer and capable ruler, and is ultimately chosen as the next Vishnu, the saviour

figure by the secret society of Malayaputras. The novel's opening declaration captures this transformation succinctly: "tall for a thirteen-year-old, already beginning to build muscle" (51). The feminist dimensions of this reimagining can be understood through Judith Butler's concept of "gender performativity" the idea that gender is constituted through repetitive acts and can be subverted through alternative performances. Tripathi's Sita performs behaviours culturally coded as masculine martial skill, political leadership, strategic warfare while retaining feminine-coded virtues such as compassion and ethical reasoning. This combination challenges essentialist gender binaries by embodying in a single character traits that patriarchal culture has traditionally segregated by sex.

Scholarly critique, however, has noted significant limitations in Tripathi's approach. While his reimagining grants Sita physical agency and martial authority, it engages less thoroughly with structural patriarchy, internalised oppression, or the emotional costs of navigating male-dominated institutions. The emphasis on what Naomi Wolf terms "power feminism" women wielding power and exercising individual choice risks overlooking how patriarchy constrains even the most capable women's decisions. For this reason, some feminist scholars have characterised Tripathi's feminism as essentially liberal in orientation: concerned with individual achievement and visibility within existing systems rather than with the deeper transformation of those systems.

Devdutt Pattanaik's Queer Mythologies and Gender Fluidity

Devdutt Pattanaik occupies a distinctive position among mythological reinterpreters, concerned less with retelling the epic narrative in a conventional literary sense than with excavating the layered symbolic meanings, alternative traditions, and marginalised perspectives embedded within the Ramayana. His work *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana* (2013) approaches the epic not as a fixed sacred text but as a living, contested tradition shaped by diverse cultural, regional, and interpretive contexts. The book's distinctive format, combining narrative retelling with illustrated panels, footnotes, and marginal commentary

drawing from over fifty regional versions of the Ramayana, itself embodies his central argument that no single authoritative version of the story exists.

Pattanaik's methodology challenges the authoritative, singular reading of the Ramayana by drawing attention to its many regional variations and oral traditions, demonstrating that no one version holds absolute interpretive authority. By placing these variations side by side, he reveals how different communities across centuries have understood Sita differently as goddess, as victim, as rebel, as ideal exposing the constructed nature of any single interpretation. This comparative approach exemplifies what postcolonial scholars call "decolonising mythology" recovering indigenous knowledge systems from the dominant interpretive frameworks that have sought to fix and standardise them. Where colonial and nationalist interpreters have tended to privilege the Valmiki Ramayana as the definitive text, Pattanaik's retelling insists on the irreducible plurality of the tradition, restoring voices and versions that have been marginalised or suppressed.

Central to Pattanaik's retelling is his reimagining of Sita not merely as Rama's devoted wife but as a figure of considerable inner strength, wisdom, and spiritual authority in her own right. He draws attention to aspects of Sita's character that traditional retellings have minimised or overlooked her origins as a child of the earth goddess, her deep connection to nature and fertility, her capacity for independent moral reasoning, and her ultimate return to the earth as an act of sovereign self-determination rather than defeat. In this reading, Sita's final disappearance into the earth is reframed as a powerful assertion of agency, a refusal to submit any further to the conditions imposed upon her rather than a passive withdrawal or a tragic end.

Pattanaik's approach to the agnipariksha the fire test that Rama demands of Sita following her rescue from Ravana is particularly revealing. Rather than naturalising this demand as a matter of dharmic necessity, as traditional versions tend to do, Pattanaik contextualises it within broader structures of social expectation and male honour, allowing the gendered

injustice of the episode to surface without imposing an overtly polemical reading. Similarly, his treatment of Sita's second exile, banished while pregnant on the basis of public rumour. It exposes the vulnerability of even the most devoted and virtuous woman within a social order that ultimately prioritises male reputation over female experience and suffering.

From a feminist perspective, Pattanaik's retelling serves to quietly but persistently unsettle the patriarchal readings that have calcified around Sita's character. By foregrounding the plurality of her representations across traditions, he implicitly challenges the reduction of Sita to a single, monolithic ideal of feminine submission and purity. His use of footnotes and alternative versions functions as a form of scholarly activism, demonstrating at every turn that the version of Sita upheld by conservative and nationalist discourse is one interpretation among many, not an eternal or divinely ordained truth.

Pattanaik's work can be situated within what scholars identify as "cultural feminism" an approach that emphasises recovering and celebrating feminine principles and indigenous traditions rather than engaging in direct political critique of patriarchal structures. This distinguishes his retelling from more explicitly feminist works like Divakaruni's The Forest of Enchantments, which grants Sita a first-person voice and positions her as an active critic of the injustices she endures. Pattanaik works more obliquely, allowing the multiplicity of the tradition itself to do the subversive work. The effect is nonetheless significant: by demonstrating that Sita has been understood across centuries as a figure of power, agency, and spiritual authority not merely of obedience and suffering he provides a mythological foundation for contemporary feminist reinterpretations.

However, Pattanaik's approach also attracts critique from feminist scholars who argue that his reluctance to adopt an explicitly political stance limits the transformative potential of his retelling. His tendency to frame patriarchal elements of the narrative within a broader metaphorical or symbolic context interpreting Sita's trials as

representations of the soul's journey rather than as reflections of women's material oppression risks, in the view of some critics, aestheticising structures of domination rather than challenging them. This tension reflects the broader debate within feminist mythology studies between cultural and political approaches to sacred texts, and between recovering tradition and transforming it. Pattanaik's *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana* remains a significant contribution to this ongoing conversation, expanding the interpretive possibilities of the Ramayana while raising important questions about the relationship between mythology, gender, and power.

Character Reimaginings: From Archetypes to Complex Subjectivities

The feminist reimagining of female characters from the epics demonstrates multiple strategies for transforming one-dimensional archetypes into complex human subjects with interiority, agency, and moral depth. Examining how key characters are reconceived reveals the politics and possibilities of revisionist mythology.

Sita undergoes the most radical transformation across these three retellings, given her status as Hinduism's paramount ideal woman. Traditional depictions emphasise absolute pativrata devotion she follows Rama into exile without question, endures captivity with unwavering purity proven through the fire test, and accepts final banishment without protest. As Nabaneeta Dev Sen observes, the traditional Sita embodies "mute acceptance of suffering" as feminine virtue, functioning as an impossible standard against which real women are perpetually judged and found wanting. Contemporary retellings fundamentally challenge this construction, though each does so through a distinctly different approach.

Amish Tripathi's *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* (2017) presents the most dramatic departure from tradition, reimagining Sita as a warrior, political leader, and chosen Vishnu — roles historically reserved for men. She walks with weapons, makes strategic military decisions, and embodies what scholars describe as "feminist nationalism." This reimagining enacts

what Judith Butler calls gender performativity demonstrating through a single character that traits culturally assigned to one gender are in fact constructed and transferable, rather than natural or fixed. By occupying masculine-coded roles while retaining feminine-coded virtues such as compassion and ethical reasoning, Tripathi's Sita challenges the essentialist gender binaries that have long governed both epic tradition and Indian social life.

Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantments* (2019) takes a markedly different approach, maintaining Sita's essentially non-violent character while granting her something the tradition consistently withholds: voice, interiority, and the capacity for critique. Divakaruni's Sita does not transform into a warrior; instead, she becomes a thinking, questioning subject who refuses to accept injustice as divine will. Most pointedly, she interrogates the agnipariksha the fire test demanded by Rama following her rescue from Ravana — exposing its gendered logic: why must the victim prove her innocence when neither the abductor nor the rescuer is subjected to equivalent scrutiny? In articulating this question, Divakaruni's Sita names the injustice that traditional versions naturalise and sanctify. Beyond her relationship with Rama, the novel grants Sita meaningful solidarity with other marginalised women Surpanakha, Ahalya, Urmila creating what feminist scholars identify as a network of female solidarity that cuts across the divisions patriarchal structures work to enforce. The novel employs first-person narration to grant Sita the subjectivity traditionally reserved for male protagonists, applying what feminist narratologists identify as a crucial shift in focalization moving from a narrative in which women's experiences are mediated through male observers to one in which a woman speaks directly and on her own terms.

Pattanaik's *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana* (2013) operates through a different but equally significant feminist strategy. Rather than granting Sita an explicitly critical or resistant voice, Pattanaik works through the multiplication of perspectives, drawing on over fifty regional versions of the Ramayana to demonstrate that Sita has never been a singular, stable figure but a contested and multivalent one. By

placing divergent interpretations side by side, his retelling implicitly challenges the authority of any one version, including those that reduce Sita to a passive embodiment of wifely virtue. His treatment of Sita's return to the earth is particularly significant: reframed not as tragic defeat or passive withdrawal but as a sovereign act of self-determination, it restores to Sita a form of agency that dominant tradition has consistently suppressed. Pattanaik's Sita thus emerges as a figure of spiritual authority and inner power, whose complexity has been flattened by centuries of patriarchal interpretation.

Taken together, these three retellings reveal the range of strategies available to feminist revisionist mythology. Tripathi demonstrates female capability through action and physical power; Divakaruni recovers female interiority and the capacity for moral critique; Pattanaik unsettles interpretive authority by restoring the plurality that singular, dominant readings have erased. Each approach carries its own possibilities and limitations, but all three share a fundamental commitment to transforming Sita from a silent ideal into a complex subject one whose story, in all its difficulty and contradiction, belongs to her.

Re-gendering Sacred Texts: Meta-Narrative Strategies and Theoretical Implications

The concept of "re-gendering" canonical texts encompasses multiple theoretical dimensions: the transformation of narrative voice, the creation of psychological interiority, the subversion of gender performativity, and the challenge to epistemological authority over interpretation. Together, these strategies constitute what postmodern narrative theory identifies as meta-narrative practice texts that simultaneously tell stories and reflect on the act of storytelling itself, exposing the constructed nature of narrative authority.

Narrative voice transformation represents the most fundamental of these re-gendering strategies. Traditional epics employ third-person omniscient narration by male sages, Vyasa in the Mahabharata and Valmiki in the Ramayana, who speak with divine authority, presenting their interpretations as objective and unquestionable truth. Feminist retellings

disrupt this authority by shifting to first-person female narration, producing what narratologists call a "focalization shift," a change in whose consciousness filters and organises the story. This technical shift carries profound political implications. In Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantments*, Sita confronts Valmiki directly after reading his manuscript of the Ramayana through the night and tells him: what occurred when I was alone in the darkness, under the sorrow tree, you don't know. You don't know my despair. You don't even know my exhilaration, how it felt, first in the forest and then in Ayodhya, when I was the most beloved woman in creation. The sage concedes the limitation of his divine vision and responds: "You must write that story yourself, Ma, for only you know it" (3). This exchange articulates the epistemological claim underlying all feminist retellings: that lived experience constitutes a form of knowledge distinct from, and not necessarily inferior to, external observation, however authoritative. The move from third-person narration, "Sita suffered," to first-person declaration, "I suffered," grants the character the standing to interpret her own experience rather than having it interpreted for her.

Feminist narratologists have analysed this strategy as a direct challenge to what they term "androcentric discourse" narrative structures that position male experience as universal and female experience as particular or secondary. Traditional epics employ a "male-as-norm" framework in which female characters appear primarily in relation to male protagonists: as Rama's wife, as the Pandavas' wife, as Dhritarashtra's wife. First-person female narration fundamentally disrupts this relational positioning, centring women's lives as stories worthy of telling in their own right rather than as supporting threads in male heroes' journeys.

The creation of psychological interiority represents the second major re-gendering strategy. Traditional epics rarely explore female characters' inner lives, their hopes, fears, desires, doubts, or moral deliberations. Emotions are externalised through action or inferred by male observers. Feminist retellings reverse this, granting women the rich interior landscapes traditionally reserved for male protagonists. This interiority transforms characters who previously functioned as archetypes into

fully realised human subjects. As scholars have observed, traditional narratives present Sita as "a plot device to further the story, instead of a complete character." Feminist retellings grant her full subjectivity, hope and vulnerability in her marriage, terror during abduction, rage at the fire test, and deliberate moral reasoning about her choices. She becomes human rather than symbol, a complex individual rather than a cultural ideal to be venerated or reproduced.

Gender performativity Judith Butler's concept that gender is constituted through repetitive acts rather than rooted in essential identity provides a key theoretical framework for understanding how these retellings subvert gender norms. Butler argues that gender identities can be "actively reshaped through new forms of performance," opening possibilities for subversion and transformation. Tripathi's warrior Sita in *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* performs behaviours culturally coded as masculine martial skill, political leadership, military strategy while retaining feminine-coded virtues such as compassion and ethical reasoning. This demonstrates that a single individual can embody characteristics that patriarchal culture has insisted on segregating by gender. The political implication is significant: if Sita can be both warrior and compassionate nurturer, the claim that women are naturally unsuited for combat or governance loses its ideological foundation. If Draupadi can be both devoted wife and war strategist, the notion that women are inherently peaceful and domestic is exposed not as nature but as ideology.

Pattanaik's *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana* extends this analysis through its engagement with the plurality of the Ramayana tradition itself. By drawing on over fifty regional versions of the epic, Pattanaik demonstrates that gender has never been understood in Hindu mythology as a fixed or singular category. His documentation of characters who change gender, transcend gender, or embody multiple genders simultaneously figures like Ardhanarishvara, whose very form combines the masculine and feminine supports his philosophical position that "the soul has no gender; gender comes from the flesh." Grounded in Hindu theological tradition rather than imported from Western theory, this position challenges gender essentialism by locating gender in mutable

material reality rather than immutable spiritual essence, undermining claims that rigid gender roles reflect divine or cosmic order.

Meta-narrative self-reflexivity constitutes a fourth re-gendering strategy, and one that is particularly visible in contemporary feminist retellings. These works frequently acknowledge their relationship to previous versions of the stories they retell, creating what postmodern theory identifies as "intertextuality" texts in active dialogue with other texts. Divakaruni's Sita directly addresses Valmiki, challenging his interpretation and claiming the authority of lived experience over poetic observation. This meta-narrative dimension is crucial because it exposes all retellings including supposedly authoritative originals as interpretations shaped by their authors' social locations and ideological commitments rather than timeless transcriptions of divine truth.

This recognition that there is no absolute or original form of myth is supported by A.K. Ramanujan's seminal essay "Three Hundred Ramayanas," which demonstrates that multiple, often contradictory versions of the epic have always coexisted, with every telling being "unique" while "no telling is a mere retelling." Feminist retellings thus participate in a long and living tradition of mythological interpretation while asserting a specifically feminist interpretive lens. The concept of "palimpsest" a layered text bearing visible traces of earlier erasures and overwrites captures this dynamic well. Sacred texts function as palimpsests in which multiple interpretations accumulate over time, with dominant readings working to suppress alternatives. Feminist retellings excavate these suppressed layers, recovering earlier women-centred traditions such as Chandrabati's sixteenth-century Bengali Ramayana, and adding new layers that future readers and interpreters will in turn engage with and transform.

Collectively, these meta-narrative strategies mount a sustained challenge to the epistemological authority that has historically governed sacred texts. Interpretive monopoly over the epics belonged traditionally to Brahmin male scholars trained in Sanskrit and ritual systems inaccessible to women and lower castes a gatekeeping that postcolonial scholars

identify as "epistemic violence," the systematic erasure of alternative knowledge systems and perspectives. Feminist retellings assert women's epistemological authority on the basis of lived experience, challenging this monopoly without necessarily claiming a superior or final truth. In doing so, they reopen the question of who has the right to interpret sacred tradition and insist that the answer must be broader, more inclusive, and more honest about the interests that interpretation has always served.

Conclusion: Re-mythologizing as Political Practice in Contemporary India

The feminist reimagining of Indian epics constitutes far more than a literary phenomenon it represents a vital form of political practice at the intersection of gender, caste, religion, and nationalism. By repositioning silenced female characters as narrators and protagonists, contemporary authors challenge not merely specific patriarchal interpretations but the very structures of epistemic authority that have historically excluded women from cultural meaning-making. This intervention carries particular urgency at a moment when Hindu nationalist forces deploy these same texts to enforce conservative gender norms and religious uniformity, making feminist retellings acts of cultural resistance as much as literary innovation.

The works examined in this study Divakaruni's psychologically complex first-person narratives, Tripathi's reimagining of Sita as warrior and political leader, and Pattanaik's recovery of the epic's plural traditions demonstrate multiple and distinct strategies for challenging patriarchal authority while simultaneously claiming cultural legitimacy. Applying theoretical frameworks drawn from Spivak's subaltern studies, Mohanty's Third World feminism, and postmodern narrative theory illuminates how these retellings collectively transform women from objects to subjects, from victims to strategists, from one-dimensional archetypes to complex human beings navigating and resisting oppressive systems.

The character reimaginings prove particularly significant in terms of their broader cultural impact. Sita moves from silent, suffering ideal to warrior leader or questioning subject, depending on the retelling; marginalised figures such as Urmila and Surpanakha gain voice and narrative centrality they have long been denied. These transformations offer contemporary women alternative models of femininity beyond patient endurance, demonstrating possibilities for agency both within and against patriarchal constraints. The commercial success of these works bestseller status, translation into multiple languages, adoption in university curricula reflects a wide cultural appetite for these alternative visions of womanhood and tradition.

A significant question nevertheless remains unresolved: whether patriarchal texts can ever be adequately reclaimed for feminist purposes, or whether truly emancipatory politics requires what might be called epistemological exit rejecting not merely dominant interpretations but the texts themselves. Dalit-Bahujan intellectuals have advanced this position most forcefully, arguing that the epics encode irredeemable caste hierarchy that cannot be reformed through reinterpretation alone. The tension between insider critics seeking expanded interpretation and outsider critics demanding fundamental rejection is unlikely to be resolved, and both positions carry important insights that feminist scholarship must continue to engage seriously.

The broader cultural politics at stake reveal how the reimagining of sacred texts functions as a central site of contestation over national identity, religious authority, and social transformation. In a contemporary India marked by intensifying religious nationalism, growing pressures of censorship, and deepening gender and caste hierarchies, feminist mythological retellings perform vital and irreplaceable work. They assert textual multiplicity against authoritarian impulses to fix meaning; they offer alternative Hindu identities compatible with feminism and social justice; they establish marginalised groups' right to narrative authority; and they create cultural resources for imagining genuinely different gender relations.

The recognition that there is no absolute or original form of myth that the epics have always existed in multiple, evolving, and often contradictory versions fundamentally challenges claims about tradition's unchanging and divinely ordained nature. A.K. Ramanujan's documentation of three hundred Ramayanas demonstrates that multiplicity is itself traditional, positioning feminist retellings as indigenous practice rather than Western imposition. The recovery of historical women's retellings, from Chandrabati's sixteenth-century Bengali Ramayana to village women's folk songs, further establishes a continuity that conservative discourse has worked to erase.

Feminist reimaginings of the Indian epics ultimately enact what Adrienne Rich described as "revision" the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction as a form of survival. In a context where patriarchal readings of sacred texts continue to shape women's socialisation, constrain their opportunities, and justify violence against them, the creation of alternative readings is not merely an intellectual exercise but a matter of political necessity. These retellings demonstrate that tradition is not a fixed inheritance passively received but a living resource actively interpreted, contested, and transformed by each generation. By asserting that women can tell their own stories, interpret their own experiences, and claim authority over traditions that have long claimed authority over them, feminist epic retellings make a meaningful and lasting contribution to the broader transformation of gender relations in contemporary India demonstrating that cultural heritage can be simultaneously honoured and challenged, preserved and reimagined, celebrated and fundamentally renewed.

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Political Consciousness in Prakash Jha's Select Films: Understanding Ideology, Power, and Social Control

Amitabh Adarsh and Devendra Rankawat

Introduction: Cinema as a Mechanism for Political Consciousness?

Since the beginning of Cinema, it has evolved and transcended to become not just a source of entertainment but rather a powerful tool to spread ideas, thoughts, and political consciousness. Culturally, film reflects the realities of society and helps us see power, ideology, and resistance in a new light. Indian democracy still faces challenges such as caste discrimination, corruption, and weak institutions. Cinema has the potential to make the audience understand and reflect on these complexities of society and politics. Prakash Jha is one of the leading filmmakers in contemporary Indian cinema, whose films consistently expose the truths of India's democratic and social structures. From Jha's early documentary *Damul* (1985), exploring communal violence in Bihar, to his commercial political dramas that challenge existing discourse and let audiences understand the truth about bonded labor, caste politics, educational inequity, and systemic corruption. His cinema is characterized by realism, Jha's work is a reflection of the surroundings in which he lives, transforming observational social realities into cinematic narratives that function as both documentation and critique. This paper examines three of Prakash Jha's most politically resonant films—*Raajneeti* (2010), *Aarakshan* (2011), and *Satyagraha* (2013)—through the theoretical frameworks established by Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault, and Antonio Gramsci. These theorists offer complementary lenses for understanding how power operates not merely through coercion, but also through ideological interpellation, discursive formation, and cultural

hegemony. By emphasizing Jha's cinema within this theoretical discussion, this study shows how the films act as counter-hegemonic interventions, challenging dominant powers, while also awakening political consciousness among viewers by revealing the mechanisms of social control.

Contextualizing Prakash Jha's Political Cinema

Prakash Jha as a director, reveals a consistent engagement with India's socio-political realities across different formats and scales. His early documentary *Faces After the Storm* (1981) examined communal riots in Bihar and was "unofficially banned" for its unflinching portrayal of violence against Muslims. This early work established Jha's commitment to using cinema as a tool for documenting and critiquing social injustice. His first feature film, *Damul* (1984), raised several social issues related to bonded labor and the caste system in rural life in Bihar. The film won the National Film Award that established Jha as a leading producer of "pure cinema", where commercial priorities are given to authentic stories. The film depicted the violent mechanisms through which upper castes maintained their stranglehold on power, using cinema to expose systemic oppression.

Mrityudand (1997) represented what Jha considers a turning point in his career—a film that maintained his commitment to addressing social issues while reaching a broader audience through the casting of mainstream stars like Madhuri Dixit and Shabana Azmi. The film explored male-dominant epistemological as well as physical violence and women's resistance in rural India, which demonstrated Jha's ability to combine social criticism with commercial appeal. His focus on political themes in Gangajal (2003), exploring police-community relations and systemic corruption in Bihar, established Jha's entry into mainstream commercial cinema. These types of films proved that politically charged cinema could succeed at the box office. Subsequent films, for instance, *Apaharan* (2005) and *Chakravyuh* (2012) projected Jha's vision of systemic oppression. Addressing themes like kidnapping industries and Naxalite insurgencies, respectively, proving that politically charged

cinema could achieve mass appeal and long-term sustainability at the box office.

The Films Under Study: *Raajneeti, Aarakshan,* and *Satyagraha*

The three films examined in this paper represent Jha's engagement with political cinema. *Raajneeti* (2010) achieved massive commercial success while presenting a searing portrait of family-based political dynasties and power struggles. Drawing extensively on the *Mahabharata* and Francis Ford Coppola's *The Godfather*, the film depicts politics as a realm of moral ambiguity where ethical considerations succumb to the logic of survival and domination. *Aarakshan* (2011) tackled one of contemporary India's most contentious issues: caste-based reservations in education and employment. The film generated enormous controversy before its release, with several states banning it over fears it would inflame caste tensions. Despite—or perhaps because of—this controversy, the film sparked important debates about affirmative action, merit, and social justice. Satyagraha (2013) was inspired by Anna Hazare's anti-corruption movement, showing how people experience the emergence, development and eventual failure of a movement. The film examined the relationship between idealism and pragmatism in political activism and raised the question of how Gandhian principles of non-violence can be effective in challenging entrenched corruption. Together, these three films cover the main themes of Jhansi's political cinema: intergenerational politics and power struggles (Politics), caste divisions and access to education (Arakshan), and corruption and popular resistance (Satyagraha). Each film uses different narrative strategies and visual choices, creating political awareness among the audience.

Raajneeti (2010): Power, Dynasty, and the Spectacle of Politics

Narrative Structure: The *Mahabharata* as Political Allegory

Raajneeti movie has an epic structure like the Mahabharata, depicting modern Indian politics as a traditional struggle for power. The film opens with an act of abandonment—a newborn child thrown into the Ganga

by Brij Gopal (Nana Patekar), echoing the story of Karna from the epic. This mythic setting logically positions the film's central themes—loyalty, dharma, and destiny—as questions of both, framed within a democratic political context. The plot unfolds as a war between two branches of a political family—one branch led by the first heir, Prithvi Pratap (Arjun Rampal), who represents his family's rightful inheritance; the other branch led by Birendra Pratap (Manoj Bajpayee), who, along with Dalit leader Suraj Kumar (Ajay Devgn), challenges the family's power. Samar Pratap (Ranbir Kapoor), initially a reluctant participant who wishes to remain in America pursuing his studies, it is drawn into the conflict and gradually transforms into a ruthless political operative under the guidance of Brij Gopal, his Machiavellian advisor. Prakash Jha stated in interviews that while he "didn't set out to create a direct adaptation," the characters and plot "naturally aligned with the *Mahabharata*" as he developed the story.

The movie portrays contemporary dynastic succession as well as political violence as inevitable once one joins the arena of power, refusing to moralize it.

Ideological Critique: Exposing the Machinery of Democratic Politics

Through its choice of subject matter, Politics shows how the democratic political system functions not as a platform for the representation of the common people, but as a platform for elite competition. In the film, elections are not seen as moments of true democratic choice, but are instead framed as a perfectly orchestrated spectacle that requires money, power, and cunning. In one revealing sequence, Brij Gopal explains to Samar how elections are won: through caste calculations, strategic violence, and the exploitation of poverty and ignorance. Suraj Kumar is initially introduced as a truthful leader emerging from the Dalit community, but later reveals that he is as sensitive to elections and corruption as upper-caste politicians. The film thus presents a cynical view of identity-based politics, suggesting that changing the social composition of political elites does not necessarily transform the logic of power itself. The role

of women in *Raajneeti* deserves particular attention as a site of ideological inscription. Bharati (Nikhila Trikha), who leaves her illegitimate child behind and enters into a political marriage, and Indu (Katrina Kaif), who marries Prithvi not for love but for political connections, represent the functional subjugation of women in a patriarchal political system. Both women have no real political freedom; they act merely as vehicles for male power and family lineage. This representation reflects the real powerlessness of women in the Indian political establishment, and it also demonstrates their inability to imagine alternative possibilities.

Cinematic Language: Constructing Political Perception

Raajneeti's aesthetic contribute to its ideological effects. The film makes politics visible through sweeping cinematography, dramatic set pieces, and an operatic scale. The violent incidents are industrialized in slow-motion, leaving the viewer with a complex mix of fear and fascination. This ambivalence—both condemning and industrializing—reflects the ambiguity of the film's sweeping moral context. The film's dialogue, which is credited to Anjum Rajbali and Prakash Jhan, serves as a vehicle for expressing political philosophy. The characters often speak in principled terms and principles, which signal political "realism": "In politics, there are no permanent friends or enemies, only permanent interests"—a phrase that, over time, becomes a naturalized notion in the viewer's mind. This dialogue style creates what Gramsci called "common sense"—natural ideas among the audience about how politics works. The editing choices in *Raajneeti* emphasize parallel action and escalating tension, borrowing from both epic cinema and thriller genres. Samar's transformation, Birendra's strategy, and Indu's evolving relationships—these cross-cutting themes place the film on a political stage, where different conflicts intersect. This complexity in the narrative makes simple moral judgments impossible that encourages the audience to understand politics just as an individual act not system. The soundtrack of the film, combines traditional Indian music with Western orchestral elements to create a grand musical landscape that elevates the political

discourse into a mythical dimension. The lack of traditional Bollywood song and dance numbers (the film only features one nightclub scene's item song) to represent its vision as a serious political film. This industrial alternative politics sets it apart from mainstream Bollywood cinema, yet remains accessible to the masses.

Aarakshan (2011): Caste, Education, and Contested Meritocracy

Narrative Structure: Idealism Confronting Structure

The film Aarakshan centers on Professor Prabhakar Anand (Amitabh Bachchan), an idealistic university president who supports the caste-based reservations despite opposition from his upper-class classmates and students. When the Supreme Court mandates implementation of reservation policies, Anand becomes embroiled in conflict with his former colleague Mithilesh Singh (Manoj Bajpayee), who has established a for-profit coaching center exploiting students' anxiety about competitive exams. The film introduces Deepak Kumar (Saif Ali Khan), a Dalit student and later teacher, who experiences first-hand the divisiveness of upper-class society members, where his social background is openly criticized. His role represents the film's central conflict that can extraordinary individual power lead to social progress or does historical injustice require numerical correction through the preservation of the caste system? The film's engagement with this question reveals the Indian casteism, but ultimately undermines structural change by emphasizing individual achievement. Anand's daughter and wife, along with other female characters are essentially supporting characters to support the male protagonists' narrative arcs. This gender movement reflects the general trend of Jha's films, where male characters and struggles are the main focus. The lack of significant female freedom reflects a limitation in the film's progressive political outlook.

Institutional Critique: Education as Battleground

Aarakshan works as an institutional review, where education, the justice system, the market and the state are examined together. The film shows

the Indian education system divided into two parts such as government institutions that are resourceless for the poor and education centers that extract wealth from middle-class families. Mihansh Singh's coaching institute commercializes the education, transforming it from a common tool into a marketable commodity. Aarakshan's move to direct the Supreme Court serves as the film's trigger event, which exposes the terrors associated with casteism and social upliftment. The film portrays the resistance of the upper caste as motivated by economic interests (fear of losing out) and cultural antecedents (belief in superior intelligence). But the film's solution—Anand sets up a private academy that provides free coaching to students of all parties—understates the problem of structural inequality as politically significant. The controversy surrounding the release of Aarakshan serves as a profound study of the film's political impact. Dalit organizations protested the film before its release, concerned that it contained "anti-Dalit and anti-reservation dialogues". The National Commission for Scheduled Castes required preview screenings, and some states permanently banned the film. This strong reaction suggests that the film was able to influence political discourse, which was particularly influential even when its true moral values were unclear at the time

Visual Rhetoric: Depicting Dignity and Discrimination

Aarakshan's cinematography shows a conventional aesthetic reality to construct its narrative of social justice. The film contrasts the spacious, well-lit classrooms of the elite college with the cramped, poorly maintained spaces of public schools, visually encoding class and caste hierarchies. Deepak's first interview scene uses close-ups and shot-reverse-shot editing to describe his loss of heart, which makes the viewer share his feelings of difference**.**

The film's dialogue helps a its main policy instrument. Anand's discourse on equality and justice functions as a direct personal address, distinct from the vague moral imperatives of politics. In a key scene, Anand says, "A person's intelligence and performance are not affected by their background". While this may seem progressive, it also reinforces

a meritocratic principle that suggests overcoming structural inequalities and overcoming defeat through equal opportunity—a condition that obscures the sense that casteism is perpetuated not only by its immediate antecedents but also by its inherent disadvantages. The film's mise-en-scène conveys a moral message. The recurring image of Gandhi's portrait in Anand's office connects the film's subject matter to India's principles of equality and social justice. However, mentioning Gandhi's symbolism, the film only presents it contextually. It not only explores Gandhi's ambiguous position on caste discrimination and his preference for personal correction**.**

Satyagraha (2013): Corruption, Resistance, and the Limits of Activism

Narrative Structure: From Personal Grievance to Political Movement

Satyagraha tells the story of how a personal grievance turns into a massive mass anti-corruption movement. The film begins with the death of a young engineer, Akhilesh (Indranil Sengupta), who dies in an accident due to government negligence. When his widow Sumitra (Amrita Rao), is unable to claim mandated compensation due to bureaucratic corruption, Akhilesh's father Dwarka Anand (Amitabh Bachchan) slaps a corrupt official in frustration and is imprisoned. This personal act of defiance becomes the catalyst for a broader movement led by Manav Raghvendra (Ajay Devgn), Akhilesh's friend and a successful telecommunications entrepreneur. With the support of journalist Yasmin Ahmed (Kareena Kapoor) and local political leader Arjun (Arjun Rampal), Manav mobilizes social media and street protests to demand Dwarka's release and broader anti-corruption reforms.

The film's clear inspiration from Anna Hazare's Jan Lokpal movement (2011) positions it as a direct engagement with contemporary political events. Jha and co-writer Anjum Rajabali use this real-world reference point to explore questions about the possibilities and limitations of civil society activism in challenging entrenched corruption. Unlike *Raajneeti*, which is necessarily portrayed as corruption, Satyagraha first points to

the possibilities of moral political action, which then gradually reveals the complexities and contradictions of mass movements.

Foucauldian Power: Corruption as Discourse

Satyagraha can be considered in terms of Foucault's concept of power which is not centralized but rather diffuse and pervasive. The film does not portray corruption as the work of a few bad individuals, but as a systemic discourse that shapes relationships with citizens and state institutions. Every action with the government requires a bribe; every government position creates an opportunity; laws that can benefit the deserving are bound by those who deserve it. This pervasive corruption is what Foucault calls the "regime of truth"—a general practice and concept that determines how power works. The characters accept corruption as inevitable, and criticize bribery in their daily interactions with the state. The film's protagonist, Dwarka Anand, is an exception to this general corruption, who is characterized not as principled but as naive or idealistic by refusing to pay a bribe Corrupt politician Balram Babu (Manoj Bajpayee) is the epitome of this systemic corruption. Importantly, the film portrays him not as an extraordinary character, but as a skilled operator who rewards such behavior. His manipulation of caste politics, institutional management and media narratives shows how power works in Indian democracy. The film does not just portray him as a villain, but also shows how such a system produces and rewards its political actors.

Counter-Hegemony and Its Limitations

Most interesting contribution of *Satyagraha* lies in its examination of counter-hegemonic mobilization and its inherent contradictions. The film first presents a human-led movement as a genuine struggle against a corrupt power structure. It mobilizes citizens through social media and street protests. This is reminiscent of Gramsci's concept of "war of position"—where the emphasis is on changing the consciousness and cultural attitudes of the people before revolutionary change. However, the film gradually reveals the movement's limitations and internal contradictions. Manav's insists on his non-negotiable demands and

explicitly refuses to participate in organizational politics. This behavior makes his movement strategically ineffective. When the government proposes some partial reforms, Mand rejects them as insufficient, in his view symbolic purity is more important than continuous change. His principled rigidity ultimately alienates potential allies and divides and weakens the movement**.** The film's most devastating critique concerns the relationship between leadership and mass mobilization. Dwarka functions as a symbol—his imprisonment and suffering legitimizing the movement—but he possesses no actual control over how his image is deployed. When the movement turns violent, contradicting his Gandhian principles, Dwarka is powerless to stop it. This dynamic exposes how mass movements can instrumentalize individual suffering while remaining accountable to no one. The character of investigative journalist Yasmin is shown in the film as both a tool for resistance through the media and as an institution with its own rules and limitations. In the beginning, she uses her platform to expose corruption and support the movement. Over time, she realizes that media coverage can be distorted and it is turning complex political issues into spectacle. This self-reflection on the role of media sets *Satyagraha* apart from simpler stories that portray journalists as straightforward heroes.

Cinematic Technique: Realism and Emotional Appeal

Satyagraha is made in a realistic style, not to show the glory of Rajneeti, but to show the protest movement as a documentary. The film uses handheld cameras and natural lighting, which shows the mass movement in a more authentic way. The story is not based on mythological archetypes, but on true events. The film's use of sound deserves particular attention. During protest scenes, the film layers multiple audio tracks—chanting crowds, television commentary, social media sounds—to create what sound theorists call a "dense sound environment" that mimics the sensory overload of actual political mobilizations. The complexity of these sounds inspires the audience to feel not just as an outside observer, but as a participant in the movement. The title song "Raghupati Raghav Raja Ram," popularized by Gandhi, functions as

both diegetic and non-diegetic sound throughout the film, linking the contemporary movement to India's independence struggle. This musical choice invokes historical memory while raising questions about whether Gandhian methods remain viable in contemporary India—a question the film ultimately answers ambivalently in the film's final scene, where violence erupts during the protest despite Dwarka's true commitment to non-violence, rapid editing and distracting camera angles are used to create a sense of loss of control. This scene makes the viewer wonder how idealistic movements can be twisted to serve the sole purpose of the founder. The movie's visual and sonic assault on the viewer creates an affective experience of sophistication that encourage the film's critical message about activism's limitations.

Visual and Language: Constructing Emotional Engagement

All three films use modern visual and sound techniques to create an emotional connection with their political narratives. This not only serves to raise political awareness through a didactic message, but also creates an impactful experience. The film's cinematography and music invite the audience to experience politics as a grand drama, which simultaneously depicts political violence in the highest aesthetic. Through modern visual styles and dialogue, the audience can directly relate to the characters. *Satyagraha's* documentary-style protest scenes and dense sounds capes immerse viewers in mass mobilization's sensory experience. These aesthetic choices function as what Althusser would call "interpellation"—the process through which audiences are constituted as particular kinds of subjects. In addition to allowing viewers to identify with certain characters, experience certain perspectives, and see their own emotional responses, Jha's films help to shape the viewer into a conscious political agent, one who can understand themselves as part of a larger power system. In moments of moral decision or emotional intensity, the use of close-ups of characters' faces introduces the viewer to their deep emotions and insights. Shot reverse shot editing during dialogue evokes personal feelings, allowing the viewer to experience the insight of the dialogue rather than a summary of political discourse.

These formal techniques transform political philosophy into lived experience, making ideology palpable and emotionally resonant.

Ambiguity Between Critique and Reproduction

The film's premise can leave the audience wondering whether the film critiques the dominant ideology or not—a fundamental yet prevalent contradiction. The film portrays political corruption and violence as a natural part of democracy, which does not reflect the circumstances of historical change. Presenting the political corruption as natural, the film may reinforce this alienation rather than providing the audience with an opportunity for critique. Similarly, *Aarakshan's* ultimately claims private charity, a solution to caste discrimination reproduces free-market capitalism, deregulation, and reduction in government spending that privatizes public goods and individualizes collective problems. The film celebrates a "good" upper-caste man (Professor Anand) who helps deserving lower-caste individuals, reinforcing savior narratives that center upper-caste agency rather than Dalit self-organization. *Satyagraha's* skepticism about popular movements, while perhaps analytically accurate, may discourage precisely the kind of political engagement necessary for challenging corruption. If electoral politics is corrupt (*Raajneeti*), institutional reform is ineffective (*Aarakshan*), and mass movements inevitably fail (*Satyagraha*), what possibilities for political action remain? These contradictions reflect Jha's position between Gramsci's "traditional intellectuals" (who support the existing structure) and "organic intellectuals" (who seek creative influence beyond the interests of the lower classes). Jhank's film shows how the machinery of power attacks the entire political structure and exposes organizational failures. His political vision is unclear; it remains in conflict between revolutionary critique and liberal reformism.

Conclusion: films as Counter-Hegemony

Despite all the limitations and contradictions, Jha's political cinema represents a significant intervention in Indian cultural politics. His films function as what Gramsci would call contributions to the "war of position"—the cultural struggle to transform common sense and create

conditions for more fundamental political transformation. By making visible the mechanisms through which power operates—Althusser's ideological apparatuses, Foucault's discursive formations, Gramsci's hegemonic structures—Jha's cinema denaturalizes what appears inevitable. The idea, founded on the theories of Althusser, Foucault, and Gramsci, shows how film can play the role as an ideological tool, reproducing or challenging dominant perspectives through its institutional structure and narrative choices. Jha's films use cinematic techniques like visual rhetoric, sound design and narrative structure that may act as a tool or mechanism to construct political awareness among the audience. His films invite viewers not to simply passively receive entertainment, but to actively participate and question the political systems that shape their lives. The three films examined in this paper—*Raajneeti*, *Aarakshan*, and *Satyagraha*—collectively map the terrain of contemporary Indian democracy's failures. *Raajneeti* exposes electoral politics as elite competition; *Aarakshan* reveals educational institutions as sites of caste reproduction; *Satyagraha* examines civil society's limitations in challenging systemic corruption. Together, they document what has been called India's "authoritarian" drift—the erosion of democratic institutions and the consolidation of power by elite interests. However, Jha's cinema also demonstrates the continued relevance and necessity of politically engaged art. In an era of increasing video censorship, political polarization, and the materialization of cultural production, filmmakers who address important social issues have a social responsibility in a democracy. The debate generated by the three films clearly emphasizes the power of cinema to intervene in political discourse and play an active role in shaping public consciousness. Future research should extend this analysis to examine Jha's more recent work, including his web series *Aashram* and his documentary projects, to trace the evolution of his political vision. Comparative studies examining Jha's cinema alongside other politically engaged Indian filmmakers—Shyam Benegal, Govind Nihalani, Anand Patwardhan would provide valuable context for understanding different traditions of political cinema in India. Ultimately, this study concludes that cinema should not be seen simply

as entertainment or ideological representation. Rather, it should be understood as a tool of power for the formation of political consciousness and for active action. From the philosophical perspectives of Althusser, Foucault, and Gramsci, films reveal and engage with the apparatuses of social and political power. In an increasingly dictatorial political environment, the counter-hegemonic cultural work becomes not only valuable but essential too. Prakash Jha's cinema demonstrates that politically conscious filmmaking is possible within a commercial framework. Popular audiences can be drawn to real political content, and cinema has the power to awaken consciousness and inspire resistance in the minds of viewers. As we suffer social inequalities, caste discrimination, and systemic corruption, the need for cinema as a cultural intervention that challenges dominant narratives and imagines alternative possibilities has become all the more urgent. Jha's films, despite their limitations and contradictions, contribute to this essential project of maintaining democratic imagination in an undemocratic age.

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Testimonial and Transgressions: Gender, Caste and Political Consciousness at the Margins in Bama's *Karukku* and Mahasweta Devi's 'Draupadi'

Ayesha Tasnim

Introduction

Bama's *Karukku* and Mahasweta Devi's 'Draupadi' are separated by genre, language, region and representational strategy, yet both critique the political production of marginalised womanhood. *Karukku* presents a Dalit Christian woman's self-narration through caste humiliation, Church discrimination and labour exploitation; 'Draupadi' depicts Dopdi Mejhen, a Santhal insurgent, whose body becomes the target of military punishment and the medium of her final defiance. In each text, gender is inseparable from social location; the women are not oppressed simply as women, but as Dalit or tribal women whose labour, sexuality, speech and bodily presence are regulated by caste and state power. The research problem lies in the critical separation of these texts. *Karukku* is commonly classified as autobiographical testimonio, whereas 'Draupadi' is treated as a paradigmatic subaltern narrative. Such separation obscures a shared question: how does political consciousness arise when oppression is lived through the body, everyday labour and institutional language?

This paper rests on three objectives:

a) To compare the representation of caste, tribal marginalisation and gendered power in *Karukku* and 'Draupadi'.
b) To analyse how testimony, linguistic form and bodily refusal represent feminist agency.
c) To assess how the two texts revise theories of subaltern agency, agency and political speech.

The scope is deliberately comparative rather than comprehensive. It concentrates on Bama's English translation by Lakshmi Holmström and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's English translation of Devi's story, treating translation as a mediating condition rather than a transparent vehicle. The argument does not homogenise Dalit and tribal experience into an unexamined identity; it identifies structural correspondences while preserving their distinct political register.

Research Gap

Earlier criticism has largely segregated the two texts into separate fields: Dalit testimonio studies for *Karukku* and subaltern studies readings of 'Draupadi'. Nabar identifies *Karukku* as a collective autobiography, whose narrative voice creates "rhetorical listening", shifting subjectivity from individual confession towards communal witnessing (Nabar 87). Bagchi similarly reads Mahasweta's narratives as counter-histories that disrupt both upper-caste feminism and male-dominated Dalit politics (Bagchi 18). By contrast, critiques of 'Draupadi' have concentrated on the subaltern body, state violence and the difficulty of speaking within dominant representational systems (Roy 34).

It was traced that comparative intersectional account of political consciousness across Dalit and tribal marginal women is insufficiently examined. Earlier criticism has tended to treat embodied agency doubly: the body was either evidence of oppression or a symbolic site of resistance, without sufficient attention to how bodily experience becomes political interpretation. Recent scholarship is beginning to address this gap: Philip, Panigrahi and Balakrishnan (2022) explore intersectional subalternity, but their analysis does not extend to comparative literary form. Similarly, recent work on Dalit women's writing has emphasized the body without fully examining its relation to state power, while subaltern studies on 'Draupadi' has focused on state violence to the neglect of everyday labour. This paper fills both gaps simultaneously: it compares Dalit testimonio and tribal fiction across two major regional traditions (Tamil and Bengali), showing that political consciousness is neither purely discursive nor purely physical, but emerges through the critical re-signification of embodied experience

Thematic Literature Review (TLR)

The critical debate on Dalit testimonio has centered on the text's double status: an individual account of autobiography and a collective testimony of community oppression. Early criticism on *Karukku* (Nabar 2012; Bagchi 2015) established that the text shifts the reader from listener to witness, creating a space for communal listening. Rather than accentuating individual agency, as Western autobiography often does, Dalit testimonio registers the collective nature of caste humiliation, labour exploitation and church discrimination. This shift is critical because it redefines agency: the narrator speaks not for herself alone, but as a representative voice of an entire community. Recent scholarship has expanded this focus by foregrounding the politics of language. Bama's decision to write in spoken Tamil, incorporating Dalit colloquialisms and regional idiom, is itself a political act. As, Holmström notes in the introduction to her English translation, Bama's narrative style resists standard, elite Tamil, creating a 'voice' that is both personal and collective. This linguistic choice is central to the text's agency: it reclaims the language of everyday life from elite co-optation. The narrator's voice is not merely a vehicle for content; it is itself a form of resistance. The literature on testimonio thus establishes three key features of the genre: (1) its collective, non-individual character; (2) its use of spoken, non-standard language to challenge elite literary norms; and (3) its critique of institutional power (caste, Church, state) from below. However, existing work on *Karukku* has rarely placed these features in dialogue with subaltern fiction from other regions, leaving its comparative potential unexplored.

Criticism of 'Draupadi' has overwhelmingly focused on the protagonist's body as both the site of state violence and the medium of resistance. Spivak's influential reading established that Dopdi Mejhen's final act confronting the Senanayak naked, bleeding and unashamed reverses the logic of sexual violence. Rather than producing shame, as the state intends, the violated body becomes a site of terrifying power that undoes the military officer's authority.

Subsequent scholarship has developed this insight by reading the body as a site of radical refusal. Roy (2018) argues that Dopdi's body resists representation: it cannot be absorbed into standard political frameworks or military logic. Similarly, Chatterji (2020) views her nakedness as a rejection of state control, a refusal to be disciplined by the modesty norms that the state uses to enforce order. These readings focus on the dramatic climax of the story, showing how the subaltern body can disrupt state power. However, most of this literature concentrates on the moment of bodily confrontation to the exclusion of everyday life. What is missing is an account of how bodily experience not just in moments of extreme violence, but in everyday labour, hunger and displacement prepares the ground for political consciousness. Dopdi's body does not suddenly become political at the moment of her violation; it has been shaped by a lifetime of subaltern existence.

A third body of relevant literature addresses the intersection of caste, gender and state power. Dalit feminist criticism has long argued that Dalit women face a 'triple oppression'-caste, class and gender that cannot be captured by upper-caste feminism or male-dominated Dalit politics. Rege (2006) calls for a 'Dalit feminist standpoint' that grounds knowledge in the lived experience of marginal women. Similarly, tribal feminist scholarship emphasizes that tribal women's subalternity is distinct from both Dalit and caste-Hindu women's experiences. Tribal women face state violence, land loss and cultural erasure alongside gender oppression.

The scholarship on 'Draupadi' occupies a complex position within this field. While Spivak's reading emphasizes the subaltern body, it does so through a postcolonial and deconstructive lens that does not fully engage with the specifics of Santali tribal identity. More recent work (Sarkar 2021) has sought to retrace the story in tribal politics, showing how Dopdi's resistance reflects a specific history of Santhal anti-colonial and anti-state struggle.

Research Methodology

This study uses a qualitative comparative textual design within an interpretive framework. It treats literary texts as social documents that

produce meaning through form and language, rather than merely reflecting social realities. The comparison is both thematic and structural.

The primary sources are Bama's *Karukku*, translated by Lakshmi Holmström, and Mahasweta Devi's "Draupadi", translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. These texts were selected because both represent women at the margins of Indian society, a Dalit Christian woman in Tamil Nadu and a Santhal insurgent woman in West Bengal. Both texts have achieved canonical status in Indian literature in translation and have generated substantial critical literature, making them ideal for comparative analysis.

Intersectionality theory, originating in Black feminist thought (Crenshaw 1989) and adapted to South Asia (Rege 2006; John 2015), holds that caste, gender, class and religion are not separable axes of inequality; they configure one another. In *Karukku*, Bama shows how caste discrimination is enforced through Christian institutional structures, so that her identity as a Dalit Christian woman subjects her to distinct forms of marginalisation that neither upper-caste women nor male Dalits experience.

Spivak's account of subaltern speech challenges the assumption that subaltern subjects can speak with ease within dominant discourses. Spivak's concept of the subaltern body as a site of radical refusal provides a framework for analysing Dopdi's defiance, showing how her nakedness disrupts military logic and state authority. Testimonial theory (Beverley 2004) complements this approach by showing how Bama's *Karukku* transforms personal trauma into collective witnessing, using non-standard Tamil dialect to resist upper-caste literary norms.

Body studies, particularly feminist theories of the body (Butler 1993; Grosz 1994), inform the analysis of how physical suffering and vulnerability can be converted into political agency. Butler's concept of performative agency is central to both texts: agency is not a fixed attribute possessed by a subject; it is produced through iterative actions and political re-significations.

Translation theory (Venuti 1995; Spivak 1993) provides the tool for analysing how the English versions mediate these texts. Translation is

not a neutral, transparent medium; it actively shapes how subaltern speech and bodily experience are received in global circuits of knowledge.

Textual Analysis

(a) Bama's *Karukku*

(i) Everyday Labour and Caste Hegemony: The opening chapters of *Karukku* depict how caste discrimination is lived through everyday labour and physical space. The young Bama observes upper-caste landlords treating Dalit workers with contempt, enforcing physical separation and economic dependence. The narrative shows that caste is not an abstract ideology but a physical reality that shapes body movements, spatial boundaries and human dignity.

(ii) Institutional Religion and Double Marginalisation: Bama's account of her experience as a Catholic nun exposes the hypocrisy of religious institutions that promise equality while maintaining caste hierarchy. The Church, far from being a refuge, becomes another site of marginalisation. The narrator's decision to leave the convent is an act of agency-a refusal to accept institutional co-optation.

(iii) Linguistic Innovation and Collective Speech: The most radical feature of *Karukku* is its language. By writing in spoken, non-standard Tamil, Bama breaks with elite literary traditions, creating a style that is both intimate and collective.

(b) Mahasweta Devi's 'Draupadi'

Devi's story centres on Dopdi Mejhen, a Santhal insurgent woman who becomes the target of military punishment. Her body is subjected to physical violence and sexual assault, demonstrating how state power uses sexualised violence to discipline subaltern populations. The climax of the story occurs when Dopdi refuses to cover her body, confronting the military officer naked, bleeding and unashamed. This act transforms her violated body into a site of terrifying power. By refusing the shame intended to discipline her, Dopdi undoes the officer's authority and exposes the limits of state power. Spivak's translation retains the

original Bengali syntax and Santali vocabulary, creating a text that resists smooth English readability. This linguistic strategy mirrors Dopdi's bodily resistance, ensuring that the subaltern voice remains distinct and challenging. Bama's Tamil-inflected diction, oral rhythms and code-switching resist the expectation that literary authority must sound standardised or elite. Kannalil and Shanthi identify fragmentation and linguistic choice as forms of discursive struggle in *Karukku* (Kannalil and Shanthi). The language carries the social world it describes; it does not translate experience into an abstract sociological register.

Devi's narrative is formally different. 'Draupadi' fragments information through bureaucratic naming, military vocabulary, mythic reference and abrupt shifts in focalisation. Spivak's translation preserves the friction between the Bengali narrative and the institutional language of the state. Dopdi's name itself becomes contested: official language attempts to classify her, while the story reveals the violence behind classification. The allusion to the epic Draupadi is not an invitation to treat Dopdi as allegory only. It exposes the distance between a mythic woman whose honour is publicly defended and a tribal woman whose violation is authorised by the state.

Comparative Analysis

Axis	Bama's narrator in *Karukku*	Dopdi Mejhen in 'Draupadi'
Axes of marginalisation	Caste, gender, class and religious institutional hierarchy	Tribe, gender, class, land dispossession and militarised state power
Mode of oppression	Everyday ritual humiliation, segregated labour, caste surveillance and church practices	Arrest, custodial rape, military surveillance and counter-insurgency
Site of struggle	Church, school, village, domestic and labour spaces	Forest, village, army camp and bureaucratic state apparatus
Form of agency	Narrative self-writing, retrospective interpretation and collective consciousness	Embodied refusal, confrontational presence and political endurance
Relationship to community	Testimonio transforms individual experience into communal voice	Solitary confrontation retains insurgent and collective political meaning

Both texts convert positions of intended abjection into political consciousness, but they do so through different technologies. Bama writes the body into a collective archive; Devi makes the body interrupt the state's archive. In *Karukku*, language accumulates experience until memory becomes critique. In 'Draupadi', the body refuses to be translated back into obedience. The contrast prevents a reductive equation between Dalit and tribal marginalisation while demonstrating that agency is shaped by the institutions through which power becomes intimate.

Results and Discussion

The first finding confirms the argument that caste or tribal oppression cannot be separated from gender. Bama's narrator encounters Brahmanical caste hierarchy through work, touch, education and religious discipline. Dopdi encounters state patriarchy through military possession of her body. In both cases, patriarchal power is not external to social marginality; it intensifies it. This finding fulfils Objective One and supports the intersectional framework. It also accords with Pan's account of Dalit women's double exposure to caste and patriarchy (Anandita 43). The comparison complicates any claim that marginalised communities are internally egalitarian. *Karukku* shows that institutional Christianity may reproduce caste distinctions, while 'Draupadi' shows that revolutionary politics does not exempt women from gendered violence. These texts therefore challenge both purely caste-centred and purely gender-centred readings.

The second finding is that the body records violence before it becomes an instrument of resistance. Bama's narrator reads bodily gestures, labour and exhaustion as historical evidence. Dopdi's violated body becomes a weapon when she refuses the state's attempt to conceal and possess it. This finding fulfils Objective Two and revises readings of *Karukku* as purely confessional autobiography. The narrative is an archive of collective injury, not simply an account of private development. It also challenges interpretations of 'Draupadi' as allegory alone. Dopdi's body cannot be reduced to a symbolic figure for rebellion because the

story insists on the materiality of rape, clothing, military procedure and fear. The emphasis on embodiment accords with recent readings by Nath and Philip, Dangwal and Balakrishnan (Nath; Philip et al.). Comparison with Baby Kamble further shows that trauma can become collective memory and political instruction rather than remain an individual wound (Mughal). Urmila Pawar's and P. Sivakami's relevance lies in the broader Dalit feminist movement from narrated injury towards critique of social institutions; Pan's discussion of Sivakami makes this transition explicit (Anandita 31).

The third finding is that political speech takes more than one form. Bama's narrator speaks through retrospective testimony, linguistic departure and communal address. Dopdi speaks through the refusal to perform shame. This answers Objective Three and complicates Spivak's pessimistic account of subaltern speech without dismissing the problem of mediation. Dopdi's defiance is narrated by Devi and translated by Spivak; it is therefore not an unmediated recovery of the subaltern voice. Yet mediation does not erase agency when the narrative formally registers the failure of authority to contain the woman it has violated.

The two texts thus distinguish voice from audibility. Bama's voice becomes audible through a literary form that asks readers to listen ethically, as Nayar argues (Nayar 27). Dopdi's action becomes politically legible precisely because it frustrates the terms by which the state expects a woman to communicate. Silence may therefore be imposed, strategic or transformed into a public disturbance. The result is not a simple movement from silence to speech but a redistribution of what counts as speech.

This study contributes a comparative framework for reading Dalit testimonio and tribal subaltern fiction without treating their histories as interchangeable. Its central theoretical implication is that political consciousness is neither purely cognitive nor simply verbal. It is produced through the interpretation of labour, humiliation, institutional contradiction and bodily exposure. *Karukku* demonstrates how self-writing can become communal testimony; 'Draupadi' demonstrates how embodied

refusal can contest the state's authority to define injury. Read together, the texts require subaltern theory to account more fully for gendered materiality and require feminist criticism to treat caste, tribe and institutional power as constitutive of womanhood. Their distinct forms of agency also suggest that literary resistance should be evaluated not only by what marginalised women are permitted to say, but by how narrative and body reorganise the conditions under which saying becomes politically recognisable.

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The Concept of Power and the Role of Literature in Generating the Power

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Introduction

When **"Literature, Society, and Political Consciousness"** is discussed it becomes inherently important to decode and understand the relationship between them. Literature is one of the most significant mediums of generating political consciousness in any society. It is an instrument both to maintain the status quo and to overturn the established order. Literature in this role, in this struggle for power, churns between two opposing forces, and hence, assumes a political role. Literature is deeply involved in the creation, distribution, and contestation of power, and therefore emerges as a significant site of political inquiry.

Understanding this relationship requires turning to political science, a discipline fundamentally concerned with the systematic study of power, including its nature, distribution, and exercise in society. So first, let us understand how we conceptualise Political Science and why there is a need to understand the concept of power.

What is Power: Characterizing power as influence

George Catlin describes Political Science primarily as *"the science of power."* Power, according to him, is *the ability to influence the behaviour of people*. In other words, as Robert Dahl defines it *"A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do"* (17). Harold Lasswell, further says that *Political Science is the study of the influence and the influential*.

Robert Dahl defines influence as *"a relation among human actors such that the wants, desires, preferences, or intentions of one or*

more actors affect the actions, or predispositions to act, of one or more actors in a direction consistent with, and not contrary to the wants, preferences, or intentions of the influence wielders" (17) In this definition the phrase 'predispositions to act' stands important. Predispositions to act refers to the tendencies, inclinations, attitudes, beliefs, values, or preferences that make a person likely to behave in a particular way. In political science, the term suggests that power can operate not only by controlling people's actions directly but also by shaping their predispositions, that is, influencing what they think, want, believe, and consider acceptable. This ability in literature to shape the people's predispositions may place opposing groups, communities, or classes as relatively more influential and less influential respectively, depending on the context. It may be used by the relatively more influential in both positive and negative ways, as well as both to maintain the status quo or to overturn it. For instance, Edward Said, through his work *"Orientalism" (1978),* showed how Western literature and discourse created an influential, constructed narrative of the "Orient," which legitimized political imperialism. While, Benedict Anderson, in his seminal work *"Imagined Communities" (1983),* explored how the rise of print media and literature in vernacular languages allowed diverse populations to imagine themselves as a single, unified nation. Moreover, Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, known for founding the modern empirical study of Political Culture, through their book *"The Civic Culture" (1963),* argued that the beliefs, emotions, and civic engagement of the masses, are inherently socialized through language and literature. If literature shapes people's beliefs about nationalism, democracy, gender roles, or social justice, it influences predispositions and therefore their future actions.

Power can be exercised in many ways. One of the visible manifestations of power is in the form of shaping perceptions and creating beliefs in the subconscious which in turn define or redefine reality and influence consciousness (Murphy).

The most effective power is often exercised before the action occurs. It operates in the realm of thought. If power works through thought,

then we need to understand the concept that links thought and politics. That concept is political consciousness.

Political Consciousness: The Space between Power and Perception

What exactly is political consciousness?

There is a difference between political consciousness and mere political knowledge. Political knowledge simply means knowing about political facts, institutions, or events. Political consciousness is not merely political knowledge; rather it is reflexive awareness of power relations, and their consequences - including inequality, domination, and resistance. It means understanding the structures and sources of power. A person becomes politically conscious when they begin seeing society not as natural but as constructed and therefore changeable. It begins when people start questioning what previously seemed normal.

For instance, Marx noted that under capitalism, workers often suffer a "false consciousness"- a misunderstanding of their condition rooted in the ruling ideology - until they become aware of their class interests. This is what he called "class consciousness" (Marx). Gramsci emphasized that hegemony works through culture and consent, not just force. Paulo Freire (1970) described "conscientização" (meaning critical awareness) as a process where the oppressed move from silence to critical awareness: they begin to perceive their reality as shaped by human choices rather than fate. He cautions against "false generosity" when powerful people give help to the same people their system keeps hurting, then call that help kindness. Frantz Fanon similarly observed that colonial subjects must shed the colonizer's imposed self-image to develop a revolutionary consciousness. In short, political consciousness is the process by which people name the world critically and realize that social conditions can be changed.

Key components of political consciousness include:

- **Awareness of power relations:** Recognizing who holds power and through what means (economic, political, cultural). For instance,

Robert Dahl defined power as *"A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do"*. Steven Michael Lukes added that power also entails shaping people's perceptions and desires. Thus consciousness means seeing how power operates overtly (through laws, force) and covertly (through ideology, norms).

- **Recognition of inequality and domination:** Recognising differences as socially constructed and historically produced, rather than being "natural." Gramsci showed that ruling classes maintain dominance through "effective ideological struggle" in civil society. Political consciousness involves identifying these ideological "given," for example, caste norms or economic disparities, as results of human arrangements. Only when they critically examine social "givens" do they see the systemic causes of injustice. This shift from fatalism to analysis marks the move from false consciousness to true consciousness.
- **Sense of resistance or agency:** Having the feeling that change is possible, and thus not simply accepting oppression. Freire insists learners must stop treating their situation as "fated and unalterable" and view it as "merely limiting, and therefore challenging". The process of becoming critically conscious awakens the sense that one can act to transform reality rather than just adapt to it.
- **Imagination of alternatives:** Envisioning different social orders. Political consciousness is not just critique of the present but creative imagination of the future. In Freire's term, it involves replacing the "culture of silence" with critical dialogue that breaks prevailing myths. Only when people can imagine alternatives (equitable society, new political arrangements) can action become imaginable.

Together, these aspects mean that political consciousness transforms how people perceive society. Instead of accepting social orders as "just the way things are," conscious individuals see them as constructed and mutable. As Freire writes, men are not static "beings" but "processes" who become more human by critically reflecting and acting on the world.

In other words, to be politically conscious is to see through the naturalized façade of society (its "common sense") and recognize the power dynamics that sustain it.

But what initiates such questioning?

This is where literature enters.

Literature as a Technology of Consciousness

Literature, at its broadest refers to any written or spoken body of creative and imaginative work, valued for their artistic merit. Literature actively shapes the way reality is perceived, interpreted, and experienced. For any political act or influence to exist, it must first be communicated, narrated, imagined, and justified, all of which are literary functions.

Words have always carried more than meaning, they carry power. When I express my thoughts, my imagination, my narrative to others, I leave some influence and they participate in it. That's how consciousness spreads. Politics, at its core, is not simply the exercise of power. It is the art of convincing, of shaping collective will through words; and literature is the architecture of consciousness. Aristotle calls human beings political animals precisely because of our ability to speak, deliberate and imagine together. Literature extends this capacity to imagine collectively. It does not merely reflect consciousness, it participates in its formation. For this reason, literature may be understood as a technology of consciousness: a cultural mechanism through which individuals learn to see, feel, imagine, and evaluate the world around them. In fact, this tells us why empires fear writers, or censorship targets literature.

The term "technology" here refers to a means through which human perception and understanding are organized. Just as a microscope reveals dimensions of reality invisible to the naked eye, literature reveals dimensions of social and political life that often remain hidden beneath everyday experience. It functions as an instrument of perception, directing attention toward particular realities, while simultaneously reshaping the interpretive frameworks through which those realities are understood.

This understanding of literature resonates with Michel Foucault's insight that power operates not only through coercion, but also through the production of knowledge and modes of perception. For Foucault, power and knowledge are inseparable because every regime of power depends upon particular ways of seeing and interpreting the world. Literature participates in this process by producing narratives, symbols, and meanings that influence how individuals understand themselves and their social environment. It becomes a site where perceptions are organized, challenged, and transformed.

However, the power of literature as a technology of consciousness is not inherently emancipatory, regressive, or directed toward any predetermined outcome. The same capacity to shape perception, emotion, and imagination can operate in multiple directions. Literature can challenge existing structures of power by questioning established ideas, exposing injustices, and imagining alternative possibilities; yet, it can also reinforce, preserve, or legitimize existing social arrangements by shaping what individuals perceive as natural, desirable, or acceptable. Similarly, the maintenance of the status quo is not always synonymous with oppression, nor is change always synonymous with progress. Literature participates in the continuous negotiation between preservation and transformation, between competing visions of society and conflicting understandings of justice, order, and power. It is precisely this contestation - the clash of ideas, values, and interests over how reality should be understood and organized- that gives literature its political character.

The significance of literature lies not merely in the information it conveys but in the experiences it creates. In this sense, literature performs five interconnected functions in the building of consciousness. It teaches readers:

- what to notice
- what to feel
- whom to sympathize with
- what to question
- what to imagine

If literature possesses the ability to shape what individuals notice, feel, question, and imagine, a further question arises: where does this political force originate? Is it embedded within the act of creation, within the realities and ideas represented in the text, or does it emerge only when the work enters the social world through interpretation and engagement? The political life of literature begins precisely at this point of interaction, where imagination becomes expression, expression becomes text, and text becomes a subject of collective interpretation.

What makes the literature political and who creates the political meaning?

What is it that makes a piece of literature political?

Is literature political because of its subject matter? Does its political character arise from the author's intention? Or is political meaning created by readers through interpretation? The answer cannot be located exclusively in any one of these elements. Rather, political meaning emerges through a dynamic interaction between the author, the text, the reader, and the historical context in which the writing and reading takes place. Literature becomes a site of political consciousness precisely because it exists at this intersection, which this paper calls the "**Triangular Model of literary political consciousness."** From the imagination of the writer to the ink on the paper, to the interpretation of the reader, it is a juncture of all three that layers literature with political consciousness.

(a) Author's intent

Author's intent means what the writer is trying to do, say, or achieve through their work. In the hands of a writer, words construct a space where art and activism meet. No revolution begins with arms, it begins in imagination when the writer becomes a thinker. It begins with a story to explain the world, to reveal the injustices, and to imagine the alternatives. The author, through his choice of subject, choice of words, choice of characters, choice of conflicts, twists and turns, deliberately creates narratives that influence the way individuals perceive society and understand relationships of power. This influence can be used both

to maintain the status quo or to overturn the established order. A piece of literature may both describe and endorse the world as it exists, or can question why the world exists in that particular way.

For instance, in "*Animal Farm*," George Orwell uses the allegory of animals overthrowing their human owner to represent the Russian Revolution and the transformation of revolutionary ideals into authoritarian rule. The characters and events are deliberately constructed to reveal how power can corrupt revolutionary movements. The famous line "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others" exposes how language itself becomes a tool of domination. In "*Nineteen Eighty-Four*," Orwell explores surveillance, propaganda, and control over truth. Through concepts like Big Brother and Newspeak, he shows how political power does not only control bodies but also controls imagination and thought. Orwell's intent was not merely to tell a story but to make readers question systems of power and recognise the dangers of authoritarianism.

In "*Pride and Prejudice*," Jane Austen uses marriage, property, and social class as central conflicts to reveal the economic dependence and limited choices faced by women in nineteenth-century England. Through characters like Elizabeth Bennet, she challenges the idea that social status and wealth should determine human worth. Her writing questions a society where women's security depended largely on marriage and where class hierarchy influenced relationships.

Arundhati Roy represents literature as resistance and a challenge to dominant narratives. In *"The God of Small Things,"* Roy explores caste, patriarchy, colonial legacies, and social restrictions through the personal tragedy of the twins Rahel and Estha. The novel reveals how social structures decide whose love, identity, and existence are considered acceptable. In *"The Ministry of Utmost Happiness,"* Roy directly engages with questions of state power, nationalism, displacement, and marginalisation. She gives visibility to voices often excluded from mainstream political narratives. Roy's work shows how fiction can challenge the dominant understanding of society by bringing suppressed experiences into public consciousness.

Mahatma Gandhi's writings illustrate how literature and political thought can become instruments for transforming consciousness. His autobiography, "*The Story of My Experiments with Truth*," is not simply a personal account of his life, but an attempt to communicate the ethical and moral foundations behind his political action. Through his narration of experiences with truth, non-violence, self-discipline, caste, religion, and colonial injustice, Gandhi constructs an idea of the individual as capable of moral and political transformation. His intent was to show that political change does not begin only through institutions or resistance movements but through a transformation of human consciousness. In *"Hind Swaraj*," Gandhi directly challenges the foundations of colonial modernity. Written as a dialogue between a reader and an editor, the text questions British rule, industrial civilisation, and the idea that political freedom is merely the replacement of foreign rulers with native rulers. Gandhi used writing to imagine an alternative political order based on swaraj (self-rule), ethical responsibility, and decentralised power. Gandhi's works demonstrate that a writer can create political imagination before political change occurs. His words did not merely describe resistance; they helped create the moral language through which the Indian freedom struggle understood itself.

Munshi Premchand represents literature as a mirror of social reality and a tool of social consciousness. His writings focused on the lives of ordinary people - peasants, women, labourers, and marginalised communities - reveals how social structures produce inequality. In "*Godaan*," Premchand portrays the struggles of Hori, a poor peasant trapped in poverty, debt, and social pressures. The novel exposes the exploitation embedded within rural economic and social systems, including the relationship between landlords, moneylenders, caste, and colonial-era agrarian structures. Premchand does not present poverty merely as an individual failure but as a consequence of larger social arrangements. In "*Nirmala*," he critiques patriarchy, dowry practices, and unequal marriage systems. Through the suffering of the protagonist, Premchand reveals how social customs can restrict women's choices and dignity. In *"Kafan,"* Premchand presents extreme poverty and social neglect, forcing readers to question a society where human suffering becomes

normalised. His intent was to make readers see the hidden realities of society. His fiction creates political awareness not through direct political slogans but by exposing the structures that shape human lives.

In *"Ghare-Baire" (The Home and the World)*, Tagore explores nationalism, identity, and political passion through the lives of Nikhil, Bimala, and Sandip during the Swadeshi movement. Through Sandip's aggressive nationalism, Tagore questions the danger of turning political movements into forms of hatred and exclusion. The novel suggests that nationalism without ethical responsibility can become another form of domination. In *"Gitanjali,"* Tagore expresses ideas of human dignity, spiritual freedom, and universalism. His poetry imagines freedom not only as independence from colonial rule but as freedom from fear, narrowness, and social divisions. In his *essays on nationalism*, Tagore criticised extreme forms of nationalism and argued for a broader humanistic vision beyond political boundaries. Tagore demonstrates that literature can influence political consciousness by questioning dominant ideas and encouraging readers to imagine alternative ways of organising society.

(b) Subject matter of Literature

Subject matter tells what the work is about and what realities it chooses to represent. The subject matter of a literary work refers to the themes, issues, experiences, and situations that the writer explores. Every story, or piece of literature is based on a context, which will reflect the social, political, and economic conditions of the time and place. For instance, Premchand's novels and stories like *"Gaban"* and *"Idgah"* respectively, reflect the comprehensive context it is set in. When literature focuses on matters connected with power, society, inequality, conflict, identity, rights, authority, or systems of control, it enters the political sphere. Literature is thus, not merely an artistic expression but also a deliberate form of political engagement. Indeed, the history of political transformation demonstrates the intimate relationship between literary imagination and social change. The Renaissance was preceded by humanist writings that challenged medieval worldviews. Enlightenment

literature contributed to the intellectual climate that made the French Revolution conceivable. Marxist movements emerged not only from economic conditions but also from texts that provided language, concepts, and visions of collective struggle. The Indian freedom movement was sustained by speeches, essays, poems, novels, and newspapers that articulated the idea of a nation and imagined a future beyond colonial rule. Before political change becomes institutional reality, it often exists as a literary possibility. Revolutions may be fought in streets and battlefields, but they are first rehearsed in language and imagination.

Politics, therefore, lies beneath the surface of the literature, in its tone, structure, irony, silence. A revolt might erupt in violence, but without literature in any form, it would lack language, imagination and moral grammar, and would not endure as political transformation. This is the power of the subject matter of literature. It is not merely a mirror of society, but of its restless conscience. Revolutions may fade into statistics; it is literature which keeps them alive.

(c) Reader's interpretation

The reader completes the circle of power, turning interpretation into activism. The power of words does not end when a book is written, rather it magnifies when read. Each reader awakens the political potential of literature, translating words into awareness, empathy and dissent. It is the reader who interprets, questions, and connects those ideas with the realities of their own society. The act of reading itself becomes the act of participation, giving its interpretation and action a political significance. The same literary work can influence different readers in different ways because interpretation is shaped by the reader's experiences, social context, and understanding of the world. A story about injustice, for instance, may generate empathy in one reader, anger in another, and a desire for social change in someone else. This shows that the political power of literature lies not only in what is written, but also in how it is received and transformed by those who encounter it. Reader response theory says that meaning exists in interaction between the text and reader, and that's how words carry power and shape the

relationship between the influence and the influenced.

The relationship between literature and politics is a relationship of influence: the writer creates a text, the text creates meanings, and the reader activates those meanings through interpretation and response. Therefore, if we define literature as the space where imagination and thoughts become language, and politics as the space where language becomes consciousness and action, then one cannot exist without the other.

Conclusion: When Words Become Political

Literature exists in a dual relationship with power: it is both shaped by power and capable of shaping power, because every literary work emerges within particular historical, social, and political conditions that influence its themes, perspectives, and expressions. At the same time, it has the ability to shape consciousness, influence perceptions, and create new ways of understanding society.

Hence, Literature becomes political when it connects power, ideas, and people. The author gives meaning, the text carries ideas, the reader interprets them, and the context gives them significance. This relationship can be understood as a continuous cycle, where power shapes literature, literature shapes consciousness, and consciousness transforms power. Thus, literature does not remain a passive reflection of the physical world; rather, it becomes an active space where ideas are formed, challenged, and transformed.

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Political Consciousness and the Making of an Indian Science Fiction Classic: Re-reading Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome*

Daisy Rani Doley and Shreyashi Mukherjee

Introduction

For a long time, literature has acted as an important medium for examining the connection that exists between society and power. Beyond reflecting historical realities, literary texts often challenge dominant ideologies, recover suppressed histories, and imagine alternative social possibilities. Works that continue to inspire such critical engagement across generations gradually acquire the status of classics because they remain relevant despite changing historical contexts. As Italo Calvino observes in *Why Read the Classics?*, a classic is "a book which has never exhausted all it has to say to its readers." The enduring significance of a classic, therefore, lies not merely in its literary excellence but in its ability to generate new meanings for successive generations of readers.

One of the defining features that enables a literary work to attain this enduring relevance is its capacity to cultivate political consciousness. Political consciousness extends beyond explicit representations of governments or political institutions; it involves a critical awareness of how power operates through knowledge, history, culture, and social institutions. Literary texts foster such awareness by questioning accepted truths, exposing systems of domination, and foregrounding voices that have been excluded from official histories. In doing so, literature becomes an active participant in shaping public understanding rather than a passive reflection of social reality.

Science fiction provides a particularly productive space for exploring these concerns because it employs speculative imagination to examine

the ideological assumptions underlying the present. Rather than functioning merely as a literature of futuristic technology, science fiction creates alternative worlds that enable readers to perceive existing political and social structures from new perspectives. Darko Suvin describes this process as "cognitive estrangement," through which speculative narratives distance readers from familiar reality while simultaneously encouraging critical reflection upon it. Consequently, science fiction has become an effective literary mode for interrogating colonialism, technological modernity, ecological crises, surveillance, and other structures of power.

Within this broader tradition, Indian science fiction occupies a distinctive position. Emerging from the complex historical experience of colonialism and postcolonial nation-building, Indian speculative fiction frequently explores the interaction between scientific modernity and indigenous systems of knowledge. Rather than reproducing Western narratives of technological progress, many Indian science fiction writers employ speculative imagination to examine questions of history, identity, social justice, and epistemic plurality. As scholars such as Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay, Suparno Banerjee, and Sami Ahmad Khan have demonstrated, Indian science fiction represents a dynamic literary tradition that negotiates between science and culture, modernity and tradition, global technological developments and local historical experiences.

Among the most significant works within this tradition is Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome: A Novel of Fevers, Delirium and Discovery* (1995). Although Ghosh is primarily known for his historical fiction, *The Calcutta Chromosome* remains one of the earliest and most sophisticated examples of Indian science fiction in English. Blending speculative fiction, detective narrative, historical revisionism, and postcolonial critique, the novel revisits the history of Sir Ronald Ross's Nobel Prize-winning research on malaria and offers an alternative account in which the celebrated scientific discovery is secretly guided by Mangala and an invisible network of indigenous practitioners. Through this imaginative reconstruction, Ghosh questions not only the authority

of colonial science but also the processes through which scientific knowledge is institutionalised and historical memory is produced.

The novel's significance extends far beyond its revision of colonial medical history. At its core, *The Calcutta Chromosome* examines how scientific knowledge is inseparable from structures of political authority. Colonial science is represented not as a neutral search for truth but as a system of power that legitimises certain forms of knowledge while excluding others. In contrast, Mangala's community develops an alternative epistemology based on collective practice, secrecy, and embodied experience, challenging the authority of institutional science and colonial archives. The conflict between these competing systems of knowledge transforms the novel into a profound exploration of power, resistance, and epistemic justice.

The theoretical perspectives of Michel Foucault, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Darko Suvin provide valuable frameworks for understanding these concerns. Foucault's concept of power/knowledge reveals how scientific institutions produce authoritative truths through systems of documentation and classification. Spivak's interrogation of the subaltern highlights the mechanisms through which colonial discourse marginalises alternative voices, while Chakrabarty's critique of Eurocentric historiography exposes the limitations of historical narratives that privilege European experiences as universal models of modernity. Suvin's theory of cognitive estrangement explains how speculative fiction enables readers to interrogate accepted historical narratives by imagining alternative possibilities. Together, these theoretical perspectives illuminate Ghosh's project of reimagining science as a contested political and cultural practice rather than a universally objective enterprise.

This paper argues that *The Calcutta Chromosome* deserves recognition as a contemporary Indian science fiction classic because it cultivates political consciousness through its sustained critique of colonial science, the politics of knowledge, and historical representation. Its enduring relevance lies not merely in its innovative narrative techniques or speculative imagination but in its capacity to encourage readers to ques-

tion the ideological structures that shape scientific authority and collective memory. By exposing the intimate relationship between knowledge and power, the novel transforms science fiction into a powerful mode of political inquiry. More importantly, the questions it raises regarding epistemic injustice, institutional authority, technological modernity, and the ownership of knowledge continue to resonate in an age increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence, biotechnology, digital surveillance, and global information networks.

Situated within the broader discourse of literature and political consciousness, *The Calcutta Chromosome* demonstrates that science fiction can function as an important site of political intervention. It not only revisits the colonial past but also illuminates contemporary debates concerning the control, circulation, and legitimacy of knowledge. Like the classics envisioned by Calvino, the novel continues to generate fresh interpretations because the political questions it raises remain unresolved. Its ability to connect historical inquiry with contemporary concerns ensures its continued relevance, establishing it as a landmark work of Indian science fiction whose political and literary significance continues to expand across generations.

Understanding Classics, Political Consciousness and Indian Science Fiction

The concept of the "classic" has remained central to literary studies, although its meaning has evolved considerably over time. Earlier approaches often regarded classics as works that achieved universal appeal through their aesthetic excellence or canonical status. Contemporary criticism, however, understands classics less as static monuments of literary achievement than as dynamic texts that continue to speak to changing historical circumstances. A classic survives because it remains open to reinterpretation, enabling successive generations of readers to discover new meanings in response to their own social and political realities. In this sense, the value of a classic lies not simply in its historical endurance but in its continuing intellectual and cultural relevance.

Italo Calvino's reflections in *Why Read the Classics?* provide a useful framework for understanding this evolving conception. According to Calvino, a classic is "a book which has never exhausted all it has to say to its readers." Rather than belonging exclusively to the past, a classic establishes an ongoing dialogue between history and the present. Each rereading becomes a fresh encounter because readers approach the text with different historical experiences and intellectual concerns. Consequently, classics do not offer fixed meanings; instead, they continually generate new interpretations that respond to changing political, cultural, and philosophical contexts. This openness distinguishes classics from works whose relevance diminishes once the circumstances of their production disappear.

Political consciousness plays a significant role in this process of continual renewal. Literary works remain relevant because they engage with enduring questions of power, justice, inequality, and historical memory. Political consciousness, however, should not be understood merely as an explicit representation of political institutions or ideological conflicts. It also involves recognising how power operates through culture, language, education, science, and historical narratives. Literature cultivates this awareness by exposing structures of domination, questioning accepted truths, and recovering perspectives excluded from official histories. It encourages readers to recognise that social realities are historically produced rather than naturally given, thereby transforming reading into an act of critical inquiry.

Michel Foucault's understanding of power provides an important perspective for examining this relationship between literature and political consciousness. Foucault argues that power is not concentrated solely within governments or legal institutions but circulates through everyday practices and systems of knowledge. Scientific discourse, education, archives, and historical writing all participate in producing what societies recognise as legitimate truth. Knowledge, therefore, is inseparable from power because institutions determine which voices receive authority and which remain unheard. Literary texts frequently intervene in these processes by questioning official narratives and exposing the exclusions

upon which dominant systems of knowledge depend. They become politically significant not because they prescribe ideological solutions but because they encourage readers to interrogate the foundations of accepted truths.

This critical function becomes particularly important within postcolonial societies, where colonialism shaped not only political institutions but also ways of producing and preserving knowledge. Colonial historiography frequently represented European modernity as the universal model of progress while reducing indigenous knowledge systems to the status of superstition or folklore. Dipesh Chakrabarty has argued that such historiography marginalised non-European histories by measuring them against European historical experience. Similarly, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak demonstrates that colonial discourse often denies subaltern communities the authority to represent themselves within dominant epistemological frameworks. These interventions reveal that political consciousness also involves recognising how history itself becomes a site of ideological contestation.

Science fiction offers a particularly effective literary form for exploring these concerns because it employs speculative imagination to question established systems of knowledge. Rather than functioning solely as a literature of futuristic technology, science fiction creates alternative realities that illuminate the ideological assumptions of the present. Darko Suvin's concept of "cognitive estrangement" explains how speculative fiction enables readers to perceive familiar realities from unfamiliar perspectives. By imagining alternative histories, futures, or scientific possibilities, science fiction encourages readers to examine existing political, social, and cultural structures with renewed critical awareness. The genre therefore becomes an important vehicle for interrogating colonialism, technological modernity, surveillance, environmental crises, and the politics of scientific progress.

Indian science fiction extends these possibilities by engaging with the distinctive historical experiences of colonialism and postcolonial nationhood. Unlike many Western science fiction traditions that celebrate technological advancement as an unquestioned sign of progress, Indian

speculative fiction frequently explores the relationship between science, indigenous knowledge, cultural identity, and social justice. Scholars such as Bodhisattva Chattopadhyay, Suparno Banerjee, and Sami Ahmad Khan have shown that Indian science fiction develops through a dialogue between modern scientific discourse and local intellectual traditions. It therefore challenges the assumption that scientific modernity must necessarily follow Western models of development. Instead, Indian science fiction reimagines science through the lens of postcolonial history, creating narratives that foreground plurality rather than universalism.

Within this tradition, Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome* occupies a distinctive position. By combining speculative fiction with historical revisionism, detective fiction, and postcolonial critique, the novel demonstrates that science fiction can function as a powerful mode of political inquiry. Ghosh reconstructs the history of Ronald Ross's malaria research not to dispute historical facts alone but to question the political structures through which scientific knowledge is produced and legitimised. The speculative narrative shifts attention away from celebrated scientific achievements towards the invisible networks of labour, indigenous knowledge, and collective agency that colonial history frequently ignores. Through this strategy, the novel exposes the ideological foundations of scientific authority while inviting readers to reconsider accepted narratives of progress and discovery.

More importantly, *The Calcutta Chromosome* fulfils Calvino's conception of a classic because it continues to generate new meanings across changing historical contexts. At the time of its publication, the novel was primarily read as a postcolonial revision of colonial medical history. Today, it also speaks to debates surrounding artificial intelligence, biotechnology, digital surveillance, intellectual property, and epistemic justice. The questions Ghosh raises about who controls knowledge, whose discoveries receive recognition, and how institutions shape historical memory remain central to contemporary public discourse. Its speculative engagement with colonial science therefore extends beyond the nineteenth century to illuminate the political challenges of the twenty-first century.

Viewed through the combined perspectives of classics, political consciousness, and Indian science fiction, *The Calcutta Chromosome* emerges as much more than an innovative speculative novel. It becomes a sustained meditation on the politics of knowledge and the relationship between science and power. Its enduring significance lies in its ability to challenge readers to rethink accepted historical narratives while imagining alternative possibilities for understanding science, history, and human agency. Like the classics described by Calvino, the novel does not exhaust its meanings after a single reading. Instead, it continually invites new interpretations because the political questions it addresses remain unresolved. It is this capacity for continual reinterpretation that establishes *The Calcutta Chromosome* as a contemporary Indian science fiction classic and prepares the ground for a closer examination of how Ghosh interrogates colonial science and the politics of knowledge in the sections that follow.

Colonial Science, Power, and the Politics of Knowledge in *The Calcutta Chromosome*

One of the most compelling aspects of Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome* is its sustained interrogation of the relationship between science and political power. Rather than presenting scientific discovery as an objective pursuit governed solely by rational inquiry, the novel demonstrates that scientific knowledge is deeply embedded within structures of authority, ideology, and historical representation. Through its speculative reconstruction of Sir Ronald Ross's discovery of the malaria parasite, Ghosh challenges the triumphalist narrative of colonial medicine and reveals that scientific knowledge is never produced independently of the political systems that validate and preserve it. In doing so, the novel transforms the history of medicine into a critique of colonial epistemology and invites readers to question the institutional processes through which knowledge acquires legitimacy.

The history of colonialism is inseparable from the history of scientific expansion. During the nineteenth century, scientific research became an important instrument of imperial governance. Colonial administrations

relied on medical surveys, botanical studies, cartography, and systems of classification to understand and administer colonised territories. Scientific knowledge was not merely a means of advancing human understanding; it also functioned as a mechanism of control that legitimised colonial authority. Diseases, populations, and landscapes were systematically documented and classified, allowing the colonial state to strengthen its administrative power. Within this framework, medicine became an important site where scientific inquiry and imperial interests converged.

Michel Foucault's concept of power/knowledge provides a useful framework for understanding this relationship. According to Foucault, knowledge is never neutral but is produced within networks of power that determine what is accepted as truth. Institutions such as laboratories, universities, hospitals, and archives do not simply preserve knowledge; they regulate its production and establish the authority of those who possess it. Consequently, scientific discoveries cannot be separated from the institutional structures that validate them. Ghosh incorporates this insight throughout *The Calcutta Chromosome*, exposing the political dimensions of scientific practice rather than presenting science as an autonomous pursuit of objective truth.

The novel's reimagining of Ronald Ross's research illustrates this critique most effectively. Historically, Ross is celebrated for identifying the role of mosquitoes in the transmission of malaria, an achievement that earned him the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 1902. Conventional scientific history presents this discovery as the triumph of an individual scientist whose perseverance transformed tropical medicine. Ghosh, however, offers an alternative narrative in which Ross unknowingly becomes part of a much larger network of indigenous experimentation directed by Mangala and her associates. While this reconstruction is fictional, its significance lies less in revising historical facts than in exposing the ideological assumptions that shape official histories of science.

Through Mangala, Ghosh introduces an alternative model of scientific knowledge that challenges the epistemological foundations of colonial

medicine. Unlike Ross, whose authority depends upon experimentation, publication, and institutional recognition, Mangala operates outside formal scientific structures. Her knowledge is collective rather than individual, transmitted through practice rather than documentation, and preserved through secrecy rather than public validation. This contrast between Ross and Mangala symbolises two competing epistemological traditions. One depends upon colonial institutions that equate documentation with truth, while the other values lived experience, intuition, and collective memory. By positioning these systems in dialogue, Ghosh questions the assumption that only institutional science can produce legitimate knowledge.

The novel also exposes the political nature of historical archives. Colonial archives have often been regarded as objective repositories of historical truth, yet they are themselves products of selection and exclusion. What is preserved within an archive depends upon institutional priorities, while countless experiences remain undocumented because they fall outside official systems of record. Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that colonial historiography universalised European experiences by treating them as the standard model of historical development. As a result, indigenous knowledge systems were either ignored or dismissed as irrational. Ghosh's speculative narrative directly challenges this historiographical tradition by suggesting that absence from the archive should not be mistaken for absence from history.

Mangala's invisibility within colonial records exemplifies this critique. Although she is the intellectual force behind the novel's scientific discoveries, history remembers Ronald Ross while forgetting the community that made those discoveries possible. Her exclusion from official narratives does not indicate a lack of agency but reflects the political mechanisms through which historical memory is constructed. In this way, Ghosh invites readers to recognise that history is never a transparent record of past events; it is shaped by institutions that decide whose achievements deserve recognition and whose contributions remain invisible.

The political implications of this argument become clearer when considered alongside Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's discussion of the subaltern. Spivak argues that colonial discourse often prevents marginalised groups from being recognised as legitimate producers of knowledge. The problem is not simply that subaltern voices are absent, but that dominant epistemological systems lack the capacity to acknowledge them. Mangala embodies this condition. As a poor hospital sweeper, she occupies one of the lowest positions within the colonial social hierarchy. Yet the novel gradually reveals her as the central architect of a scientific revolution that remains beyond the comprehension of colonial institutions. Ghosh thus overturns conventional hierarchies of knowledge by locating intellectual authority in precisely those individuals excluded from official history.

At the same time, the novel complicates the notion of subaltern silence. Mangala's community does not seek institutional recognition because visibility within colonial science would expose its knowledge to appropriation and control. Their refusal to publish or document their discoveries becomes a deliberate strategy of resistance rather than a sign of intellectual exclusion. Knowledge is protected through secrecy, collective responsibility, and oral transmission. This alternative epistemology challenges the modern assumption that knowledge acquires value only when it is publicly verified and institutionally recognised. Ghosh therefore imagines resistance not as confrontation with colonial power but as the creation of intellectual spaces that remain beyond its reach.

Murugan's investigation further reinforces this critique of scientific history. Initially convinced that historical truth can be recovered through archival research, Murugan searches obsessively for evidence of Ross's forgotten collaborators. As the narrative progresses, however, he discovers that conventional methods of historical inquiry are inadequate because the most significant events were never recorded. The archive repeatedly fails to explain what actually occurred, revealing its own limitations as a source of historical knowledge. Murugan's frustration underscores one of the novel's central arguments: historical truth cannot

always be recovered through official documentation because institutional archives themselves are shaped by political interests and epistemological exclusions.

Ghosh strengthens this critique through the novel's fragmented narrative structure. Moving across different historical periods, geographical locations, and narrative perspectives, *The Calcutta Chromosome* resists the linear progression usually associated with scientific progress and historical certainty. Readers are required to reconstruct meaning from incomplete fragments, multiple voices, and unresolved mysteries. This narrative strategy reflects the novel's larger political argument that history is never singular or complete. Instead, it consists of competing narratives shaped by different systems of knowledge and power. The fragmented form thus becomes a literary expression of epistemic plurality, challenging the authority of any single historical account.

Darko Suvin's concept of cognitive estrangement helps explain the political significance of this speculative reconstruction. By imagining an alternative history in which indigenous practitioners secretly guide one of modern medicine's greatest discoveries, Ghosh estranges readers from familiar historical narratives and compels them to reconsider the ideological assumptions underlying them. The speculative premise is not intended to replace historical fact but to expose the processes through which historical facts are produced, validated, and remembered. Science fiction therefore becomes an instrument of political critique, enabling readers to perceive the hidden relationship between scientific authority and colonial power.

The novel's critique extends beyond the colonial past to contemporary debates surrounding science and technology. In the twenty-first century, questions concerning pharmaceutical patents, biotechnology, artificial intelligence, digital surveillance, and data ownership continue to reveal the close relationship between knowledge and power. Decisions about who controls scientific research, who benefits from technological innovation, and whose knowledge receives recognition remain profoundly political. By revisiting the history of colonial medicine through speculative fiction, *The Calcutta Chromosome* demonstrates that these

contemporary concerns are rooted in longer histories of epistemic inequality. Its critique of colonial science therefore continues to resonate in a world where access to knowledge remains deeply uneven.

Ultimately, Ghosh redefines scientific history as a contested political arena rather than an objective record of discovery. By exposing the ideological foundations of colonial science, questioning the authority of institutional archives, and foregrounding alternative systems of knowledge, *The Calcutta Chromosome* transforms science fiction into a powerful exploration of political consciousness. The novel insists that knowledge is never detached from structures of power and that historical truth is always shaped by competing claims to authority. It is this sustained interrogation of science, history, and political power that establishes *The Calcutta Chromosome* not merely as an innovative work of speculative fiction but as a contemporary Indian classic whose political insights continue to challenge readers across changing historical contexts.

Subaltern Agency, Counter-History, and Political Resistance in *The Calcutta Chromosome*

While *The Calcutta Chromosome* critiques the ideological foundations of colonial science, it also offers an alternative vision of political resistance through the agency of marginalised individuals. Rather than portraying resistance through open rebellion, Ghosh imagines it as the preservation of alternative knowledge systems that operate beyond the reach of colonial institutions. The novel thus shifts political consciousness from the sphere of state power to the politics of knowledge, demonstrating that the struggle against colonial domination also involves contesting who has the authority to produce and preserve knowledge.

The figure of Mangala stands at the centre of this alternative political vision. Although she occupies one of the lowest positions in the colonial social hierarchy as a hospital sweeper, she emerges as the intellectual force behind the scientific discoveries attributed to Ronald Ross. By placing a socially marginalised woman at the centre of the narrative,

Ghosh reverses the conventional hierarchy of colonial knowledge. Mangala's authority does not derive from institutional recognition but from her mastery of an alternative epistemology grounded in collective practice, observation, and experience. Her character challenges the assumption that scientific knowledge belongs exclusively to colonial institutions or educated elites.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of the subaltern provides an important framework for understanding Mangala's significance. Spivak argues that colonial discourse often excludes subaltern voices from official systems of representation. Ghosh, however, complicates this idea by portraying Mangala's silence as a conscious strategy rather than merely a condition of oppression. Her community deliberately avoids visibility because institutional recognition would expose its knowledge to appropriation by colonial science. Silence therefore becomes a form of resistance that protects intellectual autonomy instead of signalling political defeat.

The collective nature of Mangala's community further challenges the individualism associated with Western scientific achievement. Unlike Ronald Ross, whose discovery is celebrated as the accomplishment of a single scientist, Mangala's knowledge is shared, transmitted across generations, and sustained through cooperation. This collective model of knowledge production contests the colonial tendency to associate scientific progress with individual genius and institutional authority. It also reflects the broader concerns of the Subaltern Studies Collective, particularly Ranajit Guha's argument that dominant histories often ignore the autonomous political consciousness of ordinary people.

The novel simultaneously constructs a counter-history by questioning the authority of official archives. Instead of replacing one historical narrative with another, Ghosh exposes the silences and exclusions embedded within colonial historiography. Through speculative fiction, he imagines histories that institutional records have ignored, encouraging readers to recognise that the absence of evidence does not necessarily imply the absence of agency. In this way, *The Calcutta Chromosome*

transforms history into a contested space where multiple forms of knowledge coexist and compete for legitimacy.

The political implications of this counter-history remain relevant today. Debates surrounding indigenous knowledge, intellectual property, digital archives, and the ownership of scientific research continue to reveal inequalities in the production and circulation of knowledge. By foregrounding subaltern agency and alternative epistemologies, Ghosh demonstrates that political consciousness requires questioning not only political institutions but also the systems through which knowledge itself is created, authorised, and remembered.

Ultimately, *The Calcutta Chromosome* redefines resistance as both an intellectual and political act. Through Mangala and her community, Ghosh imagines a form of decolonisation grounded in epistemic plurality rather than institutional power. The novel encourages readers to recognise that challenging dominant histories also means recognising alternative ways of knowing. It is this commitment to recovering suppressed voices and reimagining historical narratives that strengthens the novel's political consciousness and contributes to its enduring significance as a contemporary Indian science fiction classic.

Why *The Calcutta Chromosome* Endures as a Contemporary Indian Science Fiction Classic?

The enduring significance of *The Calcutta Chromosome* lies in its ability to remain relevant beyond the historical context of its publication. More than three decades after its appearance, the novel continues to inspire fresh interpretations because the political questions it raises about science, history, and power remain unresolved. This capacity for continual reinterpretation is one of the defining characteristics of a literary classic. As Italo Calvino suggests, classics continue to speak to readers because every generation approaches them with new concerns and discovers new meanings. Ghosh's novel exemplifies this quality by connecting the colonial past with contemporary debates about knowledge, technology, and justice.

One of the principal reasons for the novel's lasting relevance is its critique of scientific authority. Throughout the narrative, Ghosh demonstrates that science is not an ideologically neutral enterprise but is closely linked to structures of political and institutional power. The novel questions who has the authority to produce knowledge, whose discoveries are celebrated, and whose contributions remain invisible. These concerns continue to resonate in contemporary discussions surrounding pharmaceutical patents, biotechnology, artificial intelligence, and digital surveillance, where questions of ownership, access, and ethical responsibility remain deeply contested.

The novel also remains relevant because it advocates epistemic plurality. Rather than rejecting science, Ghosh challenges the assumption that modern institutional science is the only legitimate form of knowledge. Through Mangala and her community, he foregrounds indigenous knowledge systems that exist outside colonial institutions and official archives. This emphasis on multiple ways of knowing reflects contemporary debates concerning indigenous intellectual traditions, traditional medicine, and the preservation of local knowledge in an increasingly globalised world. The novel therefore encourages readers to recognise that knowledge becomes more democratic when diverse epistemologies are acknowledged rather than suppressed.

Another feature that establishes *The Calcutta Chromosome* as a contemporary classic is its innovative narrative form. The novel combines science fiction, detective fiction, and historical narrative while resisting definitive closure. Its fragmented structure compels readers to participate actively in reconstructing meaning, reflecting the idea that history itself is incomplete and contested. This openness ensures that the novel remains intellectually productive, allowing each reading to generate new interpretations shaped by changing historical and political realities.

Darko Suvin's concept of cognitive estrangement further explains the novel's enduring appeal. By reimagining the history of colonial medicine through speculative fiction, Ghosh encourages readers to reconsider accepted assumptions about scientific progress and historical truth. The

speculative dimension is not an escape from reality but a critical lens through which the political foundations of knowledge become visible. In this way, science fiction becomes a powerful medium for cultivating political consciousness, enabling readers to question systems of authority that often appear natural or unquestionable.

The novel's continuing relevance also lies in its contribution to Indian science fiction. At a time when the genre was often viewed as peripheral within Indian English literature, Ghosh demonstrated that speculative fiction could engage seriously with colonial history, postcolonial identity, and political thought. By blending scientific imagination with historical inquiry, *The Calcutta Chromosome* broadened the possibilities of Indian science fiction and established it as an important medium for examining questions of society, power, and cultural memory.

Ultimately, *The Calcutta Chromosome* deserves recognition as a contemporary Indian science fiction classic because it consistently encourages readers to question the relationship between knowledge and power. Its exploration of colonial science, subaltern agency, and historical memory extends far beyond its immediate historical setting, offering insights that remain meaningful in an age marked by rapid technological change and global inequalities in knowledge production. By combining speculative imagination with political critique, Ghosh transforms science fiction into a form of intellectual inquiry that challenges dominant narratives and imagines more inclusive ways of understanding history and society. It is this enduring capacity to provoke critical reflection that secures the novel's place as a significant work within both Indian science fiction and the broader discourse of literature and political consciousness.

Conclusion

Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome* demonstrates that literature can function as a powerful medium for cultivating political consciousness by questioning the ideological structures that shape knowledge, history, and scientific authority. Through its speculative reconstruction of colonial medical history, the novel moves beyond the conventional boundaries of

science fiction to expose the intimate relationship between power and knowledge. Rather than celebrating scientific progress as a neutral and universal achievement, Ghosh reveals that scientific discoveries are deeply embedded within colonial institutions, archival practices, and systems of representation that determine whose contributions are remembered and whose are erased. In doing so, the novel challenges readers to reconsider accepted historical narratives and to recognise the political dimensions of knowledge production.

By foregrounding Mangala and her community, *The Calcutta Chromosome* also reclaims the agency of those excluded from official histories. The novel proposes that resistance is not confined to direct political confrontation but can also emerge through the preservation of alternative epistemologies, collective memory, and intellectual autonomy. Its portrayal of subaltern knowledge challenges the authority of colonial science while advocating a more inclusive understanding of history and scientific inquiry. This emphasis on epistemic plurality not only enriches postcolonial discourse but also reinforces the novel's engagement with the broader concerns of literature and political consciousness.

The enduring relevance of *The Calcutta Chromosome* lies in its remarkable ability to speak to contemporary debates surrounding artificial intelligence, biotechnology, digital surveillance, intellectual property, and the ownership of knowledge. Although rooted in the history of colonial medicine, the novel continues to illuminate the ways in which power shapes the production, circulation, and legitimisation of knowledge in the modern world. Its speculative imagination encourages readers to question dominant narratives and to remain attentive to the voices and histories that institutional structures often marginalise.

Viewed through the perspectives of Italo Calvino, Michel Foucault, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Darko Suvin, *The Calcutta Chromosome* emerges as far more than an innovative work of Indian science fiction. It stands as a contemporary classic because it continually generates new meanings while fostering critical reflection on the relationship between literature, society, and political power. By combining speculative imagination with postcolonial critique,

Ghosh demonstrates that science fiction can serve as an important mode of political inquiry, capable of challenging dominant epistemologies and imagining more democratic futures. It is this enduring capacity to provoke intellectual engagement and cultivate political consciousness that secures *The Calcutta Chromosome*'s place as one of the most significant works in contemporary Indian English literature.

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Remembering and Re-Educating: The Generational Transmission of Empowerment in Miriam Cooke's *Hayati: My Life*

Diana Singnarpi and Shreyashi Mukherjee

Introduction

Hayati: My Life is a feminist, multi-generational narrative that explores the lives of Arab women across different historical and geographical contexts, including Palestine, Syria, and Iraq. Rather than following a linear plot, the novel is structured through interconnected life stories that foreground women's voices, memories, and political agency. The narrative begins in Ottoman and British Mandate Palestine, focusing on Samya Lughod, an elite Palestinian woman who becomes politically awakened through anti-colonial resistance. After her husband is killed by British forces during a demonstration near the Aqsa Mosque, Samya is imprisoned, an experience that radicalizes her. In a landmark moment, she publicly unveils herself while leading a delegation of women to the British governor's residence, symbolizing women's entry into nationalist struggle.

Subsequent generations–including Assia, Afaf, Hibba, and Maryam carry forward this legacy of resistance in diverse forms. Their stories unfold across wars, displacements, and authoritarian regimes. Some women engage in overt political action, while others resist through writing, art, memory, and moral refusal. Throughout the novel, Cooke challenges male-centered histories of nationalism and war by privileging women's testimonies. *Hayati* redefines resistance beyond armed struggle to include everyday acts, emotional labor, storytelling, and ethical dissent. The novel ultimately constructs a feminist political genealogy that reveals how Arab women survive, resist, and reshape history across generations.

Elizabeth Cooper observes that "Cooke weaves a narrative around the lives of three generations of Palestinian women, who live through the British Mandate, the First Arab Revolt, the establishment of the state of Israel, the Suez War, and the Iran-Iraq War" (Cooper 82). Such historical layering situates personal struggles within a broader arc of resistance, reminding readers that individual lives cannot be separated from political realities. The novel therefore challenges historical amnesia, insisting that women's stories–so often absent from official nationalist discourse–are essential to preserving a community's ethical and cultural memory.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts an interdisciplinary framework that integrates memory studies, feminist historiography, and postcolonial cultural theory to read Hayati: My Life as a narrative of gendered and intergenerational empowerment. Drawing on Fatma Kassem's concept of narrative histories and gendered memory, women's testimonies are understood as alternative archives that challenge masculinist nationalist historiography by positioning domestic endurance and maternal storytelling as political acts. Marianne Hirsch's theory of postmemory explains how trauma and resistance are transmitted across generations through affective and narrative inheritance, transforming memory into ethical consciousness. Edward Said's view of culture as a contested site of imperial power frames Cooke's novel as a counter-archive that resists erasure through narrative reclamation, while Hiyem Cheurfa's work on Arab women's life writing and bell hooks' notion of marginality as a "site of resistance" together foreground storytelling, home, and relational labor as crucial forms of cultural struggle. Collectively, this framework conceptualizes memory in *Hayati* as an active, empowering force that converts loss into agency and sustains Palestinian women's resistance across generations.

Review of Literature

Palestinian Women: Narrative Histories and Gendered Memory by Fatma Kassem explores how Palestinian women's lives, experiences, and memories shape and are shaped by political history, occupation,

nationalism, and gender norms. The book emphasizes narrative histories and the role of gendered memory–that is, how women recount and remember their experiences within broader national and social histories. Through the framework of narrative histories and gendered memory, *Hayati* can be read as a feminist intervention into Palestinian historiography. Assia's life story challenges the masculinist framing of resistance by foregrounding domestic endurance, maternal grief, and intergenerational continuity. Her recollections of loss are not merely emotional expressions but political testimonies. By narrating trauma to the next generation, she transforms memory into an act of resistance against erasure. Thus, Cooke positions women's lived experience as a legitimate and necessary archive of national history.

Marianne Hirsch's *The Generation of Postmemory* develops the influential concept of postmemory, describing how second generations inherit trauma through stories, images, and emotional atmosphere. Postmemory explains how individuals deeply internalize events they did not directly experience. In *Hayati*, naming Jamila after Algerian heroines exemplifies postmemory in action. The younger generation's political consciousness is shaped not by direct experience of the Nakba but by inherited narratives. In *Hayati*, Assia's narration of displacement, loss, and resistance functions as a conduit through which Maryam internalizes a history she did not personally witness. Maryam's identity is shaped by these inherited narratives, demonstrating how memory becomes both an emotional inheritance and a political education. Thus, Cooke's memoir exemplifies postmemory as a gendered process of transmission, where maternal storytelling transforms private trauma into collective historical consciousness and positions the next generation as ethical inheritors of resistance.

Edward Said's *Culture and Imperialism* extends his critique of Orientalism to examine how cultural production participates in imperial power structures. Said argues that culture functions as a site where imperial power is both naturalized and contested, and he proposes contrapuntal reading as a method for uncovering suppressed colonial histories within dominant narratives. For *Hayati*, Said's framework

clarifies how storytelling resists erasure. By privileging women's testimonies, Cooke produces a counter-archive that challenges male-centered nationalist historiography. Assia's storytelling disrupts imperial narratives that render Palestinians invisible by reclaiming historical voice through lived experience. Thus, *Hayati* exemplifies Said's assertion that resistance is enacted not only through political struggle but also through narrative reclamation, transforming personal memory into a cultural act of anti-imperial resistance.

Hiyem Cheurfa's *Contemporary Arab Women's Life Writing and the Politics of Resistance* reframes Arab women's autobiographical writing as a central, not marginal, part of resistance literature by showing how life narratives emerging from revolutionary and postcolonial contexts make women visible as "active social and political agents". This book is especially important for studying *Hayati: My Life* because Cooke's text similarly turns women's remembered life-stories into a counter-archive of national history: the memoir's multigenerational structure, its emphasis on testimony, and its movement between intimate memory (mothering, grief, naming, domestic labor) and public struggle.

bell hooks' *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* is a foundational intervention in Black feminist cultural theory that examines how race, gender, class, and imperial power intersect in everyday life and cultural production. hooks argues that marginality can function not only as deprivation but as a "site of resistance," a location from which oppressed subjects generate alternative ways of seeing and speaking. Like hooks' analysis of Black women's cultural labor, Cooke's text portrays Palestinian women transforming domestic spaces into sites of resilience and ethical resistance. Through hooks, memory, home, and storytelling in *Hayati* can be understood as cultural practices that challenge imperial erasure and patriarchal control, positioning women's relational labor and narrative voice as foundational to collective survival and empowerment.

Memory as a Tool for Empowerment

In *Hayati: My Life*, memory functions not merely as recollection but as a powerful instrument through which women reclaim identity, voice, and agency in the face of political erasure and patriarchal restriction. Cooke presents memory as an active and transformative force rather than a passive return to the past. The recollections of exile, separation, and endurance allow the female characters to reconstruct a coherent sense of self despite historical rupture. In a context marked by displacement and marginalization, remembering becomes an act of resistance. Memory binds generations together, ensuring that inherited suffering does not produce silence but instead generates resilience. The narrative demonstrates that when trauma is articulated and shared, it ceases to paralyze and instead becomes a foundation for continuity and strength. A significant illustration of this dynamic appears when Maryam names her daughter Jamila. The act of naming transcends personal affection and assumes political and cultural significance. Maryam remarks to Assia, "She's beautiful. Like her name" (Cooke 61), suggesting that the name carries symbolic weight beyond aesthetic admiration. Assia immediately perceives the historical resonance of the choice, observing that Maryam "had not forgotten the stories I'd told her about the great Algerian heroines, Jamila Boupacha and Jamila Buhryad" (Cooke 63). The name thus becomes an invocation of anti-colonial struggle and female bravery. Assia further reflects, "Jamila will grow up to be a fighter. One can't resist one's name, right?" (Cooke 63). This statement underscores Cooke's suggestion that memory, once internalized, shapes identity formation. Through storytelling and remembrance, cultural values and political consciousness are transmitted informally yet effectively across generations. Naming becomes an act of cultural preservation and moral inheritance. Said insists that resistance requires "the conscious effort to affirm and defend identity against the effects of imperialism" (209). Cooke thereby illustrates that empowerment is not a sudden or isolated achievement but a cumulative process sustained through remembrance and narrative exchange. Memory functions simultaneously as archive, instruction, and resistance,

enabling Palestinian women to assert presence and agency even within conditions of displacement and historical marginalization.

The trauma of losing a child deeply marks the lives of both Assia and Basil, whose firstborn son, Usama, was killed during an Israeli military offensive. Assia's panic and grief emerge as a form of narrative trauma, a memory that she cannot fully process or narrate without emotional collapse. Basil, equally affected, undergoes a significant transformation after this loss. When their daughter Afaf is later born, he clings to her with fierce protectiveness. After Assia is discharged from the hospital, Basil refuses to leave the baby's room, overwhelmed by the fear of loss and the need to safeguard what remains of his family. Cathy Caruth's claim that "trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event... but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature... returns to haunt the survivor later on" (Caruth 4). Their grief, as described by Miriam Cooke, reveals how war ruptures not only physical safety but also emotional bonds, and how trauma reconfigures parental love into an act of constant vigilance and mourning.

Miriam Cooke demonstrates how memory operates not merely as recollection but as a transformative instrument of empowerment, especially within contexts of trauma and political struggle. Memory becomes empowering when it transforms private grief into acknowledged truth. When Assia narrates the death of Usama, Maryam initially responds with disbelief. Her reaction reflects the psychological defense against traumatic knowledge. According to Caruth, trauma demands witnessing: "To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event" (5). The story feels too painful to be real, and she wonders whether her parents might have invented it. However, the fact that "lots of people knew about Usama" (Cooke 13) confirms that this was not fabricated grief but a widely recognized loss. Memory here moves from individual narration to communal validation. This transition from doubt to recognition marks the first stage of empowerment. Once Maryam accepts the truth, she participates in a shared history. The trauma is no longer confined to the private sphere; it is publicly acknowledged. Collective memory strengthens personal resilience

because it assures the victim that suffering is witnessed and remembered. Thus, memory functions as a tool of empowerment by affirming existence and truth. In politically charged environments where narratives may be silenced or distorted, collective remembrance resists erasure and grants dignity to the lost.

The act of writing transforms memory into cultural resistance. The arrival of Samira Azzam signals a shift from oral memory to literary preservation. Samira had been writing stories about the Resistance and publishing them across the Arab world (Cooke 13). She intended to collect them into a book, with a Beirut publisher already interested. By deciding to include Usama's story—without using real names—she converts lived experience into narrative form. Writing stabilizes memory. It gives structure to chaos and permanence to fleeting pain. By fictionalizing names while preserving events, Samira protects individuals yet safeguards historical truth. The family's tragedy becomes part of a larger archive of resistance literature. Through this process, memory is no longer passive suffering; it becomes testimony. Fatma Kassem argues that Palestinian women's narratives function as "alternative archives that challenge official historiography and reposition women as central subjects in the making of national memory" (Kassem 7). Literary representation empowers marginalized voices. It challenges dominant historical narratives and ensures that stories of loss and resistance circulate beyond geographical boundaries. Memory, once confined to one household, now participates in shaping collective consciousness.

Narrative recognition allows trauma to shift from isolation to shared identity. When Samira hands Assia the written story, Assia retreats to her room to read it. The line, "It was no longer only our story but our family tragedy," (Cooke 13) reveals a profound transformation. The event has moved beyond being a solitary experience; it has entered the realm of documented history. Seeing one's own pain represented in writing validates experience. It affirms that suffering is worthy of remembrance and articulation. For Maryam and her family, this recognition offers emotional strength. The written story allows them to see their loss not merely as victimhood but as part of a broader narrative

of resilience and struggle. Memory thus becomes empowering because it creates continuity. It bridges generations and transforms grief into identity. By being narrated, preserved, and shared, the family tragedy becomes a source of collective strength rather than silent despair. By transforming tragedy into testimony, memory becomes not only remembrance but empowerment.

Conscience as Resistance: Hibba's Ethical Awakening

Hibba's employment at Nur Advertising initially appears as a moment of professional achievement, yet it gradually becomes the site of her ethical awakening. As a recent graduate from Women's Teacher Training in Basra, Hibba enters a male-dominated workplace where she is the only woman among twelve men. The hostility she encounters—gossip, insinuations, and suspicion after she rejects male advances—reveals that professional competence does not shield women from patriarchal scrutiny. When she observes that "word got around that there was something wrong with me" (Cooke 50), the statement reflects not personal insecurity but a broader social pattern in which female autonomy is read as deviance. The suggestive "winks and nods and innuendos" (Cooke 50) operate as informal disciplinary tools. They attempt to shame her into conformity, implying that a woman who prioritizes work over male approval must be morally or socially defective. Yet her response—"I couldn't care less, as long as I could work" (Cooke 50)—signals the first stage of empowerment. She refuses to internalize the narrative imposed upon her. This early resistance prepares the ground for a deeper moral confrontation. bell hooks reminds us that "Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible" (*Yearning* 9). Hibba's strength is not merely professional ambition; it is the assertion of self-definition against a system that seeks to control both her body and her labor.

Hibba's technical skill and rising reputation at Nur create the illusion of neutral participation in commercial modernity. At first, advertising appears

to her as creative labor detached from politics. She shapes images and persuasive language, contributing to the cosmopolitan culture of Baghdad. However, under the regime of Saddam Hussein, no public industry remains untouched by militarization. When an insecticide company becomes a major client, the rhetoric of extermination seems exaggerated but harmless—typical marketing hyperbole promising to kill snakes and scorpion. The turning point begins subtly. Her supervisor's reference to her "delicate position" (Cooke 52) introduces ambiguity and unease. The phrase implies that creative decisions are subject to hidden constraints. Only later does she discover that the Chemical Company is connected to military weapons production. The advertisement is not selling pest control; it is masking chemical warfare. This revelation transforms her professional space into an ethical battleground. What once seemed commercial now appears complicit. Empowerment here shifts from workplace resilience to moral discernment.

Hibba's question–"Why do we hide?" (Cooke 53)—marks the decisive moment of ethical clarity. The question exposes the regime's reliance on concealment. Euphemism replaces truth; "insecticide" becomes a sanitized term for weapons capable of mass destruction. Her sarcastic remark—"We should be proud that we are selling goods that can annihilate innocent civilians by the hundreds of thousands" (53)—reveals the grotesque inversion of values demanded by nationalist propaganda. Violence is framed as patriotic duty. By recognizing this inversion, Hibba understands that silence equals participation. Her conscience refuses to accommodate the distortion.The ethical awakening thus becomes empowerment. It is not loud defiance but moral refusal—the refusal to let her talent legitimize destruction.

Hibba's resignation represents an act of conscious withdrawal from complicity. In wartime Baghdad, leaving a respected position entails risk. Stability, income, and professional reputation are not easily surrendered. Yet she chooses integrity over advancement. Mohanty insists that feminist praxis involves "a vision of justice that is not limited by nation-state boundaries" (Mohanty 3). Unlike those who rationalize their roles within authoritarian systems, she rejects collaboration. Her

departure anticipates the later catastrophe of chemical violence, most tragically visible in the attack on Halabja. The trajectory she sensed becomes horrifyingly real. Her earlier unease proves perceptive rather than exaggerated. Through Hibba, Cooke suggests that empowerment begins internally. Before activism, there is recognition; before protest, there is refusal. Her ethical awakening demonstrates that resistance can originate in conscience. By withdrawing her labor, she disrupts the smooth functioning of propaganda and asserts that moral clarity is itself a form of power.

Gendered Responsibility in Times of Crisis

The return of Assia and Basil to Jerusalem marks a decisive turning point in the restructuring of gendered roles under political and economic instability. Basil, despite his professional training as an engineer, is unable to secure stable employment. His temporary translation work for the U.S. Consulate provides "only one meal a day," (Cooke 17) underscoring the fragility of the household economy. Moreover, the broader political climate intensifies male vulnerability: "Any demonstration, however peaceful, was an excuse to crack down and round up men for jail" (Cooke 18). In such a context, men's public presence becomes precarious, and the conventional patriarchal expectation of male breadwinning collapses under surveillance and imprisonment. Judith Butler's observation that "Certain lives will be highly protected, and the abrogation of their claims to sanctity will be sufficient to mobilize the forces of war" (Butler 32) helps illuminate this asymmetry of precarity. Palestinian male bodies become exposed to state violence, leaving women to stabilize daily life. The crisis thus exposes the instability of gender hierarchies and demands adaptive restructuring.

This instability generates structural transformation rather than mere economic strain. Women, long confined to domestic containment, assume managerial and communal responsibilities. As Chandra Talpade Mohanty asserts, "Women are not only victims of male violence, but agents of social change" (Mohanty 7). Assia embodies this shift. Her response is not ideological rhetoric but pragmatic intervention. Instead of waiting

for employment opportunities or political calm, she evaluates immediate needs and acts decisively. Cynthia Enloe reminds us that "Militarization relies on women's labor, often invisibly, to sustain the everyday" (Enloe 3). Assia's labor—organizing childcare, rearranging domestic space, coordinating mothers—operates precisely within this invisible yet indispensable sphere. The domestic arena becomes a strategic site of endurance.

Assia's decision to establish childcare arises from necessity rather than ambition. Anticipating her own motherhood, she reasons that caring for her child can extend to others. This thinking echoes earlier communal practices in Tulkarem, where "Whenever a mother had had to go out for a mission, she had to leave her child with someone" (Cooke 18). The daycare initiative thus revitalizes existing networks of shared responsibility. Lila Abu-Lughod's assertion that "The problem is not that women lack agency but that we fail to recognize the forms it takes" (Abu-Lughod 44) is particularly relevant here. Assia's agency does not manifest in dramatic rebellion but in organizational foresight. Although she lacks traditional domestic skills such as embroidery–often valorized within patriarchal constructions of femininity–she redefines competence through coordination and community-obuilding. Empowerment lies in reinterpretation: motherhood shifts from private obligation to communal resource.

Trust-building becomes central to the initiative's success. In a conflict zone, suspicion shapes daily interactions. Mothers hesitate to leave their children with those perceived as unfamiliar. Assia and Samya counter this fear by invoking shared memory and longstanding bonds. Their appeal to collective familiarity transforms hesitation into participation. Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory clarifies how such communal continuity functions: "Postmemory describes the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before" (Hirsch 5). The daycare becomes not only a practical solution but a space where intergenerational resilience is cultivated. The apartment, once marked by economic uncertainty, fills

with the vitality of children's presence. Emotional restoration parallels spatial transformation.

The reorganization of the apartment further reflects social restructuring. Furniture is rearranged, unused items are packed away, and unnecessary belongings considered for sale. These domestic adjustments signify deeper adaptation. bell hooks' reflection that "The homeplace was the one site where one could freely confront the issue of humanization, where one could resist" (Hooks 42) resonates powerfully here. Assia's home becomes more than a shelter; it becomes a site of resistance, productivity, and communal solidarity. Six months after Maryam's birth, the daycare opens in Jerusalem; three months after Afaf's birth, another is established in Bethlehem. What began as temporary survival expands into sustainable growth. Through Assia's actions, the narrative demonstrates that crisis does not silence women; it clarifies their capacity for leadership. The erosion of male economic stability does not produce social collapse because women stabilize everyday life through adaptive intelligence. Empowerment emerges through steady, practical decisions rather than overt political declarations. As Mohanty reminds us, women function as "agents of social change" (7), even when their labor appears ordinary. In times of political upheaval, kitchens and living rooms become strategic centers of resilience. Assia's initiative reveals that when dominant systems falter, it is often women's relational labor that sustains both family and collective continuity.

Generational Transmission of Empowerment

Empowerment in *Hayati: My Life* does not appear suddenly; it unfolds gradually across generations, carried forward through gestures, stories, and lived example. The novel's matrilineal chain—Samya, Assia, Maryam, and Afaf—illustrates a continuum of resilience in which each woman reshapes inherited strength according to her own historical moment.

Samya Lughod, born in 1898, emerges as the family's foundational figure of defiance. She was an elegant woman who ran a salon in Jerusalem which was known as far as Nablus. While demonstrating against the

British near the al-Aqsa mosque, the British had killed many Palestinians including her husaband. She along with many Palestinian women was put into jail. Her participation in a public protest against British authority marks a decisive political awakening. Declaring, "To serve our homeland we shall take off our veil" (Cooke 75), she simultaneously challenges colonial domination and patriarchal restriction. Scholars such as Maha El Said, Lena Meari, and Nicola Pratt argue that actions like these "constituted a challenge to gendered structures of power that confined them to the private sphere" (El Said 4). Samya's gesture therefore signals an early feminist consciousness embedded within nationalist struggle, reclaiming public visibility for women.

Assia inherits this spirit in quieter yet equally meaningful ways. Writing letters from boarding school during the upheavals of 1948, she reflects on the gendered limitations of revolutionary participation: "It wasn't that parents didn't know. It was simply far better for everyone if as little as possible was made of females and guns" (Cooke 14). Her correspondence transforms solitude into expression, creating a written record that preserves both political history and personal voice. As Hiyem Cheurfa notes, such narratives "reject the imposed silence, reclaiming memory and authorship as acts of survival and subversion" (Cheurfa 5).

The lineage of resistance continues with Afaf, whose art becomes a visual language of protest. Inspired by Goya and the Palestinian Intifada, her collages turn suffering into testimony. One striking image depicts "a large weeping eye" gazing over "corpses . . . and a Palestinian flag flying above the side tent" (Cooke 35). Through such imagery, Afaf converts inherited trauma into witness, suggesting that art, like storytelling, safeguards collective consciousness.

Her relationship with Maryam highlights the varied forms empowerment can take. Maryam's intellectual engagement through teaching contrasts with Afaf's emotional expression through art, yet both emerge from the same legacy–a determination to assert presence in a world that attempts to deny it. Cooke thus portrays empowerment not as uniform inheritance

but as an ongoing dialogue between generations, each adapting inherited strength to new circumstances.

In *Hayati,* Knowledge is not presented as neutral; it is charged with political and ethical significance. Maryam's decision to teach at Hebrew University rather than Jerusalem University illustrates tension between resistance and reconciliation. Two years back she was constantly worrying about her decision to accept the job. She always tries to convince herself that this was the way to make a difference. Her intention is to help her "Israeli students understand and eventually respect and admire the culture of people whose existence their government was trying to erase" (Cooke 89). In this sense, teaching becomes an act of intervention. The classroom is transformed into a contested space where dominant narratives can be questioned and reimagined. Maryam's pedagogical approach demonstrates that intellectual engagement can challenge systems of power just as effectively as overt protest. By choosing dialogue over withdrawal, she turns education into a form of ethical resistance grounded in empathy and critical awareness.

Conclusion

Hayati: My Life ultimately presents empowerment as a living process sustained across generations rather than a fixed state achieved once and for all. Through Samya's unveiling and political defiance, Assia's letters and maternal endurance, Hibba's moral refusal, Maryam's pedagogy, and Afaf's art, Cooke constructs a continuum of resistance that adapts to shifting historical pressures. Memory emerges as the connective tissue binding these women together. It preserves dignity in exile, transforms trauma into testimony, and anchors identity amid displacement. Education, both formal and informal, extends this process. Stories told at night, names chosen with intention, and lessons offered within contested classrooms all function as acts of reclamation. Knowledge becomes ethical responsibility.

Cooke's narrative challenges narrow definitions of resistance. Armed struggle and public protest remain significant, yet the novel insists that resistance also resides in quieter gestures–refusing complicity, nurturing

community, teaching across divides, and creating art that bears witness. These acts may appear ordinary, but they sustain cultural survival. In tracing the matrilineal transmission of strength, *Hayati* affirms that empowerment is cumulative. Each generation inherits not only trauma but also the tools to reinterpret it. Through remembrance, dialogue, and creative engagement, Palestinian women reshape agency within conditions designed to limit them. The novel therefore stands as both testimony and instruction, revealing that memory, education, and conscience together form a durable architecture of resistance.

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Humanity, Empathy, and Artificial Life in Philip K. Dick's Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?

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Introduction

Science fiction has long served as a speculative space in which authors interrogate the ethical, philosophical, and social consequences of technological advancement. Among the most influential works in this tradition is Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (1968), a novel that transcends genre boundaries to pose enduring questions about the meaning of being human. Written during the Cold War era and in the shadow of nuclear anxiety, the novel reflects widespread fears concerning technological domination, ecological destruction, and emotional alienation. Dick's dystopian vision is not merely a futuristic fantasy, but a critical mirror held up to modern society, exposing the fragility of moral values in a mechanized world.

Set in a post-apocalyptic Earth devastated by World War Terminus, the novel follows Rick Deckard, a bounty hunter tasked with "retiring" rogue androids who are virtually indistinguishable from humans. These androids, produced by the Rosen Association, possess advanced intelligence, emotional simulation, and physical superiority, yet are deemed inhuman due to their alleged lack of empathy. As Deckard hunts them down, the narrative increasingly destabilizes the binary opposition between human and machine, forcing both protagonist and reader to confront unsettling ethical contradictions.

The novel's central concern is not whether androids can imitate humans, but whether humans themselves still possess the qualities–compassion, empathy, and moral responsibility–that justify their dominance. Dick

complicates the definition of humanity by depicting humans who are emotionally deadened, spiritually hollow, and morally compromised, while certain androids display fear, desire, and self-preservation that resemble genuine emotional life. In doing so, the text anticipates later posthumanist debates about artificial intelligence, cyborg identity, and the dissolution of the human subject.

This research paper explores ten major themes that structure the novel's philosophical inquiry. Each theme is examined through close textual analysis and supported by secondary criticism drawn from science fiction studies, postmodern theory, and cultural philosophy. The study argues that *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*ultimately rejects biological essentialism and instead presents empathy as the ethical core of humanity–while simultaneously questioning whether such empathy can survive in a technologically saturated world.

Literature Review

Critical engagement with Philip K. Dick's work has consistently emphasized his obsession with reality, identity, and ontological uncertainty. Scholars such as Christopher Palmer argue that Dick's fiction is characterized by a persistent "destabilization of reality," in which characters can no longer trust appearances, institutions, or even their own perceptions. In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* this destabilization manifests most clearly in the blurred distinction between humans and androids, a theme that has attracted sustained scholarly attention.

DarkoSuvin, in *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction*, situates Dick's novel within the tradition of "cognitive estrangement," arguing that science fiction functions by presenting a recognizable world rendered strange through a novum–in this case, android life. Suvin contends that the androids force readers to reassess human identity itself, revealing it as historically constructed rather than naturally given. This reading supports the view that Dick's novel is less concerned with technological prediction than with philosophical critique.

Postmodern theorists have also found fertile ground in Dick's work. Fredric Jameson reads Dick as a diagnostician of late capitalism, suggesting that the commodification of animals, emotions, and even religion in the novel reflects the logic of consumer culture. The obsession with owning real animals—symbols of status and moral worth—illustrates how authentic values are replaced by market-driven substitutes. Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulacra further illuminates the novel's emphasis on artificiality, particularly in the prevalence of electric animals and simulated emotions, which function as copies without originals.

Feminist and posthumanist critics, notably Donna Haraway, provide additional insight through the lens of cyborg theory. Haraway's assertion that the boundary between human and machine is politically and culturally constructed resonates strongly with Dick's portrayal of androids. Rather than depicting machines as inherently monstrous, the novel reveals how institutional power defines and enforces categories of legitimacy, often through violence.

Religion in the novel, particularly the cult of Mercerism, has been interpreted as both a parody and a sincere exploration of collective suffering. Patricia Warrick argues that Mercerism represents humanity's desperate attempt to maintain empathy in an emotionally barren world, even as its technological mediation undermines its authenticity. The empathy box, which allows users to merge with Mercer's suffering, exemplifies Dick's ambivalence toward technological spirituality.

Despite extensive scholarship, the novel remains open to reinterpretation in light of contemporary concerns about artificial intelligence, surveillance, and emotional automation. This research builds upon existing criticism by synthesizing ethical, philosophical, and socio-economic perspectives, offering a comprehensive thematic analysis that underscores the novel's continuing relevance in the twenty-first century.

Major Thematic Concerns in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*

1 Humanity Vs Artificiality: One of the most fundamental themes in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? is* the unstable boundary between humanity and artificial life. Philip K. Dick constructs a future in which androids are biologically and cognitively indistinguishable from humans, thereby destabilizing traditional humanist assumptions that equate humanity with origin, biology, or appearance. The novel repeatedly asks not what humans are made of, but what ethical and emotional capacities define them.

The androids created by the Rosen Association possess advanced intelligence, self-awareness, and emotional simulation. The Voigt-Kampff empathy test–used to identify androids–suggests that the only reliable distinction between humans and machines lies in emotional response, particularly empathy toward other living beings. However, as the narrative progresses, this distinction becomes increasingly fragile. Several humans in the novel exhibit emotional numbness, cruelty, and moral indifference, while certain androids demonstrate fear, self-preservation, and even attachment to one another.

Rick Deckard's professional duty as a bounty hunter requires him to "retire" androids, a euphemism that masks the moral violence of execution. Initially, Deckard views androids as mechanical threats, but his encounters–especially with Luba Luft and Rachael Rosen—force him to confront their apparent subjectivity. His growing discomfort suggests that the category of "artificial" is socially constructed rather than ontologically stable.

Christopher Palmer argues that Dick's androids function as mirrors reflecting human moral emptiness rather than as simple antagonists. The android is terrifying not because it is different, but because it is almost the same. This resemblance exposes the fragility of human identity, revealing it as dependent on fragile ethical practices rather than inherent superiority. The novel thus undermines anthropocentrism and anticipates posthumanist critiques that reject the idea of human exceptionalism.

Ultimately, Dick presents humanity not as a fixed biological category but as a moral achievement—one that can be lost. The artificiality of androids becomes less disturbing than the artificiality of human emotional life in a society dominated by technology, commodification, and violence.

2 Empathy as Moral Identity: Empathy functions as the novel's central ethical principle and the primary criterion used to distinguish humans from androids. In the devastated post-war world, empathy is elevated to a moral absolute, institutionalized through Mercerism and technologically measured through the Voigt-Kampff test. Yet Dick's portrayal of empathy is deeply ambivalent, revealing both its necessity and its vulnerability.

The Voigt-Kampff test measures involuntary empathetic responses to hypothetical scenarios involving animal suffering. Animals occupy a sacred position in the novel's moral economy, symbolizing life, responsibility, and ethical authenticity. The presumed inability of androids to empathize with animals becomes the justification for their extermination. However, this framework is repeatedly challenged by the narrative. Androids learn to simulate empathy, while many humans fail to demonstrate it meaningfully.

Rick Deckard's emotional trajectory is central to this theme. Initially confident in the moral clarity of his work, Deckard gradually experiences emotional collapse as he recognizes the suffering of the androids he kills. His sexual relationship with Rachael Rosen further complicates the issue, as it blurs the line between emotional manipulation and genuine connection. Deckard's empathy expands beyond socially sanctioned boundaries, forcing him to question whether empathy can remain exclusive to humans.

Mercerism, the dominant religion of the novel, institutionalizes empathy through collective suffering. By using the empathy box, individuals merge with Wilbur Mercer's eternal struggle, experiencing pain as a shared moral ritual. While this practice reinforces social cohesion, its technological mediation raises doubts about authenticity. When Mercerism is revealed to be a fabricated broadcast, its moral authority

is undermined–but not destroyed. Dick suggests that even constructed systems of belief can produce real ethical effects.

Patricia Warrick interprets empathy in the novel as a fragile defense against moral entropy. It is not a guaranteed human trait but a discipline that must be continually practiced. This interpretation aligns with Dick's broader skepticism toward essentialist definitions of humanity. Empathy does not reside securely within humans; it must be chosen, protected, and enacted–often at great psychological cost.

Thus, empathy emerges as both the novel's ethical ideal and its most endangered value. In a world saturated with artificial stimuli, emotional automation, and violence, empathy becomes the final marker of moral resistance.

3. Post-Apocalyptic Alienation: The setting of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* is crucial to its thematic structure. Earth after World War Terminus is a landscape of decay, emptiness, and environmental ruin. Nuclear fallout has rendered large portions of the planet uninhabitable, driving mass emigration to off-world colonies. Those who remain behind inhabit a world defined by isolation, degeneration, and existential fatigue.

Urban spaces in the novel are characterized by abandoned buildings, empty apartments, and decaying infrastructure. These physical environments mirror the psychological state of the characters, who experience profound loneliness and disconnection. Rick Deckard and his wife Iran exemplify this alienation: despite living together, they struggle to communicate authentically, relying instead on mood organs to regulate emotional states artificially.

The concept of the "specials"–humans damaged by radiation and deemed intellectually inferior –reinforces the theme of alienation through social exclusion. These individuals are barred from emigrating and stigmatized as biologically defective, highlighting the novel's critique of eugenics and technocratic dehumanization. J.R. Isidore, a "special," embodies moral innocence and emotional generosity, contrasting sharply with the ethical sterility of so-called normal humans.

Fredric Jameson interprets the novel's post-apocalyptic environment as an allegory of late capitalist alienation, in which social bonds are replaced by technological substitutes. The empty cityscape reflects not only nuclear devastation but also the erosion of communal life. Technology, rather than reconnecting individuals, intensifies isolation by mediating every aspect of experience.

The androids themselves are products of this alienated world. Created for colonial labor, they rebel not merely for freedom but for recognition and survival. Their presence on Earth exposes the moral contradictions of a society that depends on exploitation while denying responsibility.

In portraying a future marked by environmental collapse and emotional desolation, Dick offers a warning rather than a prediction. The novel suggests that technological progress divorced from ethical responsibility leads inevitably to social fragmentation and moral exhaustion. Alienation, in this sense, is not merely a consequence of apocalypse—it is its defining condition.

4. Religion, Technology, and Capitalist Ethics: Religion in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*takes the form of Mercerism, a technologically mediated belief system centered on collective suffering and empathy. Unlike traditional religions grounded in transcendence or divine authority, Mercerism operates through an "empathy box," a device that allows individuals to fuse their consciousness with that of Wilbur Mercer, a Christ-like figure condemned to eternally climb a barren hill while stones are hurled at him. Through this ritualized suffering, participants experience communal pain and emotional solidarity.

Mercerism functions as a moral counterweight to the emotional emptiness of the post-apocalyptic world. In a society fragmented by nuclear devastation and technological alienation, Mercerism provides a shared ethical framework rooted in empathy. The act of suffering together becomes a means of preserving human connection in a landscape otherwise defined by isolation. Importantly, Mercerism reinforces the moral imperative to care for animals and living beings, thereby supporting the ethical hierarchy that privileges empathy over efficiency.

However, Dick complicates this religious structure by revealing Mercerism to be, at least in part, a fabricated media spectacle. The televised exposure of Mercer as an actor on a studio set destabilizes the religion's claim to authenticity. Yet this revelation does not destroy Mercerism's ethical power. Even after its artificiality is exposed, characters such as Rick Deckard continue to experience genuine moral insight through Mercer's teachings.

This paradox underscores one of Dick's central philosophical claims: authenticity is not determined by origin but by ethical effect. Mercerism's value lies not in its metaphysical truth but in its capacity to cultivate empathy. As Patricia Warrick observes, Mercerism represents "a desperate moral technology," an attempt to preserve ethical feeling in a world where natural empathy is under constant threat. The religion thus mirrors the androids themselves–artificial constructs capable of producing real emotional consequences.

Mercerism also serves as a critique of passive spirituality. The empathy box requires users to actively participate in suffering rather than escape from it, reinforcing Dick's belief that moral life entails responsibility and pain. In this sense, Mercerism is less an opiate than a discipline, demanding emotional engagement rather than comfort.

5. Technologies and Dehumanization: Technology in the novel operates as a double-edged force: it sustains human life while simultaneously eroding the very qualities that define humanity. Devices such as mood organs, empathy boxes, artificial animals, and android labor systems permeate everyday existence, shaping emotional experience and moral judgment. Rather than liberating humanity, these technologies increasingly regulate and replace authentic feeling.

The Penfield mood organ exemplifies this dynamic. By allowing users to dial specific emotional states, the device transforms feelings into programmable commodities. Iran Deckard's dependence on the mood organ reflects the collapse of spontaneous emotional life, as grief, desire, and hope are artificially induced rather than organically experienced. While the device offers relief from despair, it also eliminates the possibility of genuine emotional growth.

Similarly, artificial animals replace extinct or unaffordable real ones, becoming symbols of technological compensation for ecological destruction. Although these machines mimic life, their presence underscores the absence of authentic nature. The normalization of artificial substitutes conditions humans to accept simulation as equivalent to reality, further blurring ethical boundaries.

The androids represent the most extreme manifestation of technological dehumanization. Designed for off-world servitude, they embody a system that treats sentient beings as disposable property. Their rebellion exposes the moral hypocrisy of a society that relies on exploitation while denying accountability. The bureaucratic language of "retirement" masks systemic violence, allowing humans to evade ethical responsibility.

Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulacra is particularly relevant here. In a world where simulations replace originals, ethical reference points collapse. The distinction between real and artificial becomes irrelevant, leaving power structures free to define legitimacy arbitrarily. Dick's novel anticipates this condition, portraying a society in which technological efficiency supersedes moral reflection.

Ultimately, technology in the novel does not inherently dehumanize; rather, dehumanization occurs when technology is divorced from ethical restraint. Dick warns that without moral vigilance, technological systems will not merely serve humanity but redefine it—often at the expense of empathy and responsibility.

Conclusion

Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? remains one of the most philosophically ambitious works of twentieth-century science fiction. Through its exploration of artificial life, empathy and technologythe novel challenges fundamental assumptions about what it means to be human. Dick rejects biological essentialism, instead presenting humanity as a fragile ethical practice grounded in empathy and responsibility.

Five themes examined in this paper demonstrate that the novel is not merely a cautionary tale about technology but a profound moral inquiry

into modern civilization. Dick exposes how systems of power, consumerism, and technological mediation erode authentic emotional life while offering artificial substitutes that simulate meaning without sustaining it.

In an era increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence, digital surveillance, and emotional automation, *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* remains urgently relevant. Its warning is clear: without empathy, humanity risks becoming indistinguishable from the machines it creates.

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The Politics of Voice: Language, Gender and Identity in Sujata Bhatt's Search for My Tongue and Suniti Namjoshi's Feminist Fables

Gargi Saraswat and Abrar Ahmed

Introduction

Writing by Indian women in English has often been approached through the paired histories of colonial language and gendered exclusion. Such approaches are necessary, but they can become reductive when language is treated merely as a symbol of national displacement or when feminist literary form is treated merely as a vehicle for political content. Sujata Bhatt's *Search for My Tongue* and Suniti Namjoshi's *Feminist Fables* invite a more integrated reading. Bhatt's poem stages conflict between English and Gujarati through the image of two tongues occupying one mouth. Namjoshi's fables recast inherited narratives, especially Aesopian structures, to question who may speak, who is assigned a moral lesson, and whose interpretation becomes authoritative.

The paper has the following four objectives:

1) To analyse how *"Search for My Tongue"* represents linguistic conflict as a struggle over somatic, memory-bound and identity.
2) To examine how *Feminist Fables* contest gendered and moral voice by subverting standard literary forms, including classical fable structures.
3) To theoretical models that link the concepts of hybridity, subalternity, performativity, aesthetic labour, female authorship, and identity formation.
4) To challenge readings that reduce Bhatt's poetry to simple diasporic identity or reduce Namjoshi's fables to simple satiric exercises.

The paper makes a humble attempt to trace the following:

1) How do Bhatt and Namjoshi represent voice as contested, embodied and politically recoverable?
2) What formal strategies enable female authors to subvert standard literary forms and assert agency in language?
3) How do postcolonial and feminist theoretical models explain the performativity and aesthetic labour of voice in these texts?
4) What new insights emerge from a comparative reading of language, gender and identity in postcolonial female writing?

The paper makes a humble attempt to fill the following research gap

Existing scholarship highlights key aspects of the two works but leaves important gaps, particularly regarding the intersection of language, gender, identity, and agency. Most scholarship on Sujata Bhatt's *Search for My Tongue* focuses on themes of migration, bilingualism, and the loss of native language. Researchers often view the poem as a primary document of cultural displacement rather than an intricate, embodied exploration of agency through performance and artistic labour. Similarly, critical response to Suniti Namjoshi's *Feminist Fables* mostly centers on her use of satire, parody, and fable forms to challenge patriarchal and heterosexual norms. While these studies offer useful insights into her formal strategies, they rarely examine how she constructs voice as an instrument of resistance or how her work aligns with or differs from other postcolonial female writers.

The critical gap this paper addresses lies in the comparative analysis of these two texts. Though both writers address questions of voice, language, and gender, their work is rarely analysed together. Existing studies either treat them separately or place them in broad, generalised categories of postcolonial or feminist literature. This approach misses the subtle differences in their methods and the distinct ways they construct agency. Bhatt focuses on the corporeal and psychological experience of language, using imagery of bodily transformation and

memory to illustrate how language is lived, lost, and reclaimed. Namjoshi, in contrast, uses structural disruption, subverting traditional narrative forms to expose how language and authority are maintained through genre and narrative conventions.

By conducting a detailed, comparative reading, this paper fills this gap, showing how both writers challenge dominant structures and propose alternative models of voice and identity. It brings postcolonial theories of hybridity and subalternity into dialogue with feminist accounts of performativity and agency, providing a richer understanding of how language, gender, and authority interact in postcolonial female writing.

Systematic Literature Review

Language, Bilingualism, and Postcolonial Voice

The interaction between language and identity is central to postcolonial writing, where language is both a tool of expression and a site of struggle. Early postcolonial theory often emphasized the tension between the imperial language and native tongues, framing the choice of language as a political act. Later scholarship, however, shifted focus to hybridity, code-switching, and the ways writers transform English to express non-Western experiences.

In the context of Indian English poetry, writers have long grappled with the challenges of using a former colonial language. Scholars note that bilingual writers often experience a dual consciousness, navigating between the dominant status of English and the personal, cultural, or emotional weight of their mother tongue. Bhatt's *Search for My Tongue* is frequently cited as a central example of this struggle, showing how language loss and recovery are experienced on a personal, physical level. Critical response to Bhatt's poem has largely focused on its themes of bilingualism, diaspora, and cultural loss. Scholars argue that the poem highlights the tension between the imported language, which dominates public life, and the mother tongue, which remains tied to memory, intimacy, and body. Some readings emphasize the poem's depiction of language loss as a form of cultural displacement, while others focus on

the ultimate resurgence of the native tongue as a symbol of cultural resilience.

The limitation of a celebratory hybridity model is that it can understate unequal power. Bhabha's third space describes the production of new meaning between established cultural positions, but Bhatt's poem insists that the space between languages is not free of coercion. The Anglophone environment is represented as a situation in which one tongue threatens to displace another. Recent work on staged code-switching is helpful here because it argues that literary bilingualism is produced within writing and cannot be treated as a transparent reproduction of spoken language (Grutman 57). The Gujarati passage in Bhatt's poem is therefore not merely evidence of bilingual competence; it is a formal event staged for readers who may not understand it.

Research on code-switching in English poetry similarly demonstrates that the insertion of another language may create dramatic, lyrical, social or political effects (Barnes). This insight strengthens a reading of Bhatt's Gujarati as an intervention in the authority of English. Yet a formal account of code-switching must be joined to feminist analysis. The poem does not present language as an abstract repertoire. It presents the speaker's mouth as a site where competing demands are imposed upon a gendered subject

Feminist Fabulism, Satire and Animal Allegory

Criticism of Namjoshi generally agrees that *Feminist Fables* reworks inherited narrative forms in order to expose patriarchal common sense. The collection's use of lions, wolves, foxes, jackdaws and mice draws upon Aesopian familiarity while altering the moral and political implications of those figures. The study of subaltern voice argues that Namjoshi's fables place hegemonic traditions on trial and foreground the expressive claims of marginalised figures (Manggong 7). The analysis of strategic essentialism similarly suggests that animal identity becomes a tactical form through which the collection questions the human insistence on categorising the strange as inferior (Ross 24).

These approaches agree that animal allegory is not an escape from politics. It is a technique for making hierarchy visible. Their difference concerns the degree to which the animals should be read as direct representations of human groups. Strategic essentialism offers a stronger account because it preserves the figures' alterity. The lion is not simply a man, nor is the mouse simply a woman. Their animal status exposes the instability of the categories through which authority is naturalised. Recent criticism presents Namjoshi's method as a broader feminist revision of folklore, myth, fairy tale and fable. It argues that the collection disrupts binary distinctions and imagines a space where identities need not remain fixed within inherited social boundaries (Khatun 56). This reading captures the collection's formal plurality, but its emphasis on liberation can risk overlooking the persistence of power. Rewriting a moral does not automatically dissolve the social structures represented by the moral. Namjoshi's irony is most effective when it shows that even alternative communities may reproduce hierarchy. The work on Namjoshi's feminist ideology provides a useful corrective by emphasising her critique of power within feminist as well as patriarchal formations. It describes her writing as a practice of reworking myths, legends and fairy tales to address women's erasure, while also questioning the replication of dominance within supposedly emancipatory groups (Goel 12). This point is especially relevant to the present study because it shifts attention from the presence of feminist characters to the organisation of narrative authority.

Gender, Identity and the Speaking Female Subject

Feminist theory has shown that the speaking subject cannot be separated from the social norms that make speech recognisable. Spivak's account of subalternity warns against assuming that representation automatically gives the oppressed access to political speech. A text may speak for a marginalised subject while still reproducing the conditions of her silence. Butler's theory of performativity similarly explains gender as an effect of repeated acts rather than a stable essence. These perspectives allow *Search for My Tongue* and *Feminist Fables* to be read as texts concerned with the production of intelligible identity. Recent work on

feminist retellings uses performativity to show how inherited female roles can be disrupted through alternative actions and narrative forms (Ponnarasi and Sindhu 44). Though that scholarship focuses on mythological retellings rather than Namjoshi, its central insight applies here: repetition can sustain hierarchy, but repetition can also become the means of revision. Namjoshi's fables repeat recognisable forms only to make their authority unstable. Studies of women's poetry have also cautioned against universalising female experience. Work on mothering in New English poetry argues for a locational feminism attentive to gender, race, ethnicity and the specific histories of women's speech (Papke 12). This caution matters for Bhatt. The speaker's linguistic conflict should not be converted into a universal model of womanhood or migration. Her voice is situated within a particular relation between Gujarati, English, memory and the expectations of an Anglophone audience. The unresolved gap lies at the intersection of these three fields. Scholarship has shown that Bhatt's poem represents diasporic language conflict, and that Namjoshi's fables revise patriarchal narrative. It has not sufficiently examined how both writers make gendered speech formally visible. The present study addresses this gap by treating language, voice and identity as mutually constitutive rather than as separate themes.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study uses a qualitative, interpretive design grounded in feminist textual analysis. It does not seek to measure readers' responses or establish sociolinguistic frequencies. Its object is the literary organisation of voice: the ways in which diction, address, genre, imagery, narrative perspective and formal interruption produce or constrain agency.

The feminist orientation of the method requires attention to both representation and form. It asks how female and marginalised subjects are positioned, but also how a text invites, limits or unsettles the reader's authority over those subjects. Postcolonial analysis supplements this approach by examining the relation between language, cultural hierarchy and the afterlife of imperial forms.

Data Sources and Text Selection Criteria

The primary texts are Bhatt's *Search for My Tongue* , published in *Brunizem*, and the complete collection *Feminist Fables*. They were selected for three reasons. First, both are established works in Indian English and diasporic women's writing. Secondly, both make voice central to their politics: Bhatt through the conflict between Gujarati and English, and Namjoshi through the redistribution of speech within inherited fable structures. Thirdly, their formal difference permits comparison without assuming that all feminist writing operates through the same genre.

The whole of *Feminist Fables* is treated as the relevant textual field, while particular attention is given to "The Lion and the Cub", Aesopian revisions, *The Sun and the Moon*, the reworking of the Beauty and the Beast motif, and recurring figures such as the lion, wolf, fox, jackdaw and mouse. The analysis remains at the level of motif, narrative function and argument.

Theoretical Framework

The study draws on Spivak, Bhabha, Anzaldúa, Cixous, Gilbert and Gubar, Showalter, Butler, Mulvey and Hochschild. Their concepts are not applied as interchangeable labels. Each is used to illuminate a distinct textual operation. Spivak's account of the subaltern provides a method for asking whether a marginalised voice is permitted to speak on its own terms or is translated into the idiom of dominant authority. Bhabha's hybridity and third space clarify how Bhatt's poem produces meaning between English and Gujarati, while also allowing analysis of the coercive conditions under which that space is formed.

Anzaldúa's linguistic borderlands and account of tongue-tying illuminate the bodily and psychological effects of being positioned between languages. Cixous's écriture féminine directs attention to writing that refuses linear mastery and gives prominence to the body, multiplicity and non-hierarchical forms of expression. Gilbert and Gubar's angel/mad woman polarity provides a framework for reading the opposition between acceptable femininity and unruly female speech. Showalter's gynocriticism supports the study of women's literary traditions and the

forms through which women construct female subjectivity. Butler's performativity is operationalised by examining repeated roles, moral expectations and acts of compliance in Namjoshi's fables, as well as the speaker's shifting relation to English and Gujarati in Bhatt. The male gaze, following Mulvey, is defined as a structure in which the female figure is organised for a presumed masculine spectator or interpretive authority. In the present study, the concept is extended cautiously to the textual demand that a female speaker appear coherent, accommodating and available for judgement. Emotional labour, following Hochschild's concept of the management of feeling to satisfy institutional or interpersonal expectations, is adapted here to the aesthetic labour of a female speaker who must perform accommodation and please an imagined audience. Feminine agency means the capacity for self-authored speech and action. It does not imply complete autonomy; rather, it identifies moments in which a subject alters the terms under which she is represented or heard.

The analysis proceeded through four stages. First, the primary texts were read closely for instances of voice, silence, address, naming, linguistic alternation and narrative authority. Secondly, these features were coded thematically under voice, marginalisation, agency, bodily imagery, inherited form and resistance. Thirdly, the coded passages were interpreted through the theoretical concepts defined above. Finally, the two works were compared according to speaker position, language politics, form, mode of resistance and relation to tradition.

The method treats textual details as evidence rather than illustrations of predetermined theory. A theoretical concept is retained only where it clarifies a formal or rhetorical feature of the text. This procedure also prevents the comparison from becoming a claim that Bhatt and Namjoshi express the same politics. Their common concern with voice emerges through different aesthetic practices.

The theoretical framework begins from the proposition that voice is relational. Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?" remains crucial because it distinguishes between the existence of speech and the conditions under which speech becomes audible as knowledge. A subaltern voice is not

simply a quiet voice waiting to be released. It is a voice whose social position may prevent its utterance from being recognised except through the categories of dominant representation. In Bhatt, this problem appears through the speaker's relation to an imagined Anglophone listener. In Namjoshi, it appears through characters who are assigned meanings by inherited moral structures. Bhabha's hybridity complicates binary accounts of cultural identity. The third space is not a stable compromise between two pure cultures but a site in which meanings are negotiated and transformed. Bhatt's poem inhabits such a space formally, since English and Gujarati coexist without becoming equivalent. The poem does not translate Gujarati into English for the reader's comfort. It makes linguistic difference remain present. Namjoshi's fables similarly occupy a third space between inherited fable and feminist counter-narrative. Their politics depend on entering tradition without submitting to its authority. Anzaldúa's borderlands theory makes hybridity bodily. The border is not only a cultural location but also a condition of linguistic strain, where the tongue may be tied, corrected or divided. This concept is particularly productive for Bhatt's two-tongue conceit. The mouth becomes a border zone in which identity is physically imagined as competition and coexistence. It also assists in reading Namjoshi's animals as border figures: neither merely human allegories nor autonomous beasts, they occupy an unstable position that exposes the arbitrariness of social classification. Cixous's écriture féminine directs attention to writing that permits the body to interrupt the authority of linear, closed discourse. Bhatt's organic imagery and the return of Gujarati through the image of blossoming exemplify a movement away from linguistic mastery towards regeneration. Namjoshi's short forms similarly destabilise the expectation that a fable should deliver a single authoritative lesson. Feminist writing here is not defined by a particular style but by its refusal to allow patriarchal closure to determine meaning. Gilbert and Gubar's angel/madwoman polarity clarifies the gendered stakes of acceptable speech. The angel represents the woman who remains pleasing, silent and morally compliant; the madwoman represents the figure whose unruly speech threatens masculine order. Bhatt's speaker is pressured towards accommodation but retains a voice that cannot be fully disciplined.

Namjoshi's female and non-normative figures often occupy the position of the supposedly unreasonable character, yet the texts reveal that what is called irrational may be a response to an irrational order. Showalter's gynocriticism shifts attention from women as objects of representation to women's textual production of female experience. Applied here, it means examining how Bhatt and Namjoshi create forms of female authority rather than merely identifying feminist themes. The question becomes how the lyric speaker and fabulist narrator organise knowledge, memory and judgement. Butler's performativity explains why gendered identity can be both constrained and revised. A role becomes authoritative through repetition, but repetition also creates the possibility of variation.

In *Feminist Fables*, the inherited moral is a performative structure: it repeatedly assigns characters a lesson and thereby stabilises hierarchy. Namjoshi's revisions reveal that the assignment can fail. In Bhatt, linguistic identity is also performative. English is not simply a language the speaker possesses; it is a social practice through which she is expected to demonstrate competence and belonging. The male gaze is used not as a claim about authorial intention but as a way of analysing the imagined viewer or judge built into a text. In Bhatt, the second-person address constructs a listener who evaluates the speaker's linguistic condition. In Namjoshi, inherited fables often encode a perspective that turns animals and women into objects of observation, classification or moral use. Feminist revision interrupts that perspective by allowing the observed figure to become an interpreter. Emotional labour identifies the affective cost of this process. The female speaker may have to perform calmness, accommodation, gratitude or intelligibility in order to remain acceptable. Bhatt's speaker imagines the consequences of failing to manage linguistic conflict: one language may be made to 'rot' and be expelled. Namjoshi's characters often resist precisely the emotional roles assigned to them, refusing to sustain the comfort of those who benefit from their compliance. Feminine agency is therefore defined modestly as self-authored speech and action within conditions that remain restrictive. It is not the fantasy of an unmediated

voice. Bhatt's agency lies in making the suppressed language speak within the English poem. Namjoshi's agency lies in revising the conditions under which characters receive a moral identity. In both cases, agency is formal before it is declarative.

Textual Analysis

Bhatt's *Search for My Tongue*

Bhatt's poem begins from a question addressed to another person: "I ask you, what would you do / if you had two tongues in your mouth" (Bhatt, lines 1-2). The question converts linguistic plurality into an embodied predicament. A tongue is not merely a code or a cultural emblem; it is an organ necessary for speech, taste and bodily life. The hypothetical 'you' appears to invite sympathy, but it also establishes an imagined Anglophone judge. The speaker asks what the addressee would do because the addressee is presumed to occupy a position in which monolingual speech is normal. The question exposes that norm by making it strange.

The two tongues cannot function harmoniously within the social order imagined by the poem. The speaker states that "you could not use them both / together" (Bhatt, lines 5-6). The difficulty is not presented as an intellectual problem of translation. It is a bodily prohibition. Two tongues in one mouth suggest excess, but the poem's syntax turns excess into enforced incompatibility. The speaker is compelled to experience plurality as a conflict because the dominant linguistic environment recognises only one tongue as properly usable.

The poem then gives the threat a temporal and organic form. "Your mother tongue would rot, / rot and die in your mouth" (Bhatt, lines 7-8). The repetition of 'rot' slows the line and makes decay audible. The mother tongue is not simply forgotten; it is imagined as decomposing within the body. The phrase "in your mouth" is decisive because the site of speech becomes the site of death. The speaker's linguistic crisis is therefore a crisis of embodied self-relation. A language that cannot be spoken is not absent from the body; it remains there as a painful remainder.

The final stage of this imagined decay is expulsion, "until you had to spit it out" (Bhatt 9, line 3) The image invokes social pressure as a bodily reflex. The mother tongue becomes something that the speaker must eject in order to continue speaking acceptably. This is where the concept of emotional labour becomes relevant. The speaker is not simply learning English. She is expected to manage the affective discomfort produced by linguistic difference, to suppress the visible signs of attachment to another language, and to present a coherent, accommodating self to the Anglophone judge. The pressure is aesthetic as well as social: the speaker must make her voice appear fluent, controlled and pleasing. The Gujarati passage interrupts this pressure: "munay hutoo kay aakhee jeebh maarhee." Its refusal of immediate translation is formally significant. The passage is placed within an English poem, but it is not subordinated to English explanation. It creates what Bhabha would call a third space, though the poem makes that space less secure than a celebratory account of hybridity might imply. Gujarati is present as language and sound before it is available as semantic content to every reader. The passage therefore contests the assumption that the English reader is the poem's sovereign interpreter.

The Gujarati section also creates a dream-space. The speaker moves from explicit reflection into a mode in which the mother tongue appears to return from beneath conscious control. The language is not introduced as a museum object or cultural token. It acts upon the speaker, recalling itself through bodily memory. Anzaldúa's linguistic borderlands illuminate this movement because the poem locates linguistic identity between conscious choice and involuntary return. The tongue is tied by social pressure, yet it is not erased.

The dream-space complicates Spivak's account of voice. The mother tongue speaks, but not as an autonomous social subject outside mediation. It becomes audible through the English poem, through a Gujarati passage embedded in an Anglophone textual form. The poem therefore does not present a pure recovery of an untouched origin. Instead, it stages the difficulty of making a marginalised language appear without translating

it into the dominant language's terms. Gujarati survives through formal opacity as much as through semantic declaration.

The poem's organic imagery then changes direction. At the close, "every time I think I've forgotten, / I think I've lost the mother tongue, / it blossoms out of my mouth" (Bhatt, lines 30-32). The movement from rotting to blossoming is not a simple reversal of negative and positive images. Both are bodily processes. The mouth that threatened decay becomes the site of growth. Language is imagined as a living form that can remain silent and re-emerge. Cixous's emphasis on embodied writing is useful here because the poem refuses to separate linguistic identity from the material body of speech.

The word 'blossoms' also changes the relation between agency and involuntariness. The speaker does not claim to have deliberately restored Gujarati through an act of will. The mother tongue returns when she thinks it has been lost. This suggests that agency may operate through attention and permission rather than mastery. The speaker creates the textual conditions in which Gujarati can appear, but the language itself exceeds her conscious command. Feminine agency therefore takes the form of making space for a suppressed voice rather than claiming total ownership of it. The poem's second-person address remains active at the close. The imagined Anglophone judge has not disappeared, but the poem has altered the terms of judgement. The addressee is forced to imagine two tongues, rot, expulsion and unexpected blossoming. The speaker's experience is no longer an eccentric personal difficulty; it becomes a challenge to monolingual normality. The male gaze, adapted here as a structure of evaluative visibility, is displaced by a voice that refuses to appear as a neatly assimilated subject.

The poem can therefore be read beyond diaspora-only interpretation. Its concern is not merely that migrants fear losing a heritage language. It is that the demand for linguistic accommodation is gendered and affective. The speaker must manage the conflict, anticipate judgement and make her divided condition intelligible. Her resistance consists in refusing the demand that one tongue displace the other. English remains

the poem's principal medium, but Gujarati transforms what English can contain.

Namjoshi's *Feminist Fables*

Namjoshi's *Feminist Fables* works through the compactness of fable, but it does not preserve the genre's conventional moral stability. Aesopian fables typically present animals as recognisable types whose actions culminate in a lesson. Namjoshi retains the recognisable animals while altering the relation between character and lesson. The lion, wolf, fox, jackdaw and mouse continue to carry cultural associations, yet those associations are made available for interrogation rather than accepted as natural truths.

'The Lion and the Cub' is central to this process because the lion represents patriarchal authority in a form that appears at once natural and theatrical. The lion's power derives from inherited assumptions about strength, rule and entitlement. The cub's relation to the lion exposes the process by which authority is transmitted and learned. The fable does not merely oppose a weak cub to a strong lion. It examines the pedagogical structure through which subordinate figures are taught to recognise authority as inevitable. The lion's status resembles the moral authority of the traditional fabulist. He occupies the position from which behaviour can be interpreted and corrected. Yet Namjoshi's revision makes this authority unstable. The lion becomes readable as a patriarchal figure because his claims depend upon repetition, performance and the expectation that others will accept his interpretation. Butler's theory of performativity clarifies why the lion's authority can be challenged: what appears essential is sustained through repeated acts and recognitions. The cub's significance lies in refusing to remain only an object of instruction. The cub's position is marginalised, but marginalisation does not eliminate interpretive capacity. The fable creates a conflict between the authority that explains and the subject who experiences. This is where Spivak's framework becomes relevant. The question is not whether the cub is present but whether the cub's perspective can alter the moral structure that has defined it. Namjoshi's revision suggests

that a voice becomes politically consequential when it changes the terms of the lesson. The recurring wolf and fox likewise destabilise the moral coding traditionally attached to them. Rather than treating the animals as fixed embodiments of evil, cunning or appetite, the collection uses their conventional reputations to show how quickly narrative authority classifies a creature. The jackdaw and mouse perform a related function. Their smallness, awkwardness or marginal position exposes the violence of a system that turns difference into a ready-made moral category. The collection's feminist politics become especially visible in its treatment of female figures who refuse the moral assigned to them. In a conventional fable, a female character may serve as an example of vanity, obedience, foolishness or rewardable virtue. Namjoshi's revisions interrupt this economy by making the female figure question the lesson itself. The refusal is not necessarily heroic in a conventional sense. It may take the form of irony, contradiction, withdrawal or an insistence that the narrator's interpretation is inadequate. The Beauty and the Beast reworking is significant in this regard. The traditional motif often organises female desire around the transformation or redemption of a male figure. Beauty's value is connected to her capacity to recognise an inner goodness beneath masculine monstrosity, while the narrative rewards her patience and emotional labour. Namjoshi's revision unsettles this arrangement. The female figure is not required simply to accommodate, soothe or improve the supposedly misunderstood male subject. The motif becomes a test of who is expected to perform care and who is permitted to remain difficult.

Hochschild's concept of emotional labour, adapted to literary form, therefore clarifies the politics of these fables. Women in inherited stories are often required to manage the feelings of others: to reassure, forgive, nurture and make patriarchal authority appear humane. Namjoshi exposes the work involved in such accommodation. The female figure who refuses the assigned moral refuses not only a plot but also an emotional service. She does not agree to make the narrative comfortable for the authority that governs it. Mulvey's male gaze can also be applied to the collection's revision of fairy-tale and fable conventions. In these

traditions, the female figure is frequently made visible for evaluation: she is beautiful, good, desirable, dangerous or punishable. Namjoshi's characters resist this objectifying structure by becoming readers of the narrative in which they appear. They are not merely seen; they interpret. The shift from object to interpreter is a form of feminine agency. The collection's relation to Aesop is consequently neither rejection nor simple appropriation. Namjoshi needs the recognisability of Aesopian animals in order to expose the authority attached to them. Her fables enter tradition strategically, using inherited expectations as material for reversal. This strategy corresponds to the idea of strategic essentialism, since the animal types are temporarily retained in order to contest the hierarchy they conventionally support (Ross 6). *The Sun and the Moon* extends this revision beyond patriarchal animal hierarchy into a cosmological structure. The contrast between the two figures invokes binary ordering, but the fable questions the assumption that difference must culminate in dominance. The collection repeatedly treats binaries as narrative conveniences rather than ontological necessities. Such revision corresponds to recent criticism that reads Namjoshi's work as creating non-normative spaces beyond rigid linguistic, gendered and social boundaries (Khatun 6). The fables therefore do not simply give marginalised figures a voice in the sense of adding them to an existing narrative. They alter the rules by which speech becomes moral knowledge. This is why their satire cannot be regarded as light or merely comic. Humour is a method of epistemological disruption. It makes authority appear contingent, and it prevents the reader from settling too quickly into the role of moral judge.

Comparative Analysis

Bhatt and Namjoshi differ in genre, scale and technique, yet their texts share a politics of formal interruption. Bhatt interrupts English with Gujarati and linear narrative with organic return. Namjoshi interrupts the moral closure of fable with alternative perspectives and resistant figures. In both cases, voice emerges through a struggle over interpretive authority.

Comparative Dimensions

Dimension	Bhatt's "Search for My Tongue"	Namjoshi's Feminist Fables
Speaker position	A diasporic lyric speaker divided between linguistic demands	A plural field of animal, female and fabled voices
Language politics	English is challenged by the embodied return of Gujarati	Inherited moral language is revised through irony and re-narration
Form	Lyric address, bilingual interruption and organic imagery	Short fables, animal allegory, fairy-tale revision and moral subversion
Mode of resistance	Retention and re-emergence of the mother tongue	Refusal of assigned roles and reversal of narrative authority
Relation to tradition	Gujarati memory enters an English poetic structure	Aesopian and fairy-tale conventions are entered, altered and reworked
Central threat	Linguistic loss, expulsion and assimilation	Patriarchal classification, moral discipline and emotional coercion
Form of agency	Making space for a suppressed language to speak	Rewriting who may judge, interpret and receive the lesson

Bhatt's speaker is singular, but the poem's second person expands the conflict beyond autobiography. The "you" makes the reader inhabit the linguistic condition that the speaker has been forced to negotiate. Namjoshi's collection, by contrast, disperses subjectivity across animals and narrative frames. The result is not a single representative voice but a series of challenges to the assumption that authority must be concentrated in one moral speaker. The language politics of the two works are also related but distinct. Bhatt contests the dominance of English by allowing Gujarati to remain partially untranslated. Namjoshi contests the dominance of inherited moral language by showing that the same plot can generate different ethical conclusions. Bhatt's resistance is multilingual; Namjoshi's is metanarrative. Both challenge the idea that the dominant form is neutral.

Comparative Table: Sujata Bhatt and Suniti Namjoshi

Category	Sujata Bhatt – "Search for My Tongue"	Suniti Namjoshi – *Feminist Fables*
Language Politics	English is challenged by the embodied return of Gujarati.	Inherited moral language is revised through irony and re-narration
Form	Lyric address, bilingual interruption and organic imagery.	Short fables, animal allegory, fairy-tale revision and moral subversion.
Mode of Resistance	Retention and re-emergence of the mother tongue.	Refusal of assigned roles and reversal of narrative authority.
Relation to Tradition	Gujarati memory enters an English poetic structure.	Aesopian and fairy-tale conventions are entered, altered and reworked
Central Threat	Linguistic loss, expulsion and assimilation.	Patriarchal classification, moral discipline and emotional coercion
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Characters and Voices across the Two Works

Character or Voice	Agency	Marginalisation	Critical Function
Bhatt's lyric speaker	Reclaims the right to sustain two languages and to narrate linguistic conflict.	Pressured to assimilate and perform intelligible English identity.	Makes language loss visible as embodied and gendered.
The mother tongue as quasi-character	Returns, blossoms and exceeds conscious control	Threatened with rot, death and expulsion.	Converts language into a living participant in identity
The Anglophone addressee	Possesses presumptive interpretive authority.	Not structurally marginalised within the poem's imagined order.	Represents the judge before whom accommodation is performed
Namjoshi's lion	Exercises inherited authority but depends on recognition.	Its authority is exposed as constructed rather than natural.	Figures patriarchal power and moral command
Namjoshi's cub	Gains agency by resisting a fixed lesson or subordinate role.	Positioned under the lion's authority	Reveals how hierarchy is taught and potentially refused
Female fabulist figures	Interpret, contradict and refuse assigned moral functions.	Reduced by inherited narratives to objects of judgement or care.	Transform the object of a story into its critical reader
Wolf, fox and jackal	Vary according to the narrative that classifies them.	Constrained by conventional moral identities	Expose the instability of allegorical types
Mouse and other minor creatures	Agency emerges through small-scale refusal and alternative perspectives.	Marginalised by size, status or narrative expectation.	Challenge the equation of power with interpretive truth

The table indicates that agency in both works is relational. The lyric speaker does not escape the Anglophone order, and the fable characters do not abolish hierarchy simply by speaking. Agency appears when a subject alters the terms of interpretation: Bhatt makes Gujarati audible without translating it into English's authority; Namjoshi's makes inherited figures generate meanings that their traditional moral structures cannot contain. The two works also differ in their treatment of identity. Bhatt

retains the category of the mother tongue but refuses to treat it as static: Gujarati survives through change, memory and re-emergence within English. Namjoshi is more suspicious of fixed identity categories. Her animals and fairy-tale figures reveal how identities are assigned through narrative conventions. Bhatt's poem asks how an identity can persist across languages; Namjoshi's fables ask how identities are manufactured and policed. Their relation to tradition is consequently double. Neither writer rejects inheritance. Bhatt's Gujarati is an inherited language that becomes newly visible through an English poem. Namjoshi's Aesopian animals are inherited figures that become instruments of feminist critique. Tradition supplies the material of resistance, but only after its authority has been exposed.

Results and Discussion

The first finding is that language in both texts functions as a contested ground rather than a transparent medium. This finding addresses the first and second objectives and answers the first research question by showing that voice is embodied and politically regulated. In Bhatt, the two-tongue conceit makes identity material. English and Gujarati are not simply cultural affiliations held by a reflective subject; they are imagined as organs competing within one mouth. The language-loss readings identified in recent scholarship rightly recognise the poem's diasporic anxiety (Kamble 78). The present analysis extends that insight by showing that the poem's central problem is not only whether Gujarati survives, but whether the speaker is allowed to remain linguistically excessive.

The poem's Gujarati passage also complicates a simple opposition between native and foreign language. It is not presented as a transparent return to an untouched origin. Its presence within English makes the mother tongue newly strange, even to the reader who may claim cultural familiarity with it. Bhabha's hybridity is therefore useful when treated as a condition of negotiation rather than as a celebratory resolution. Anzaldúa's borderlands better captures the poem's sense that linguistic plurality is lived through bodily strain. Namjoshi extends this contest

from language to moral discourse. Her fables expose the vocabulary through which animals and women are classified. The lion's authority, the fox's cunning and the mouse's insignificance are not fixed facts but narrative effects. Through strategic use of recognisable types, the collection shows that identity is produced by repetition and can be interrupted by revision (Ross 8).

The second finding is that both texts represent speech as labour. This finding addresses the third objective and the second research question by connecting linguistic agency to emotional accommodation. Bhatt's speaker is compelled to negotiate how she appears to an imagined Anglophone audience. The poem's question "what would you do" is both an appeal and an accusation. It asks the addressee to imagine linguistic conflict, but it also exposes the unequal burden placed upon the speaker. She must accommodate the dominant language while preserving a language that the social order treats as expendable. The images of rot and spitting suggest that assimilation is not passive forgetting; it is an active performance of expulsion. The concepts of the male gaze and emotional labour help identify the gendered dimension of this performance. The poem does not explicitly construct a male spectator, and the analysis should not impose one. Yet it does construct an evaluative position from which the speaker's linguistic body is judged. The female speaker must appear intelligible and controlled, even while her experience is internally divided. Her agency emerges when the poem refuses this demand for polished monolingual coherence. Namjoshi's fables make emotional labour more visible by presenting characters whose expected roles include care, patience, forgiveness and compliance. The reworking of the Beauty and the Beast motif is particularly significant because it questions the demand that a female figure redeem masculine violence or make monstrosity emotionally manageable. The refusal of this task is not a rejection of feeling; it is a rejection of compulsory service.

The collection's broader satire also demonstrates that patriarchal authority depends upon the emotional participation of those it governs. A moral lesson works only if its audience accepts the emotional

arrangement it proposes: admiration for the powerful, shame for the disobedient, pity for the repentant or approval of the self-sacrificing woman. Namjoshi interrupts this arrangement by making characters refuse the feelings assigned to them.

The third finding is that both texts reclaim voice through forms of renewal rather than through simple declaration. This addresses the fourth objective and the third research question. Bhatt's closing image of the mother tongue that "blossoms out of my mouth" presents linguistic survival as organic recurrence. The image does not claim that the speaker has returned to a pre-diasporic identity. It indicates that the suppressed language has been transformed by its passage through displacement. Cixous's emphasis on embodied, non-linear writing clarifies why the poem's resolution is not argumentative proof but a bodily image of emergence.

Namjoshi's equivalent of blossoming is fabular reversal. The old form remains, but its moral growth changes direction. The lion may still appear as a lion, the fox as a fox and the mouse as a mouse, yet the narrative no longer permits their conventional meanings to settle the matter. The female figure who refuses the assigned moral creates a new interpretive possibility. This is agency as formal alteration. The evidence therefore challenges the earlier critical orthodoxy in two ways. First, Bhatt should not be read only as a poet of diaspora and bilingual loss. Her poem also examines the gendered labour of linguistic accommodation and the politics of being judged through speech. Secondly, Namjoshi should not be reduced to light satire. Humour in *Feminist Fables* is an instrument for exposing the institutional and emotional mechanisms by which patriarchal meaning becomes ordinary.

Comparative Subsection: Bhatt, Namjoshi and Their Contemporaries

Comparison with Kamala Das indicates that Bhatt's female voice shares a concern with the body as a site of linguistic and social conflict, but Bhatt places that conflict within multilingual displacement rather than primarily within erotic or domestic self-disclosure. Both writers question

the demand that women present a coherent and acceptable self, yet Bhatt gives language itself the role of contested body. Imtiaz Dharker offers another relevant comparison because her poetry frequently links voice, displacement, religious or cultural boundaries and the material conditions of belonging. Bhatt's use of Gujarati similarly demonstrates that linguistic difference can function as a form of resistance within English. The comparison suggests that Indian English women's poetry often treats the dominant language as a medium to be reshaped rather than simply accepted or rejected.

Angela Carter's revisions of fairy tale provide a useful parallel to Namjoshi's treatment of inherited forms. Both writers expose the gendered arrangements concealed within apparently innocent stories. Their methods differ: Carter often develops narrative and sensuality at greater length, while Namjoshi uses compression, irony and fable. Yet both demonstrate that retelling is a political act because inherited plots organise expectations about female desire, obedience and transformation. Aesopian tradition remains the necessary counterpoint. Aesop's animals depend upon recognisable types and compressed moral inference. Namjoshi retains these features only to make their authority unstable. Her work therefore does not abandon fable; it reveals that fable has always been a technology of social classification. By changing who receives the lesson and who interprets it, she transforms the genre's political function.

The comparison also refines the concept of feminine agency. Neither Bhatt nor Namjoshi imagines agency as an isolated power outside social forms. Bhatt's agency depends upon the coexistence of Gujarati and English within a poem shaped by English. Namjoshi's agency depends upon entering traditions whose conventions are not hers to control completely. In both works, resistance is strongest when it acknowledges mediation.

Conclusion

This study has argued that Bhatt's *Search for My Tongue* and Namjoshi's *Feminist Fables* represent voice as a contested relation

among language, gender and authority. Bhatt converts bilingual conflict into an embodied drama in which the mother tongue is threatened with decay yet returns through organic regeneration. Namjoshi converts inherited fable into a site of moral and epistemological dispute, where animals and female figures challenge the authority that classifies and instructs them.

The scholarly contribution lies in bringing together two bodies of criticism that are usually separated: postcolonial work on diaspora and language, and feminist work on narrative form and fabulist revision. The comparison demonstrates that linguistic agency is not exhausted by the preservation of a heritage language, nor is feminist agency reducible to the presence of resistant characters. Both depend upon formal practices that alter who may speak, how speech becomes intelligible and whose interpretation is granted authority.

Theoretically, the texts require a qualified account of hybridity, subaltern speech and performativity. Hybridity can generate new forms of expression, but it remains marked by unequal linguistic power. Subaltern speech may become audible through literary form, but its mediation must remain visible. Performativity constrains identity while also creating opportunities for revision. The concepts of the male gaze and emotional labour extend feminist analysis from representation to the demands placed upon speakers to appear pleasing, coherent and accommodating. Feminine agency consequently emerges as self-authored speech and action within, rather than outside, structures of constraint.

Future research could examine how Bhatt's multilingual poetics and Namjoshi's fabulist revisions interact with translation, readership and the publication histories of Indian English women's writing.

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Mud, Memory, Metaphor: An Affective Reading of Selected Films

K. Kannan Prasad

The concept of clean and dirty are universal across human culture. The concepts also have been considered similar to concepts like holy/profane, familiar/unfamiliar as a binary. The traces of binary in such concepts affects perception of dirt, mud and soil among human culture. The research paper analyses how 'affect' is represented in films like *Predator* (1987), *Yajaman* (1993), *Indian* (1996), *Sangamam* (1999), *Kannathil Muthamittal* (2002), *Chandramukhi* (2005). The perceptions of dirt and mud as a binary also allows for it to be constructed as a metaphor, which is tied to the concept of cleanliness. As a metaphor, dirt, mud and soil are used in multilayered and paradoxical ways. Dirt, mud and soil serve as metaphors of embarrassment, loyalty, security and celebration. "Dirt on the body often signals more than uncleanliness; it reflects social hierarchies, cultural anxieties, and ideas about propriety, order, and the body's role in society." (Masquelier)

Mud is constructed as a metaphor of security in *Predator*. Major Alan Schaefer along with his team are deployed in the forest of Central America. An alien which is eponymous of the title of the film, kills everybody. Schaefer tries hard to confront using the weapons he has at his disposal. The alien represents a civilization which is far more advanced than the technology available at Schaefer's disposal. Such a state pushes Schaefer to fight with all his might leading to the discovery that the infrared technology used by the alien can be masked only by a layer of mud all over his body. Though he finds it by accident, Schaefer uses the discovery, eventually killing the alien.

Mud is constructed as a metaphor of loyalty in *Yajaman*. Vaanavarayan is a feudal landlord much respected among the people of his village. His

character is contrasted with Vallavarayan, antagonist of the film. As a visceral response to the characteristics of Vaanavarayan as a respected person in the village, people of the village use the soil under his feet as sacred ash. The sacred ash is applied by a character in the film as an act of serving Vaanavarayan with complete loyalty.

Mud is constructed as a metaphor of embarrassment and shame in *Sangamam.* Aavudapillai is a folk artist who runs a troupe to perform the art. The folk-art form is foregrounded as an art form of the marginalized people with the use of percussion instruments like 'Thaarai', costumes that mimic the art form of marginalized people and dance which may be considered as a dance form that does not have a specific 'modus operandi'. In contrast, Sivasankaramoorthy, runs a troupe that performs Bharatanatyam. There is a clear foregrounding of the idea that dance art form performed by Aavudapillai and his son, is of low culture and that of Sivasankaramoorthy is from high culture. Such a stereotype has been metaphorically perpetuated through the use of mud.

Aavudapillai visits Sivasankaramoorthy's house to initiate the wedding of his son with Sivasankaramoorthy's daughter. The stereotype of the art form performed by each family is scrutinized eventually leading to the denial of Sivasankaramoorthy to wed her daughter to the son of Aavudapillai. The metaphor of dirt is constructed through the embarrassment that Aavudapillai is exposed to, after the denial. Aavudapillai is thrown into mud as a sign of rejection, leading to embarrassment. The mud is employed as a metaphor of embarrassment through three visceral embodiments. One, Aavudapillai is pushed into sticky mud embarrassing him in front of others as he is an aged person. Two, Aavudapillai pins the medals received as awards in his dress which represents his pride and expertise in his art form. The muddying of his medals has deep impact in Aavudapillai's emotion. Three, Aavudapillai's art form serves as the primary reason for Sivasankaramoorthy to reject the marriage proposal. Hence Aavudapillai also takes the muddying of his clothes as a failure of promise he had made to his son about the marriage. The visceral responses of the character are expressed through non-verbal language and in turn similar emotional responses are evoked

among the viewers. The mud in this context is used as a metaphor of embarrassment to dehumanize Aavudapillai. The context of the embarrassment also springs from the class distinction attitude towards cleanliness. Thus, Aavudapillai's art form and his socio-economic class are dehumanized.

Mud is constructed as a metaphor of celebration in *Indian*. Senapathy the protagonist of the film is seen to be teaching his son and daughter as a parent on how to dance in a mud pit. The mud pit is created to mix the mud so as to get it ready for pot making. The tradition of pot making even at the contemporary times is made by mixing mud by stamping on it. The tradition of mixing mud with feet, without any machinery requires a person to not slip and fall. Senapathy witnesses his son and daughter slip and fall while mixing the mud. So, Senapathy feels the need to teach his son and daughter to do it without falling and steps into the mud. The didactic utility of mud transforms into a celebration while Senapathy with experience, efficiently mixes the mud without falling.

Mud is constructed as a metaphor of embarrassment in *Chandramukhi* where Murugesan performs as a comedian. Saravanan, the protagonist of the film finds the need to coerce Murugesan to accompany him on a mysterious journey. Murugesan understanding the implications of the journey denies it. Mud is used as a tool to coerce Murugesan into accepting to sit on the motorcycle driven by Saravanan. When he denies it, a choreographed mud splash bathes Murugesan while he stands at the sides of the road. The mud splash is again repeated after Murugesan denies it one more time and goes onto accept to accompany Saravanan on his journey when he is embarrassed to stand there by mud splash.

Soil is constructed as a metaphor of both love for the wife and love for the nation, in *Kannathil Muthamittal*. Shyama and Dileepan are from Mankulam, a civil war-torn village in Sri Lanka. Dileepan applies the soil from the bank of the river, on Shyama to both invoke his love for Shyama and foreground the idea of love for his country. The soil of Mankulam represents the idea of 'belongingness'. Dileepan while applying the soil to Shyama portrays that both are equally important to

him. Dileepan, as revealed later, fights as a soldier of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

The treatment of soil, mud and dirt as metaphors of embarrassment, loyalty, celebration and security reflects the binary of clean / dirty, which is not supported by scientific theories. But the metaphors emanate from the 'affect' created by perspectives shaped by human understanding of the aforementioned materials. The creators of these films have been influenced by subjective material reality and forge the metaphors on soil, mud, and dirt.

Dirt, soil and mud according to Olli Lagerspetz, has been metaphorically used to comment on broader aspects of human condition or society.

In its broader metaphorical use, dirt has been connected with the human condition in many ways: as something unwanted or dangerous, but also as an indispensable part of life. It forms a point of reference for reflections on cultural order, disorder, and exclusion (Olli).

In the context of the chosen films, the treatment of dirt as metaphor exposes the socio-economic conditions, articulation of emotions and survival.

Schaefer meets with a power beyond his comprehension. As a war veteran, Schaefer is used to having the upper hand due to the advanced war machinery he has at his disposal. But the alien, comes from a different and advanced civilization altogether. Schaefer feels overpowered, lost, and also grief-stricken after all his team members are killed in the most brutal way possible. In such an emotional state, Schaefer finds himself in a place that he may not escape the alien and jumps from a cliff into the water. The alien pursues Schaefer leading to the discovery that the Alien does not have the capacity to see through mud-covered Schaefer. The alien in the movie does not possess ability of vision like human beings view this world. The alien instead uses infrared technology to read heat signature of organic beings like human. Schaefer gets shielded from the heat signature that the alien uses to spot and kill organisms. Schaefer expresses visually that he has discovered a way to go undetected and the weakness of the alien vision.

Schaefer in the eventual scenes regains his 'power' and decides he could use the forest to his advantage. Schaefer gets ready for guerilla warfare, only this time, painting himself completely with mud instead of camouflage materials used in guerilla warfare against other human beings in instances like Vietnam War. Dirt embodies the shield that saves a human life and brings out a response of relief among the viewers in contrast to the pity/fear experienced while the alien butchers other team members of Schaefer in the film. Paradoxically, Americans have always looked at dirt as the opposite of dirt, "The quest for cleanliness in America was more than a battle against dirt. It was part of a larger struggle for control over one's body, home, and environment, a moral imperative deeply embedded in the culture" (Hoy). Yet the director of the film represents dirt as lifesaving in the aforementioned context. The embodiment still instills the idea that the dirt provides control to Schaefer over his environment.

Aavudapillai and Murugesan's embarrassment provoke a mixed response among the viewers. Manivannan, the actor who plays Aavudapillai in *Sangamam* is an aged and respected actor in Tamil films. Vadivelu, the actor who plays Murugesan in *Chandramukhi* is known to the Tamil audience as an actor who makes fun of 'self' to provoke laughter among the audience. Dirt embodies the emotion of pity while Aavudapillai is pushed into the mud and embodies the emotion that arouses out of jest, when Murugesan is splashed with mud in the films. Aavudapillai feels embarrassed about the event and the viewers are bound to empathise with him. In contrast, viewers are put into a fit of laughter while Murugesan is splashed with mud.

Vanavarayan's conduct in the film makes the villagers feel inspired about him. Dirt embodies pride when the villagers use the soil that he has walked over, as sacred ash to apply it on to their forehead as a mark of respect. The viewers respond with awe for the character, also because of the actor who plays the role. Rajinikanth is the actor who plays the role and the viewers readily accept that such a subjective reality is possible since they are used to the idea of Rajinikanth being respected within and outside the cinematic frame.

Senapathy dances in the mud pit that has a background music, slow in tempo played along with it. The old wife of Senapathy joins him with similar pattern of dancing outside the mud pit, while the son, daughter and few of the villagers watch the event. At the end, Senapathy stops to look at his son who had slipped and fell in the mud. While Senapathy's son is seen cleansing himself of the mud, Senapathy looks at his son and raises his eyebrows in unison. A gesture that suggests that an old man like him is able to do it and his son is not able to do as a youngster. The dirt embodies a variety of concepts including the didactic nature of the event, old vs new and son vs father who do not get along in the ideology each of them have. As a reason, the dirt embodies the celebratory experience of Senapathy.

Shyama and Dileepan evoke a sense of 'belongingness' as the soil of their homeland foregrounds the idea of inseparability of land and woman. Dileepan serves Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam and dies eventually in the civil war. Soil in such a context embodies love for homeland and the sacrifice one has to make. The viewers respond with melancholy when Dileepan finds a hierarchy in the love relationship he shares with his wife and his home land, eventually choosing the latter and ditching the former. Dileepan and Shyama are about to get romantic as the application of dirt is contextually made as foreplay. "Dirt and sexuality have long been linked in cultural imagination, as both are associated with the 'forbidden' and the dangerous. What's clean and what's dirty are not just moral judgments but reflections of societal power structures" (Kipnis). Dirt is used as an object of bond that Dileepan and Shyama share with their homeland. As a result, Shyama shares a similar interest to serve the LTTE. It could be inferred that Dirt, soil and mud brings out multi-layered meanings and the films generate affective response among the viewers.

The meaning of Dirt, Soil and mud, according to Olli Lagerspetz "The meaning of dirt is highly contextual. There is no absolute criterion for something being dirty. Instead, it is dirt in relation to a particular background or set of expectations" (Olli). The directors of the films, John McTiernan, R.V. Udayakumar, Suresh Krissna, Shankar, P. Vasu

and Mani Ratnam choose to use the material objects in a context that each of the directors prefers to use.

The material objects like their physical attribute gets moulded by the creators to evoke certain responses and foreground certain ideas in their films. The material objects are made into metaphors of security, loyalty, embarrassment, shame, and celebration. The creators do not make it hard for the viewers to comprehend this metaphor. The understanding of these metaphor is tied to the teleological nature of the context that the creators of the selected films wish to convey. The metaphor evokes very particular emotions like pride, jest, pity, fear among the viewers and the contexts that are required to convey these emotions are emoted by face reactions, music and non-verbal language of the actors, through the use of dirt, soil and mud towards the purpose of emoting aforementioned feelings in the viewers.

Mary Douglas makes negative associations about dirt, while dirt, mud and soil in the chosen films do not always have negative associations. Mary Douglas invokes negative associations in the context of societal norms that are presented as taboo, belief, pollution and exclusion which she emphasizes through her statement,

Dirt is essentially disorder. There is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists in the eye of the beholder. For us, dirt is a by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements (Douglas).

Sangamam and *Chandramukhi* are the two films among the chosen films that render a negative association while other films are positive by focusing on love, safety, loyalty and celebration. The research paper has explicated on the different superlatives of associations through emotions evoked in each context. But the associations have not been binary in nature as the research paper suggests. Instead, these are perceptions generated by the creators of the films.

Nobert Elias and Hans Peter Duerr suggest that the attitude towards soil, mud and dirt undergo a "civilizing process" (Hans) and such attitudes are not universal but culturally constructed.

Changes in attitudes towards dirt, soil, and bodily functions are part of the broader civilizing process, whereby behaviors once considered acceptable gradually become stigmatized, as societies develop more refined standards of cleanliness and order (Elias).

If there are no negative associations, it would mean that soil, mud and dirt are given only a one-sided treatment. It could be said that the films chosen for the research paper does not involve in a civilizing process that renders dirt, soil and mud only as unclean or impure. These films at the same time contribute to the creation of meaning that surrounds the material objects, in turn render such meaning to a particular geographical region.

If the teleological nature of dirt, soil and mud is to evoke responses of pride, jest, pity, and fear from the viewers, the perceptions of clean/unclean differs with many factors. City, town, villages, States, Countries, Continents may have specific contrast in the perception of clean/unclean. The perception of clean/unclean become responsible for positive and negative associations of dirt, soil and mud. The films chosen has the settings that also contribute to this perception. But settings alone do not contribute majorly to the perception. If the question of, point of view is taken, the viewer might emote a particular response from the frames rendered by the creator. The creator is influenced by his/her ideology on the teleology of dirt, soil and mud. "Dirt has always been a central part of human life, embodying both the mundane and the symbolic. It can represent neglect and decay, or, paradoxically, fertility and renewal" (McLaughlin). A viewer may not have the freedom of contributing to the meaning of the frames created by the creator instead the viewer acts as an interpreter. Hence the creators of the films foreground their perceptions about dirt, soil and mud onto the viewers. The perception may be intentional or unintentional. Nevertheless, the analysis of particular frames in the films prove that expected outcomes are received from the viewers.

Dirt, soil and mud, thus has been treated with subjective reality of the creators. The creators embed the materials with multilayered meaning that are highly contextual. Though the materials have been considered

clean / unclean by culture, the research paper had focused on embodiment of experiences that they generate. The films *Yajaman, Indian, Sangamam, Predator* and *Kannathil Muthamittal* contribute to the visceral creation of soil, mud and dirt as metaphors that 'affect' the perceptions of the viewers. Media has extraordinary power in manipulating the perception of the viewers.

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Disposal of the Colonial System in *Life and Times of Michael K*

M.Manimehala and T.M.S.Maideen

The Life & Times of Michael K, Coetzee's first Booker Prize-winning book, tells the narrative of having a cleft lipped, humble farmer Michael K, who embarks on a risky trip from civil war-torn metropolitan South Africa to native place of his mother, Prince Albert, during the apartheid era of the 1970s and 1980s. The story takes place in, a country city known for severe injustice, South Africa at the peak of a civil war.

This novel is broken into three sections. The first section contains most of Michael's travels up to the point he is apprehended by the armed service and suspected of assisting the conspirators. The middle section is told by a physician in one of the relocation camps where he is taken. Michael is being monitored by a doctor. He is finally able to get away from the camp, and in the concluding section, the novel focuses on his arrival back to the city where he began his adventure. This novel addresses not just the topic of race, but also themes of colonialism. *The Life & Times of Michael K* tells the narrative of the protagonist, who does not consider himself to be a member of society. Michael K is unable to feed his from mother because of his cleft lip, which prevents him from doing so. He was institutionalised as a youngster and is a simpleton. Because his cleft-lip triggers him to feel lonely and excluded from society, he plays no active part or contributes to anything. The book is about Michael K's battle of survival and how a civil war splits up the country and punishes them cruelly. When Michael reaches to his mother's farm, he discovers that the farm is abandoned and begins to live off the soil there. Later, one of the farm's genuine owners' relatives comes and instructs him as if he were a servant.

As Visagie, the grandson of the farm's previous owners, later dispossesses him of this residence and shifts him to the servants' living place; the house suggests the self's need affirm itself by dominating nature and others." It functions as a multifaceted emblem of settlement, possession, and mastery (Marais 109).

Karin Talén's research project for her Master of Arts degree, titled "The Outsider and the 'Other' in *Life & Times of Michael K*: A Postcolonial Reading," examined the roles of the outsider and the "other" in Coetzee's 1983 novel *Life & Times of Michael K* from the perspective of postcolonial reading and narrative analysis. Michael K., the primary character in the narrative, was seen by the other characters in the text as a "other," and the circumstances of the story lend even more weight to this concept. By taking on the role of the "other," Michael K stripped himself of authority. In addition to this, it examined how the story's main character, Michael K, became powerful despite being an outsider. After much deliberation, the researcher arrived at the conclusion that Michael was able to have a greater degree of influence on his life because he seemed to be an outsider. Due to the fact that Michael was an outsider looking in, he was able to influence the way power was distributed throughout the book.

In their research paper titled "A Study of Racism and Colonialism in J. M. Coetzee's *Life Time of Michael K*," Awdhesh and Charan (2022) conducted an analysis of racism and colonialism in *Life and Times of Michael K*. In this context, the research investigates how racial segregation and prejudice have left their mark on the lives of individuals living in South Africa, as well as the consequences that have resulted from those factors. In addition to this, they spoke about the racial and colonial violence perpetrated by apartheid on the sons of soil of South Africa. Because of their analysis, they concluded that the sons of soil of South Africa do not fight for land but rather for civil liberties. According to their findings, the white population is struggling for the rights to stabilise the existing power while the rest of the community is marginalised.

Many research investigations have been conducted on a wide variety of topics, some of which include racial decimation; identity crisis;

existentialism; imperialism; theme analysis; character analysis; psychological difficulties of the characters; and theme analysis. Nobody has ever tried to examine the disposal of colonialism by itself. In addition, the researcher thinks that it is necessary to do an in-depth investigation of Coetzee's contribution, which should include the elimination of colonialism that is shown in his characters. It is anticipated that the outcomes of this sort of in-depth examination would disclose newly discovered facts about his accomplishments.

Using postcolonial theory as a framework, this research conducts a content analysis of *Life and Times of Michael K*. While the book serves as the major source, secondary materials include prior research articles, reviews, M.Phil. and Ph.D. theses and dissertations, as well as a few other works that connect to extermination of colonialism. The postcolonial interpretation of this work is discussed in detail throughout the whole of this article.

The following research questions that guide this work.

1. Does postcolonialism aptly fit to this novel?
2. Does this novel have the idea of the disposal of colonialism?

The present study aims to focus on the postcolonial study of Coetzee's novel "*Life &Times of Michael K*" with respect to destruction of imperialism. The work is under consideration of *Life &Times of Michael K*.

Within the context of this book, many of the symbols that Coetzee has used hint that the era of colonialism will soon come to an end. The law-and-order situation in a nation cannot be maintained by a colonial authority. In South Africa, the apartheid policy that was implemented by the colonial authority contributed to the country's division. The bulk of black people were being oppressed by a white minority. People began guerilla warfare to defend their rights. As a result, the nation was engaged in a conflict, which made the lives of regular people like Michael K and Anna K more difficult. To travel inside their own nation, citizens must first get permission from the appropriate authorities. Because the Colonial Bureaucracy was so unsympathetic, they were unable to get permission.

They are not being courteous in their speech and instead are using foul language. A harsh tone is used by the policewoman in response to Michael K's request for permission. In her own words:

> Don't waste my time. I am telling you for the last time, if the permit is granted the permit will come! Don't you see all these people waiting? Don't you understand? Are you an idiot? Next! She braces herself against the counter and glared pointedly over K's shoulder:' Yes, you, next!'(20)

She may have avoided the use of harsh language by expressing herself more politely. If the people's problems are not being addressed by the bureaucracy, then that form of government and bureaucracy need to be eliminated. It implies that the practise of colonialism should be abolished.

People who are without a home and without jobs are being housed and fed in relocation camps that are operated by the colonial authority. However, the real purpose behind it was to get labour at low wages for railways and surrounding farms. In addition to this, it was a site of persecution during colonial rule. The colonised are housed in the camp in the same manner that the animals are, in the shed. The inmates are forced to participate in any sort of activity by being given directions, orders, and other forms of coercion. The following are some examples of the threats that the camp leader made to the inmates, as mentioned by Coetzee:

> Do you hear me? I want everyone to hear me? You ask for war, get war! I am putting my own men on guard here –fuck the Army! – I am putting my men on guard, and I am locking the gates, and if my men see any of you ,man ,woman or child, outside the wires, they have order to shoot, no questions asked! No one leave camp expect on labour calls. No visit, no outings, no picnics. Roll-calls morning and evening, with everyone present to answer. We have been kind to you long enough. (92)

Threatening the people they are attempting to colonise and maintain under their control is one of the strategies that colonial agents use in their efforts to do so. They will even resort to using foul language to

cover up their true behaviour. All these factors demonstrate that colonialism should come to an end since it is unable to solve the problems faced by the people. The fact that Michael K's mother is now hospitalised is yet another setting that demonstrates the need of putting an end to colonialism. The colonial authority is unable to give the people with the appropriate care they need. Therefore, this is a sign that conveys the message that the era of colonialism will soon come to an end.

The war in South Africa has taken a terrible turn. Michael K, having served as a prison warden, is aware that one of the goals of war is to assign responsibilities to members of underrepresented groups. This demonstrates the racist South African government's idealistic conception of democracy. According to what he says, "In order to give underrepresented groups a voice in the decisions that affect them." However, in a nation such as South Africa, it takes a shady turn, and the white minority makes attempts subjugate the black majority. Michael K is opposed to war, and when asked about it, he gives the following quote: "War is for taking others' monkey (56)." When it is no longer under control, war takes a particularly terrible turn. People in Michael K's situation suffer from both sides of the problem.

Coetzee has used a great deal of symbolism in this manner, all which points to the conclusion that colonialism ought to be abolished. The author, Coetzee, manages to masterfully dramatise the vivid events and deeds that signal that the era of colonialism is coming to an end. phenomena like as a curfew, police patrols, guerrilla fighting, and the resistance of the people are examples of phenomena that point to the impending end of colonialism.

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Reel Politics: The Role of Bollywood in Shaping Political Consciousness

Manoj Kumar and Parul Mishra

Introduction

As the largest electorate in history goes to the polls in India from April 19 to June 1, 2024, all the political parties are trying to influence voters' decisions through cinema. Bollywood, the Indian film industry, no longer portrays politics as the subject of mystery and criticism. The present paper attempts to examine the multifarious elements that influence the delineation of politics in films. When the Indian film industry is looked at through the eyes of law, it is observed that many factors are taken into consideration- that have impact on how politics are depicted and how these portrayals akin to real-life issues with law, and government, it also confirms if the depiction is real or fake. Movies often portray what's happening in society and politics. Acting as a mirror to society their target is to decode what people expect for, what is disheartening to them, and what opinion they hold for their appointed leaders. When politics is portrayed in movies, they often focus on portraying what's happening in the government and how it is affecting people's lives. It is noteworthy that these portrayals primarily am inclined towards the dark side of the politics. The cinematic portrayal of the 1950s and early 1960s focused on depicting Nehru's idealism of concordance, philosophy and advancement and socialist patriotism in movies such as, Ab Dilli Door Nahin, Jagriti, Naya Daur, Dharmaputra etc., and a lament-like war cinema in movies like, Haqeeqat. Even the critics of Nehru's policies in films such as, Do Beegha Zameen, Footpath, Pyaasa, Shree 420, and Phir Subah Hogi, were appreciated nationwide.. These were based on social commentaries highlighting pro-people policies and community building; they deeply presented patriotism in a polite manner without

showing nay thing harsh and harsh. The footprints of that Nehruvian approach could be observed later in the humanism of films such as Bajrangi Bhaijaan, Chak De India and Lagaan, (The New Indian Express). Cinema, as a mass medium, possesses a unique capacity to influence perceptions, shape discourse, and construct social reality. In India, where film culture is deeply woven into the social fabric, Bollywood's influence extends far beyond the silver screen. Shirin Akhtar says, Cinema must not be reduced to a mouthpiece for majoritarianism. It should remain a platform for storytelling that embraces complexity, dissent, and plurality (NEWSCLICK). In democratic societies, cinema can be a tool for critical thought, empathy, and resistance. However, when controlled by dominant ideologies, it can become a vehicle for propaganda, erasure, and exclusion. Today, Indian cinema is at crossroads, once a space for pluralistic storytelling, it is now increasingly co-opted to serve majoritarian narratives. By selectively glorifying certain histories, vilifying communities, and suppressing dissenting voices, cinema is being transformed from a medium of artistic expression into an instrument of ideological conformity. This growing capture of film by majoritarian politics demands urgent scrutiny, as it threatens not only artistic freedom but also the foundations of a diverse and democratic society. (NEWSCLICK). This phenomenon is not accidental; cinema has traditionally been known to mirror the society, it is a carefully orchestrated effort that aligns with the political climate, using cinematic storytelling to rewrite history, demonise certain communities, and glorify majoritarian heroes. A recent example of this trend is the film *Chhava,* which, like many others before it, exemplifies how the industry is being used to push a one-dimensional narrative that sidelines historical complexity in favour of a dominant ideology. Over the past decade, the rise of Hindutva politics has reshaped cinematic narratives, stories that once embraced diversity and social justice are now being leveraged to reinforce cultural hegemony. *Chhava* is one great instance of the same. While the Maratha legacy is undoubtedly significant, the film's selective portrayal of historical characters raises concerns about its agenda. The erasure or vilification of Soyarabai Bhosale and the controversy around historical accuracy reflect an effort to sanitise history

to fit the contemporary majoritarian narrative. Reinforcing hyper-nationalist rhetoric, wherein the protagonist embodies an unquestionable loyalty to the state, often portrayed as synonymous with Hindu majoritarian values. Films such as The Kashmir Files (2022) and Gadar 2 (2023) have amplified this narrative, weaponising history and patriotism to construct a divisive political discourse. The increasing dominance of majoritarian narratives in cinema leaves little space for dissent or alternative viewpoints. The representation of Muslims, Dalits, and other marginalised communities in Bollywood has become more stereotypical and exclusionary, Muslim characters are often reduced to either villains, terrorists, or regressive patriarchs, reinforcing Islamophobic stereotypes.

Films like Article 15 (2019) are now largely absent from mainstream narratives. Alternative histories and perspectives such as the role of Bahujans in medieval resistance movements are ignored in favour of a dominant Brahminical-Maratha nationalist lens. The backlash against scholars and activists questioning these portrayals further demonstrates how cinema is being weaponised to control historical discourse and suppress alternative narratives. To counter the ideological capture of cinema, we must take active steps to resist the cultural hegemony being imposed through films. Encouraging and promoting independent films that challenge dominant narratives is essential. Rather than passively consuming cinema, audiences must engage critically with the perspectives films promote. Recognising subtle ideological biases can help prevent majoritarian narratives from being normalised.

A pluralistic film industry must provide space for multiple histories and identities, rather than enforcing a single dominant narrative. More representation from marginalised communities can counter the majoritarian stranglehold over storytelling. Filmmakers must be questioned for historical inaccuracies and ideological distortions, especially when they contribute to communal polarisation. Additionally, the CBFC must be altered to function as a neutral certifying body, rather than a political instrument that shapes narratives to serve majoritarian interests. Indian films are known to drive social points. The NLC website shares the *Portrayal of Politics in Indian Cinema.*, It reflects that

the makers of movies are nowadays using political subjects to show burning issues of the society. By such creations, they probably depict negative portrayals of lawmakers to catch tending to issue with the way politics work as a whole. "*Satyagraha*," by Praksh Jha in 2013 portrays how corruption and the government system is responsible is an evident instance. Amitabh Bachchan plays the role of an activist, who stands out for speaking against the corrupt politicians. This representation of common man highlights the urge for legislative reforms and change in governance. Indian cinema including tollywood are taken as portraying complex characters with mixed approach towards life and survival. Praksah Jha's another movie "*Raajneeti*" (2010), delineated grey characters. The film exhibited the dark realities of politics and the lives of politicians. Substantially, there are not rigidly good or bad politicians; they are complicated personalities trying to steer a challenging political scenario.

The paper attempts to answer how does Bollywood contribute to the formation and evolution of political consciousness in India? We posit that it functions through three primary mechanisms:

1. **Narrative and Thematic Content:** Films as direct or allegorical commentaries on political issues.
2. **Star Politicians and Celebrity Endorsements:** The leveraging of cinematic stardom for political capital.
3. **The State-Film Industry Nexus:** The use of cinema as a tool for state propaganda and soft power.

The present study primarily endeavors to establish a theoretical framework, then provide a historical overview of Bollywood's political journey, followed by a detailed analysis of contemporary trends, concluding with an assessment of the implications of this reel-political synergy.

Namrata Joshi's article in The Indian Express states that when election is near there is a rising propaganda that tells its viewers to vote for the right candidate but doesn't show any specific political party actively

endorsing it. Sharing her views on films related to politics that her best-loved film viewing experiences was a classic of 1958 by the legendary MG Ramachandran, Nadodi Mannan (The Vagabond King), at Coimbatore's iconic Delite cinema back in 2014. This was his first film wherein he played double role of King Marthandan and the radical Veerangan. An engrossing mix of intrigue and emotion, comedy and action, it was above all politically charged in its dismissal of monarchy and call for democracy with MGR as Veerangan getting thumping approval from Delite's predominantly underprivileged audience as he spoke about the oppression of the poor. (The New Indian Express). The movie (Nadodi Mannan) is frequently mentioned in the history of Indian cinema as a "propaganda blitzkrieg", "party manifesto" and "ideological vehicle" for the DMK, with party flags shown in the film. In addition to this, it strictly portrayed MGR as a "revolutionary leader" of the multitude, the one who never faced defeat in any election in Tamil Nadu. Basically, it depicted the prevailing propaganda in the film was replete with idealism. The movie was considered to be an anti-injustice and pro-reforms, a film of the people and for the people. (TNIE)

Theoretical Framework: Cinema as a Political Site

The analysis is grounded in the concept of cinema as a "cultural apparatus" that produces and disseminates ideology. Drawing from Louis Althusser's Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), we can view Bollywood as an institution that interpellates individuals into subjects of the prevailing political order, often reinforcing state-sanctioned narratives (Althusser 1971). Furthermore, Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony is pertinent; ruling classes maintain dominance not merely through coercion but by cultivating cultural and moral leadership. Bollywood becomes a terrain where this hegemony is both negotiated and consolidated, making certain political ideas appear as "common sense" (Gramsci 1971).

Benedict Anderson's concept of the "imagined community" is also crucial. Bollywood, with its pan-Indian appeal, has been instrumental in forging a sense of shared national identity, defining who belongs and who is the "other" (Anderson 1983).

Historical Evolution: From Nation-Building to Angry Young Man

The political role of Bollywood has evolved significantly over decades.

- **The Golden Age (1950s-60s):** In the nascent years of independence, filmmakers like Raj Kapoor and Bimal Roy used cinema as a tool for social reform and nation-building. Films like *Mother India* (1957) allegorized the nation as a resilient, sacred entity, sacrificing for her children. *Naya Daur* (1957) pitted traditional values against modern industrialization, reflecting the anxieties of a developing nation. The political consciousness here was one of idealized socialism and collective responsibility.
- **The Angry Young Man Era (1970s-80s):** The failure of the Nehruvian dream, rising unemployment, and political corruption found its voice in the "Angry Young Man" persona epitomized by Amitabh Bachchan. Films like *Deewar* (1975) and *Zanjeer* (1973) depicted a cynical, dystopian view of the state, where the system had failed the common man. This era reflected a shift from faith in the state to a vigilante-driven desire for justice, mirroring the public disillusionment of the time.
- **The Liberalization and Its Discontents (1990s-2000s):** With India's economic liberalization, Bollywood shifted towards narratives of globalized, affluent urban life (e.g., *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, 1995). However, this period also saw the rise of explicitly political films. *Roja* (1992), while a Tamil film dubbed in Hindi, had a massive impact, intertwining personal emotion with hyper-nationalistic sentiment regarding Kashmir. This marked a new, more visceral form of patriotism. Later, films like *Rang De Basanti* (2006) connected India's freedom struggle with contemporary political apathy, sparking real-world public debates and protests.

Contemporary Bollywood and the New Political Consciousness

The last decade has witnessed a profound transformation in Bollywood's political role, characterized by an overt alignment with the ruling dispensation's ideology of Hindu nationalism.

The Genre of "New Patriotism"

The term, "New Patriotism" is beautifully explained by **Jennifer Blackburn** in her book, *The [New] New Patriotism*, published in 2020. "New Patriotism" typically refers to a cultural, political, or cinematic genre characterized by love for one's country,

A new genre of films has emerged that reframes Indian history and nationalism through a majoritarian lens. These films often position Hindus as historical victims and valorize a muscular, often militaristic, form of patriotism.

Bollywood cinema presenting patriotism is not mere entertainment about India, it is the technique through which India exhibits itself what it is. Taking instances from *Mother India*'s post-independence fabrication of the Indian woman as the concrete representation of national resilience, to *Dhurandhar*'s contemporary say that patriotism's broader aspect is the camouflaged forfeit of intelligence operatives who serve the nation without any remembrance. Indian film industry and cinema has worked as the nation's significant device of collective identity arrangement, constructing what Indians think of their nation, history, and obligations to both with a cogent power that no government drive, no educational system, and no political utterance can match. The patriotic movies does not only indicate national identity, it reshapes it, and the development of the patriotic film from post-colonial idealism through Cold War anxiety through liberalization-era confidence through twenty-first-century security consciousness match India's dynamic relationship with itself as incisively as any political chronicle. (Insight Crunch).The movies of current times are reframing the meaning of politics. There are instances from movies like:

- *The Kashmir Files* (2022) presents a narrative of the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits, generating massive political discourse and being endorsed by the ruling party.
- *The Kerala Story* (2023) claims to expose religious conversion and terrorism, despite controversies over its factual accuracy.

- *Uri: The Surgical Strike* (2019) and *Article 15* (2019), while different in tone, both tap into a contemporary nationalist sentiment—the former celebrating military prowess and the latter critiquing social hierarchies while still operating within a statist framework.

These films are not just stories; they are political events. Their release is accompanied by tax exemptions from state governments and promotional support from political leaders, blurring the line between cinema and state propaganda.

The Political Economy of Film making

This shift is underpinned by a changing political economy. The industry has witnessed a consolidation of power, with a few large studios dominating production. Allegations of a "boycott culture" and pressure groups have created a climate of fear, discouraging content that is perceived as critical of the government or majoritarian sentiment. This informal censorship shapes the kind of stories that get greenlit and distributed, thereby narrowing the spectrum of political discourse available to the public.

Star Power in the Political Arena

The phenomenon of film stars transitioning into politics is not new, but its nature has changed. While stars like Amitabh Bachchan and N.T. Rama Rao used their screen personas to build political careers, the current trend involves active campaigning and vocal endorsements.

- The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has successfully co-opted major stars like Akshay Kumar and Hema Malini, leveraging their mass appeal.
- Superstar Salman Khan's *Bharat* (2019) was seen by many as an allegory for the nation's journey under the current leadership.
- The public, in turn, often conflates a star's on-screen persona with their off-screen political beliefs, making celebrity endorsement a potent tool for political mobilization.

Case Study: *Rang De Basanti* (2006) vs. *The Kashmir Files* (2022)

A comparative analysis of these two influential films highlights the shift in political consciousness.

- ***Rang De Basanti*** fostered a consciousness that was **anti-establishment and critical**. It urged the youth to question systemic corruption, drawing parallels between past and present failures of the state. Its call to action was directed against a corrupt political class.
- ***The Kashmir Files*** fosters a consciousness that is **majoritarian and victim-centric**. It directs public anger against a specific religious community, positioning the state as the ultimate protector of a persecuted Hindu identity. Its politics is one of polarization and historical grievance.

Both films mobilized audiences, but towards vastly different political ends, demonstrating cinema's power to shape not just the *fact* of political engagement, but its *direction* and *target*.

Conclusion

Bollywood is far more than escapist entertainment; it is a critical agent in the political life of India. It has evolved from a tool for post-colonial nation-building to a complex and powerful platform that reflects, amplifies, and sometimes spearheads shift in the country's political consciousness. The contemporary intertwining of Bollywood with a majoritarian political project represents a significant moment, where the cultural hegemony of the ruling class is increasingly consolidated through reel narratives.

However, this is not a monolithic process. Independent and parallel cinema continues to offer counter-narratives. The audience, too, is not a passive recipient but an active interpreter. The future of this relationship will be determined by the ongoing struggle within the industry and society at large over who gets to tell the story of India. Understanding "Reel Politics" is, therefore, essential to understanding the dynamics of modern Indian democracy itself. As the line between entertainment and ideology

continues to blur, the role of critical media literacy becomes paramount for a citizenry navigating a landscape where politics is perpetually projected on the big screen.

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Reimagining Bihar: A Study of Socio-political Marginalization in Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger*

Md Sabir Hussain and Keshav Namdeo Borkar

Introduction

In his debut novel *The White Tiger*, winner of the 2008 Man Booker Prize, Aravind Adiga challenges the ideological construction of India's post-liberalization success story by exposing the social fractures lying underneath the success of the story. Bihar—the novel's geographical and symbolic centre known as "Darkness" becomes the confluence of political corruption, caste oppression and moral decay. Adiga crafts a complex allegory of the contradictions of contemporary India by using the first-person narrative of Balram Halwai, the protagonist of the novel, a lower-caste individual, who kills his employer and reinvents himself and becomes a self-made entrepreneur. The juxtaposition of India's images as a global power and the novel's internal disparity and contradictions give the novel's satire an unrestrained power.

In Indian discourse, Bihar has, for decades, been characterized as a region of inefficiency, a region of backwardness, and lawlessness. Adiga's fictionalization in Bihar transforms the stereotype into a politically evocative metaphor. Bihar in the novel, is not a simply a neglected state in the country; it represents the downside of the country's development narrative–the invisible labour and dispossession that supports urban affluence. Bihar, the native place of the protagonist Balram Halwai, Adiga, the author of the novel emphasizes that the "Darkness" is not an anomaly of the region, but truly is a foundation of the country's capitalist system. His narrative thus, challenges the ways in which neoliberalism dismantles the old hierarchies with new forms.

Through the analytical lens of Post-Colonialism, Marxism, and Subaltern Studies, the study tries to explore how the novel *The White Tiger* reimagines Bihar as both a place of subjugation and prepares a foreground for the emergence of resurgence. Moreover, it also tries to explore how the author's narrative voice, spatial metaphors such as dark and light, and moral ambiguities engage with the politics of marginalization in the contemporary India.

Literature Review

As a political satire and a critique of globalization *The White Tiger* received considerable attention from scholars, researchers and critics around the globe. Ruvani Ranasinha (2012) a scholar has observed that in *The White Tiger,* Adiga1 pointedly departs from the romantic idealism-the characteristic of earlier Indian writers, by confronting 'the grotesque inequities and the violence of neoliberal modernity' (235). In the same vein, Murari Prasad (2010) interprets the novel as a 'narrative of rupture' where Adiga challenges the so-called democratic inclusiveness of India, thereby highlighting the existence of caste-based exclusion (37).

Adiga's writing in this novel, focuses on the 'moral corrosion' of success' in a capitalist society driven by corruption, conspiracy and capitalism. As chelva Kanaganayakkam argues Balram's transformation from rags to rise embodies the 'self-commodification' through the Marxian lens. Another scholar E. Dawson Varughese explains that the novel is a postcolonial parable, depicting the subaltern who internalizes the power he seeks to escape rather than challenges the order.

In the above interpretations from different scholars the study can observe that though much attention has been given to class and capitalism, fewer studies examine the novel's involvement with spatial and regional politics. Adiga's description of Bihar, often symbolises to 'The Darkness,' acts as a dynamic place of great complexity and meaning. This study addresses the absence of writing on *The White Tiger* with respect to the socio-political history of Bihar by locating the absence of the narrative's regional focus on postcolonial India's hierarchies.

Theoretical Framework: Post Colonialism, Marxism, Subaltern Studies

Post Colonialism: Continuance of Internal Colonies

Postcolonial theory examines the nature of the relationship of power conferred by colonization and how this relationship continues, even after the colonized nation got independence. The works of Homi K. Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak, especially Bhabha's notions of hybridity and mimicry and Spivak's question, "Can the subaltern speak?" (Spivak 1988), provide helpful insight to understanding and contextualizing the narrative voice of Balram. In Adiga's novel, the colonial relic and domination of the rural poor are metropolitan elites. Bihar, the "Darkness," is an Internal Colony of India, exploited for its labor and resources by the "Light" of Delhi, Gurgaon, and Bangalore.

Marxism and the Dialectics of Liberation

Marxist theory provides a unique perspective to stand sideways and examine the economic system in relation to Balram's metamorphosis. The advancement of capitalist societies and the social order grounded in capitalism is elaborated in Balram's journey, and this journey embodies the Marxist dialect. The journey begins and ends at the paradox. The paradox is liberating and self-defeating at the same time. The irony from the point of view of Adiga is in the fact that even self-making enterprise unpopularly termed in the neo-liberal order as rebel is devoid of the much-needed self-sustaining revolution.

Subaltern Studies and the Voice of the Marginal

The Subaltern Studies group, starting with Ranajit Guha, and later including Dipesh Chakrabarty and Partha Chatterjee, aimed to restore the voices of the ones that elite historiography neglected. Adiga's Balram exemplifies such voices: rough, unfiltered, and ambivalent in morality. From self-narration to writing letters to the Chinese Premier, Balram exercises narrative authority over his life story. His letters become an act of resistance, pivoting the margins to become focal points of discourse and self-definition. In Spivak's terms, Balram's narration is the counter to the prevailing condition of the subaltern being unrecorded, albeit with

the recognition of the contradictions of such unrecorded narration being couched in the resources of global capital.

Bihar is a Space of Darkness

In the context of India's uneven development, Adiga's use of Darkness, as a metaphor is keenly felt critique. The reoccurring 'Darkness' throughout the novel is meant to alert readers that the metaphor is more about moral Darkness and epistemic closure rather than being about physical poverty and lacking electricity. The Darkness is an antithesis of the Light. Light in that context refers to New Delhi, Gurgaon, and Bangalore, the globalizing cities which, along with their socially exploited rural hinterlands, glow and richly sustain with the transformed capitalism.

The difference is similar to what Dipesh Chakrabarty describes (2000) as the, "heterotemporality of modernity," in which the pre-modern and hyper-modern co-exist. Feudal social order and caste-based servitude still exist in Bihar within a country that claims to have crossed to the "age of information technology." It is this co-existence that Gramsci refers to as a "passive revolution," a change that occurs, but without any significant amendments.

Balram's description of his village, Laxmangarh, is a perfect example of this paradox. He describes the villagers as being ruled by the corrupt landlords with animalistic nicknames: "The Stork," "The Buffalo," and "The Wild Boar," which emphasize their predatory dominance upon them. (Adiga 25). The lack of education, health services, and social mobility which means the villagers will always remain in perpetual dependency. Bihar, in this way emerges as an unseen substratum of India's capitalist modernity. It provides the entire country a huge number of workers, yet receives none of the economic prosperity.

Adiga's satire deepens this moral geography. When Balram refers to Bihar, the river Ganga as "the Black River of India," he highlights the fact there are entire regions that have been excluded from the national imagination. His escape from Bihar is a "crossing" from invisibility to visibility, but the moral implications of this shift, or crossing, make one wonder whether this is crossing the line or simply remaining in place.

Balram Halwai: From Subaltern to Subject

Balram Halwai exhibits the movement spanning the development of the subaltern into a fully conscious subject. His evolution from a village boy called "Munna" (the one without a name) to "Balram" (a white tiger) then to "Ashok Sharma" the entrepreneur, signifies a self-making process of multiple layers. Each of the name changes signifies a shift in the identity, a change from the representation of an eternal servant to one with agency of an identity of self from internal construction.

His communication to the Premier of China, Wen Jiabao is a representation of both irony and defiance. By writing a letter to a foreign head of state Balram also aims to place his story with the confines of global capitalism and satirizes India with the eagerness to gain global recognition. The epistolary form of the letter makes it possible for Adiga to place juxtaposing confession and critique against each other. The letter serves as a space to reflect morally and politically comment in the narrative.

However, Balram's self-liberation himself from the shackles of his former life is contradictory. The act of killing Ashok, his boss may be framed as an act of defiance against the subjugation, but it also makes one a person who imitates the society one is running away from. In the process of becoming a capitalist, Balram has also adopted the oppressive logic of exploitation that was the former basis of his bondage. Adiga has constructed a complex character who has both polar elements of a protagonist continuing with unyielding oppression and the elements of a character fighting against the oppression. The classic subaltern who is not silent but uses the discourse of power.

Adiga uses Balram to critique the disillusionment of the meritocratic ideologies that permeate the fabric of neoliberal India. The ideologies that promote self-employment, self-made, and other similar rhetoric champion unbridled capitalism while ignoring the multitude of inequalities that enable only a few to attain the success they promote. Each unpunished murder, deceit and moral bankruptcy of the system antagonistic to equity Balram commits exposes even more the unbounded success the system permits.

The Politics of Caste, Class, and Capitalism

Caste as the Architecture of Inequality

Caste remains the most enduring and invisible mechanism of social stratification in the subcontinent, and in *The White Tiger*, Adiga shows how it coexists with capitalism as a mutually reinforcing system. Balram Halwai's identity as a member of the Halwai caste, a community historically confined to the occupation of sweet-making, determines his social position within the self at the moment of birth and even before the birth of self. He narrates, "I was supposed to make sweets, but I was making tea" (Adiga 54), reflecting the caste system's intricate entwining with institutional economic roles, as his life ends of predicaments of destiny unbounded.

Although contemporary India purportedly claims to have moved beyond caste through various democratic reforms, Adiga illustrates the ways in which caste still continues to dictate access to various resources, including dignity. Balram's employers in Delhi and Gurgaon, the wealthier landlords and corporate executives, epitomize what Louis Dumont referred to in his anthropological work, *Homo Hierarchicus (1970)*, as " caste is founded ona hierarchical opposition between the pure and the impure" (Dumont, 40). The novel depicts the ways in which caste has not disappeared, but rather, metamorphosed, particularly as it pertains to the forms of economic hierarchies afforded by neoliberal capitalism.

Balram's consciousness of caste is inextricably, and paradoxically, interrelated with an emerging awareness of his class position in the hierarchy. He understands that the former logic of caste with its hierarchy of purity has been replaced with a new logic of money. "In the old days, there were one thousand castes and destinies in India," he proclaims, "now there are just two: men with big bellies, and men with small bellies" (Adiga 64). This new logic exemplifies the kinds of materialist shifts which classical Marxist theory has predicted, specifically the shift from the accommodation of social relations of production within a feudal system to a capitalist one. Nevertheless, Adiga is careful to clarify that it is not castes that have been dismantled by capitalism; rather, it is the workings of the caste system that have been economically commodified,

as the "servant-master" relation continues to exist, albeit now under the guise of contemporary employer-employee relations.

Class Mobility and the Illusion of Freedom

At first glance, Balram's eventual rise to entrepreneurial success may seem to uphold the neoliberal contract to class mobility. His traversing from the rural region of Bihar to the Bangalore corporate world symbolizes the modern Indian ideology's promised expansion of opportunity. Subversively, however, Adiga exposes the moral and structural violence of Balram's ascension.

The expansion of Balram's murderous liberation exposes the movement's ethical paradox. To break free from servitude, Balram must violet the law but also the moral order that constitutes his humanity. This frustration of order has affinity to the ideological articulation in Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), where the colonized subject of violent displacement must, paradoxically, reclaim the right to self-determination. Balram does not, however, represent that revolutionary subject. Unlike Fanon's vision, Balram's establishing of violence is devoid of any conscionable emancipation. Rather, it is an individual emancipation that occurs, even as the surround order remains exploitative.

Thus, Adiga moves beyond the neoliberal ideal of meritocracy's success to show that success stories like Balram's are simply systemically regressive. His identity as Ashok Sharma, the businessman who, like many, exploits the system, is indicative not of a rupture in the oppressive systems of India, but rather a continuation of that oppressive system.

Reimagining Marginality: Bihar as a Metaphorical Nation

Bihar: The Geographical Negligence

Within the borders of Bihar, Adiga imagines the geopolitics of the Bihar as the Bedrock of the Democracy of the Darkness. For Adiga, the 'Darkness' is a 'Darkness' that is not an aberration, but the 'Darkness' of the infrastructure of the Development of the Dark. Departing from the dominant metaphor of 'Darkness', Adiga is the only representation of Chakrabarty's 'Provincializing Europe' (2000): re-appropriating Bihar

and its Darkness. In the contemporary, Bihar is marginalized, but in metaphor and in analogy, it is the economic discourse and in the development of the nation in Crisis, Bihar sustains India, it is the marginalized India.

Adiga's representation of Bihar's political decay mirrors real historical dynamics. Bihar demised as a prosperous the center of intellectual reform, a position it held soon after the de-colonization, and progressively decayed as an impoverished and a corrupt state. This decline reflects a capitalistic and feudal structure democracy. When assertively stating that the central character, Balram, hails from Bihar, Adiga emphasizes a contradictory drama that the 'Dark' Bihar, in its unrelenting marginalization, is the centre of development.

Foucault's concept of *heterotopia* can be mapped on to the duality of the novel's spatial imaginations, "Darkness" and "Light." As a heterotopia, Bihar incorporates various ancient and contemporary forms and simultaneously upholds different systems of oppression and liberation. In this spatial dialectics, Adiga illustrates Bihar as the collective unconscious, the ignored and suppressed underside of the country's international ambitions.

Bihar as a Subaltern of the Nation

Bihar as its metaphorical subaltern enhances the convergence of space and the voice in Adiga's discourse. Like in Spivak's portrayal of the subaltern, Bihar lacks visibility within the national framework. Its inhabitants are silenced and are mere data to be quantified within the narratives of poverty and underdevelopment. Balram's account thus embodies the reclamation of voice, for a region of silence and for the dispossessed.

With Balram's letters, Adiga situates Bihar as a locus of epistemic subversion. By narrating from the "Darkness," Balram subverts the colonial gaze, demonstrating the ways in which contemporary India still colonizes its peripherals. Self-narration elevates the region's marginality to impetuousness to declare, "I am tomorrow," signifying that once stirred, the periphery offers its potential to the country (Adiga 321).

Narrative Structure and Language as Forms of Resistance

The Epistolary Structure

The Political use of Voice inherent from the format of the Letter- a medium generally associated with intimacy and confession as purposely used for political discourse, allows Balram to situates himself on a global discourse on power, development and morality (or the lack of). Adiga amplifies the epistolary style of mock subversion as hierarchy in communication and plays with the power of voice.

The epistolary format captures the issue of spaces and the socially flecked, laced of the social system in the Indian context. The format gives space for Balram to self-justify but self-critique. The text performances with a voice, and the voice is self-aware. The self-aware written system is the storytelling system and unveils the design to critique, 'question to the authority in power' (Hutcheon 5), a concept captured by Linda Hutcheon as 'postmodern historiographic metafiction'.

Language and Irony

Balram's identity is partially constructed by the use of unrefined language when speaking in English-fluent yet deliberately unpolished. The importance of his speech lies in undermining the elitism of the language. In this regard, Adiga builds an argument on Ngugi waThiong'o's *Decolonising the Mind* (1986) and suggesting that linguistic appropriateness for the subaltern can be a form of resistance and "a carrier of culture" (13). In this regard, Balram's language, tone filled with dark humour and irony dismantles the colonisers and the elite's moral superiority.

Adiga's use of language, irony, witty remark in this novel functions as a political critique. Balram's confession and his revelation construct a system, where success requires moral corruption. Even his laughter is subversive destabilizing the authority by revealing the hypocrisy. Bakhtin, a theorist theorized the same concept in his *Rabelais and His World* (1984). He declares" Laughter overcomes fear and paves the way for a new world" (91)). He further suggested that carnivalesque laughter

of the oppressed creates an inversion of hierarchy where the marginalized voice gets authority to challenge the power through mockery.

Neoliberal Modernity and the Moral Paradox of Freedom

The Rooster Coop as Ideological Apparatus

Acting as an allegory, the powerful metaphor of ideological control is the "Rooster Coop" representing the psychological entrapment of India's under class. It describes a system where the poor remain complicit in their own suppression and subjugation. As Balram identifies and declares it both a cultural and moral prison, he writes "The greatest thing to come out of this country in ten thousand years of its history is the Rooster Coop" (Adiga 173). Looking from a Marxist perspective, Rooster Coop embodies the concept of *false consciousness* where the oppressed holds and internalizes the values of the oppressor. The servant's loyalty to their master does not serve only physically, but bounded by a moral code of servitude. Ideologically, Adiga shows that violence is ineffectively function in maintaining the class hierarchy.

Balram's murder of his employer Ashok represents the shattering of this Marxist ideological enclosure. However, this action reveals the paradox of the absence of hegemonic control in a morally corrupt economy. Balram becomes the very antagonist, his freedom comes at the cost of being an oppressor. Consequently, Adiga's narrative exposing the moral paradox of the neoliberal modernity : freedom can be attained only through the complicity.

The entrepreneurial Myth and Global Capital

The post-1991 entrepreneurial zeal in new India has been lauded as paradigm of self-reliance and innovation. Adiga, however, subverts this illusion by framing entrepreneurship as another form of survivalism. The metamorphosis of Balram into a businessman does not signify disengagement from exploitation; rather, it signifies his assimilation into a new form of exploitative structures. With the establishment of his drivers' company, White Tiger Drivers, he continues the same exploitative labor practices of which he was a victim.

In this portrayal, Adiga empathizes with David Harvey's critique of neoliberalism as a form of class exploitation. Harvey in his *A Brief History of Neoliberalism, 2005*) states, "the restoration of class power to the wealthy elites" (Harvey 16). Balram, like the neoliberal subject, is both a victim and a paradoxical beneficiary of the exploitative structures. The capitalist exploitation of his rationality is internalized as a moral imperative. The assertion of Balram that "an honest man is an existential absurdity" (Adiga 276) speaks to the absence of morality that is crafted by and through the neoliberal form of freedom.

Literature, Power, and Representation

The Political Function of Fiction

Adiga's *The White Tiger* is an epitome of what Edward Said termed "worldly criticism" – a form of literature that engages with, and represents, public discourse by unmasking narratives and systems of oppression. The power of the work is that it does not segregate politics from aesthetics. Adiga situates himself within a first-person narrative to critique, and therefore, blurs the boundary between literature and documentation.

Adiga, like Dickens and Orwell, employs humour and irony to craft social realism, but with themes and concerns of social order unique to a postcolonial context. To write solely to depict the poor of India, he also had to grapple with the accounts of the poor and marginalized and bring to light the narratives they usually keep hidden. He uses fiction as a tool of history to tell the story of the marginalized unheard patterns of history and counter the dominant narratives.

The Ethics of Representation

However, Adiga's representation of Bihar and its people, with a focus on 'the margins,' has sparked a different kind of debate over the ethics of voice. The critique here has to do with Adiga as an 'English-educated elite' appropriating subaltern experience for a global readership. This critique also resonates the same with Spivak's critique of the 'ventriloquism of the subaltern.' However, there is self-reflexive irony

in *The White Tiger*, and this does not work against this critique. The novel does not work from a point of claiming authenticity. It simply works from a point of staging contradictions.

By capturing Balram's confession as both real and performative, Adiga puts in front of us evidence of the instability of representation. The novel's ethical strength lies not in speaking *for* the marginalized, but in dramatizing the impossibility of doing so in an accurate manner. The novel, therefore, transforms the question, "Can the subaltern speak?" into "How can literature acknowledge its complicity and at the same time resisting power."

Conclusion

Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* reimagines Bihar not merely a marginal landscape; it transforms it into the pivotal ethical, moral, and political axis of India's fragmented modernity. Through the transformative trajectory of Balram Halwai, Adiga interrogates the contradictions of postcolonial democracy, the persistence of caste and class hierarchies, and the moral ambiguity of liberation under neoliberal capitalism. Bihar's "Darkness" emerges as a region of both exploitation and radical awakening–a regional space where the nation's repressed truths come to light.

By blending postcolonial critique with Marxist analysis, Adiga illuminates the continuity between colonial domination and internal oppression. His narrative dismantles the myths of meritocracy and democratic mobility, revealing that liberation, in contemporary India, is inseparable from moral compromise. Balram's voice–ironic, violent, and self-aware–becomes a symbol of the subaltern's double consciousness: simultaneously resistant and complicit, oppressed and empowered.

Ultimately, *The White Tiger* demonstrates the potential of literature to intervene meaningfully in political discourse. It reclaims fiction as a site of ethical reflection and resistance, where marginalized voices can articulate the silences of history. By reimagining Bihar as both a metaphor and a lived space of contradiction, Adiga situates the region—and by

extension, the nation—within a larger conversation about justice, agency, and the politics of visibility. His novel stands as a testament to the transformative power of storytelling in confronting the enduring structures of marginalization in postcolonial India.

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Women's Political Awakening through Silence and Resistance: A Study of Jaya and Leela in Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest* and *Lights Out*

Meenal Bais and Sanjay Kumar Singh

Introduction

Manjula Padmanabhan, one of the most significant contemporary Indian playwrights, has carved a niche for herself through her sharp socio-political critiques, particularly in the realm of gender, power, and human exploitation. Her plays often expose the hidden violence of patriarchal and capitalist structures, questioning the ethical and emotional silences that shape women's existence. Two of her notable works, *Harvest* (1997) and *Lights Out* (1984), stand out as powerful explorations of women's agency and resistance in oppressive circumstances.

In *Harvest*, Padmanabhan presents a dystopian vision where the human body becomes a commodity in the global market. The play revolves around Jaya, a woman trapped within the patriarchal dominance of her husband and brother-in-law, who trade dignity for survival. While the men succumb to material greed and submission, Jaya embodies resilience and political awakening, resisting not through open revolt but through silence, irony, and her refusal to be dehumanized.

Similarly, in *Lights Out*, Padmanabhan confronts the middle-class apathy towards gendered violence, dramatizing a scene where urban residents witness a brutal assault on a woman yet remain unmoved. Leela, the central female character, is caught in the dilemma between compliance with her husband's indifference and her own moral outrage. Her silence, hesitation, and eventual voice reflect the suppressed but emerging political consciousness of women confronting systemic violence.

Together, Jaya and Leela represent different dimensions of women's political awakening–through silence, resistance, and moral defiance. Their struggles highlight Padmanabhan's broader concern with exposing the intersections of gender, power, and resistance in modern society.

In Harvest, Om Prakash, a lower-middle-class man in Bombay, signs a contract with an American corporation, InterPlanta, to sell his organs. The corporation, represented by a glamorous figure named Ginni, takes control of his family's life, installing surveillance devices in their home and dictating their diet, hygiene, and relationships. From the beginning, Jaya–Om's wife–occupies a marginal yet crucial position in this arrangement. Unlike Om, who justifies his choice as economic survival, or Ma, who embraces the sudden material luxuries, Jaya is skeptical. When Om first announces his contract, Jaya responds with stunned silence, refusing to celebrate. Later she tells him bitterly: "You're selling your body. Not just yours—ours. Our home, our privacy, our freedom. What do you think you've done?" (Harvest 18). Her words reveal that the sale of one man's body implicates the entire family. By refusing to applaud Om's so-called sacrifice, Jaya challenges the patriarchal logic that frames male economic decisions as heroic. Her silence during Om's boasts becomes an indictment of a system that turns human lives into commodities.

One of the most telling scenes occurs when Ginni appears on the family's screen, instructing them in how to behave. Ginni orders them to bathe more often, eat healthier, and smile for the camera. Om and Ma quickly comply, eager to please their benefactor. Jaya, however, resists. Instead of smiling, she averts her gaze. Instead of thanking Ginni for the food parcels, she remains silent. This silence unsettles Ginni, who asks Om, "Why is she so quiet? Doesn't she know how lucky she is?" (Harvest 27). Jaya's silence here is profoundly political: it refuses the narrative of luck and gratitude that justifies exploitation. As Roshni Prabhakaran notes, "the panoptic system depends not only on obedience but also on visible displays of compliance" (Prabhakaran 3). Jaya disrupts this mechanism by refusing to perform compliance. Her silence denies Ginni the satisfaction of domination through spectacle.

Any silence is not reactive, it is strategic. Jaya reacts bitterly in later scenes, when Ginni tries to flirt with Om and demean Jaya in a core way by identifying herself with a more glamorous and Western woman. "She wants you, Om. Why don't you go? Then why not be her pet, her doll? (Harvest 36). The strength of such statements is increased by her her silence in previous moments. With minimal defensive actions, Jaya is awaiting until the right time to euphonize with words that showcase the lysting gaze of Ginni. Silence, then is a condition of time—an instrument of delayed expression. The fact that agency is not always loud may be filled in when Judith Butler suggests that it can often be a stylized repetition that resignifies norms (Butler 145), which explains the strategy of Jaya. Her sparce interventions and silence resignify her look; not a passive wife, but a woman who does not want to be devoured.

The climax of Harvest intensifies this politics of refusal. Ginni is revealed to be not a glamorous woman but a dying old man who covets Jaya's youth. He tells her, "I want you. Your skin, your blood, your breath. I want to live inside you" (Harvest 57). Faced with this monstrous desire, Jaya makes her final declaration: "I'll die knowing that you, who only live to win, will have lost to a poor, weak, and helpless woman" (58). Here Jaya reclaims the very categories of weakness and helplessness as forms of strength. By refusing to submit, even at the cost of death, she destabilizes the logic of exploitation. Her earlier silences build toward this final statement of defiance. As Prabhakaran suggests, "Jaya's ultimate victory is her refusal to be absorbed into the system" (5). Her political awakening is thus forged not through revolt but through an unyielding refusal to play the role of the compliant subject.

When Jaya opposes the commodification of the body under the influence of global capital, Leela in Lights Out opposes the being normalized in the middle classes. The play is founded on a factual event in Bombay when people stood by just watching a woman being raped in broad daylight. Padmanabhan has made this event a kind of a moral drama and compelled the viewers to see into their own voyeurism. In the play, Leela and her spouse Mohan can see the violence through their window.

Mohan takes it like a curiosity, and whether they ought to call the police or not. Even their neighbors explain to themselves their inaction by arguing that these kinds of events are not unique or unusual and that nothing can be done. It is against this backdrop of apathy that we can see the silence of Leela.

Here Bar One, Mohan summons Leela to the window, telling her to look. She objects at a beginning replying, I do not want to see. I can hear enough" (Lights Out 12). Her unwillingness to look contrasts with the other people being keen to watch. Such new silence distinguishes her moral suspension v/s voyeurism. Alpna Saini notes that when Leela does not wish to look, this destabilizes the voyeuristic form of the play itself in which the watching in the play becomes an accessory in violence (Saini 4). Leela refuses to be involved by not watching. Her silence in this case does not mean that she is a coward but rather it consists of refusal to inside out spectacle out of suffering.

As the play progresses, Leela becomes more disturbed by the others' responses. In Scene Three, one neighbor suggests that the assault is "an everyday matter" and that they should not interfere. Leela replies softly, "How can you say that? How can you watch and do nothing?" (Lights Out 34). Her voice, almost breaking into silence, highlights the enormity of the others' moral failure. Unlike the men, who intellectualize and rationalize, Leela experiences horror in her body—through trembling, silence, and gasps. Her physical refusal to normalize violence becomes her resistance.

The most chilling moment comes in Scene Four, when the neighbors begin to treat the assault as entertainment. One-character jokes that it is "better than a film," while another laughs. Leela cannot laugh; she stands in horrified silence. When pressed to join, she blurts: "Most people don't just stand around taking pictures!" (42). This line is crucial, as it exposes the theatricality of voyeurism itself. Just as an audience watches a play, the neighbors watch a crime. Leela's silence punctuates this unsettling parallel, reminding the actual audience of their complicity. Padmanabhan's dramaturgy here is Brechtian: it alienates the audience,

forcing them to see their own role in the spectacle. Leela's silence becomes the hinge that turns theatre into political confrontation.

Leela's awakening becomes most evident in the final scene. As the assault continues, Mohan insists they do nothing. Leela, finally breaking her long silence, pleads: "We cannot just sit here. We cannot pretend it is not happening" (59). Though she cannot stop the violence, her recognition of complicity marks a transformation. She moves from passive witness to conscious resistor, from silence imposed to silence chosen. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's question, "Can the subaltern speak?" is instructive here. Spivak argues that subaltern women are often denied speech within dominant discourses (Spivak 271). Leela's silence demonstrates this paradox: she cannot intervene in a way her peers recognize as legitimate, but her refusal to join them becomes a form of speech. Her silence speaks against normalization, even if unheard by those around her.

Jaya and Leela thus occupy different but interconnected terrains of resistance. Jaya resists a global system that commodifies her body; Leela resists a social system that commodifies violence. Both awaken politically by transforming silence into refusal. Their strategies reflect what Chandra Talpade Mohanty describes as "situated knowledges of resistance"—small, everyday acts that disrupt oppressive systems without necessarily overturning them (Mohanty 340). Neither Jaya nor Leela leads a revolution, but both awaken to the political implications of their choices, making silence itself a weapon.

The plays also implicate the audience in these awakenings. In Harvest, spectators watch Jaya's surveillance, complicit with the gaze of Ginni. In Lights Out, spectators mirror the neighbors watching the assault. In both cases, silence on stage provokes discomfort in the audience, forcing them to confront their own silences. As Saini argues, "Padmanabhan makes the audience an extension of the onlookers, thereby denying them the moral high ground" (7). Theatrically, silence becomes contagious: Jaya's refusal to perform and Leela's refusal to laugh spread unease to the audience, awakening their own political consciousness.

Conclusion

Harvest by Manjula Padmanabhan and Lights Out by Manjula Padmanabhan, show the way in which women may be awakened to political awakening through silence and struggle. Jaya will not allow herself to be commodified and rented by the global capitalism of her body and her feelings; Leela will not allow herself to objectify violence by the means of voyeurism. Their silences are absences too but other ways of being, not inactivity but opposition. Padmanabhan escapes the traditional concept of voice and agency, demonstrating that it is possible to use silence as a potent political tool in situations of oppression by women. The staging of these awakenings also brings audiences to worry about their part in systems of power by dramatizing them on the stage. In these plays, silence is not what lacks speech it is the commencement of politics.

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Male Gaze and Its Subversion in Indian Cinema

Palash Sharma

Films, being a visual medium, have a powerful effect and impact on the viewers. While in most of the films, there is a disclaimer that this movie is purely a work of fiction, not even impurely, and despite it being one of the biggest lie one can ever tell and even after announcing it in the beginning that it is a lie people cry, laugh, get angry, shout and goes out of the cinema with a different face and feeling than the one they came in.

In India, Cinema directly competes with Cricket; in other words, it's an emotion felt and not an intellectual activity, though it also means it is dominantly considered an escapist activity rather than an awareness medium. So, sometimes it's the cricket on the front foot and cinema on the back foot, and vice versa, and sometimes they both complement each other. Now that it is another question if films, like any other art form, imitate life or, as Oscar Wilde said, if it is the life which imitates art. Putting aside this dichotomy for a while, one thing which we can say for sure is that life and art are connected, integrated either complementarily or paradoxically. Thus, when we watch a film, we are impacted because we are looking at someone's life or maybe participating in it.

Now, as mentioned before, Film is a visually dominant medium; it will have an impact and will still convey something without the sounds, music, and dialogue. With the visuals comes the aspect of perspective; it becomes an important factor of how, when, and from where the visuals are shown, as with the change in perspective, the meaning changes. For example, a zero may look the same from every angle, but a nine becomes a six and it is important because one is an average student while the other is a topper. The element of perspective merges film,

politics, and culture, and the latter two being male-dominant everywhere, and also in India, this perspective, also known as the gaze, caters to the male viewers.

Laura Mulvey, in her essay, Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema (1965) argues that traditional (Hollywood) film is organized around the pleasure of looking ("scopophilia") from a masculine, heterosexual perspective. She draws upon Freudian psychoanalysis and the Lacanian theory of desire and distinguishes two forms of visual desire:

- Voyeuristic pleasure: where men observe women as objects of control or curiosity.
- Fetishist pleasure: where women's bodies are sexualized and idealized to defuse castration anxiety.

She says,

"The presence of woman is an indispensable element of spectacle in normal narrative film, yet her visual presence tends to work against the development of a story line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation. This alien presence then has to be integrated into cohesion with the narrative. As Budd Boetticher has put it:

What counts is what the heroine provokes, or rather what she represents. She is the one, or rather the love or fear she inspires in the hero, or else the concern he feels for her, who makes him act the way he does. In herself the woman has not the slightest importance" (Mulvey 11).

For example, we can see this in one of the recent films "Pathaan" where the hero played by Shahrukh Khan was introduced in an action sequence fighting multiple goons and flying a helicopter whereas in contrast the main actress, who is also an agent, is introduced in a sensuous way with a three-to-four-minute song in which she is dancing and the hero is watching. Mulvey also raises this point in which she says,

'Traditionally, the woman displayed has functioned on two levels: as erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium, with a shifting tension between the looks on either side of the screen. For instance, the device

of the show-girl allows the two looks to be unified technically without any apparent break in the diegesis. A woman performs within the narrative, the gaze of the spectator and that of the male characters in the film are neatly combined without breaking narrative verisimilitude' (Mulvey 12).

The hero, as mentioned before, is not shown in an eroticized manner like the actress, though he too is objectified, but in a different way, as Mulvey says in her essay-

"A male movie star's glamorous characteristics are thus not those of the erotic object of the gaze, but those of the more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego conceived in the original moment of recognition in front of the mirror" (Mulvey 12).

This aspect can be seen repeatedly in most mainstream Indian films like the Horror Comedy universe of Stree or the comic universe of Housefull, or the action YRF's spy verse. If nothing, the films will have a dance number or an item song, even if it has a (semi) rural setting, like Vicky Vidya ka Voh Vala Video, or an item song will be included in the end when the end credits roll.

Though often we see these item songs are placed in a way that enhances or moves the plot forward. We can see how an old formula still successfully prevails in the mainstream cinema and still impacts the audience. This leads to the question of whether the film industry, dominated largely by men, meaning often we see only the man's perspective on the screen, has the power to change the perspective? If so, can he overcome these years and years of conditioning and bring about this change? If yes, how will he portray women? Will he be able to portray social as well as personal life authentically, where women's desires would be considered human?

Because in the Indian context, a woman exploring, knowing, and accepting her desires (especially the sexual ones) is considered morally degrading.

Now, the male gaze doesn't simply objectify women sensually; the gaze signifying males' desires shifts according to them, and this shifting has

influenced Indian cinema, which showcases how women have been looked at, framed, and voiced on screen across decades.

'This is what makes cinema quite different in its voyeuristic potential from, say, strip-tease, theatre, shows, etc. Going far beyond highlighting a woman's to-be-looked-at-ness, cinema builds the way she is to be looked at into the spectacle itself' (Mulvey 17).

Beginning with the 1940s and 1950s, it was the time of the post-independence optimism, and women were seen as symbolic mothers, lovers, or moral anchors of the nation, the famous example being that of the film Mother India (1957) that glorified the sacrificial and nurturing aspects of womanhood. She embodies resilience and strength, but her heroism is confined within the boundaries of traditional roles such as upholding family honor and nurturing her children. Women were seen as embodiments of virtue, devotion, and sacrifice. She was revered but didn't have any autonomy of her own.

Then came the 1960s, where we can see a soft male gaze; the women became romanticized objects with the rise of urban modernity, glamour, and romance. Movies like Padosan showcased the actress as muse or spectacle; it was an idealized romantic gaze. Women were seen as objects of desire through men's emotions. Sensuality appeared in song sequences framed through male fantasy, like camera lingering or voyeuristic angles. An exception of this is also seen in some films like the film Guide (1965) where Rosy challenges patriarchy and seeks freedom, a rare early example of female gaze breaking through.

Then came the 1970s, when the itemization of the female body happened. Political unrest, the rise of escapist cinema, and the 'angry young man' movement started. It was a commercial male gaze where women were commodified, and women became visual relief in male-dominated narratives. So, Cabaret numbers with Helen like 'Piya ab tu aaja' in the film Caravan (1971), 'Mehbooba Mehbooba' in the film Sholay (1975), Yeh Mera Dil in the film Don (1978). An exception in this wave is Bhumika (1977) by Shyam Benegal, which was a feminist critique of how men and cinema exploit women's bodies.

In the 1980s, we saw the rise of a feminist counter gaze, which also showcased women's suffering. So there arose a duality where the mainstream films continued to objectify women while art cinema began to humanize the politicize the woman's image. So films like Umrao Jaan (1981) showcased a courtesan's inner life, not just her performance, and films like Mirch Masala (1987), which showcased women's suffering, while mainstream films like Chandni, Maine Pyaar Kiya continued to objectify women. In the 1990s, the gaze became glamorous due to liberalization, MTV culture, and the beauty pageant generation, and women became symbols of modern luxury and erotic appeal. Here too we see a duality good girl for tradition, while a 'sexy girl' for fantasy, so women's bodies became a site of aspiration and consumption. The exception in this decade was Bandit Queen (1994), which was a film of raw female subjectivity and resistance to the male gaze.

In the 2000s, the emergence of female desire occurred along with ambiguity as global feminism influenced Bollywood, which led to the rise of urban independent women. Women started desiring and not just being desired. Films like Omkara (2006), Water (2005), and Provoked (2006) challenged repression. The screen woman began looking back, aware of being watched, sometimes weaponizing her sexuality like we see in the 2011 film The Dirty Picture, which made sexuality female-centered. Then, in the 2010s, the female gaze emerged in the digital age and with the influence of global dialogues on gender. It was a reflective and self-aware image where women became narrators of their own stories, as we see in the film Lipstick Under My Burkha (2016), which discusses women's secret lives, their fantasies, or the film Margarita with a Straw (2014), which is a differently abled woman exploring her sexuality or other films like Thappad, Queen, etc. The lens shifted inward, and the female gaze replaced the male one, narrating desire, fear, and fantasy.

2020s, our decade, the age of streaming platforms, feminist film criticism, queer narratives and gender studies, the gaze becomes plural, intersectional, self-owned, and sometimes even gender neutral. We see complex characters through various lenses, for example, the short film

Geeli Pucchi from Neeraj Ghaywan from Ajeeb Daastans anthology 2021, where we see Konkona Sen Sharma's character through caste, gender, queer, and sexuality lenses. As a result, now women's perspectives are no longer exceptions; they are storytellers, creators, and viewers of themselves.

Though there were exceptions in most of the decades but it is around the 2000s when we see the woman on screen in mainstream cinema gradually owning her gaze and becoming aware and resisting the male gaze. Coming back to the question this research paper tries to pose, here in this list, if you can categorize the films according to the male and female directors a difference emerges, most of the films dealing with women's private and personal desires are made by women directors while the films dealing with women's social position and status are made by both male and female directors.

For example, Thappad by Anubhav Sinha, Tumhari Sulu by Suresh Triveni, Lipstick under my Burkha by Alankrita Shrivastava, and Margarita with a Straw by Shonali Bose.

Muvley, in her essay, notes that three perspectives of the male gaze operate simultaneously:

- The gaze of the man behind the camera.
- The gaze of the male characters within the film.
- The gaze of the spectator who identifies with the male point of view.

"There are three different looks associated with cinema: that of the camera as it records the pro-filmic event, that of the audience as it watches the final product, and that of the characters at each other within the screen illusion" (Mulvey 17).

By looking at the examples mentioned above, we can conclude that male directors have been able to subvert the male gaze. The film 'Anarkali of Arah' was directed by Avinash Das (his debut), featuring Swara Bhaskar as the lead actress, with Sanjay Mishra, Pankaj Triphati, Mayur More, and Ishtiyak Khan as the supporting cast. This film explores

themes of women's agency, status, caste, and their ownership of sexuality, and along with that, this film is also placed in an important time frame. This film was released in 2017, which means it is the descendant of movies like The Dirty Picture, Pink, Parched, and Lipstick Under My Burkha, and the predecessor of movies like Gangubai Kathiawadi.

So, in the film the protagonist Anar (Anarkali), played by Swara Bhaskar, who is a street singer, we see in her the awareness of 'Reshma' of The Dirty Picture who turns her sexuality into power and rise in status, So Anar too knows about the power she holds over others but she couldn't rise in status like Reshma, in her also echoes Pink's Deepak Sehgal's 'No means no' statement, doesn't matter if she is a street singer or a prostitute, along with that we also see the pride she has for her profession just like Gangubai, the confidence and the will to resist if one tries to invade the boundaries without her permission. Anar has seen her mother's murder in front of her eyes when she was dancing and singing, and a drunk guy pulls the trigger, and despite that, she has chosen the same profession; that incident has made her fierce; it has made her aware that being timid is not an option; she has to have agency over herself.

This film realistically explores and showcases the politics behind the treatment of a woman of lower status, who doesn't hold much power, and how society treats her, watches her, and sees her as a woman of bad character, of how even the law distinguishes between her and a person who holds much power, the Vice Chancellor, played by Sanjay Mishra as Rohit Vats of Hindustan Times puts it that,

"Anaarkali of Aarah brings forth a world that's out of focus and needs our attention. Marginalised sections are fighting their own battles in this part of the globe, and 'Anaarkali Of Aarah' wants us to be sympathetic to them" (Anarkali of Aarah).

The first aspect or the perspective, according to Mulvey, is the gaze of the man behind the camera or the director. Avinash Das plays multiple roles and portrays multiple gazes, which play various functions throughout the film.

First gaze is the male gaze itself, that gaze portrays Anar as an object when she is dancing and singing. This gaze is seen in the beginning when her mother is singing the song ' Lahanga Jhaanke' along with the song's lyrics. Her dance movements are also sensuous, along with the camera angles, which are close-ups focusing on her movements that erase the boundaries between the male viewers in the film and those watching the film (Anarkali of Aarah 03:30- 05:26).

The same is again seen when Anar is dancing and singing the song 'Aye sakhi ooh' here too, along with the song's lyrics; her dance movements are sensuous, and the same camerawork is seen, which unifies both the male characters and the viewer's gaze (Anarkali Of Aarah 09:46-12:00).

Then again, the same thing is repeated in the middle of the film, the scene which then creates the main conflict, when she is performing the song 'Dunaliya mein jung' (Anarkali of Aarah 29:15-33:00).

This, only for a few seconds, also happens when she is recording the song 'Mora piya matlab ka yaar', even in the recording, she is wearing the same clothes that she wears while dancing, though, in the context of the film, that holds a deeper significance, as through that clothes she could re-live and feel her own self again that recording room becomes her stage (Anarkali of Aarah 01:19:26-19:40).

Then towards the end again we see the same thing, but the whole context changes, she is singing and dancing and performing the same song performed by her mother in the beginning, but the lyrics change gradually, and here too the male viewers and characters' gaze is unified, but now the dance is not a voyeuristic pleasure but one of showing her own agency. The male gaze is the same, but has changed its meaning (Anarkali of Aarah 01:41:57-48:14).

A character like that often gets categorized into the voyeuristic or the fetishist object, but as this character is the protagonist of the film, nor is there a hero who heroically comes to her rescue, the director humanizes her instead of idealizing her.

We see her practicing with the band members on how they are going to sing and what they are going to sing. We see her buying a lipstick from a shopkeeper, though here, there is a social element involved, so some form of glamour and idealization is visible (Anarkali of Aarah 14:40-16:20).

But in her home, we see her cooking food, living alone, sleeping alone, stripped of all her glamour, her real self, doing regular household chores like making tea, food, etc. (Anarkali of Aarah 16:55-17:28).

Along with that, we also see her resilience and her will to fight back. She goes to the police station to file a FIR, but the officer refuses and throws her out of the police station.

We see her in fear when the goons destroy her house and try to kidnap her, but she runs away, in the whole chase sequence, no hero comes to save her or to fight off the goons. She reaches the railway station, and one hand comes on her shoulder, and that is of Anwar, played by Mayur More. She hugs him, and they leave Aarah (Anarkali of Aarah 57:56-01:00:25).

Then another human aspect we see is her obsession or dedication towards her craft. We see how much she misses the stage and yearns to sing, when after coming to Delhi, she says to Anwar to find her a singing job. When Anwar comes back, he finds her lying around the tape reels, all of these not only make the woman human but also the woman belonging to her profession. We empathize with her; we see them with desires, fears, and aspirations (Anarkali of Aarah 01:09:50-12:04).

Throughout the first perspective, there are times when the first and second gazes merge, and we see Anar getting objectified, but it isn't shown for the pleasure of the audience; it is done to showcase the reality of what happens in those situations. The camera angles don't become a medium for Socophilia but instead become a reality check for the society.

Now comes the second perspective, the gaze of the male characters in the film. Here, too, various gazes fall on the protagonist Anar. First is

the classic good old male gaze, which is shown various times, like when she is walking on the street, people stare at her, then again in the shows where she sings and dances, all the male spectators look at her with the male gaze (Anarkali of Aarah 29:15-33:00).

In fact, this male gaze further builds up the mindset of her being a woman of bad character, which we see in the Vice Chancellor and the police officer characters. In fact, one who sings and dances on erotic songs is a prostitute who can be bought, as we see in the hotel scene (Anarkali of Aarah 45:30-50:20).

Then we also see the male gaze from women. After Anar is bailed from jail, and when she comes back to her house, the women of her street go inside their homes; that judgment is an extension of the male gaze. It is an irony of how the male spectators who go and watch her dance, objectify her, throw money at her, are the same who then judge her as a characterless woman (Anarkali of Aarah 56:58-57:11).

Then another gaze is of a friend who doesn't objectify her but treats her humanely, is frank with her, and she also allows him to be that frank; the way he talks to her, behaves with her will be considered an invasion of her boundaries if someone else were to do it. That friend is the band owner, Rangeela, played by Pankaj Tripathi. He is a businessman and a realist so even though he knew the VC is wrong he didn't or couldn't help her when he was harassing her on the stage, that again though subverts the whole male gaze idea of a hero coming to save the woman on screen, he even bails her out form jail and asks her to apologise to the VC, now even though his actions were mixed with feelings of friendship and his business, for Anar it led to breaking of her trust on him. This is seen in the studio owner towards the end of the movie, who, being a businessman, doesn't want to get involved in her case but advises her to just do what they want.

Another gaze is the love gaze, not the lust objectification one, but a pure love gaze. Anwar, played by Mayur More, follows her and loves music like her. When she was chased by the goons, and she outsmarts them and reaches the railway station, the hand that falls on her shoulder isn't

of Rangeela or anyone from her band, but of Anwar, who in no way can fight off the goons, but it is there for her support and of his love for her. Though this angle isn't explored much, but one scene on the bus, he touches her hand, but she moves her hand, then smiles, looking the other way (Anarkali of Aarah 01:20:15-20:26).

Then another gaze, which is an idealized gaze but not the idealization leading to objectification. This is the gaze from Heeraman Tiwari, played by Ishtiyak Khan; he is the only one who realizes her talent. For him, she is the country's best singer, which he tells her various times by his catchphrase-

'desh ke liye hi kar lijiye.'

He never once judged her, even though he knew there was a case going on with her, and the police were looking for her. He took both of them to his home when they were ousted from theirs. That look he gives her when the police are taking her is the same look that Faizi gives to Gangu in the end.

Lastly comes the third perspective, and that is of the audience watching the film. The director plays with their gaze very beautifully, as from the very beginning we are shown a dancer murdered, which reduces, if not removes completely, the voyeuristic effect on the audience. Further as the movie progresses from some time the audience and male characters get unified and it becomes a scopophilia but then as the director humanises her and shows us the way the system treats her, towards the end we can't help but root for her and he last song on which she dances doesn't create a voyeuristic effect but a rage transferred from her for her justice. The audience again unifies with the spectators, but this time with their silence, with the awareness of knowing the reality but not speaking about it.

Now comes the second movie titled 'Girls Will Be Girls' by a female director, Suchita Talati, produced by Richa Chada and Ali Fazal, starring actors Preeti Panigrahi, Kani Kusruti, and Kesav Binoy Kiron. This film won the World Cinema Dramatic (audience) prize, and Preeti

Panigrahi won the World Cinema Dramatic Special Jury Award for Acting at the Sundance Film Festival 2024.

So, being a woman-directed film, the first perspective, that of the person behind the camera, will be a female, but is it appropriate for a film about a girl's sexuality and coming of age, a female director and a male-dominated crew can make it really difficult to portray the vulnerability needed for the portrayal of such topics. That's why the director chose or made the whole crew women-dominant, as she says-

"In spaces which are more 'male', women wear armor. But when we don't have to fight for respect or be more masculine to be taken seriously, it opens up mental space and we can get more done," says Talati. "And because the film is about a young girl's sexuality, for me it was very important to build a safe space where the cast could be vulnerable" (Talati).

The movie is about a teenage girl who is in tenth and from the first scene, it is established that she is the perfect schoolgirl, she is the prefect of the school, class topper, the girl all the teachers expect to come first in the board exams but it is also the most complex age as hormones starts asserting their presence in the body, one feels the flutters of first love, the desire to possess it, its jealousy, one also begins exploring his or her body, becomes conscious of their appearance more than ever and in the Indian context all the latter things emerging from hormones are restricted, and the whole society alertly surveillance them, the rules are simple, boys and girls should remain distant, but if broken boys are allowed more exceptions than girls and a simple rumour is enough to strip off a girl's character even if she is a prefect. It is also the age when a girl becomes aware and encounters the male gaze more consciously.

So, the first perspective, that of the director, becomes a female perspective or gaze, and we see the difference in the way this movie is able to treat the personal desires of a girl authentically, which we hardly see in Anarkali of Aarah. The gaze of the director merges with the protagonist's point of view, as most of the time, it's her perspective we see.

Throughout the film, we don't see any voyeuristic or fetishistic elements. We are shown through a girl's lens of what she feels and desires, the way she gazes at boys or her crush, called Sri, played by Kesav Binoy Kiron.

Mira's beginning of exploration of her sexuality is shown through a beautiful symbol. The symbol of the constellation Pleiades, which, according to Greek mythology, were seven sisters, daughters of the titan Atlas, and they were pursued by the hunter Orion. So, they asked for the help of Zeus to protect them, and he turned them into stars forming the cluster or constellation Pleiades. This constellation plays multiple functions, first it showcases to Mira, Sri's studious side in contrast to the marks he had got in the class test, it becomes a bonding factor for Sir and her as in a crucial café scene they both search about this constellation and its myth, as per the Hindu astrology it symbolizes transformation which connects with the film as it is after this scene we see Mira and Sri getting close to each other, Mira begins to explore her body and sexuality. Thus, the director doesn't use sensual or scopophilia elements or any double-meaning metaphors to portray this; using a symbol of a constellation gives her exploration a bold, rebellious, fierce, and spiritual tone, in contrast to society's ideology (Girls Will Be Girls 08:35-09:05).

The scenes that any mainstream film will make it voyeuristic by adding sensuous elements, those scenes are treated with sensitivity and the way a girl will feel in those times. The scene in which Mira is bathing, and she kisses her hand as if trying to feel the same when she kissed Sri's cheek the day before. This exploring act is not portrayed by any music playing in the background; there is just the minimal background noise, and her eyes show curiosity about finding out where exactly her skin feels the same as Sri's, and by the end, she laughs at her silliness. Instead of creating a voyeuristic or fetishist effect, this subverts it (Girls Will Be Girls 16:40-17:14).

The director, as in Anarkali of Aarah, also humanizes girls' bodies. We see Mira having body hair, waxing her legs, being conscious of her

body, and performing small acts like applying moisturizer on the body, lip syncing a song, which humanizes her, and gives a realistic tone to the film, instead of using all of those with glamorous elements.

In an interview the director says that in India having a boyfriend or girlfriend means most of the time you would be sneaking in, we see this in the scene in the science laboratory of the school when they first kiss, in that scene the director puts a frame on the foreground to make us feel as if we are sneaking in their private moment and they too in turn are sneaking that kiss from others.

This same happens in the scene in Mira's room when they make out, here too a frame is put on the foreground to showcase that we are sneaking in their sneaking moment (Girls Will Be Girls 45:00-45:25).

This is not just shown when they are sneaking, this technique is also used when she masturbates using a soft toy, this again is used to showcase her sneaking from her mother and it is just a single shot frame of her back, no other camera angles are shown, we aren't show her face at all nor do we see how she is feeling, this makes the whole act a self-exploration act and again no music is used which adds on to the realistic tone. The moment when she smells that toy shows her curiosity and tells us the necessity for a woman to sit behind the camera to portray a woman's desires authentically (Girls Will Be Girls 23:00-24:07).

The same pattern is repeated when they go to a mountain to make out, in that frame, a bush comes in the foreground to portray the same thing.

Now, if we look at the movie posters, as well as the title, we don't see Sri's character in the majority of them; it's just Mira and her mother or just Mira, implying that it's a film about a mother-daughter relationship or about a girl's self-exploration, coming of age.

The director creates a complex and tense dynamic between the three. The mother hasn't been able to go through her coming of age and finds an escape in the boyfriend of her daughter, who is herself going through her coming of age. As Jacob Aller, the editor of Paste magazine, says, in an interview with Suchi Talati-

"I always describe this movie as two coming of ages, it's like one going forward and one moving backwards. As soon as she meets a boy, she's like Oh, I can finally express myself. This is so exciting, and her mom is like Ah, I can finally express myself, this is so exciting" (Talati).

We first see this in the scene when Mira and Sri are dancing, and she comes and, as a way of showing Mira, her mother starts dancing with Sri. This initiates the awkward love triangle; the daughter starts getting jealous of her mother for trying to snatch away her boyfriend. As the director says that in the triangle between them, the alliances keep on shifting, there is Mira and Sri, and the mom doesn't know what they are doing, then there is Mom and Sri, and Mira doesn't know what they are doing, and then there is Mira and her mom.

The first dynamic, that of Mira and Sri, which we discussed before, is a dynamic of first love; the sneaking-in technique with having a frame in the foreground is also seen in the scene when they make out with Mira's mother in the bathroom.

In that scene, we see a brilliant use of architecture and camera placement, for Mira could see her mother and Sri, but not vice versa. Mira could see her mother being playful with Sri, and the way she places her hands on his head and reads her book beside him. Mira doesn't like it when Sri talks to her, and we see that she erupts rudely at her when she says,

"You bought this trash with his money."

For a book she was reading (Girls Will Be Girls 11:05-11:30).

We also see that her mom wants to spend more time with Sri in the next scene when she makes three cups of tea and deliberately leaves Mira's cup in the kitchen (Girls Will Be Girls 11:58-12:12).

Then comes the scene when Mira and Sri have sex, here again as mentioned before we see the whole act through Mira's eyes and again it doesn't become an act for visual pleasure for the audience, we don't see any frame in the foreground, we don't see any expression of pleasure in Mira's eyes, it is awkward, uncomfortable, she doesn't know what

she has to do and Sri in contrast knows which makes her feel silly and in the beginning it hurts her and then the camera shifts and we only see her one eye, which is distracted and she sees the sky and then we are shown the sky. The act for which she was preparing and taking notes, when it happened, didn't feel special in any way (Girls Will Be Girls 30:50-32:02).

Then comes the dynamic of Sri and Anila, Mira's mother. This dynamic makes one uncomfortable, and it's the suspense of what happens between the two that becomes one of the leading forces driving the story, as it adds a layer of suspense to the film. We see Anila gradually becoming more frank with Sri; she starts sharing her personal stories with him, and even Sri becomes more friendly with her and starts sharing his problems with her. Mira feels left out, and it creates jealousy in her. This builds up towards the end when Sri, on his birthday, stays in their house, and Anila insists he sleep in her bedroom with her. We again see the brilliant use of architecture and camera angles. Mira doesn't know what is happening inside the room as Anila has closed the door, and neither does the audience don't know, as the director only shows her perspective.

Then there is the mother-daughter dynamic, which is established as complex, and it is shown through Mira's dialogue in the beginning to Sri when he asks if she is scared of her mom-

"No, now I just can't stand her" (Girls Will Be Girls 13:40-14:24).

In the scene when Mira is applying moisturizer and then starts dancing to a song playing on the radio, and when her mother joins and comes close to her, she stops dancing. It shows how she doesn't feel very comfortable around her (Girls Will Be Girls 20:20-21:40).

Though both of them know each other very well, there are various scenes where we see that the stories Anila tells to Sri Mira, know them, and Mira too agrees when Anila says that she wants to be like her dad. Despite all of that, we never see them laughing together or talking more than necessary. Most of the time, it's her mother who tries to talk to her, tries to dance with her, but she doesn't talk to her.

Then there is the dynamic of all three together, and throughout the film, whenever all three come together, it's Anila who talks with Sri, and Sri, Mira remains silent most of the time, except for the last scene, there too Anila is in the kitchen when they both talk but it's the first time we see Mira talking to Sri and having a conversation when Anila is around. Mira understands how Sri has been using Anila, and the next shot of Anila working and cleaning the kitchen, this puts things into perspective for Mira as she understands why Anila has been trying to get close to Sri, her loneliness becomes visible to her, and that scene also makes the spectators question if all of the film is shown through Mira's perspective, then were the acts done by Anila were acts of jealousy?

In this way the director Suchi Talati's, the woman behind the camera, perspective merges with the protagonist's perspective who is a girl and subverts the whole male gaze perspective and instead focuses on making the girl and women by extension human having her own desires, sexuality, own will to explore them and most importantly her own agency to say no just like Mira does to Sri in the end.

Now comes the second perspective, the gaze of other characters. So, the first gaze is the male gaze, which is introduced to the girl by a teacher. She makes Mira and her friend Priya, played by Kajol Chugh, stand on chairs and demonstrates to other girl students how it looks when you are wearing a short skirt and climbing the stairs. It is again, like in Anarkali of Aarah, the gaze of society that used to surveil them.

Two scenes showcase the perversion of this male gaze. First is the scene when Mira is sitting in the science lab, and the boys sitting in front of her bend beneath the desk and see under her skirt (Girls Will Be Girls 32:45-33:15). The second scene is when the girls are climbing the stairs, and the boys take photos of them (Girls Will Be Girls 39:17-39:28).

It's this gaze from which Mira has to hide, especially being in her position, who is an ace student and a prefect, she in turn has to maintain or surveil other girls so that they keep distance from the boys. She can't rebel, so she has to become a hypocrite if she wants to explore love or her sexuality.

Then comes Sri's gaze on Mira, it is a male gaze, not in the defining terms, but meaning that it is the gaze of a male, and no camera shots are shown in a way that tells us Sri looks at Mira in an objectified manner, though it could be because the film is presented through Mira's POV. But the scenes when he is looking at her, most of the time, it is reciprocated by Mira.

Then comes Anila's gaze on Mira and Sri. It's a complicated gaze of envy and freedom. Anila, being a young mother, wants to give Mira the freedom, which we see in the scene when Mira is going for a movie with her friend Priya in the dialogue-

Mira says she is going out with Priya for a movie, and her father, Harish, played by Jitin Gulati, says, "Wearing this?" Anila instantly snaps at Harish, which shows that she wants her daughter to wear whatever she wants; in fact, she is the one who chose the skirt, as we see in the scene before (57:50-58:00).

But when she sees Mira having a boyfriend, she also feels envious of her and, as mentioned before, tries to get close to Sri, though in the end this dynamic becomes more complex, as when we see Anila's loneliness, we reevaluate her acts and rethink if those were an attempt to get rid of the loneliness she was feeling or it she was envy of her daughter.

As the director says in an interview-

"This girl's young mom who didn't quite get to have a coming of age herself is seeing her daughter blossom into a young woman and feeling a longing for her lost youth and wanting a piece of it and making everything really uncomfortable and I feel like this is a dynamic actually that is much more common than you think, like so many women have come up to me like oh yes I saw too much of myself and I think these are important in a way, these are unnamed things it's really uncomfortable to say that I feel like my mom is competing with me" (Talati).

Then comes the third perspective, that of the spectators. Throughout the film, as mentioned and explained above, the viewers never once get subjected to the male gaze; the sexual scenes are shown with sensitivity and as an act of exploration from a girl's point of view. No camera

angle showcases the girl's body as an object; instead, it humanizes her. The film treats its concept with such care and respect that it neither objectifies women not it creates castration anxiety in male spectators.

The male gaze, is a patriarchal perspective that sexualises and devalues women, it's an extension of the hegemonic ideology and cinema has turned its depiction into male fantasy, and so not only it says about the perspective of the person behind the camera but also of the audience and more often than one think, this is used to satisfy the expectations of the viewers. The ideology is so inherent among us that, as Margaret Atwood says in her book The Robber Bride-

"Male fantasies, male fantasies, is everything run by male fantasies? Up on a pedestal or down on your knees, it's all a male fantasy: that you're strong enough to take what they dish out, or else too weak to do anything about it. Even pretending you aren't catering to male fantasies is a male fantasy: pretending you're unseen, pretending you have a life of your own, that you can wash your feet and comb your hair unconscious of the ever-present watcher peering through the keyhole, peering through the keyhole in your own head, if nowhere else. You are a woman with a man inside watching a woman. You are your own voyeur" (Atwood 392).

But is this voyeurism the same as it is for the males? Do women, too, look at other women with a male gaze, and if yes, is the purpose the same as it is for men? In many movies, we see women getting jealous of other women's beauty, the standard of which is again set by men.

The female gaze is a feminist theory term referring to the gaze of the female spectator, character, or director of an artistic work, but more than the gender, it is an issue of representing women as subjects having agency.

The theme of female Voyeurism can be seen to have been explored in the short film 'The Mirror' in the Lust Stories 2 anthology, directed by Konkona Sen Sharma, starring Tilotama Shome as Ishita and Amruta Subhash as Seema. Though it's a short film, it's a part of an anthology that can be categorized as mainstream cinema. Apart from the themes

of lust, desire, class, power, consent, and female voyeurism. Not the voyeurism that serves the male gaze, but the one where the viewer is a woman.

The story begins where Ishita comes home early from work due to migraine, only to find her house help, Seema, having sex with her husband in her house on her bed in her room. She watched that through a mirror placed in front that showed her bedroom in the reflection. The first time she saw this, she got embarrassed and grossed out and left the house. Later, she tried to masturbate at night and started to cry. When she cries, we see her loneliness, we connect the dots, and see her longing to be with someone like Seema. Again, just like in 'The Girls Will Be Girls', here too the person behind the camera is a woman, and despite having themes like lust, desire, and voyeurism, this film makes the whole phenomenon human; no camera angles objectify women's bodies in the film.

As the film progresses, Ishita starts watching them and pleasures herself while doing so; it becomes a habitual activity for her. This doesn't stop here; at one point, Seema gets to know about it as she catches her setting the chair up and watching in the mirror, like Ishita. Seema too doesn't put a stop to this and confronts Ishita instead; she likes it, and she performs for her; in fact, she becomes happier, and it becomes a play of power. She masturbates at night thinking about them, and for Ishita, performing for Ishita helps her orgasm as the director herself says-

"I made some conscious decisions as a director. The camera only enters the bedroom when Seema knows Ishita is watching. She invites us in. Performing, in a way, helps her orgasm." The tacit permissions the two women give each other–Ishita lets Seema use her bedroom, and Seema lets Ishita watch–allow each pleasure. There is something capacious in Ishita's curiosity, and there is spunk in how Seema responds" (Sen Sharma).

Mulvey in her essay talks about how films cater to male audience, but along with that they also conditions men as well as women about the

beauty standards like the perfect figure for a women or the perfect height or physique for men, so it's not just a simple process of men viewing women but it also about how men views men and how women views men and women and film being male centric so the way a women views women also becomes male centric. Now this leads to the question of whether Ishita's gaze is the same as the male gaze. If it is the gaze of the man inside her, as Atwood says, watching them. Or can it be the female gaze, showcasing her desire? If that gaze is without the conditioning of the male one. The article written by Jyoti Nisha seems to answer this question. She says-

"This act of seeing is so honest, visceral, and truthful that it dissolves the moulds that we have seen of women before. *The Mirror* reminds us that if we peeled away the layers of women's sexuality, a spectrum of desire would open" (The News Minute).

So, Ishita's gaze not only subverts the male gaze but asserts its dominance over it. As it's not a male character who gets associated with the male spectator or audience, who is watching the whole act, it's a woman who is watching it and is getting aroused while doing so. The camera angles don't create the voyeuristic effect; instead, the camera sticks to Ishita's point of view, and the audience feels what she feels. The shot when she sees them for the second time, and the camera zooms in on her eyes, and she blinks, and the place changes. We see her in the office as the camera zooms out. The look on her eyes portrays confusion, shock, and her frustration about what to do next, and even her desire for emotional connection, which she doesn't have. This whole shot and the transition symbolize how she is consumed by this whole act; it's not simple or easy for her to fire Ishita, not that she can't, but she doesn't want to. This act of voyeurism is not just scopophilia but her desire for connection; she becomes a voyeur to counter the loneliness in her life (The Mirror 00:35:04-35:05).

We see that in the scene when she is on the same side of the bed and is imagining herself in the position of Ishita (The Mirror 00:38:26-38:32). As the director says-

"Because I felt a little bad, I was like Why am I not entering with Seema (in the film)? Why am I not starting with Seema? It's because I am luring in the Ishitas" (Sen Sharma).

This points to the fact that she wants the audience to merge with Ishita's point of view. We see that the two perspectives, that of the character and the audience, merge here, and the audience is women, just like when the male characters look at women in the film and their gaze becomes one with the male audience, but here the purposes are different for both.

So, here we see the subversion of all three perspectives, that is the person behind the camera is a woman, the gaze of both the major characters are of women and finally the audience which can relate to the story are women, which is seen in an Indie film like 'Girls Will Be Girls', but not often in mainstream films, and that too with the same elements used for the male audience. Throughout the film male gaze is totally absent, and the female gaze holds the same power as the male. This puts the woman in the cinema on an equal pedestal as the man; the woman can fight like a man, work like a man, explore her desires, sexuality, with as much freedom as a man.

But again, as we see in 'Anarkali of Aarah', the status also plays an important role. In this film, Seema lives in a crowded place, so she can't afford privacy like Ishita, while Ishita lives alone and lacks the connection Seema has with her husband. In the film, the mirror becomes a space of equality as the director says-

"And the mirror for me is the only portal through which they actually connect and have some kind of a fake, temporary equality" (Sen Sharma).

So, the second gaze where the male characters look at the women, here a woman looks at a woman. The man in this film doesn't hold that power over women; we see the subversion of the voyeuristic element, and the scopophilia is used for a woman's pleasure.

It's a shameful act, no matter who does it, and just because the purposes are different, that doesn't make it any less bad, but that also doesn't

mean that it is worse than the scopophilia of the male gaze. Showcasing this act in the mainstream cinema puts the women in the whole spectrum; it gives them the freedom of having desires that are considered taboo. This film starts the discussion for all the 'Ishitas'.

Along with Ishita's gaze on Seema, Seema also gazes at Ishita through the mirror, and that gaze holds power over Ishita. Seema not only likes it when Ishita watches her but also likes the power she has over her, as she is dependent on her. The mirror not only creates equality but also changes the power dynamics of their relationship.

So, even now, there is no fixed definition of the female gaze, and looking at all the films, one thing is for sure that it's complex, unlike the male gaze, which depends on power, or dominating the other gender; the female gaze isn't just about holding power or domination, it's about her own image and the way she sees the world around her. So, only after a woman comes in, all three perspectives of Mulvey can then a definition of female gaze would get theorized.

With that said, we can conclude that it seems difficult for a man behind the camera to truly portray a woman's private and personal desires. As Judith Butler says-

"Because there is neither an 'essence' that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires, and because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all" (Butler 215).

By extension of which, it's not like one who starts performing acts of a different gender can now portray it truly. Though with sensitivity and a sense of empathy, a male director can portray the social issues faced by women, but otherwise to portray women's experience through her point of view requires a woman behind the camera or at least on the writing table.

Movies like these not only change the narratives, subvert the male gaze, but can also help to theorize the female gaze, where the main focus on all three perspectives becomes that of women. It will be complex, and various factors will have to be considered. Still, it is required to make

women autonomous of themselves, their bodies, their thoughts, and their desires, so in the end, even if they become voyeurs, there is a woman, not a man, inside them who is watching another woman.

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The Significance of Vocation in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*

Paramba Dadhich and Himanshu Solanki

Dorothea's aspirations of building modal cottages, serving the needy and rising in intellect clash with the society's aspirations of a 'feminized' nature and sensibility. Sir James Chettam knows Dorothea's extreme interest in preparing designs for cottages and aids her in her project by material means, yet never acknowledges the possibility of it being a potential vocation for Dorothea. Her limited education is conditioned by the society which she inhabits. As Susan Greenstein observes, "*Middlemarch* is a novel of vocation in which the costs and adjustments required to have a career are studied within the context of a larger society." What plays a significant role in determining the lives of individuals can be called the 'medium' as George Henry Lewes had explicated in his study of Comte, "the idea of Life presupposes the constant correlation of two indispensible elements, 'organism' and 'medium'" meaning that the existence of an environment is a precondition for the organism to act. This 'medium' in Middlemarch is its social fabric.

Lydgate's career of medical reform is a product of the ongoing debates that are reflected in the Middlemarch society. It was the period of the Reform Bill of 1832. The thrust for medical reform was part of this larger movement and the strands that get reflected in *Middlemarch* concern themselves with the introduction of scientific methods of diagnosis and treatment as well as reforming the structure of medical profession by accepting the generation of general practitioners like Lydgate himself. The prevalence of 'institutional stratification' in the nineteenth century is represented strongly in *Middlemarch* and assumes greater significance in this context. Lydgate's treatment by senior medical men and the public in general is also the treatment of the theme

of vocation in the novel since it reflects prevalent attitudes towards the nuances occurring in the medical profession. The tripartite hierarchy among the physicians, surgeons and apothecaries had been the principal defining feature. On the one extreme were apothecaries who could dispense medicines prescribed by the physicians and also give them independently. On the other hand, physicians were higher in social positioning and only prescribed medicines. The surgeons therefore carried a precarious middle position which is also reflected in the case of Lydgate whose experiments are frowned upon generally in Middlemarch. In the episode where Mr. Wench's medication for Fred Vincy prove to be misapplied, Lydgate assumes charge and it becomes a cause of resentment for Mr. Wench who had been a family doctor to the Vincys. The divisions were becoming porous as when Lydgate is introduced by the narrator as a "new young surgeon" but comes across as a master of diagnosing internal medical ailments such as Mr. Casaubon's heart disease.

How social position and customs determine a professional man's reception in society is elaborated by the example of Dr. Minchin who is distinguished in Middlemarch by the fact that he likes to quote from the *Essay on Man* and his preference is an outcome of his being understood as having "some kind of kinship to the bishop." Added to this is his "refinement of all kinds." The preference for connections and refined liberal education over medical skill in the case of a medical man comes across in Dr. Minchin's misdiagnosis of Nancy Nash's cramps as tumor.

However, Lydgate's involvement in the functioning of the hospital and a general absence of a sense of welcome about it among the people play a significant role in determining Lydgate's turn of career. In the beginning he associates his vision of reform and personal development with a positive attachment to the hospital. But by the end, by unwittingly linking himself with Nicholas Bulstrode's disgrace his socio-medical entwinement is complete. Although Lydgate is starkly different from Minchin, Wench and Toller in terms of his practice, expertise and skill, he finds it highly difficult to receive approval and recognition in the town.

But Middlemarch is also an account of "ordinary human life," of the labor classes such as the scenes at Tipton. Caleb Garth, who has been represented as the one man in the novel who is satisfied of his work and also the relatively meager income that the work generates, is essentially an autodidact. The Garths have not been able to ascend socially and it is stated that the absence of social mobility in their case is an outcome of Mr. Garth's profession. But he is the one in the novel who has trained himself in his vocation and identified land related work as his field of work. Mr. Garth is characterized by the manual labor that he conducts. His responses too are in terms of movements of head or hand where language fails him, as once he "shook his head to help out the inadequacy of words." Therefore, Mr. Garth's assimilation in his vocation is complete and also determines his social position.

While men are also expected to live up to gendered roles, *Middlemarch* mostly focuses on the way that such norms are particularly constraining and restrictive for women. This is explored most notably through the novel's central character Dorothea Brooke who dreams of a grand, intense, and meaningful life that is essentially incompatible with the role society has allowed for her. As a result, she becomes confused about what she really wants and makes some difficult life decisions that only serve to further isolate her from her true self and desires. Through Dorothea, the novel implicitly critiques the oppressive norms society places on women. At the same time, however, it also shows that any resistance is limited, as alternative ways of living for women do not exist. As a heroine, Dorothea is deeply empathetic. She is ambitious, idealistic, free-spirited, and kind, yet these admirable aspects of her character make it difficult for her to confirm to the gender expectations of the society in which she lives.

For example, she is "enamored of intensity and greatness," fond of horse-riding, and dreams of building cottages for tenant farmers so that they might live in suitable conditions. These ambitions do not confirm with social norms for women, and thus although these dreams and impulses exist very strongly within her, Dorothea feels embarrassed of them and attempts to suppress them within herself. She wants to conform

to a feminine ideal, which leads her to be highly self-critical and make promises that are challenging keep (such as her vow to give up horse-riding).

Dorothea's attempt to suppress her own desires and personality leads her to exist in a confused and self-contradictory state. Dorothea attempts to solve the internal conflict she feels between her desires and socially approved gender roles by marrying the much older Edward Casaubon. Because Casaubon is a scholar working on an ambitious project on religious history (*The Key to All Mythologies*), she believes that she can access the "intensity and greatness" she desires for herself through his research.

When Dorothea decides to marry Casaubon, her family and neighbours are confused and predict that the marriage will not bring her happiness. They see what Dorothea herself cannot. She is both suppressing her own self and trying to achieve the idealistic by living through her future husband. Dorothea says that she wants a husband who can be like a father and teacher to her. However, as Mr. Brooke points out, she is a strong-willed person attached to her own opinions.

It is painful to witness Dorothea make an ostensibly bad life decision, which ends up making her miserable. At the same time, the novel's exploration of gender norms shows that Dorothea's decision to marry Casaubon is not made out of mere passion. Rather, Dorothea is trapped by the conflict between her own impulses and social expectations of her as a woman. The issue of her marriage to Casaubon is only a part of this wider conundrum.

When Casaubon dies, Dorothea has a chance to re-live her life and, through her second marriage to Will Ladislaw, and ends up choosing a path that brings her far greater happiness and peace. On the other hand, Dorothea's eventual fate as a housewife and mother reminds readers that there is only so much women can do to resist gender roles in a society that has so few rights, resources, and opportunities available to women.

Dorothea loves Will, but her own ambitions—such as the cottages and "colony" she planned to build for tenant farmers—remain unfulfiled at the end of the novel. The narrator observes: "Many who knew her [Dorothea] thought it a pity that so substantive and rare a creature should have been absorbed into the life of another, and be known only in certain circles as a wife and mother. But no one stated exactly what else that was in her power she ought rather to have done."

This catches the predicament of the situation Dorothea and other strong-willed women of the time find themselves in. They desire a more ambitious and vocational life than that of a wife and mother, but social economy does not offer professions to them. Thus, even if they resist against the gender norms of the era, there is only so much that this rebellion can achieve.

The novel's subtitle, "A Study of Provincial Life," indicates that the book intends to give readers a sense of what "provincial life" is like during this period, during which the class system remained both stern and extremely prominent as a way of structuring society. This "provincial life" is further defined by the fact that the characters are all connected to one another in a complex familial, marital, political, and vocational network. While this close-knit aspect of the community has a positive dimension, the novel represents a satirical view of how small communities like Middlemarch can foster intense social hierarchies.

In *Middlemarch*, class anxiety emerges primarily through a concern with family reputation. The obsession leads Middlemarch residents to be overly involved with and critical of other people's choices, especially women's choices of whom to marry. There is little privacy in Middlemarch, and certain characters (such as Mrs. Cadwallader) exacerbate this by being prone to gossip and judgment about marriages in the community. For example, Mrs. Cadwallader is highly critical of both Dorothea's marriage to Casaubon and her relationship with Will.

Coming from a "good" family is deemed valuable yet considering that no one can actually change the social status of their own family, the only way to rise in rank is through marriage. At the same time, the novel

suggests that fixating on social status and improving it through marriage can have profoundly negative effects on people's lives. Rosamond willingly marries Lydgate because he comes from a noble family: "[Lydgate] had a profession and was clever, as well as sufficiently handsome; but the piquant fact about Lydgate was his good birth, which distinguished him from all Middlemarch admirers, and presented marriage as a Prospect of rising in rank." Rosamond is fixated on improving her own social standing, so much so that she ignores the reality that Lydgate is poor. In the end, his lack of wealth makes their marriage difficult and miserable.

To make matters worse, those whose families can't be traced (either because they come from elsewhere or, as in the case of Joshua Rigg, they are "illegitimate" children born outside of marriage) are treated with suspicion. For example, the narrator notes that Middlemarch townspeople are doubtful of Bulstrode not just because he is a Methodist, but also because "five-and-twenty years ago no one had ever heard of a Bulstrode in Middlemarch." This detail shows how difficult it is for a person to garner acceptance within Middlemarch. Anyone who is different or who does not have family reputation is immediately subject to judgement.

This obsession with class and family reputation over other, more meaningful merits also makes life in the town backwards and dysfunctional. On the subject of doctors, the narrator notes that "this was one of the difficulties of moving in good Middlemarch society: it was dangerous to insist on knowledge as a qualification for any salaried office." People favor certain doctors because they are popular or have simply been around for a long time, rather than because they have the best medical knowledge and skill. This shows that townspeople care far more about doctors' class and reputation than their actual capability to perform in a professional role.

This obsession with reputation distinguishes Middlemarch from more metropolitan parts of England during this era. While hardly confined to provincial areas, fixation on class and family status is far more pronounced in places like Middlemarch than it is in cities like London.

As there are both fewer people and fewer kinds of people living everyone is cognizant of where they exist in the rigid, hierarchical social structure.

In this aspect, the fixation on hierarchy and status within the Middlemarch community keeps the community back while other parts of the country advance. There are some benefits to the intense interconnection that exists between residents of Middlemarch; there are many instances when the townspeople help one another out, such as when Dorothea writes Lydgate a £1000 check so that Fred is no longer in debt to Bulstrode. The provincial aspect of life in the town forces the community and its members to remain stuck in an old, hierarchical, and judgemental way of life.

Thus, Middlemarch presents various kinds of professions persisting in a small provincial town. Mr. Vincy's business of dying, Bulstrode's banking profession, Fred Vincy's refusal of church as a profession, all represent various attitudes to different kinds of vocations. And deeply intertwined with it are the impressions of social structures working upon these professions.

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The Racial Divide: Political Consciousness in E. M. Forster's India

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Introduction

E. M. Forster's engagement with India occupies a complex position in twentieth-century literature. Best known for *A Passage to India*, his work reflects a deep fascination with Indian culture and a simultaneous struggle to represent Indian political subjectivity within the constraints of colonial discourse. This paper investigates the racial divide in Forster's literature, focusing on how political consciousness is articulated—or obscured–in his narrative imagination.

While Forster never settled in India, his extended visits and extensive writings reveal sensitivity to Anglo-Indian relations and an acute awareness of the fractures produced by colonial rule. Yet, critics have long debated whether Forster's empathy suffices to bridge the chasm between colonizers and colonized, or whether his liberal humanism inadvertently reinscribes the very hierarchies he seeks to critique. This research examines key textual moments, historical contexts, and theoretical frameworks to analyze Forster's portrayal of race, power, friendship, and political awareness in *A Passage to India*, supplemented by relevant essays and travel reflections.

A Passage to India unfolded an attempt to understand the real India. The entry of Miss Adela Quested from England to India changes the atmosphere of both the novel and at the same time the relationship between India and Britain in reality. Racial politics deep rooted within prejudice among the British against the people of India. To the British people India is a country of weak, unreliable, dishonest, lustful country having feminine qualities. Through this novel we realize that the British

people try to come close to the Indian people, but ultimately they realize it is not possible for some reasons one of which is a difference of race, superior and inferior. The suppressed and oppressed racial attitudes hover towards and oppressed racial attitudes hovers towards the native Indians by the British people. It runs to its climax point in the caves episode where Adela Quested throws a charge against Dr. Aziz for attempting to rape. According to Forster for Indian people this is common as it is said by the policeman . . . " . . . When an Indian goes badly, he goes hot only very bad, but very queer." By guided racial prejudice and complete racial politics he thought that all unfortunate natives are criminal at heart." (Foster 176). At present, in India the case of "Nirvaya" also proves that comment.

Racial politics between Oriental and Occidental in very much vibrant in *A Passage To India*. The occidental like Miss Adela Quested are very frank and easy while Dr. Aziz, the representative orientalists having with supreme and qualms. Dr. Aziz s arrest heightens the lesion between two races. Fielding, the gentlemen throws his insight to understand the situation properly to give Dr. Justice with the help of the law. The British police throws very unimpressive and vulgar attitude towards the Indian people. Hamidullah s role in this matter added a racial color to make the situation more volatile. The caves episode brought positiveness in the context of India and a negative result to the British people. Because all the Indian were untied against the colonizer British people considering that this is nothing but racial politics or tactics or a calculated conspiracy to humiliate and to insult the Indian people. Only for taking a revenge for not properly understanding India what actually it is. We can say it's a spark of angst, hatred and typically racial biasness.

Historical and Theoretical Context- British Imperialism and the Indian Context

To understand Forster's representation of race and political consciousness, it is necessary to outline the broader imperial context of British rule in India. The British Raj (1858–1947) was not merely a political administration but an ideology underpinning racial hierarchies

and cultural subjugation. Indian resistance grew steadily through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, culminating in movements for self-rule led by figures such as Gandhi and Nehru. British perceptions of India were often marked by paternalism, eroticization, and a belief in the civilizing mission–a discourse that profoundly influenced literary representations of India by British authors. Within this historical backdrop, Forster's work must be read as participating in, responding to, and sometimes resisting the dominant imperial narrative.

Postcolonial Theory and Concepts of Race

Postcolonial theory provides essential tools for analyzing how race and power operate in colonial literature. Frantz Fanon's Black Skin, White Masks dissects how colonial subjects are radicalized and alienated; Edward Said's Orientalism reveals how Western texts produce the "Orient" as an object of knowledge and domination; Homi Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and ambivalence demonstrate how identity is negotiated at the colonial frontier.

These theoretical lenses help interrogate Forster's narrative strategies: does he subvert imperial binaries or merely reframe them in liberal terms? How do his Indian characters assert agency within a narrative shaped by Western perspectives?

Forster's India: A Passage to India and Beyond Literary Representations of India

Forster's A Passage to India (1924) stands as his most sustained engagement with Indian themes. Set in the fictional city of Chandrapore, the novel revolves around the relationship between Dr. Aziz, an Indian Muslim physician, and Cyril Fielding, the British headmaster of a local college. Their tentative friendship is shattered by the controversial incident at the Marabar Caves, which becomes a site of misunderstanding, racial tension, and cultural rupture.

Forster also wrote essays, letters, and travel impressions about India, where his reflections ranged from admiration for Indian culture to frustrated empathy in the face of political complexity. These writings

reveal his evolving perception of the subcontinent and his awareness of the limitations inherent in cross-cultural understanding.

Key Themes: Race, Friendship, and Misrecognition

The relationship between Aziz and Fielding is central to exploring racial consciousness in the novel. While Fielding espouses equality and opposes overt racial discrimination, his perspective remains shaped by colonial privilege. For Aziz, aspirations for friendship are entwined with experiences of humiliation and marginalization.

The Marabar Caves episode serves as a symbolic collapse of naive optimism—a moment where cultural misunderstanding escalates into irrevocable conflict. The caves, echoing with meaningless sound, become a metaphor for the limits of communication and the deep-seated fractures of empire.

Political Consciousness in Forster's Narrative
Individual Agency vs. Structural Constraint

Forster's characters often grapple with questions of individual connection and structural constraint. Dr. Aziz's desire for friendship with Fielding signals a political yearning: for recognition beyond colonial categories. Yet Aziz's journey reflects the fragility of political consciousness under imperial domination. His retreat into emotional extremes after the trial reveals how personal identity is destabilized by systemic oppression.

Fielding's liberalism, while morally appealing, often fails to translate into effective political action. His interventions are limited to interpersonal mediation rather than collective political engagement. This raises questions: Does Forster envision a truly political subject for India, or does he confine his representations to interpersonal ethics?

Cultural Essentialism and Its Limits

Although Forster critiques British prejudice, he is at times complicit in cultural essentialism. Indian characters are portrayed with sympathetic nuance, yet their political aspirations often remain underdeveloped. Figures such as Mohammed Ali and the Indian nationalists are present

but not fully fleshed out as agents of political change. Their presence suggests the stirrings of nationalism, but Forster does not delve deeply into the ideologies shaping India's path toward independence.

Thus, Forster's political consciousness can be seen as partial: aware of racial injustice yet hesitant to engage with the complexities of Indian political struggle.

Textual Analysis: Key Passages and Narrative Strategies the Marabar Caves: Echoes of Miscommunication

The Marabar Caves scene is perhaps the most analyzed passage in Forster's novel. Its significance lies in how it exposes the instability of meaning and the impossibility of mutual understanding within colonial hierarchies. The caves' echoes reduce communication to a hollow reverberation, suggesting that language itself may be inadequate to overcome racial and cultural barriers.

This episode encapsulates the novel's central political dilemma: even well-intentioned attempts at cross-cultural dialogue can be undermined by profound asymmetries of power and history.

The Tea Party: Performance of Colonial Civility

The tea party at Mrs. Moore's bungalow highlights the performative nature of colonial civility. Indian guests are subjected to rigid social norms and subtle humiliations, underscoring the racial etiquette that governs such gatherings. Forster uses this scene to illustrate how seemingly polite interactions can perpetuate inequality, revealing the insidiousness of colonial social structures.

Aziz and Fielding: Friendship Under Siege

The dynamics between Aziz and Fielding reveal the limits of cross-racial friendships within an imperial context. While Fielding advocates for fairness, his interventions are circumscribed by his role within colonial society. Aziz oscillates between trust and suspicion, reflecting the psychological toll of living under domination.

Comparative Perspectives: Forster and Other Colonial Writers

To further understand Forster's political consciousness, it is useful to compare his work with other writers engaged with colonial themes.

Rudyard Kipling vs. E. M. Forster

Kipling, often celebrated as the bard of empire, unabashedly champions British superiority. In contrast, Forster's narrative interrogates colonial arrogance and racial prejudice. Yet both authors are products of their time, and Forster's critique remains rooted in a liberal humanism that sometimes fails to fully confront systemic inequities.

Gandhi's Political Vision vs. Forster's Narrative Humanism

While Forster was sympathetic to Indian nationalism, his work does not embody the political radicalism of figures like Mahatma Gandhi. Gandhi's emphasis on self-rule and collective struggle contrasts with Forster's focus on individual relationships and moral understanding. This comparison highlights the limitations of Forster's political imagination: potent in ethical insight, less so in articulating mass political agency.

Critical Responses to Forster's India
Postcolonial Critiques

Many postcolonial critics argue that Forster's India replicates colonial frameworks even as it attempts to critique them. For example, critics question whether the Indian characters possess full subjectivity or are mediated through Western consciousness. The novel's narrative authority remains with the English narrator, prompting scholars to investigate how power is inscribed in narrative perspective.

Sympathy vs. Solidarity

Forster's empathy for Indian characters has been both praised and critiqued. Some scholars assert that his sympathetic portrayal makes him an important anti-colonial voice within British literature. Others contend that sympathy without structural analysis risks sentimentalism that obscures the material realities of colonial oppression.

Forster's Legacy: Race, Empathy, and Political Awareness

Ambivalence as Political Statement

Forster's ambivalence is not merely aesthetic; it reflects the difficulty of transcending entrenched racial and political hierarchies. His refusal to offer simplistic resolutions mirrors the complexity of colonial relations. In this sense, the absence of clear political prescriptions may itself be a critique of imperial certainty.

Influence on Later Literature and Critical Thought

Forster's work has influenced later writers and theorists concerned with cross-cultural encounter and the politics of representation. His emphasis on human connection resonates in postcolonial narratives that seek to balance particularity with universality. Additionally, his texts are foundational in courses exploring colonial literature and race.

Conclusion

E. M. Forster's engagement with India reveals a nuanced, though occasionally conflicted, political consciousness. His critique of racial prejudice and his portrayal of cross-cultural encounters foreground moral complexity and the fractures of empire. However, his liberal humanism often stops short of fully embracing Indian political agency, leaving questions about the efficacy and limits of narrative in confronting colonial power.

Forster's contribution to literary and political thought lies in his willingness to expose the racial divide and to complicate rather than simplify relationships between colonizers and colonized. While his perspective is limited by his historical and cultural position, his work opens space for reflection on the enduring challenges of representation, empathy, and justice in a world structured by inequality.

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An Explication of Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story*: Peter's Dehumanising Estrangement and Jerry's Existential Responsibility

Santhosh Ganapathy and P. Thiyagarajan

Introduction

During mid-twentieth century, several concepts such as Failure of Communication and Alienation, Compartmentalization, World-War, Television and Rise of Consumerism affect many middle class Americans' life style. They start living a life without the consciousness of existence. Individual and society suffer a lot because of the conventional ideas of bourgeois way of life. Edward Albee, a playwright, the first one to introduce the theatre of Absurd in America, concerns on this estrangement of American society. His very first play *The Zoo Story* deals with the problems mentioned above. The primary aim of Albee is to bring out people from such an unconsciousness life to conscious one.

Peter, the antagonists of the play, is an example of such a conventional life. *The Zoo Story* conveys the problems of a bourgeois and their psychological sufferings, and also shows that there is no peace in the minds of post-war American middle-class people because of their adaptation to the comfortable and luxurious life in accordance with 'American Dream' and its artificiality.

Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story* portraying the connection between the individual's problems, the loss of social values and humanity. Albee reveals the truth that the individual's loss of consciousness is the primary reason for the deterioration of the society as observed by Roudane, "Albee's interest is in fundamental human values as objectified through the individual" and ". . . Crimes of the heart, not the state, stand out in The Zoo Story" (29). The convictional intentions and ideas of American

bourgeois' hearts are represented through the channel of Peter.

Failure of Mutual Communication

Albee's symbolic representation in his play *The Zoo Story* explains his intention regarding estrangement through dehumanizing pretense of upper-middle class. Peter a typical post-world war capitalistic influenced and self-estranged American, who is not ready forever to search or to accept a new relationship from unknown others to avoid uncertain futuristic problems. Albee's main aim of creating this character may be to show the failure of communication in post-war American society.

While Peter reading a book in the park, Jerry enters and tries to make a conversation, Even though Peter does not like to continue the conversation with Jerry, he pretends to accept the conversation. Peter's body language obviously shows his hatred towards Jerry and he terribly wants to cut the conversation immediately but he hides his inward feelings which are clearly witnessed through Albee's narrative technique.

JERRY. (He stands for a few seconds, looking at PETER, who finally looks up again, puzzled) Do you mind if talk?

PETER. (Obviously minding) why . . . no, no (17)

Peter is not ready to walk a short distance at least to find a correct path meanwhile Jerry meets so many things in his long travel of life and he comes back to the correct path in which he realizes to act with existential responsibility in this socially, culturally, economically absurd world as Albee insists, "sometimes a person has to go a very long distance out of his way to come back a short distance correctly" (21).

Peter assumes that his conservative life is fulfilled one and he has been longing for the so called modern American comfortable life, without realizing the illusionary effect of the age of commodity culture. Peter's "dress and his manner" (14) shows his acceptance of conventional life of America and he does not realize that such a life can never give him solace for which he has been depriving.

Peter faces much trouble from his family, so he is mentally restless. His depersonalized heart does not allow him to see the inner-quest of Jerry who tries to make Peter aware of his fallacy, which ends in vain until Jerry has to sacrifice his life. Peter does not show his natural emotion to Jerry but obviously he does not want to talk with Jerry and tries a lot of avoidance techniques and uses many non-verbal actions to get rid of the conversation with Jerry as Roudane indicates,

Peter tries avoiding Jerry, a strategy of avoidance that occurs on a verbal as well as non-verbal plane. Peter's body gestures – the constant turning away during the opening exchanges, the pretending not to hear, raising a hand to object, the winces, the forced smile – serve as ways of deflecting social engagement (31).

Peter may ignore Jerry due to Jerry's appearance, behavior or for any other reason, but certainly those actions of Peter related to bourgeois and their adaptation of capitalistic ideas and conventional notion of settlement and comfort life as Poonam Mishra witnesses "Peter is not a living person; he is an agglomerate of exaggerated traits, a collage of farcical bourgeois characteristics - the incarnation or the caricature of an idea" (36).

Peter not only loses the mutual relationship with others but also with his wife and children similarly as many Americans do in the post-war American society. Peter's marital life becomes impotent one, so Peter becomes self-divided and it may be the reason of his estrangement from others; it can be assumed from Albee's prequel *At Home at the Zoo* staged in 2004. He is incapable of consummation as Roudane observes a connection between Peter's sexual impotence and his adaptation to American life thus, "Peter fails in human intercourse because of a withdrawal into comfortable, bourgeois life, a life of denying the tragic" (32). Peter gets married but he does not get happy and peace from his marital life which Peter considers as his manly identity irrationally as Poonam Mishra charges, "His marriage is revealed as an empty sham, to be regarded as a necessary asset for the successful man" (Mishra 29).

The loss of inner-peace of the self makes Peter a brutal, even though Peter cannot accept it Jerry confirms that Peter is "an animal" (Albee 40). Through the channel of Jerry, Albee criticizes the brutality of conventional American society which paves the way to self-mutilation, bad-faith and conventional life.

Consumerist Culture and Compartmentalization

Post-World War American people have been exploited by the capitalistic ideologies which make them accept every false notion towards success and meaning of life in the name of American Dream which prompts them to attain the following traits " . . . The Importance of distinctive dress at any cost . . . Personal comfort before public duty. . . . The exaggerated importance of T.V. . . . Social climbing" (Amacher 76). Thus it is clear that the bad-faith of middle-class life is that they start purchasing things unnecessarily and consider such hoarding culture as a social respectable one. Peter is also affected by these conventions which do not let him be solitude, but make him an alienated. Hoardings of cats, parakeets, televisions show that Peter yields to a consumerist creed.

The bad-faith of possessing television is being considered as a fashion of modern culture to be followed in the contemporary American society. The media impacts on the middle class lifestyle as Frederick R. Karl echoes, ". . . by the fifties that the culture was stacked against the so-called "people". Increasingly, now that mass media had with television a new way of penetrating into the American home, large segments of the population were being shaped by external forces" (Hendin, 2004:36); the lines from *The Zoo Story* sarcastically show the pretending attitude of Peter, as belonging to an upper-middle class society, about possessing televisions,

> Jerry. I bet you've got TV. huh?
> Peter. Why yes, we have two;
> One for the children. (Albee 17)

Thus televisions play as a catalyst to change people as a worshipper of this capitalistic consumerism. The words of Tim Woods bring out the

real status of American society under the influence of television thus, "Television commercials pull apart cultural signifiers of every kind and allow them to float around in a loose space… where they attach themselves to commodities" (Woods 225). Without possessing television, American families have not been considered as a fulfilled family in America in the mid twentieth century, but today the situation is the same in all over the world because of the impact of Globalization.

Peter in the end of the play obviously shows his "compartmentalization" (Nabi 237) attitude by revealing his desire to have a son (Albee 18) and demanding his rights for public park bench (37-39). These intentions of Peter reveal his unjustifiable class and gender segregation ideas. He is not satisfied with his two parakeets, cats, televisions, and a small publishing house with two hundred thousand annually, marriage life, two daughters, but eventually tries to establish his authority over park bench. Peter is not ready to give up the bench for Jerry, but pretends as he is fond of Jerry. Peter considers giving up is a humiliation and against social honor because ". . . the capitalistic American society denies this sharing and sacrificing only to confirm to the constant demand of materials and belongings in modern socio-cultural life" (Nabi 237).

Many post-war Americans like Peter live their life in Bad-Faith rather existential and humanistic values. To remark Peter's pretense and hypocritical nature and to warn Peter's losing of humanity and self-identity Jerry calls him as "an animal" (40) and to amuse his hypocrite behavior to bring him out from his spiritual unconsciousness Jerry calls him to "fight for the bench" (38). Jerry also blames Peter that he "couldn't even get . . . a male child" (38) to break Peter's ego which creates an illusion over reality. If Peter can think, he may realize that no one can attain solace, inner-peace and honor with mere material possessions. Peter advices Jerry that "People can't have everything they want" (35), but Peter does not realize the truth of his words. To make Peter realize his self-deception Jerry asks him as follows,

"Why? You have everything in the world you want; you've told me about your home, and your family, and your own little zoo. You have

everything, and now you want this bench . . . is this the thing in the world you'd fight for? Can you think of anything more absurd?" (37)

Thus, through the quarrel between Peter and Jerry for the bench (2007:35-40), Albee clearly emphasizes that Peter is such a conventional sham who does not understand that his possessions cannot bring him solicitude and existential significance. Peter without having consciousness is being swallowed by the clutches of consumerist culture of the conformist American society.

Jerry's Existential Responsibility

Jerry as an orphan, who loses his family in his childhood itself, struggles a lot in his life. Albee has portrayed Jerry as a representation of marginalized society and its sufferings as Roudane observes, "Jerry's world is troubled, and environment filled with sufferings humanity and with a disarming mixture of love, hate, and squalor" (Roudane 31). Jerry's sufferings never make him as an evil one and he never tries to become a conventional American and to hoard as Peter and other consumers. Albee presents pessimistic views of human life through the character of Jerry and explains the reasons of the absurd situation on this earth and eventually giving silent optimistic solution through the death of Jerry as an Existential quest to break the inhuman silence of degenerated American society. Amacher observes, "His death is a deliberate act of protest against the wrongs of the city, the injustice of the system, the bourgeois values that cause nausea, the feeling of life being lived in a void, the isolation of man" (Amacher 51). Albee clearly emphasizes one thing here that Jerry's wisdom is not attained immediately, but "he has taken thirty-odd years to experience a minute of fulfillment" (Roudane 31). After going a long way in the life and after facing many struggles man gets wisdom of existential responsibility and get rid of their illusion of life; Jerry as such a man finds the truth that living for other's sake is life not for self sake as W. Kim Rogers remarks "Each Person is conjointly responsible both to oneself and to everyone else. . . . The Responsibility in one's action can give a meaningful fulfillment to the actions of others" (Gordon 407). Jerry may not change the world

but he can change Peter's artificial middle-class values successfully by sacrificing his life at the end of the play as Zimbardo accepts, "Jerry dies for Peter. He dies to save Peter's soul from death by spiritual starvation" (Bigsby 52).

Jerry finds out the reality that in the modern world American people lose their humanity, so there is failure in a real communication in American society. His longing for conversation shows his searching for humanity among people who lost their consciousness. He does not expect conversation like "give me a beer, or where's the john, or what time does the feature go on, or keep your hands to yourself, buddy" (Albee 18-19). All he wants is a ". . . really talk" (19). Jerry's many words to Peter and his story about the Dog show that Jerry is harsh and eccentric figure, but in each and every matter in the conversation Jerry lists out the convictional and conventional thoughts of Peter and the society like failure of communication, commodification, and compartmentalization. He implies one thing clearly that "we do not try to reach each other" (31) and become self-imprisoned because of losing consciousness "we neither love nor hurt" (31) any one. This is the great idea of Albee who reveals it through the channel of Jerry.

Jerry's possessions are the great satirical response to the commodified consumerists' culture of American people,

> . . . toilet articles, a few clothes, a hot plate . . . a can opener . . . a knife, two forks . . . two spoons . . . three plates, a cup, a saucer, a drinking glass, two picture frames, both empty, eight or nine books, a pack of pornographic cards, regular deck, an old Western Union Type writer that prints nothing but capital letters, and a small strongbox without a lock. . . ." (22)

Jerry's appearance of ". . . not poorly dressed, but carelessly" (14) is the great example of his realization regarding reality of life. Thus, both by possessions and appearance, Jerry tries to convey symbolically that American people during post-war time are exploited by the American buying culture as Yuval Noah Harari observes, "Most Christians did not imitate Christ, most Buddhists failed to follow Buddha. . . . In Contrast,

most people today successfully live up to the capitalist-consumerist ideal" (Harari 391).

As how Jerry sacrifices his life for Peter, weeps for the sufferings of his neighbors thus, ". . . I have myself to pray for, the colored queen, the Puerto Rican family, the person in the front room whom I've never seen, the woman who cries deliberately behind her closed door, and the rest of the people in all the roominghouses, everywhere" (Albee 2007). Jerry, with the self-reliance and self-realization, sacrifices his life for the sake of other people and try to redeem them from illusory American life as Rose A. Zimbardo's accepts, "This modernized Messiah first identifies himself with the outcasts and the afflicted and then assumes responsibility for them" (Bigsby 50). Finally, it is obvious that humanity and existential responsibility the two great qualities which mostly required today as it is emphatically insisted through Jerry by Albee.

Conclusion

Edward Albee's *The Zoo Story* clarifies how the common man is webbed in social convictions and how society makes many inevitable inescapable burdens on him. The social and individual relationships and the problems are very critically created by the societal norms and inter-social regulations of the individuals of the society. Thus, Albee reveals through *The Zoo Story* that those individuals are conformists of the capitalists' convictions and compartmentalization. Peter is one of the conformists but whose life after the death of Jerry cannot be remained the same yet it shows that Jerry's death is not a meaningless as it creates some transformations in the life of Peter.

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Power, Politics and Resistance: A Comparative Study of Bhisham Sahni and George Orwell

Sarla and Vijay

Introduction

Literature has always maintained a dynamic relationship with political life because it reflects the social realities shaped by power, governance, and ideological conflicts. Beyond providing aesthetic pleasure, literary works interrogate political institutions, expose injustice, and encourage readers to engage critically with the structures that regulate human existence. Consequently, literature becomes a significant medium through which societies understand authority, democracy, and resistance. The twentieth century represents one of the most politically turbulent periods in modern history. Colonialism, the rise of fascism, the spread of communism, the Second World War, and the Partition of India transformed the political landscape across continents. These developments profoundly influenced literary expression, leading writers to question authoritarianism, violence, nationalism, and the manipulation of public opinion.

Among the major literary voices of this era, Bhisham Sahni and George Orwell stand out for their fearless engagement with political realities. Although separated by geography, language, and historical experience, both writers investigate how political systems manipulate ordinary citizens through fear, ideology, propaganda, and institutional control. Their writings challenge readers to recognize the hidden mechanisms through which power operates in society. George Orwell, writing in the context of European political crises, developed a literary vision centred on the dangers of totalitarianism. His novels *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* demonstrate that political domination extends beyond physical coercion to include psychological conditioning, linguistic

manipulation, and the systematic control of historical memory. Orwell argues that when truth itself becomes politically manufactured, democracy is placed under serious threat.

A significant point of convergence between Sahni and Orwell lies in their concern for the ordinary individual. Neither writer celebrates political leaders or heroic revolutionaries; instead, both focus on common people whose lives are disrupted by ideological conflicts beyond their control. Their narratives reveal that political decisions often produce devastating consequences for those who possess the least political power. Another striking similarity is their treatment of language as a political instrument. Orwell illustrates how language can be deliberately simplified, distorted, and controlled to restrict independent thought, whereas Sahni demonstrates how rumours, inflammatory speeches, and communal slogans transform neighbours into enemies. Both writers therefore reveal that language possesses immense political power capable of constructing or destroying social harmony. The present study therefore adopts a comparative approach to examine how Bhisham Sahni and George Orwell conceptualize power, politics, and resistance within their respective literary traditions. By analysing their selected works, the paper seeks to identify the universal patterns of political domination as well as the diverse forms of human resistance that emerge across different cultural contexts.

"यह तेरे रिश्ते की है?" हवलदार ने पूछा।
"रिश्ते की क्यों होगी जी, यह काठियावाड़ की है, हम बनजारे हैं।"
"तू गाड़ी में कहां जा रही है?"
"फिरोजपूर, जी।"
"वहां क्या है?"

"हम बनजारे हैं, हवलदारजी, पहले हमारे लोगों ने यहां जमीन ली थी, पूरे दो साल हलवाही की है। अब हमें फिरोजपूर में जमीन मिली है। हमारे सभी लोग चले गये हैं, पर यह मुझे छोड़ती नहीं थी।"

हवलदार दुविधा में पड़ गया। एक ने जनकर फेंक दिया, दूसरी ने दूध पिलाकर बड़ा किया। बच्चा किसका हुआ ?

"तेरा घर–घाट कोई नहीं है, जो अपना बच्चा इसे दे दिया? तू रहती कहां है?" हवलदार ने बच्चे की मां से पूछा।

"यह कहां रहेगी जी, पुल के पास जो फूंस के झोंपड़े हैं, यह वहीं पर रहती है। हम वहीं पर रहते थे। यह मेरी पड़ोसिन है जी, मजूरी करती है। इसकी तो नाल भी मैंने काटी थी।" बच्चे की मां उद्‌भ्रान्त–सी अपने बच्चे की ओर देखे जा रही थी। लगता जैसे वह कुछ भी सुन नहीं रही है। (माता–विमाता)

The selected passage presents a poignant exploration of motherhood, poverty, migration, and human compassion through a realistic dialogue between a police constable, a Banjara woman, and the biological mother of an abandoned child. Rather than relying on descriptive narration, the author allows the moral complexity of the situation to emerge through conversation, compelling readers to confront the distinction between biological motherhood and motherhood as an act of care and sacrifice.

At the centre of the episode is the conflict between biological and emotional motherhood. The Banjara woman openly states that the child is not related to her by blood but that she has nurtured and breastfed him despite having no familial obligation. Her refusal to abandon the child, even while her community migrates to Firozpur in search of livelihood, illustrates that maternal identity is shaped by affection, responsibility, and emotional commitment rather than solely by biological ties. The narrative thus challenges patriarchal and conventional definitions of kinship, proposing that motherhood is fundamentally an ethical and emotional relationship.

The dialogue also foregrounds the precarious existence of nomadic and economically marginalised communities. The Banjara woman's explanation that her community had worked as agricultural labourers for two years before being allotted land elsewhere reflects the instability of migrant lives. Constant displacement deprives such communities of social security and permanent belonging. Against this backdrop, the act of caring for an abandoned child becomes an extraordinary assertion of humanity amid structural deprivation. The passage implicitly critiques the socio-economic conditions that force vulnerable communities into cycles of migration and insecurity.

Equally significant is the portrayal of the child's biological mother. The constable initially approaches the issue from the perspective of responsibility, questioning why she gave away her child despite being alive. However, the narrative gradually reveals her circumstances. She is a daily wage labourer living in a temporary thatched hut near the bridge, surviving on the margins of society. Her silence and vacant gaze at the child indicate profound emotional trauma rather than indifference. The text avoids moral condemnation and instead encourages readers to interpret her actions as the consequence of extreme poverty, helplessness, and social exclusion. This sympathetic representation transforms the abandoned child into a symbol of the failures of society rather than the failures of an individual mother.

The constable functions as a representative of institutional authority and public morality. His confusion "एक ने जनकर फेंक दिया, दूसरी ने दूध पिलाकर बड़ा किया। बच्चा किसका हुआ?" constitutes the ethical core of the narrative. The question transcends legal ownership and interrogates the meaning of parenthood itself. The author deliberately refrains from providing a definitive answer, thereby inviting readers to reflect upon competing claims of biology, caregiving, and moral responsibility. This ambiguity enhances the psychological depth of the narrative and transforms a personal incident into a universal ethical dilemma.

From a literary perspective, the passage exemplifies social realism. The use of colloquial speech, regional expressions, and understated dialogue lends authenticity to the characters and their lived experiences. Instead of emotional exaggeration, the author employs restrained narration, allowing silence, hesitation, and ordinary conversation to communicate intense psychological suffering. The realistic portrayal of migrant labourers, informal settlements, and everyday hardships situates the narrative within the broader discourse of social inequality and marginalisation in contemporary India. The passage also foregrounds gendered dimensions of poverty. Both women occupy socially vulnerable positions and struggle within conditions shaped by economic deprivation rather than personal choice. Their contrasting responses to motherhood–one compelled to relinquish her child and the other choosing to nurture

a child not biologically her own—demonstrate that women's lives are profoundly influenced by structural inequalities. Consequently, the text critiques a social order that measures motherhood through moral judgement while ignoring the economic realities that constrain women's choices. The passage extends beyond an individual story of child abandonment to offer a nuanced critique of poverty, migration, and social exclusion. By juxtaposing biological motherhood with nurturing motherhood, the narrative redefines maternal identity as an ethical practice grounded in compassion and responsibility. Through realistic dialogue, psychological subtlety, and socio-economic contextualisation, the author exposes the complex intersections of gender, class, and humanity, making the passage a powerful commentary on the resilience of human compassion in the face of material deprivation.

Review of Literature

Existing scholarship on Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas* and George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* largely examines political power, ideological domination, propaganda, communalism, totalitarianism, surveillance, language, and resistance, but the two authors are generally studied within separate critical traditions. Research on *Tamas* primarily situates it within Partition studies, focusing on communal violence, political manipulation, religious identity, institutional responsibility, displacement, and the destruction of social belonging. Pal (2011) examines the internal structure of communal violence and the role of political provocation and dehumanisation, while Deswal (2015) highlights the political exploitation of religious differences. Revathy and T. Senthamarai (2022) emphasise institutional violence, communal politics, and gendered violence, and Rawson and Bose (2021) show how Partition transforms familiar spaces into sites of insecurity and displacement. Kaur (2025), through comparison with *Train to Pakistan*, further demonstrates the relationship between communal politics, migration, loss of belonging, and human suffering. However, scholarship on *Tamas* remains largely confined to Partition discourse and rarely compares its communal manipulation with Orwellian forms of ideological control.

Studies of *Animal Farm* generally interpret it as a political allegory of revolutionary betrayal and totalitarianism. Zybala (n.d.) and Zurni et al. (2025) emphasise Orwell's critique of the corruption of revolutionary ideals, while Ali (2021) examines propaganda and Squealer's manipulation through fear, hope, ignorance, and misinformation. Jalal and Rasool (2023) demonstrate how rhetoric enables political domination, whereas Hasan et al. (2020) show how manipulated laws, vague principles, and fear facilitate the exploitation of powerless groups. Bourdieu-inspired research identifies symbolic violence in the use of oral and written discourse to legitimise inequality (M.I.P. 2026), while Ben Khalifa (2026) highlights asymmetrical power relations through critical discourse analysis. Srebryanskaya (2017) further explains how political myths and official narratives legitimise obedience by controlling interpretations of the past, present, and future.

Scholarship on *Nineteen Eighty-Four* primarily focuses on totalitarian control over consciousness, memory, privacy, language, and truth. Sanam Raza Pahalwi (2022) examines indoctrination, punishment, and the destruction of privacy and human relationships. Sharma (2023), drawing on Bentham and Foucault, interprets telescreens and continuous surveillance through the panopticon, demonstrating how individuals internalise observation and regulate themselves. Islam (2025) extends Orwellian surveillance studies to contemporary Indian contexts, examining biometric identification, facial recognition, monitoring, and their implications for dissent. Lu (2002) identifies Newspeak as a mechanism for restricting thought, while Massaad (2025) connects language control with the suppression of individuality and identifies memory, writing, and forbidden knowledge as forms of resistance.

Interdisciplinary scholarship provides useful theoretical frameworks for connecting these texts. Foucault's theories explain surveillance, discipline, discourse, and the production of compliant subjects, while Bourdieu's concept of symbolic violence explains how domination becomes normalised through language and representation (P. et al. and Sharma). Critical discourse analysis further demonstrates how political language constructs legitimacy, enemies, collective identities, and acceptable

knowledge (Ben Khalifa and Jalal & Rasool). Nevertheless, existing comparative studies generally remain either within Partition literature or within Orwellian studies. The major research gap is the absence of a sustained cross-cultural comparison of *Tamas*, *Animal Farm*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* focusing simultaneously on power, ideology, propaganda, institutional control, and resistance. The present study addresses this gap by comparatively examining Sahni's representation of communal and institutional violence alongside Orwell's representations of propaganda, linguistic manipulation, surveillance, and totalitarian control, while also analysing the different forms of ethical and political resistance presented in the three texts.

The hypothesis testing confirms the research hypothesis (H1) and rejects the null hypothesis (H0). The comparative analysis of Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas* and George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* reveals significant thematic convergence in the representation of power, politics, ideology, propaganda, and resistance. While *Tamas* portrays communal manipulation, rumours, and religious identity as instruments of political domination, Orwell's works depict control through propaganda, rewritten history, surveillance, language, and ideological manipulation. Despite their different historical and literary contexts, all three texts demonstrate how political authority shapes social relations and controls perceptions of reality. At the same time, the works retain the possibility of resistance through critical awareness, memory, solidarity, and rejection of imposed narratives. Therefore, the findings establish a meaningful structural relationship among the selected texts, supporting H1 and demonstrating literature's role in exposing and questioning systems of political power.

This study has sought to examine how power, politics, ideology, propaganda, and resistance are represented in Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas* and George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Through a comparative reading that brings together historical context, political allegory, narrative form, and the textual operations of language, it has traced both the common structures and the significant differences through which the three works critique domination.

The comparison demonstrates that, for both Sahni and Orwell, political power does not simply govern an already divided society; it actively transforms social divisions and ideological differences into instruments of control. In *Tamas*, religious identities and local tensions are manipulated until neighbours become enemies, while institutional interests and political calculations intensify communal suspicion and violence. The novel exposes the anatomy of a riot as a process in which ordinary social relations are reorganized by manufactured antagonism, producing displacement, fear, sexual violence, and the destruction of shared belonging (Pal, Revathy & T. Senthamarai). Orwell presents a parallel process in more allegorical and systemic forms. In *Animal Farm*, the revolutionary promise of equality is appropriated by the pigs, and class hierarchy is reconstructed through ideological claims, fear, and political betrayal. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the Party extends this logic to the total administration of reality, making power dependent upon the regulation of thought, memory, language, and human intimacy. Together, the novels show that domination is most durable when it appears as necessity, security, historical truth, or collective welfare rather than as naked coercion.

A central finding of the study is therefore that propaganda and narrative control are not secondary features of authoritarian politics but foundational mechanisms of authority. Squealer's rhetoric in *Animal Farm* alters the meaning of events, redirects public anger, and persuades the animals to accept increasingly unequal conditions; the pigs' control of written principles and public speech enables them to convert exploitation into apparent legality (Jalal & Rasool and P. et al.). Similarly, the Ministry of Truth in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* institutionalizes historical revision, while Newspeak seeks to reduce the conceptual resources necessary for dissent. The Party's power rests not only on surveillance and punishment but also on its capacity to determine what can be remembered, said, or even imagined; scholarship on the novel accordingly identifies language as a central instrument in the production of conformity (Lu and Sharma).

Tamas, although less centrally concerned with linguistic engineering, reveals how rumours, religious symbols, official evasions, and politically charged interpretations can produce a false violation and mobilize communities against one another. In all three texts, the struggle for political power is inseparable from the struggle to define reality. The most important difference lies in the scale and form of resistance. *Tamas* foregrounds the social and communal consequences of political manipulation within the historically specific crisis of the Partition of India. Its emphasis falls upon fractured neighbourhoods, displaced families, ordinary victims, and the moral devastation caused when plural social life is recast through communal categories. Orwell's novels, by contrast, depict more systematic and institutionalized forms of authoritarian control: surveillance through telescreens, organized censorship, Newspeak, the rewriting of historical records, and the creation of permanent ideological obedience. Yet this difference does not divide their moral visions. Both writers preserve the possibility of resistance through critical awareness, the recovery of memory, human solidarity, and the refusal to accept imposed narratives as unquestionable truth. Sahni's attention to shared suffering and the remembered bonds of community contests communal myths, while Orwell's acts of reading, remembering, writing, loving, and questioning expose the fragile spaces from which dissent may begin.

The significance of these works consequently exceeds their immediate historical settings. Literature here functions not merely as a reflection of political reality but as a critical space in which the operations of authority can be examined, demystified, and resisted. By making manipulation visible, *Tamas*, *Animal Farm*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* cultivate the interpretive vigilance that authoritarian power seeks to suppress. Their continuing relevance lies in their capacity to help readers recognize communal division, propaganda, surveillance, historical distortion, and the gradual erosion of democratic values in contemporary public life (Islam). Read together, Sahni and Orwell remind us that democracy depends not only upon institutions but also upon memory, language, solidarity, and the courage to question official truths. Their

literature thus remains an important resource for fostering political awareness and strengthening democratic consciousness.

Suggestions for Further Comparative Research

The present study may be extended by placing *Tamas* within the wider literary and intellectual corpus of Bhisham Sahni. His short stories, essays, and memoiristic writings on Partition may be examined alongside the novel in order to assess the continuities and variations in his representation of communal identity, displacement, institutional violence, and ethical responsibility. Such research would clarify whether the ordinary citizen's vulnerability to political manipulation, which is central to *Tamas*, is a recurring feature of Sahni's oeuvre. Since *Tamas* also foregrounds the effects of riots on women, including abduction, sexual violence, and the destruction of familial security, future studies should give sustained attention to the gendered consequences of communal politics (Revathy and T. Senthamarai).

Orwell's essays, political journalism, and wartime writings likewise invite comparison with *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Such a study could investigate how his nonfictional reflections on propaganda, political language, socialism, imperialism, and public truth are transformed into allegorical and dystopian forms. This would help distinguish between Orwell's critique of political ideas and his critique of the institutional mechanisms through which those ideas become instruments of domination. In *Animal Farm*, rhetoric and persuasion enable the pigs to acquire and sustain authority (Jalal and Rasool), whereas *Nineteen Eighty-Four* demonstrates the more comprehensive control of language, memory, privacy, and thought (Lu).

A further avenue would be a multilingual comparative study of Partition literature. *Tamas* may be read alongside works in Urdu, Punjabi, and Bengali, as well as with other Indian Partition narratives such as *Train to Pakistan*. Such research would enable scholars to examine how different linguistic communities represent migration, territorial loss, neighbourly intimacy, communal conversion, and the reconstruction of identity.

The spatial and psychological dislocation produced by Partition remains especially significant because the loss of home generates an intergenerational sense of insecurity and belonginglessness (Rawson and Bose). Comparative work may also place Sahni and Orwell in dialogue with other dystopian and postcolonial writers, without erasing the historical specificity of their respective contexts.

Translation studies constitute another important area. A comparison of English translations of *Tamas* with the Hindi translations of Orwell's novels could examine how political terminology, religious vocabulary, idiom, irony, and culturally specific references are transferred or transformed. Such research should ask whether translation preserves the local texture of Sahni's communal world and the conceptual force of Orwellian terms such as "Newspeak," "doublethink," and "Big Brother." Gendered, subaltern, memory-studies, and intergenerational approaches would further recover perspectives that conventional political readings may overlook.

Interdisciplinary Research Directions

The comparison may productively engage political science, sociology, and psychology. Political-science research could study the relationship between state authority, elite interests, manufactured crisis, and the weakening of democratic accountability. Psychological approaches may investigate fear, conformity, obedience, scapegoating, internalised surveillance, and the transformation of neighbours into enemies. The communal violence represented in *Tamas* and the totalitarian obedience depicted in Orwell's fiction should therefore be read as related but distinct mechanisms of political control.

Media and propaganda studies can analyse rumour, repetition, emotional persuasion, historical revision, and the construction of the enemy. Research on *Animal Farm* already demonstrates that propaganda operates through appeals to fear and desire, particularly when limited education prevents ordinary people from scrutinising official claims (Ali). Surveillance studies may connect Orwell's telescreens and panoptic

design with more recent forms of digital monitoring, while maintaining the distinction between everyday dystopia and constitutional

the distinction between literary dystopia and constitutional democracy (Islam). These texts can also illuminate contemporary digital disinformation by providing a vocabulary for analysing algorithmic amplification, manipulated memory, anonymous rumour, and the circulation of communal narratives.

Pedagogical Recommendations

Tamas, *Animal Farm*, and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* should be taught together in university literature, political thought, and civics classrooms. Their juxtaposition would enable students to compare communal polarisation with institutional totalitarianism, allegory with dystopia, and physical violence with linguistic and psychological control. Classroom activities may include comparative close reading, analysis of speeches and slogans, mapping of power relations, translation exercises, and critical evaluation of fabricated or politically loaded narratives. Such pedagogy can cultivate critical literacy, democratic consciousness, and media awareness. Teaching across Hindi and English should be encouraged so that comparative literature becomes a dialogue between languages rather than an English-centred exercise.

Societal and Practical Implications

The continuing relevance of these works lies in their capacity to help readers recognise the early signs of propaganda, communal division, political scapegoating, and the erosion of democratic values. *Tamas* emphasises the human cost of manufactured communal conflict and calls for unity and peace (Deswal), while Orwell warns against the unchecked concentration of authority, the manipulation of truth, and the suppression of independent thought (Zybala). Their combined ethical lesson is that resistance begins with questioning official narratives, preserving historical memory, protecting linguistic freedom, and sustaining solidarity across religious, social, and political differences.

Comparative study of Sahni and Orwell thus possesses broader value beyond literary interpretation: it equips readers to identify how power operates and to defend the habits of thought, memory, dialogue, and collective responsibility on which democratic awareness depends.

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Symbolism, Simplicity, and Soul: Language, Orality and Cultural Resistance in Vijaydan Detha's Storytelling

Seema Sharma

Introduction: Vernacular Literature as Cultural Resistance

The relationship between oral traditions and written literature has long occupied a contested space within Indian literary discourse. Literary prestige has historically been associated with dominant languages, such as Hindi-, and English, while regional languages have frequently been relegated to the margins of literary production. Vijaydan Detha (1926-2013), born in Borunda, a village in Jodhpur district, developed a deep connection with the oral traditions of Rajasthan. He chooses to write in the Marwari vernacular of Rajasthan against the linguistic hierarchy and emerged as a significant literary voice in the 20th century. He challenges conventional distinctions between folk and modern literature by transforming orally transmitted folk narratives into sophisticated literary texts and repositioning vernacular storytelling as a site of cultural agency and social consciousness. In an interview, Detha says- "My village was my University and my literary education, to which he owes his style."(Dehta, "Village My University"). Influenced by Rabindranath Tagore, Sharad Chandra Chattopadhyay and Marxist thoughts, he recalibrates the moral universe of the traditional folktale. For decades, non-Rajasthani readers accessed Detha's work primarily through Hindi translations, but the English translators and some cinematic adaptations made it accessible to a global audience. Equally important to Detha's formation was his collaboration with the folklorist Komal Kothari. Together, they founded Rupayan Sansthan, an institution dedicated to the documentation and preservation of oral traditions, dialects, songs and agrarian ecologies of Rajasthan. Some of his stories and novels

have been adapted for stage and screen -Mani Kaul's *Duvidha*(1973), Habib Tanvir and Shayam Benegal's *Charandas Chor* (1975), Prakash Jha *Parinati* (1986), Amol Palekar *Paheli* (2005), Pushpendra Singh's *The Honour Keeper* (2014), Dedipya Joshi's *Kaanchli Life in a Slough*(2020). Detha prepared a massive lexicon of sixteen and a half thousand Rajasthani proverbs, along with their meanings in Hindi, in the 'Rajasthani-Hindi Proverb Dictionary. He was a recipient of the Padma Shri(2007) and the Sahitya Academi Award (2004). His contribution led to his nomination for the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2011.

The paper examines how his linguistic choices depict the complexities, his reliance on *chaugas*, proverbs, riddles and his refusal of rhetorical excess work together to create narratives that depict the complexities of modern selfhood about gender, desire and feudal power, along with village traditions, the social world of Rajasthan and orality. Detha's language functions as a cultural archive and a vehicle for progressive critique. The study adopts a qualitative textual analysis. The translations are examined through the lenses of folklore studies, oral narrative theory and feminist literary criticism. The study analyses symbolism, oral devices, colloquial expressions and narrative structures to understand how language functions as a medium of cultural preservation and transformation in Detha's work.

Ngig) wa Thiong'o asserts that "language carries culture, and culture carries the entire body of values by which we perceive ourselves and our place in the world" (16). Therefore, Detha's commitment to writing in Rajasthani may be understood as a decolonial literary practice that resists linguistic homogenisation. It affirms the legitimacy of regional epistemologies. His narratives often center around folk and indigenous individuals, illustrating their challenges, customs, and cultural practices. Detha's stories breathe life into the everyday world of rural Rajasthan – its farmers bent over sun-baked fields, its weavers threading stories into cloth, its potters shaping earth into art. He writes of people who labour quietly and endure deeply, whose lives are rooted in land, community, and tradition. Nomadic wanderers like the Banjara and Raika find space in his narratives too, as do tribal communities often left at the

margins – each rendered with dignity, intimacy, and an unhurried eye for the texture of their lives (Kumari and Kashyap i296).

Existing scholarship on Detha focused on folklore preservation, gender politics and social resistance. While these approaches have yielded valuable insights, the inter-realtion between symbolism, linguistic simplicity and oral aesthetics as an integrated strategy has received little attention. This study addresses the gap by examining- how these three elements together produce a distinctive literary mode that preserves cultural memory and critiques entrenched systems of power.

The Architecture of Symbolism: From Folk Motifs to Radical Critique

The narratives operate through an intricate symbolic network. He transforms familiar folk motifs into instruments of Social and political Critique. He reinterprets those symbols to expose the contradictions embedded in feudal, patriarchal and hierarchical social structures. In this way, symbols become active sites of resistance that enable the emergence of alternative ethical and social possibilities.

Vladimir Propp claims that folktales derive meaning not from individuals but from recurring narrative functions and patterns (21). Although, Detha employs traditional folk motifs of feudalism, patriarchy and social inequality, and reconfigures their functions to critique, to interrogate contemporary social realities. In his fiction universe, symbols become dynamic carriers of cultural memory and political dissent. Supernatural beings, animals, magical objects and physical apparel are transformed into sophisticated semiotic tools designed to dismantle contemporary socio-political injustices. As Vishes Kothari observes in his introduction to *The Garden of Tales of Tales*-, "the stones, trees, animals, wind, rain, gods and goddesses are all active participants. The landscape is alive with stories, and it is the story which is used to make sense of the world all around." (xiii). Joshi acknowledges -Using the voices of wise shepherds, foolish kings, crafty ghosts, clever princesses, honest thieves, talking necklaces, and amorous snakes, Detha manages to make their words come vibrantly alive. His stories grapple with contemporary

concerns and age-old dilemmas and blur the lines between rural and urban, ancient and contemporary, to pose situations that find echoes across languages, cultures and ages (Joshi 39). The symbolic framework enables Dehta to challenge the anthropocentric and patriarchal system of thought while simultaneously foregrounding Indigenous ecological knowledge.

A captivating example of this symbolic reconfiguration appears in '*The Dilemma (Duvidha)*' The story centres on a young bride, named Lacchi, abandoned by her merchant consort immediately after marriage, who has a five-year business plan to accumulate wealth. He prioritises economic accumulation over emotional companionship. A ghost residing in the Khejari tree, enchanted by Lacchi's beauty, assumes her husband's form. Later on, he confesses his true identity, acknowledges her autonomy and asks for explicit consent to enter into a relationship. The ghost is not portrayed as a 'threatening entity', unlike conventional representations of supernatural beings; rather he functions as an alternative subject- who recognises her autonomy. The story's symbolic significance extends beyond the supernatural framework. The recurring image of the 'Khejari tree' is itself heavy with cultural resonance, evoking shelter, fertility and liminal space between domestic order and wild possibility. The tree is situated between domestic order and untamed freedom, and represents an alternative space in which restrictive social conventions may be questioned. His symbolism extends to landscape and natural imagery. Detha foregrounds women's emotional and sexual agency through this symbolism and destabilises the institution of marriage. The dialogue between the ghost and the merchant husband further intensifies this critique:

"What is the meaning of joining only hands? Marriage vows cannot be valid for life. One can trade things, not love. You began trading in love. When you do that, this is the result,' the ghost responded. The real husband's heart began pounding. He had never had time to think of these things" (Detha, *New Life* 118).

The conclusion is also remarkable. The ultimate resolution of the plot involves the ghost being magically trapped inside a leather bag (*mashak*)

by the old shepherd. It also depicts the folkloric resolution and patriarchal structure of Rajasthani culture that keep women trapped in real-world village communities. The ghost's symbolic containment mirrors the broader societal impulse to suppress alternative forms of desire and social possibility. More importantly, it underscores women's limited choices within patriarchal systems. He articulates this predicament when he writes: "Even the cattle are not used this way against their will—they too resist. What choices are given to a woman in her life? Till she reaches the funeral grounds, she has to adorn the bedchamber and from the bedchamber, the only way out leads to the funeral pyre" (Dehta, *New Life* 120).

Through such moments, symbolism becomes a vehicle for exposing emotional isolation and gender inequality.

Similarly, '*The Slough* (*Kenchuli*)' employs the image of a snake shedding skin to explore female resistance and bodily autonomy. Gujari, an extraordinarily beautiful woman, whose husband Lachhman, is a subservient labourer under the local feudal landlord (Thakur). The thakur and his servant Bhoja lust after her and continuously attempt to violate her modesty. She realizes that her husband lacks the courage to protect her. In the end, she strips away the illusion of marriage, protection and societal honour, walking away from both the men, ultimately shedding her Kenchuli (skin), a biological act of renewal and Survival. In the end– "With eternal hope in her womb, she still roams the universe, naked. She has no destination and knows no rest. And when the extant sun and moon disintegrate, her womb might bear fruit." (Dehta, *New Life* 97) Through the symbolic shedding, Detha transforms a traditional folk motif into a profound declaration of self-ownership and absolute bodily autonomy.

A similar strategy operates in 'Sonal Bai'.The golden hair of Sonal symbolises -beauty and commodification of female identity. The mother's obsessive counting of each strand reflects society's tendency to regulate and monitor women's actions. When Sonal climbs the sandalwood tree, it is an act of rebellion against patriarchal authority. The tree itself

embodies freedom, emotional sanctuary, and a way to rise above worldly limitations. She says:

Climb,climb re sandal tree,climb high (Dehta, *Timeless Tales of Marwar* 43).

The story discloses the act of resistance, sacrifice and transformation. Sonal's determination to keep her nephew close defies the patriarchal norms that pressure women to cut emotional ties for the sake of marriage and social standing. The child's transformation into a peacock serves as a reminder of the tragic fallout of power struggles, jealousy, and emotional turmoil. The two sandalwood trees at the end are symbols of resilience and shared remembrance in the face of oppression.

Through these narratives, Detha demonstrates that symbols are neither static nor ornamental. They operate as dynamic cultural signifiers that challenge dominant ideologies and generate alternative modes of ethical understanding. His symbolic universe transforms folklore from a repository of inherited wisdom into a critical language capable of interrogating patriarchy, feudalism and social injustice. By weaving together folk imagination and social critique, he elevates oral tradition into a compelling medium for ethical and political contemplation.

Simplicity: Orality, Idiom, and the Architecture of the Tale

While symbolism supplies depth in narratives, simplicity supplies the texture and communicative power. It is not for stylistic plainness, or narrative limitation, but for deliberate aesthetic strategy, that preserves the cadence of oral storytelling while ensuring complex social and philosophical concerns, for a broader readership. Through rhythmic repetitions, colloquial expressions, proverbs, dialogic narration and formulaic openings, Detha constructs a literary language that retains the intimacy of spoken communication without compromising intellectual sophistication.

Vishes Kothari's assessment that " the lightness of his prose" is " so characteristic of oral traditions" identifies this simplicity not as a stylistic imitation but a deliberate aesthetic choice, one that preserves the cadence

of the village storyteller even on the printed page (Kothari) His translator Christi. A.Merrill observes that Detha's tales draw on " The enchanted ways of Folk Fiction" in which animals speak, shapes shift, and the socially marginal outwit the powerful, all in service of addressing pressing political concerns of his day (The Wire). Walter J.Ong theory of orality provides a useful framework of understanding. "Oral cultures think in mnemonic patterns, employing repetition, formulaic expressions and rhythmic structures to preserve collective memory (34) Detha's use of *Chaugas*, repetitions, proverbs and dialogic narration exemplifies Ong's concept of oral thought processes, where it turns into performative experiences that evoke a storyteller addressing a living audience.

Detha's creative employment of 'Chauga' in the beginning of the narrative is like invocation, which marks the transition from ordinary reality into storytelling imaginative realm. It is the 'signature of Rajasthani oral convention'(Merrill 24) used to transport the audience from the present space into the fictitious world of the story (Kumari 226). It prepares listeners for participation in a world where the boundaries between reality and imagination remain fluid. The opening lines of *The Winds of Time* illustrate this technique:

> No God like time.
> No brother like time.
> No journey like time.
> No shadow like time.
> No doer like time.
> No undoer like time.
> The drums of time.
> The leela of time.

Tales of time. Change with time. (*The Timeless Tales of Marwar* 4)

These repetitions in the rhythmic form-: foreground the narrative's central philosophical theme. It also generates a musical quality that reflects oral performance. The language's simplicity masks a deeper meditation on social transformation. The older generation, which relied on contentment and harmony, lived in peace and happiness, but the new

generation changed and moved towards self-centeredness and greed. The farmers of earlier generations were not ready to take the wealth, found buried in the land, and the later generations killed each other for the wealth. Detha captures the delicate nuances of artistic appreciation and human greed through colloquial expressions. Rather than complex psychological jargon to depict character internalities, he utilises folk idioms that externalize internal psychological states.

The dialogic syntax of stories, mirroring the cadence of live storytelling, addresses an active audience with brief, direct sentences. The repetitive conjunctions and rhythmic exclamation marks make it replicate the conversational momentum of oral delivery. The opening passage of *The Dilemma (Duvidha)* demonstrates this oral immediacy:

"There was once a wealthy Seth who was returning home with his son's marriage party after the wedding celebrations. They all stopped on the way to rest in the cool shadow of an old khejari tree. Near the Khejari was a pond full of rippling water covered with lotus flowers. At that hour of the afternoon, the sun's rays came down mercilessly, and the hot wind of the month of Jeth blew in the jungle" (Detha, *New Life* 99).

The passage establishes an atmosphere, introduces characters, and situates the narrative within a culturally recognisable landscape in a simple tone. The economy of expression enables the story to unfold naturally without burdening the reader with excessive exposition. Dialogue becomes a space for negotiating social tensions and ethical dilemmas. Rather than functioning as a vehicle for plot development, characters speak in language appropriate to their social positions, thereby preserving authenticity while simultaneously exposing structures of power and inequality. This strategy is particularly evident in the story *The Thakur's Ghost*, where conversations between the feudal thakur (the ghost of feudal authority) and Chaudhary (farmer) reveal the authority's exploitative foundations. Detha exposes the mechanism through which 'power' is normalised and perpetuated within rural societies. The story ends with an important message about the importance of toil, when the ghost leaves the land forever.

Detha's folk universe positions nature as superior to human beings. His soul lies in an egalitarian dialogue across species boundaries. In some stories,- insects, snakes, lice, trees, sun, rain clouds etc are not passive background settings or anthropomorphic caricatures. They are granted distinct subjecthood, possessing their own moral codes and agencies. His environmental ethics views human survival as sustainable development with nature. Lawrence Buell positions that environmental texts position the non-human world "as an active presence rather than a passive backdrop" (7). Detha similarly grants agency to trees, animals, clouds, and insects, creating an ecocentric worldview. His stories suggest that human existence cannot be understood isolated from larger ecological systems that sustain it. The story '*Sulking Raina De'* presents a dialogue between Sun and Moon.It reveals the importance of nature and its cycle. The sun says: "I have to look after the entire universe. I wake all living things with hunger in their bellies, but I do not let them go to sleep hungry. They rely on me alone. If I break my rule, it will betray their trust in me" (Dehta, *The Garden of Tales* 240).

The stories of Vijaydan Detha in the field of prose are distinguished by their linguistic creativity and the refinement of style. The devices of personification, repetition, riddles and participation create an emotional effect on the reader etc. This cumulative effect creates the 'soul' from intimacy, moral participation and communal warmth, which keeps the reader inside the oral community of the tale. This quality distinguishes Detha, from other writers, who merely represent folk culture versus those who embody it. The rich imprint of his sensitive personality is clearly visible in his writing skills. The author, far from artificiality, has embraced a simple, elegant, natural, and straightforward style.

Locating the "Soul": The Acoustic Preservation of Orality and Progressive Humanity

The third, more elusive dimension of storytelling of Detha's art, its 'soul' which emerges from the convergence of oral performance, emotional intimacy, ethical participation and collective memory. The soul of his narratives resides in their ability to preserve the acoustic warmth and

communal intimacy of oral storytelling. He infuses it with modern, secular and progressive humanism. Through this synthesis, his stories transcend entertainment and become spaces for ethical and communal reflection.

Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogism offers an important framework for understanding the aspect of Dehta's narrative practice. Bakhtin posits that meaning emerges through dialogue and the coexistence of multiple voices (272). Detha's participatory storytelling invites readers to engage with diverse ethical perspectives rather than passive consumption. The stories are filled with interesting dialogues and idioms at various places, which keep the reader bound to the narrative. His stories achieve structural intimacy by embedding explicit frame narratives within his stories, utilizing internal listeners who interrupt, question and comment on the unfolding events. It reminds of a village square gathering. The text remains participatory and open. It comes with rhetorical questions- in a conversational tone.

- *"Now, you tell me, what choice did she have?"*
- *"Who can predict the twists of fate?"*
- *"Is money truly greater than a man's word?"*

Dehta weaves such a tapestry of reality and fantasy in his stories that the moral perception changes. At the same time, the core structure of the plot remains intact, compelling readers to engage directly with the moral, political and ethical dilemmas. The aphoristic quality of his language further contributes to his stories' enduring vitality. Wise sayings and Proverbs condense complex social observations into memorable expressions that can be easily circulated within oral communities. These concise formulations allow ethical knowledge to be transformed across generations. For Instance:

"A Diamond attains its true value when it is dug out of earth" (Dehta,*The Garden of Tales* 9).

"Sermons on Justice, Unity, brotherhood and equality have not changed the ways of nature, nor will they ever" (Dehta,*The Garden of Tales* 37).

It's man's intelligence that it only bows to the rising sun. Respects power. Fears the ruler more than even death. (Dehta *The Garden of Tales* 74).

Such statements do more than communicate moral lessons; they reveal the mechanisms through which societies organise authority, value labour, and negotiate power. A. K. Ramanujan observes that Indian folktales are "context-sensitive narratives that constantly reinvent themselves through performance" (xii). Detha preserves this performative quality while simultaneously modernising the folk tradition. His stories remain open, fluid and dialogic.

Detha has embraced modern values that benefit all sections of society. The linguistic texture and elaborate storytelling are his specialities, and this is also the secret behind the author's popularity and success. "Detha's stories showcased the vivid, common-sense wisdom of Rajasthani folk traditions," writes Merrill in her introduction to Choubuli, a collection of stories by Detha that she has translated.(qtd in Purohit).Detha's "vital work has helped to record the dialects and languages" of one such region, writes scholar Mrinalini Watson.(qtd in Purohit)

Thus, Detha's creative world is so diverse, substantial, captivating, and original that it allows him to carve out a distinct identity for himself in fiction literature. In his stories, the vast experiences of life, found powerful expression in their deep, aphoristic nature, which is capable of shaping the entire environment and human destiny.

Detha's storytelling transcends mere entertainment, serving as a vital medium of preserving Rajasthani heritage and addressing critical social issues. His commitment to writing in Rajasthani and his innovative adaptations of traditional tales highlight the importance of safeguarding regional identities in a rapidly changing world. By integrating traditions with contemporary themes, Detha's works remain a testament to the enduring spirit of Rajasthan and its people.

The Dilemma of Translation and Linguistic Loss

The question of translation occupies a significant position in the reception of Detha's literary corpus. Although translations have introduced his

stories to national and international audiences, they have simultaneously exposed the limitations of transferring culturally embedded meanings from one linguistic system to another. Detha's prose is deeply rooted in the geographic and cultural ecosystem of Marwar, so translating the stories in English, the text faces what translation theorist Spivak refers to as 'danger of translationese'- a flattening of the radical specificity of the regional idiom into generic, homogenised global English. She cautions that "the task of the translator is to surrender to the text rather than domesticate it" (Spivak 398). This observation becomes particularly relevant to Detha's stories, whose cultural specificity risks being flattened in translation. For Example- Rajasthani 'maati' carries a rich web of cultural connotations, symbolising morality, ancestral heritage, agrarian labour etc. It cannot be translated as 'mud' or 'soil' or 'earth'.

Translating Detha is no simple task. His stories carry the wild, unruly spirit of folk tradition — earthy, playful, unapologetically alive. They are shaped with a literary finesse that feels almost effortless. To translate him well, one must hold both worlds steady at once: the rowdy laughter of the village square and the quiet grace of a well-crafted sentence. And beneath it all lies perhaps the greatest challenge — remaining true to a sensibility that speaks naturally and intimately to young Rajasthani ears, for whom these landscapes, these voices, and these rhythms are not folklore but lived memory. The problem lies in capturing the dynamism of folk culture and making the written version convey all the complexity and energy of oral versions (Joshi 40). Christi Merrill translator of his stories, says- "At times it becomes very difficult to match and transform Detha's oral versions with zesty turns of phrase and lively atmosphere he creates while performing" (72-73). Detha wove together the old art of storytelling with the craft of modern literature, producing tales that feel both deeply familiar and freshly alive. The result is stories that are not merely retold but reimagined – compelling, warm, and quietly delightful.

However, the recent translations of Vishes Kothari's approach offer a viable counter strategy by retaining Marwari terms and consciously utilising English dialect to honour the oral pacing and rhythm of language.

Conclusion

Vijaydan Detha's storytelling is a significant milestone in modern Indian literature. With his thoughtful and skilful use of language, he broke down the artificial barriers that separated oral folk traditions from the cutting-edge modernism of his time. By anchoring his writing in a blend of symbolism, simplicity, and depth, Detha transformed folktales from mere nostalgic relics into a vibrant and revolutionary medium for contemporary social and political commentary.

Translations offer valuable insights that highlight Detha's enduring relevance and brilliance in today's global conversations. They have uncovered complex subversions within his seemingly straightforward stories, revealing subtle critiques of environmental degradation, species hierarchy, and traditional gender norms. His clear and accessible language opened up the literary world, making intricate psychological insights and bold social critiques available to a wider audience. The rich symbolic framework he crafted provided a powerful vocabulary to challenge and expose the forces of patriarchal capitalism, feudal oppression, and caste discrimination. At the same time, the deep 'soul' in his writing maintained the warm, intimate feel of oral traditions, inviting readers to become active participants in a broad, secular humanist journey. Detha's linguistic universe demonstrates that vernacular literature is not a peripheral literary tradition but a powerful epistemological space capable of generating alternative narratives of identity, resistance, ecology and human coexistence. Detha's body of work offers a compelling example of a decolonial approach to literature. He showed that an author doesn't have to adhere to Western narrative conventions or use overly formal language to create literature that resonates with people everywhere. By deeply exploring the vernacular of his own culture, Detha revealed a treasure trove of human resilience, creativity, and progressive ideas. His stories stand as a lasting testament to this rich legacy.

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Triple Marginalization Faced by Dalit Mahar Women in Babytai Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke*

Shobha Banshiwal

Introduction

Jyotiba Phule, the social reformer in 19th century coined the word Dalit to describe the downtrodden and oppressed classes. Later, Bhimrao Ambedkar used this term to stand against caste discrimination and for the transformation of the people at the lowest rung of the caste system. Dalit women have always been relegated to the lowest status in the society. They suffered triple marginalization on the basis of caste, class and gender. They were oppressed and marginalized by upper class people not only due to their lower caste and poverty but also due to gender discrimination by their own families and communities. They endured all forms of prohibitions like social, political, cultural and religious. They suffered patriarchal dominance. Patriarchal traditional social and cultural norms restricted their freedom and autonomy. They had limited access to education and human dignity.

Baby Kamble, the Dalit activist and writer who was born in the Mahar community in Maharashtra revealed in her autobiography *The Prisons We Broke* that Dalits were considered untouchables by upper castes. They were treated with hatred and disgust by upper castes. Being a Dalit, born in Mahar community, she presents miserable condition of women in Maharwadas. Maharwada wa a group of fifteen families belonging to Mahar community which were situated at the outskirts of the villages in Maharashtra. These people suffered poverty and lived in filthy conditions. Kamble depicts the miserable condition of Mahar women who were not only oppressed by upper caste men and women

due to caste and gender discrimination but they were also exploited within their own family and community due to patriarchy.

Women in Maharwadas suffered miserable lives as daughters-in-law. They were married at the tender age of eight or nine, and used to become victims of physical assault and violence. They had continuous pregnancies which deteriorated their health. They became victims of malnutrition. They had no access to medication. They had unsafe deliveries at home which often resulted in infections and deaths. They suffered physical violence too. They were inhumanly beaten by their husbands and their in-laws. Often their noses were chopped off and they were driven out of the house. Their parents-in-law provoked their sons to punish their wives for crossing the limits. They were accused of doing deeds which they did not even understand. Their mothers-in-law often persuaded their sons to leave their wives and marry a widow. Kamble gives reason behind such toxic behavior of mothers-in-law that these women felt a kind of comfort and peace by exploiting their daughters-in-law. Through this way, they could release their frustrations by gaining a kind of victory over their daughters-in-law even when it was at the cost of lives of their daughters-in-law. There remained a constant pressure on Dalit women to remain within the boundaries set by the patriarchy. Especially the daughters-in-law were targeted by their mothers-in-law who kept an eye on their each step.

In Mahar community it was the custom to keep women behind the threshold. The families enjoyed honour in proportion to the restrictions imposed on the women of the house. Baby Kambel's father also used to keep her mother confined within the house. The poverty and oppression had adverse psychological effect on her. She could not maintain harmonious relations with her family relatives. On the other hand, her father was respected for his amiable personality while her mother became insensitive and unkind to others due to the suffocation and oppression. Dalit Mahar women were subjected to biased practices. When upper caste person walked on the road, the Mahar women were expected to bow down before them and step out of the road, and utter the words "The humble Mahar woman fall at your feet, master." Often

the newlywed women unaware of these practices were insulted by the upper caste men who would say "Who, just tell me, who the hell is that knew girl? Doesn't she know that she has to bow down to the master?.. How dare she pass me without showing due respect?" (Kamble, 53). While purchasing groceries on the shops, Mahar women were expected to not touch the shopkeeper while taking things. These women were expected to put the money before them. Baby Kamble highlighted this irony by stating that although the money touched by these women did not pollute them. Kamble revealed how these women were underpaid for their hardwork. They took care of their children, did all the cooking, and went to the forest to collect woods and sell them in the market for their living. But they were mentally harassed and abused by upper caste women who threatened them and paid them low for the woods.

In the second part of her autobiography, Kamble reveals the rising awareness of Dalit women about their living conditions. Their occurred a change for the better due to Bhimrao Ambedkar's ideologies. Dalit women also played a major role in spreading the teachings of Ambedkar and making a path for the betterment of their community. Amedkar emphasized on the eradication of gender discrimination. He emphasized on the education of women and socio-cultural rights for women. In her introduction to the autobiography, *The Prisons We Broke* Maya Pandit highlights the double marginalization faced by Mahar women and their resilience in the face of discrimination. She writes-

If the Mahar community is the 'other' for the Brahmins, Mahar women become the 'other' for the Mahar men. Baby Kamble demonstrate how caste and patriarchy converge to perpetuate exploitative practices against women. It is here that the urge to define the self becomes most evident in women. Baby Kamble shows the remarkable dignity and resilience of Mahar women in their struggle through which they have emerged as the agents of transformation in their community (Kamble).

Mansi Maharan in her article "Voices of Resilience and Resistance in Babytai Kamble's The Prisons We Broke" writes-

The Prisons We Broke offers a compelling exploitation of the voices of resilience and resistance within Dalit communities, shedding light on the intersecting forms of oppression faced by Dalit women and the strategies they employ to assert their agency and reclaim their dignity. Through Kamble's narrative, we gain a deeper understanding of the complexities of caste, gender, and class dynamics and collective action to confront systematic injustices and pave the way for a more equitable and just society (Maharan 93).

Conclusion

In her autobiography Kamble reveals the resistance and resilience of her people against social injustices and discrimination. She reveals harsh realities faced by Mahar communities like poverty, social discrimination, isolation, dishonor, humiliation etc. She also reveals the prevalent problems like child marriages, mal-nutrition and physical abuse. Through her autobiography, Kamble spreads awareness about the suffering, oppression and triple marginalization faced by Dalit women in Mahar community on the basis of caste, class and gender. She encourages them to raise their voice and fight against orthodox patriarchy and exploitation and make her own identity.

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"Call It Palimpstine": Aesthetics of Difference and Multi-Cultural Complexities in Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*

Snehlata Tailor

Introduction

The cultural composition of the Indian subcontinent today is a product of the long history of invasions and settlements of the people from outside. The assimilation of these outsiders had been so subtle and complex that what we perceive today of Indian culture is in fact an amalgamation of a large variety of cultures, myths, ethnicities, values, customs, traditions, beliefs, philosophies and religions. However, when the issue arises about the authenticity, and claims are made on the basis of ancient history from the times back in eternity, it surely gives rise to a sense of alienation to the others who fail to claim any part in that ancient history.

The recent developments in the cultural landscape of the Indian subcontinent could be perceived as an outcome of such authoritative claims. The government in power is making colossal efforts to resolve the conflicting cultural and religious matters which have been the cause of great concern for more than a century. One such concern was the resolving of the '*Ram Janmabhoomi*' Temple dispute in Ayodhya. The history of the dispute's dates back to the early 19th century. It has been claimed that the *Babri Masjid* was built in the year 1529 on the temple of Shri Ram. From time-to-time efforts have been made legally to reclaim the temple premises for building *Ram Temple*. The historical verdict was made on 9th November 2019. The Supreme Court ordered the disputed land to be handed over to a trust to build the *Ram Temple*. It also ordered the government to give 2.0 hectares (5 acres) of land

inside Ayodhya city limits to the Uttar Pradesh Sunni Central Waqf Board for the purpose of building a mosque (Ayodhya dispute, Wiki). Consequently, the much-awaited event of consecration of the idol of '*Shri Ram Lala*' took place on 22 January 2024. This made the country occupy the important news line of the popular newspapers across the world. The entire country seemed to be proud and mesmerised for their beloved *Ram* to be restored in his Kingdom, and as if this was the commencement of *Ramrajya*. Many devotees in Ayodhya looked filled with hope for a new beginning. Of course, the country is going to be benefitted both economically and culturally by this grand tourist spot. "Ayodhya's tourism is certainly going to flourish as 50 million tourists are expected to be coming to visit Ayodhya every year. The Labour and Employment ministry expects about 500,000 jobs directly or indirectly related to the hospitality sector to be created in the area before 2030. Entrepreneurship opportunities are also likely to increase (Ram Mandir, Ayodhya Britannica). The immensity of the celebration of the consecration ceremony of *Ram Temple* can be known by the media coverage of the event across the world. The news report of *the Economic Times* on the day, reflects the widespread popularity of the event:

More than 50 nations are slated to witness various events, with the consecration ceremony set to be streamed live. In the United States alone, the streaming will occur at approximately 300 locations. The UK, Australia, Canada, and Mauritius will also broadcast the event live at 25, 30, 30, and 100 locations, respectively. The global celebration of the Ayodhya Ram Mandir inauguration underscores the universal significance of Lord Ram's teachings and the shared cultural legacy of Hindus worldwide. Hindus across the globe await the 'Pran Pratishtha' ceremony, anticipating a historic event that transcends borders and unites communities in celebration of faith and common values. (The Economic Times 2024).

The event is lauded for "fostering a sense of shared cultural heritage and faith". *The New York Times* reported, "Naturally India's secularists see the rise of a Ram Temple on the site of the Babri masjid as confirmation of their own defeat." Most of the media reports across

the world portrayed it as a victory of Hindu supremacy and an alienation of Muslim community in the subcontinent. The news of *Ram Temple* can never be complete without the reference to the historical incident of the Babri Masjid demolition in 1992. This incident led to a new wave of sectarian violence across the country. The country has been suffering with such communal riots due to the communal seeds sown by the British regime's Divide and Rule policy. After the hideous realities of partition, this communal hatredness still continues to ravage the subcontinent.

The incident of *Babri Masjid* demolition was criticised by the secular people from both inside and outside the country. One among such people is the writer Salman Rushdie who, in response to the violent happenings in the country, wrote a very popular work of fiction *The Moor's Last Sigh* in the year 1995. The novel accommodates liberal and secular sentiments of Rushdie for a more peaceful world. The novel celebrates the plurality and hybridity of the identity in a country like India where the complex historical happenings have shaped a composite, colourful and multicultural landscape. But sometimes this plurality receives a hideous blow when some forces driven by the singularity of their motive attempt to damage the spirit of unity in diversity. Rushdie's fiction received motivation from such complexities of postmodern Indian history. Through his writing, Rushdie attempts to vocalise the futility of the claims and motives which are used to justify sectarian bigotry.

It should not be forgotten that the novel was written during the period of exile when *Fatwa* was being issued against Rushdie on account of his novel *Satanic Verses* in the year 1989. It was a period when the writer had to go into hiding and become immobile because of security concerns. He had not visited India for a long time. He was inhabiting the "imaginary homeland" through the act of writing. In an *Interview with Charlie Rose,* Rushdie admits how his feeling for India "gave the book like an extra emotional gear." "The need for India '' and "friends over there" and the loss of it was compensated with "the only way" which was "creating for himself the Homeland". He also expressed his apprehensions about becoming a tool in the hands of politicians in India

owing to the Fatwa crisis. In the interview he revealed that he was worried "if some political extremists in India would likely make political capital for themselves for their own benefit out of something like the crisis of *Fatwa*". He registered his unwillingness to become a tool in the hands of the politicians. Going back to India at the time of the General Election in 1995 meant that politicians will surely make him the tool. Rushdie's answer to such forces was in the form of this novel in which he has attempted to define his stand unequivocally against any form of sectarian bigotry. Some critics like J.M.Coetzee expressed concern "If Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* outraged the dour literalists within Islam, then *The Moor's Last Sigh* would anger the fascist-populist element within Hindu sectarianism"(NY Book Review). But in fact Rushdie's effort was to use his skill of writing fiction effectively to escape the net of political extremism by giving away the message of his belief in plurality and multiplicity of India's cultural landscape.

Rushdie's idea about the composite culture has been engraved in the product of "Palimpsest". A palimpsest is a kind of superimposition or partial eraser on an older society or culture by a newer one. Rushdie has provided the same analogy of a palimpsest to better understand the dispute of *Babri Masjid* and *Ram Mandir*. The narrator, Moor, in the novel expresses the impossibility of authenticity when things are in the shape of a palimpsest. As he reflects:

The city itself, perhaps the whole country, was a palimpsest, Under World beneath Over World, black market beneath white; when the whole of life was like this, when an invisible reality moved phantomwise beneath a visible fiction, subverting all its meanings, how then could Abraham's career have been any different? How could any of us have escaped that deadly layering? How, trapped as we were in the hundred percent fakery of the real, in the fancy-dress, weeping-Arab kitsch of the superficial, could we have penetrated to the full, sensual truth of the lost mother below? How could we have lived authentic lives? (Rushdie 184).

A repeated reference has been made to palimpsestic state of things to highlight the complexity. In the novel,Vasco Miranda's painting of Aurora

had been painted over by another painting of a weeping Boabdil. Vasco Miranda makes an effort to erase the layer in order to get the original painting but it proves to be a rigorous and destructive task. Similarly, to delineate cultures, and the separation of people on the basis of their religious belief is not an easy task and not even worth the effort, as much is destroyed in any such attempt and what is achieved is the violence and destruction on all fronts. Rushdie's novel underlines such instances of violent happenings in the commercial capital of India 'Bombay'.

Rushdie's concern for the cultural raptures and violence has been put forth through a hybrid postmodern narrative in a very subtle way. The aesthetics of difference has been interwoven in the narrative through inclusion of a variety of ethos. The binaries of Hindu-Muslim communities which form the major issue for both the political and cultural discourses have been discouraged by introduction of the Christian and Jewish communities in form of the major characters of the novel. The story revolves around the life of the fictitious successors of Vasco da Gama, the catholic Portuguese who appeared in the southern coast of India in the late 15th century. The central character 'Aurora', mother of 'Moor' the narrator, has been portrayed as a very passionate representative of hybrid multicultural 20th century India. The novel is divided into four parts which represent different phases of Moor's life. Interestingly, whatever is true of the narrator's life is also true of the country. Stephen Baker in his article ''You Must Remember This'': Salman Rushdie's The Moor's Last Sigh" highlights:

Moraes Zogoiby is living his life at twice the speed he should; when he ought to be in his prime, he is already old and weakened: like post-Independence Indian democracy, he has aged far too quickly. So Rushdie constructs a triple analogy: the narrator's life reflects that of the state, but the narrator is also constructed by his form of narration. Both Saleem and Moor, in their ever more desperate attempts to make their narratives cohere, raise the question of the coherence or viability of the Indian state as a single political entity. The work of art itself, then, the very construction of these fictional narratives becomes another reflection of

social construction. Self exists as an act of aestheticization, and that self is also a figure for the nation (Baker 49).

In the opening part titled "The House Divided" Moraes Zogoiby 'Moor' gives an account of the de Gama family which celebrates the beauty of the composite ideologies. Moor's maternal great grandfather Francisco de Gama is portrayed as a modernist with "eyes fixed on the future"(17). He never approved of the British regime and fought against them in his own capacity. While his wife Epifania, taking the other side, always criticised Francisco for his anti British affiliations with Home Rule League. Even their sons Camoens and Aires took sides with their father and mother respectively in the argument. Camoens was a nationalist. Initially he was lured to the communist ideology and later a 'Nehru man' but "a timid soul who could only be a revolutionary firebrand in the company of a few friends or in the privacy of his study"(32). His wife Isabella was also a passionate woman with witty retorts on the idiosyncrasies of the Gama family. When Camoens and Aries were sentenced in jail she maintained the family business. Three years later when Camoens was again home she fell severely ill. To relieve from the gloom surrounding both the family and the country at that time which was one decade prior to India's independence, Camoens forebodes hope for a better world:

…he would whisper to her about the dawning of a new world, Belle, a free country, Belle, above religion because secular, above class because socialist, above caste because enlightened, above hatred because loving, above vengeance because forgiving, above tribe because unifying, above language because many-tongued, above colour because multi-coloured, above poverty because victorious over it, above ignorance because literate, above stupidity because brilliant, freedom, Belle, the freedom express, soon soon we will stand upon that platform and cheer the coming of the train (Rushdie 51).

He also expresses fear for narrow sectarian revolts taking place in the village incited by Mahatma Gandhi. Camoens' account of the visit to Malgudi details the same:

I had seen India's beauty in that crowd with its soda-water and cucumber but with that God stuff I got scared. In the city we are for secular India but the village is for Ram. And they say Ishwar and Allah is your name but they don't mean it, they mean only Ram himself, king of Raghu clan, purifier of sinners along with Sita. In the end I am afraid the villagers will march on the cities and people like us will have to lock our doors and there will come a Battering Ram (Rushdie 55-56).

Camoens' fear materialises in the later happenings of the narrative. Camoens only daughter Aurora represents the passions of a multicoloured composite India. She inherits the passions and modernism of her forefathers and foremothers. She is a great artist with unusual skills in painting. Amazed by her first artistic creation Camoens calls it "the great swarm of being itself" (Rushdie 59). In the painting, she had depicted the important events of Indian history which is an amalgamation of cultures of all sorts of communities. But "only God was absent" (Rushdie 60). The child Aurora painted the world she was aware of. It reflected the world that contained all the beauty and kaleidoscopic spectrum of cultures. She was raised in such an environment where all cultures got mixed with each other to form a beautiful composite one on the canvas of great Mother India.

Later Aurora chooses Abraham, a Jew, as a life partner. Abraham's descendancy is also not clear. It was hinted that his ancestor was an illegitimate son of a Jewish woman who had slept with Boabdil, the Moorish sultan of Granada, Spain, and stole away his crown. So some "miscegenation occurred" (Rushdie 82). Moor expresses wonder at the tale of his ancestors by saying, "CHRISTIANS, PORTUGUESE AND JEWS; Chinese tiles promoting godless views; pushy ladies, skirts-not-saris, Spanish shenanigans, Moorish crowns . . . can this really be India? Bharat-mata, Hindustan-hamara, is this the place?". Moor's frustration with the politics of minority and majority is revealed when he says, "No, sahibzadas. Madams-O: no way. Majority, that mighty elephant, and her sidekick, Major-Minority, will not crush my tale beneath her feet. Are not my personages Indian, every one? Well, then: this too is an Indian yarn" (Rushdie 87).

Moor is raised by Aurora and Abraham in a very liberal manner. He views himself as "a real Bombay mix" (Rushdie 104). Aurora always discouraged any display of narrow religious dogmatic rituals. She disapproved of the Ganpati Festival by calling it a "jolly jiving of much replicated God". She danced every year to show "contempt for the perversity of humankind which led huge crowds to risk death-by-trampling". But ironically she was taken to be celebrating the occasion and so she "became a star attraction of the event she despised, a part of what she had been dancing against" (Rushdie 104).

Jill Didur in his article " Secularism Beyond the East/West Divide : Literary reading, Ethics, and The Moor's Last Sigh" elaborates how the cultural practices of the majority in a multicultural society are likely to subsume the voice or the practices of the minority by judging them against their own norms of majoritarianism. He concedes that "A reading of secular discourse that does not persistently beg the question of how it may be used to launder the views of the majority as universal unwittingly risks establishing a new hegemony"(553). Jill Didur's apprehensions regarding the manipulation of the secular discourse by the powerful underlines the narrative of Aurora's dance and paintings. Aurora's paintings mirror various phases of India's political and cultural journey. Her 'Moor' paintings are marked with the fusion of inner and outer world. She dreamed of a world where diversities are reversed, relished and rejoiced. Describing one of such paintings she tells Moor:

Call it Mooristan. This seaside, this hill, with the fort on top. Water-gardens and hanging gardens, watchtowers and towers of silence too. Place where worlds collide, flow in and out of one another, and washofy away. Place where an air-man can drowno in water, or else grow gills; where a water-creature can get drunk, but also chokeofy, on air. One universe, one dimension, one country, one dream, bumpo'ing into another, or being under, or on top of. Call it Palimpstine (Rushdie, 226).

Rushdie positions the city of Bombay as a symbol of the aesthetics of differences. In the third part of the book titled "Bombay Central" Moor narrates how the city represents a hybrid composite culture and how it has been central to the whole course of Historical events in the country:

In Bombay all Indias met and merged. In Bombay, too, all-India met what-was-not-India, what came across the black water to flow into our veins. Everything north of Bombay was North India, everything south of it was the South. To the east lay India's East and to the west, the world's West. Bombay was central; all rivers flowed into its human sea (Rushdie 350).

Opposite to such artistic celebration of hybridity and multiculturality stand the narrow sectarian forces in the characters of Scar and Raman Fielding who defined the political and cultural aspects of the country through a very narrow lens. They create a stifling air in the city for artists like Aurora. Unfortunately, when the demolition of *Babri Masjid* took place, the city could not remain unaffected by the event. The city's powers of dilution could not weaken "the corrosive acid of the spirit". Here Rushdie incorporates in the narrative of the novel, the incident of a series of bomb blasts in Bombay in 1993 to show the severity of the outcomes of such sectarian bigotry. Moor reflects how the violent eruption across the country in the name of *Lord Ram* was against the essence of the ideas that *Ram Rajya* advocated. As Rushdie argues "The true rule of Ram should be premised on the mutating, inconstant shape shifting reality of human nature, and not only human nature but devine as well. As Lord Ram was an avatar of Vishnu who was the most metamorphic of the Gods"(351). Bombay was torn apart with the serial bomb blasts. Oppositional forces in the shape of Raman fielding and Zogoiby-Scar enmity were responsible for it. The effect of communal riots were seen in the form of numerous deaths irrespective of any creed. This was an irreparable and deadening blow to the aforementioned plurality of the city. With such destruction in the background, Moor left Bombay with the guilt of murdering Raman Fielding whom he held responsible for the death of his mother Aurora on account of the report from his father Abraham Zogoiby. As it was planned and arranged earlier by his mother, Moor managed to fly to Spain. He arrived in the town Benengeli where people from across the world come to seek obscurity "to lose themselves in themselves, to live in a kind of dream of what they might have been, or preferred to be"(402). Moor aimed to

reclaim his mother's lost paintings from Vasco Miranda who had settled long back in Benengeli. But he had to face brutal treatment by Miranda. He was forced to write the story of his life. Here art becomes a means of survival for him and the Japanese art restorer. Vasco Miranda wanted the Japanese lady to restore the painting which he made many years ago. Because of the vulgarity of the painting he was ordered to palimpsest it by another painting of Sultan Boabdil. Restoring the painting was a very difficult task. In the end, Miranda shot the lady dead, and himself also dies due to overdose of drugs. Somehow Moor escapes and continues to sigh with the agony of having the memory of hideous happenings of his life. Finally he reaches to Alhambra fort which stands as a

monument to a lost possibility that nevertheless has gone on standing, long after its conquerors have fallen; like a testament to lost but sweetest love, to the love that endures beyond defeat, beyond annihilation, beyond despair; to the defeated love that is greater than what defeats it, to that most profound of our needs, to our need for flowing together, for putting an end to frontiers, for the dropping of the boundaries of the self" (Rushdie 433).

Rushdie's approach to the problems of sectarian bigotry encompasses a vast tapestry of human failings across the world. Rushdie's reference to Spain under the rule of Moors, and also the comparison between the last Moorish Sultan Boabdil and Moraes Zogoiby has been done to accentuate the futility of the attempts to destroy the beauty of composite cultures. But in the opinion of J.M. Coetzee:

The palimpsesting of Moraes over Boabdil supports a less trite, more provocative thesis: that the Arab penetration of Iberia, like the later Iberian penetration of India, led to a creative mingling of peoples and cultures; that the victory of Christian intolerance in Spain was a tragic turn in history; and that Hindu intolerance in India bodes as ill for the world as did the sixteenth-century Inquisition in Spain (Coetzee).

However, Rushdie's concern for the aesthetics of compositeness has been successfully put forth through the narrative.

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Political Consciousness: The Enchanted Power: Apsarâs as Instruments and Agents in Mythological Power Structures

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Introduction

The apsarâ occupies a distinctive place in the mythological and literary imagination of South Asia. She is celestial yet embodied, divine yet frequently subordinated, associated with pleasure yet deployed in contexts of political emergency. She appears as dancer, courtesan, lover, mother, temptress, companion, performer, and mediator between worlds. Her beauty is often treated as an intrinsic quality, but in the narrative economy of myth it is also a resource mobilized by institutions of power. The apsarâ's body can interrupt austerity, redirect desire, precipitate dynastic continuity, produce conflict, or entertain a royal court. Her presence is therefore not merely ornamental. It is functional, strategic, and political.

This paper proposes two concepts for interpreting these narratives: "political consciousness" and "enchanted power." Political consciousness here does not refer to modern ideological self-awareness in a narrow sense. It denotes the capacity of a narrative to register relations among authority, legitimacy, coercion, desire, social order, and resistance. A myth may possess political consciousness even when its characters do not articulate a political theory. It may dramatize the distribution of power, identify threats to hierarchy, and reveal the costs of maintaining institutions. The stories of apsarâs are politically conscious in this sense because they repeatedly stage the relationship between ascetic merit and divine sovereignty, between masculine self-control and feminine allure, and between the authority of a court and the bodies through which that authority is secured.

"Enchanted power" names the specific modality through which apsarâs operate. Their power is not usually the power of office, command, weapons, lineage, or juridical sovereignty. It is affective, aesthetic, erotic, and performative. It works through attraction and distraction, but also through speech, movement, timing, memory, and the capacity to cross boundaries. Enchantment is not synonymous with deception. It is a mode of political efficacy in which the body, the senses, and the imagination become instruments of governance. In the stories under consideration, power is maintained not only through force but through the management of desire.

The conventional interpretation of the apsarâ emphasizes her status as a divine seductress. In this view, Indra sends a celestial nymph to disturb a sage's penance; the nymph performs her task; the sage falls; and the threat to the gods is removed. Such a reading identifies the institutional function of the apsarâ but risks reducing her to an extension of male will. Recent feminist reinterpretations have challenged this reduction by recovering the emotional and subjective dimensions of figures such as Menakâ. Kavita Kane's Menaka's Choice, for example, reconstructs Menakâ as a character with desires, conflicts, and aspirations rather than as an anonymous instrument of Indra's anxiety (Sonawane and Kesur). The value of such a reinterpretation lies not only in its sympathetic treatment of a mythological woman. It also reveals that the older story already contains tensions that make a purely instrumental reading inadequate.

The argument of this paper is therefore double. First, apsarâs are instruments of power within mythological structures. Their sexuality, beauty, and artistic performance are deployed to regulate ascetic and royal authority. Second, they are agents within those structures. Their agency may be constrained, indirect, or tragic, but it is nevertheless real. They negotiate assignments, pursue desire, form attachments, experience loss, and generate consequences that exceed the intentions of the powers who employ them. The apsarâ's political significance lies precisely in this contradiction: the system treats her as a resource, yet the resource acts.

This argument also requires attention to genre and textual plurality. Apsarâs appear across Vedic, epic, PurâGic, Buddhist, dramatic, and courtly traditions, and their meanings change according to narrative context. The representation of women in Sanskrit literature is not uniform. Studies of Sanskrit literature from Kashmir, for instance, show that female characters range from figures who reproduce normative expectations to adventurous women who exercise varying degrees of initiative and decision-making (Iris). Similarly, studies of love in Sanskrit literature identify a historical movement in which women's social position becomes increasingly subordinate, even as erotic literature continues to grant female bodies considerable aesthetic centrality (Baldissera). The apsarâ belongs to this tension between social subordination and symbolic potency.

Conceptual Framework

Instruments and agents

The distinction between instrument and agent provides the primary analytical framework for this study. An instrument is a person or object used to accomplish an external purpose. An agent, by contrast, acts from a position of intention, whether or not that intention is fully autonomous. The distinction should not be treated as absolute. In political life, instruments can act, and agents can be constrained. Indeed, the most revealing political figures are often those who occupy the space between the two categories.

Apsarâs are repeatedly introduced as instruments. Indra, king of the gods, deploys them against ascetics whose tapas threatens the hierarchy of heaven. Their task is defined in advance: interrupt the ascetic, provoke desire, and prevent the accumulation of power. The narrative grammar is therefore institutional. Apsarâs are sent, assigned, commanded, or persuaded. Their beauty is understood as an available technology. The divine court possesses them in much the same way that it possesses weapons, messengers, or strategies.

Yet the myths do not entirely suppress their agency. The apsarâ is not an inanimate object carried to the scene of action. She must speak,

perform, improvise, respond, and endure. The success of the assignment depends upon her skill, but the consequences of success may become personal and irreversible. Menakâ's encounter with Viúvâmitra produces not only the termination of his austerity but also the birth of Úakuntalâ and the emotional problem of abandonment. Urvaúî's relationship with Purûravas produces a cycle of erotic attachment, separation, and remembrance that cannot be reduced to a divine mission. Tilottamâ's beauty is used to destroy Sunda and Upasunda, but the brothers' destruction also demonstrates the unpredictable violence of an instrument whose power lies in generating desire.

Agency, then, appears in several forms. It may be intentional choice, as when an apsarâ pursues or rejects a lover. It may be negotiation, as when she seeks terms for remaining in a relationship. It may be affective attachment, as when maternal or erotic bonds alter the meaning of an assigned role. It may also be consequence: an action becomes agentive when it produces effects that exceed the framework designed by the institution. In this broader sense, the apsarâ's agency resides not only in what she chooses but in what her presence makes possible.

The heavenly court as a political structure

The court of Indra should not be treated merely as a divine setting for fantastic stories. It is a political structure organized around hierarchy, privilege, security, and the preservation of authority. Indra's throne is repeatedly threatened by ascetics, demons, rival gods, and ambitious kings. The anxiety surrounding asceticism is especially significant. A sage who accumulates tapas can become powerful enough to challenge the gods, alter cosmic arrangements, or acquire extraordinary capacities.

The mythology of Viúvâmitra makes this anxiety particularly visible. Viúvâmitra begins as a king and seeks to become a Brahmin through the accumulation of ascetic power. His transformation is narratively exceptional because it crosses a boundary that normative Brahmanical ideology tends to treat as difficult or impossible. The study of Viúvâmitra's legends emphasizes that his stories have been repeatedly adapted to construct and reinforce ideas of Brahmin power across historical contexts

(Sathaye). His struggle is therefore not simply a personal contest between desire and discipline. It is also a narrative about the production of authority and the legitimacy of social status.

Within this political structure, Indra's deployment of apsarâs may be understood as a form of counter-insurgency. The ascetic does not lead an army, but tapas produces a rival concentration of power. The apsarâ is sent because the divine polity recognizes that desire can interrupt the conversion of bodily discipline into sovereignty. Erotic attraction becomes a defensive instrument of the state.

The heavenly court is also a performance space. Apsarâs dance and sing before gods and kings; their bodies embody the pleasure and abundance of the court. The court's magnificence is not only architectural or material. It is sensuous. Through music, dance, ornament, and erotic spectacle, the court displays its capacity to organize pleasure. The apsarâ is therefore both performer and sign of political prosperity. Her presence represents a court that has conquered scarcity and transformed desire into spectacle.

This courtly function connects apsarâ narratives with broader Sanskrit literary traditions. Studies of Aúvaghoca's mahâkâvya argue that pleasure and poetic form are not superficial embellishments but transformative instruments that shape the reader's perception (Regan). The courtly world uses aesthetic experience to organize attention and emotion. Apsarâs, as performers of embodied beauty, inhabit this aesthetic politics. Their dances do not simply entertain; they help constitute the sensibility through which power is recognized as attractive, legitimate, and desirable.

Tapas, merit, and the power economy

The political economy of these myths is structured by the relation between tapas and desire. Tapas is ascetic heat, the energy generated through discipline, abstinence, concentration, and bodily control. It is not merely a moral virtue. It is a form of power that can be accumulated, transferred, weaponized, or exchanged. Desire, especially erotic desire, is represented as both a natural force and a potential threat to ascetic accumulation.

The opposition between tapas and kâma should not be simplified into a binary of good and evil. Sanskrit narratives often recognize the productive force of desire. Sexual union can generate children, dynasties, alliances, and forms of knowledge. At the same time, desire can be portrayed as an obstacle to liberation or as a force that exposes the instability of masculine authority. Aœvaghoca's treatment of sexuality and household life, for example, engages with the tension between erotic attachment and the Buddhist path of renunciation (Olivelle). The presence of pleasure is not merely condemned; it is integrated into a larger argument about religious transformation.

The apsarâ enters this economy as the personification of desire's political capacity. When Indra sends Menakâ, the question is not whether Viúvâmitra is morally weak in an individual sense. The question is whether ascetic power can be allowed to accumulate without limit. The myth encodes a political calculation: if tapas produces a challenge to the gods, desire will be mobilized to dissipate it.

A process of power conversion is therefore at work:

Ascetic discipline	Accumulation of tapas
Threat to divine hierarchy	Deployment of apsara
Awakening of desire	Interruption of austerity
Restoration of courtly power	Attachment loss and consequence

The final node is crucial. The intervention does not simply restore equilibrium. It generates attachment, pregnancy, abandonment, anger, shame, memory, and new forms of political legitimacy. The instrument of stabilization becomes a source of narrative instability.

The Apsarâ as Instrument of Power

Menakâ and Viúvâmitra

The story of Menakâ and Viúvâmitra is perhaps the most influential example of the apsarâ as an instrument of divine policy. Viúvâmitra, once a king, undertakes severe austerities in pursuit of spiritual and social transformation. His tapas alarms Indra, who fears that the ascetic may acquire powers capable of threatening the gods. Indra sends Menakâ

to disturb him. Menakâ enters the forest, and through her beauty, presence, and erotic appeal, she awakens Viúvâmitra's desire. The sage abandons his austerities and lives with her for a period. Their union produces Úakuntalâ. Eventually Viúvâmitra recognizes the loss of his ascetic achievement and returns to penance, while Menakâ departs and the infant Úakuntalâ is left in the forest.

The narrative is often summarized as a cautionary tale about the fragility of ascetic discipline. Such a summary, however, obscures the institutional dimension of the episode. Menakâ is not acting in a private erotic field. She has been sent by a sovereign who is protecting his political position. Her beauty is treated as a resource within a power economy. The story therefore attributes political intelligence to Indra but renders the woman's action as natural seduction. This is a gendered distribution of intentionality: the male ruler has strategy, while the female performer has allure.

Yet the narrative cannot maintain this distinction completely. Menakâ must execute a complex task. She must enter the ascetic's environment, create an atmosphere of attraction, and sustain a relationship sufficiently long to interrupt his tapas. Her success depends on performance, not merely appearance. The apsarâ is thus a skilled political operative whose instrumentality requires expertise.

The consequences of the mission also exceed the divine court's immediate objective. Menakâ becomes the mother of Úakuntalâ, one of the most important women in Sanskrit literary tradition. In the Mahâbhârata, Úakuntalâ's story culminates in the recognition of her son Bharata, whose name becomes associated with the land and the dynastic imagination of India. In Kâlidâsa's Abhijñânaúâkuntalam, the story is transformed through the themes of love, memory, curse, separation, and recognition. Menakâ's assigned seduction thus becomes part of a genealogy that links celestial intervention, human kingship, and cultural identity.

The political meaning of Menakâ's action is consequently ambivalent. From Indra's perspective, the intervention preserves divine sovereignty. From the perspective of Viúvâmitra, it delays his transformation and

reveals the vulnerability of ascetic power. From Menakâ's perspective, it produces an intimate relationship and a daughter whose abandonment becomes a source of suffering. A feminist rereading must not simply invert the moral hierarchy by declaring Menakâ wholly innocent or Viúvâmitra wholly culpable. It must instead examine the institutional conditions under which her body is made responsible for preserving male power.

Kane's Menaka's Choice is significant because it reconstructs precisely this interior dimension. The novel moves beyond the conventional image of Menakâ as a seductress and gives her a first-person voice, emotional complexity, and a struggle for autonomy (Sonawane and Kesur). Its feminist intervention lies in showing that an assignment imposed by Indra does not exhaust Menakâ's identity. She has desires that are not reducible to the mission, and she experiences consequences that the divine court does not absorb. The retelling thereby makes visible what the older narrative tends to displace: the emotional labor and personal cost of political instrumentality.

Tilottamâ and Sunda and Upasunda

The narrative of Tilottamâ provides a second model of the apsarâ as a weapon of divine statecraft. Sunda and Upasunda are powerful asura brothers who obtain extraordinary strength and become jointly dominant. Their unity makes them difficult to defeat, for they share power, territory, and affection. The gods therefore seek a means of turning their unity against itself. Tilottamâ is created or assembled from the finest elements of beauty and sent before the brothers. Each desires her exclusively, and their rivalry culminates in mutual violence and death.

Tilottamâ's role is more explicitly instrumental than Menakâ's. She is fashioned for a political purpose. Her beauty is not simply an attribute but a constructed weapon. The myth literalizes the idea that feminine allure can be assembled and deployed as a technology. The brothers are defeated not by superior force but by the redirection of desire. The masculine alliance collapses because it cannot regulate possession.

This episode reveals several dimensions of the power economy. First, desire is shown to be politically stronger than military solidarity. Sunda and Upasunda can defeat armies, but they cannot share the object of their desire. Second, the gods' use of Tilottamâ reflects a political preference for indirect action. The divine court avoids open conflict and manipulates the enemy's internal relations. Third, feminine beauty is presented as an instrument that operates through the weakness of masculine possession. The brothers' downfall is caused not by Tilottamâ's violence but by their own inability to negotiate desire.

At the same time, Tilottamâ is not entirely absent as a subject. The narrative grants her the capacity to move through the world, appear before the brothers, and produce an effect that requires conscious performance. Nevertheless, compared with Menakâ, she is more strongly objectified. She is designed, displayed, and deployed. Her individuality is less important than her function. This difference demonstrates that apsarâ narratives exist along a spectrum of agency. Some figures are psychologically elaborated; others are reduced to the political effects of their beauty.

The story also indicates that the category of "seduction" is inadequate if it suggests merely private manipulation. Tilottamâ's seduction is an instrument of collective security. She is part of a divine strategy for managing an existential threat. Her body becomes the site at which the political order intervenes in the enemy's emotional life. Desire functions as a weapon because it transforms the relations among political actors.

Seduction as statecraft

Taken together, the stories of Menakâ and Tilottamâ show that seduction operates as statecraft in the divine polity. It is a practice of surveillance, intervention, and regulation. The apsarâ is sent where ordinary force is ineffective: into the hermitage, the space of concentrated austerity, or into the intimate bond between rival brothers. She works at the level of affect, where power becomes vulnerable to attraction.

This political use of eroticism reflects a wider Sanskritic concern with the relation between kâma and authority. Love literature repeatedly

stages union and separation, divine love, illicit desire, marriage, and the unequal social status of women (Baldissera). In apsarâ narratives, these motifs are redirected toward institutional ends. Erotic relations are not only personal experiences; they are mechanisms that regulate social and cosmic order.

The court's reliance on apsarâs also reveals its dependence upon forms of power that it does not fully control. Indra can issue commands, but he cannot manufacture desire in the ascetic or dictate the consequences of erotic union. He relies on the apsarâ to activate a force that is inherently unstable. The divine state thus governs through a power that may produce unintended effects. Enchantment is useful precisely because it is not entirely predictable.

The Apsarâ as Agent

Urvaúî and Purûravas

The story of Urvaúî and Purûravas offers a more complex representation of apsarâ agency. Urvaúî, one of the most celebrated celestial women, becomes attached to the mortal king Purûravas. Their relationship is governed by conditions, often including the protection of two lambs and the requirement that Purûravas not be seen naked by Urvaúî except under specified circumstances. The gods or Gandharvas eventually create a situation in which the conditions are violated. Urvaúî returns to the celestial realm, and Purûravas is left in grief. Their separation is followed by encounters, negotiations, and the possibility of continued union through carefully defined arrangements.

The narrative is important because Urvaúî is not initially introduced as an instrument sent against a particular male threat. Her desire and attachment are central to the plot. She chooses, however conditionally, to enter a relationship with a mortal. Her conditions establish a form of contractual agency. She does not simply submit to Purûravas; she defines the terms under which intimacy may continue.

At the same time, her agency is limited by the structure of the divine world. She remains subject to the claims of heaven, and the conditions

of her relationship are vulnerable to manipulation by celestial powers. Her departure demonstrates that even a powerful apsarâ cannot freely convert desire into permanent social belonging. She can enter the human world, but she cannot necessarily remain there.

The story therefore presents agency as negotiation within constraint. Urvaúî's conditions give her control, but they also reveal the precariousness of her position. Her relationship with Purûravas cannot become an ordinary marriage without confronting the difference between celestial and human existence. The narrative's emotional force derives from this asymmetry: the king desires permanence, while the apsarâ belongs to a world organized by mobility and impermanence.

Modern literary interpretations of Urvaúî often emphasize her sensuality. A study of Siddhicharan Shrestha's epic Urvashi, for example, reads the character through the concept of worldly desire and argues that her actions express attachment to bodily pleasure ([Bodha Raj Dhakal] et al.). Such a reading identifies one important dimension of the character but risks reproducing the traditional reduction of apsarâs to sensuality. Urvaúî's desire should also be read as a form of decision-making. Her sensuality is not merely an instinctual defect; it structures her relationships, creates conditions, and produces a world of emotional consequences.

The story further complicates the relation between desire and political power. Purûravas is a king, and his attachment to Urvaúî affects his royal identity. The king who should represent stability becomes subject to longing and grief. Urvaúî thus exercises power over sovereignty without possessing a throne. Her influence is intimate but political because it alters the behavior and self-understanding of a ruler.

Menakâ's maternal and emotional stakes

Menakâ's agency becomes most visible when the narrative is considered beyond the moment of seduction. Her relationship with Viúvâmitra produces Úakuntalâ, but Menakâ does not raise her daughter. In many traditional tellings, the child is left in the forest and later discovered by the sage KaGva. The abandonment is often treated as a narrative

necessity that enables Úakuntalâ's upbringing in the hermitage and her eventual encounter with King Ducyanta. Yet from Menakâ's perspective, it represents the cost of a celestial system that permits the use of women for political ends while refusing them stable maternal roles.

The mother's absence is not a simple absence of feeling. The story's structure suggests a conflict between celestial duty and maternal attachment. Menakâ belongs to a class of beings whose social function is mobility. She is not organized around domestic permanence. Nevertheless, the birth of Úakuntalâ creates a relation that cannot be erased by the completion of Indra's political objective.

Kane's feminist reinterpretation makes this conflict central. The study of Menaka's Choice emphasizes that the novel gives Menakâ independence, desire, internal conflict, and personal growth (Sonawane and Kesur). This is not merely a modern addition to an otherwise empty figure. It draws out the implications already present in the myth: if Menakâ is capable of love, then the divine assignment produces emotional injury; if she is capable of choice, then her obedience cannot be understood as total; if she is a mother, then her departure has ethical and political meaning.

The maternal dimension also complicates the opposition between instrument and agent. Menakâ's daughter becomes central to dynastic and literary history, and therefore Menakâ participates in the production of human legitimacy even though she is excluded from its institutions. She is a biological and narrative origin of a royal line, but she does not receive the corresponding political authority. Her contribution is appropriated by structures that preserve the visibility of fathers, kings, and descendants while marginalizing the woman whose body made continuity possible.

Apsarâs as performers at courts and in epic narratives

Apsarâs are not only dispatched on missions. They are also dancers and singers at divine and royal courts. Their performance places them within a broader politics of representation. Courtly power depends upon displays of refinement, abundance, and aesthetic mastery. The apsarâ's

body becomes a medium through which the court represents itself as pleasurable and civilized.

The aesthetic dimension of this role should not be dismissed as apolitical. Sanskrit poetics associates performance with the production of rasa, an affective experience shared between work and audience. Scholarship on rasa emphasizes its pervasive function across poetic forms and its capacity to organize emotional and psychological response (Majhi). Apsarâs, as performers, participate in this production of collective feeling. They help shape the emotional environment in which divine or royal authority is experienced.

The same performance can, however, become a site of subordination. The dancer's value is defined by the pleasure she produces for others. Her body is visible, celebrated, and controlled. The court grants her symbolic centrality without necessarily granting institutional power. This pattern resembles the broader representation of women in Sanskrit literature, where female figures may exhibit initiative and independence even within texts shaped by Brahmanical norms (Iris).

Epic narratives occasionally preserve the disruptive potential of performance. Apsarâs can provoke jealousy, redirect succession, inspire poetry, or expose the vulnerability of heroes. Their presence makes visible the instability of male self-control. They do not need to occupy the formal center of the court to influence its relations. Their power lies in their capacity to alter affective arrangements.

Agency within constraint

A feminist account of apsarâs must avoid two opposing errors. The first is reduction: the apsarâ is merely a patriarchal instrument and has no agency. The second is romanticization: the apsarâ is secretly free because she possesses erotic power. Neither position is adequate. Erotic influence does not automatically produce autonomy. A woman may be desired and still be controlled; she may be politically useful and still be disposable.

The more precise concept is agency within constraint. Apsarâs act in spaces not of their own making. They are subject to Indra's authority, the expectations of celestial society, the demands of performance, and the instability of relations with mortal men. Yet within those constraints they negotiate terms, pursue attachments, interpret assignments, and generate consequences. Their agency is partial but not illusory.

This approach corresponds with broader feminist readings of mythological women. Feminist appropriations of the RâmâyaGa and Mahâbhârata have shown that traditional narratives can be rearticulated to create space for postcolonial Indian feminist thought, even while such appropriations must remain attentive to caste, class, and nationalist politics (Luthra). The value of rereading apsarâs lies in a similar process of rearticulation. Their stories can be used neither to confirm timeless patriarchal truths nor to supply uncomplicated feminist heroes. They are sites of contestation.

The Power Economy of Tapas and Desire

The mythology of apsarâs encodes female allure as a political resource because it imagines power as transferable and vulnerable to interruption. Tapas accumulates in the body of the ascetic, while desire disperses or redirects that accumulation. The apsarâ is positioned at the point where these energies meet.

The ascetic's body is a political body. Through discipline, the sage withdraws from ordinary social exchange and generates an exceptional power. His control over appetite becomes a challenge to kingship and divine sovereignty. The female body, by contrast, is represented as a site of attraction, fertility, and relationality. When the apsarâ enters the hermitage, she brings the social and sensual world into a space organized around renunciation.

This contrast is not merely theological. It reflects a gendered theory of political danger. Male asceticism is imagined as capable of producing sovereignty, while female sexuality is imagined as capable of disrupting it. The female body is therefore simultaneously marginalized and feared.

It is excluded from formal authority but inserted into the most consequential operations of authority.

The structure may be represented as follows:

Tapas as stored power
Ascetic independence
Challenge to divine sovereignty
Female allure as resource
Desire and attachment
Interruption of ascetic discipline
Indra orders intervention
Restored hierarchy
New offspring and dynasties
Emotional and ethical consequences

The model shows why the apsarâ cannot be considered merely destructive. Her intervention may interrupt ascetic power, but it also produces offspring, stories, alliances, and cultural memory. Desire does not simply dissipate power; it redistributes it. Viúvâmitra's lost tapas is accompanied by the birth of Úakuntalâ. Sunda and Upasunda's destruction opens the possibility of restored cosmic order. Purûravas's love for Urvaúî transforms the king's relationship to mortality and loss.

The mythology also understands desire as an instrument of knowledge. Aœvaghoca's literary treatment of pleasure suggests that aesthetic and erotic experience can be used to transform perception rather than merely distract from truth (Regan). Although apsarâ narratives often present desire as a threat to asceticism, they also reveal its epistemological force. The ascetic learns that self-mastery is vulnerable; the king learns that sovereignty does not eliminate dependence; the audience learns that power operates through emotions as much as through institutions.

The moralization of female allure nevertheless remains problematic. When the ascetic falls, blame often attaches to the woman or to the seductive force she embodies. This displaces attention from the institutional decision to send her. The divine polity creates the situation and then narratively naturalizes its consequences as feminine temptation.

Such a structure is a classic form of ideological displacement: political violence is transformed into erotic inevitability.

A critical reading must therefore distinguish between desire as a human or cosmic force and the gendered distribution of responsibility for that force. The apsarâ does not invent the political system that uses her. Her beauty becomes a resource because the court defines it as one. The problem is not simply that she seduces; it is that her ability to seduce is appropriated by an institution while her own costs remain privatized.

Feminist and Modern Re-readings

Modern feminist mythological fiction has made the apsarâ newly visible as a subject. Such fiction does not merely retell old stories; it interrogates the conditions under which the old stories were told. The question becomes not "What did Menakâ do to Viúvâmitra?" but "What did the divine court demand of Menakâ, and what happened to her afterward?"

Kavita Kane's Menaka's Choice is especially important in this regard. The novel rejects the conventional image of Menakâ as a beautiful but morally suspect seductress and presents her as a woman with autonomy, emotional depth, and an evolving sense of self (Sonawane and Kesur). Its use of first-person narration is politically consequential because it relocates narrative authority. Menakâ is no longer seen only through the eyes of the gods, the ascetic, or the male reader. She becomes the interpreter of her own life.

The title itself, Menaka's Choice, shifts the conceptual framework from assignment to decision. In the traditional narrative, Indra's command appears to define Menakâ's role. In the feminist retelling, the question of choice becomes central: what does it mean to act when the available options are structured by power? Choice need not mean unrestricted freedom. It may involve selecting among compromised possibilities, negotiating with authority, or claiming ownership over an action initially imposed by another.

This approach reflects a wider movement in feminist engagements with Indian epics and mythology. Women writers and performers have

appropriated epic figures to create new positions within contested cultural narratives (Luthra). Such appropriations are politically productive because epics remain active cultural resources rather than closed historical documents. At the same time, feminist readings must remain attentive to the risk that mythological women may be used to construct an idealized national or civilizational femininity. The recovery of voice should not become another form of symbolic appropriation.

The contemporary feminist interpretation of Menakâ also invites comparison with modern studies of women in classical narrative. Feminist criticism has shown how figures such as Sîtâ, Úakuntalâ, and other epic women can be subordinated through moral expectations concerning chastity, obedience, and sacrifice, while also preserving moments of resistance and self-definition (Yashvi and Khurana). The apsarâ differs from the wife or queen because she is not usually governed by the same domestic norms. Yet she is subject to another form of control: her body is made available for political and aesthetic use.

This distinction is important. The apsarâ is not simply an "unrestrained woman" who stands outside patriarchy. Her apparent sexual freedom may conceal institutional dependence. She can move between lovers, courts, and worlds, but her mobility is also what makes her useful to the court. She is free enough to enter spaces that respectable women may not enter, but not free enough to define the purposes for which her mobility is employed.

Modern feminist fiction can therefore perform two related tasks. It can restore interiority to the apsarâ, and it can expose the political structure that made her interiority invisible. The first task is representational; the second is analytical. Together they produce political consciousness.

The contemporary relevance of these narratives also extends beyond literary revision. Studies of women's ritual authority in Balinese Hindu contexts show that women's bodies can mediate divine power and acquire communal legitimacy even when formal structures remain patriarchal (Jero et al.). This modern example helps illuminate the apsarâ's position. Authority may be exercised through embodiment, performance, and

recognition rather than through official office. Such authority is real, but it remains vulnerable because it is not institutionally secured.

Discussion: The Apsarâ as Liminal Political Actor

The apsarâ is best understood as a liminal political actor. She is neither sovereign nor subject in the ordinary sense. She does not rule the heavenly court, yet the court depends upon her. She is not usually granted formal authority, yet her actions affect ascetics, kings, dynasties, and cosmic order. Her power is therefore relational and mediated.

The concept of liminality captures her movement across boundaries: heaven and earth, asceticism and desire, performance and politics, divinity and mortality, freedom and coercion. Urvaúî crosses between celestial and human worlds but cannot permanently belong to both. Menakâ enters the hermitage as an agent of heaven and leaves it as a mother whose emotional relation to Úakuntalâ cannot be contained by the mission. Tilottamâ moves from divine construction to political instrument, turning the intimacy of two brothers into their destruction.

What does "enchanted power" reveal about gendered political thought in myth? First, it reveals that power is imagined as embodied. The body is not external to politics. It is one of the principal media through which politics operates. The apsarâ's body produces attraction, and attraction reorganizes authority. This is a distinctly gendered form of political thought because the body in question is coded feminine and because the burden of political mediation is placed upon women.

Second, enchanted power reveals the limits of coercive sovereignty. Indra may be king, but he cannot directly command Viúvâmitra's mind. He must work through an affective intermediary. The ruler's reliance on the apsarâ indicates that authority is never self-sufficient. It requires symbols, performances, and emotional technologies.

Third, enchanted power reveals that the distinction between pleasure and politics is unstable. Courtly pleasure, erotic desire, and artistic performance are not merely private or decorative. They shape the distribution of power. The aesthetic organization of pleasure can make

hierarchy appear natural and desirable. Scholarship on Sanskrit literary culture has emphasized that poetic pleasure may itself be transformative, guiding audiences toward new states of perception (Regan). Apsarâ narratives dramatize a comparable transformation within the story world.

Fourth, the apsarâ exposes the unequal distribution of consequence. The divine court benefits from the interruption of tapas, but the apsarâ bears the emotional consequences. The gods preserve their hierarchy, while Menakâ is separated from her child and Urvaúî becomes associated with a cycle of attachment and loss. The political system externalizes its costs onto the woman whose body serves its purposes.

Finally, the apsarâ demonstrates that agency may persist in conditions of structural constraint. Her agency does not necessarily appear as open rebellion. It appears through the shaping of encounters, the setting of conditions, the formation of attachments, the exercise of performance, and the generation of consequences. This is why the binary between instrument and agent is insufficient. The apsarâ is an instrument whose operation requires agency, and an agent whose possibilities are structured by instrumentalization.

The political consciousness of the myths lies in their refusal to make this contradiction disappear. Even when the narrative appears to celebrate divine strategy, it leaves behind questions about responsibility, desire, and loss. Who owns the consequences of a political seduction? What happens when a weapon becomes attached to its target? Can a celestial performer belong to herself? What forms of power become visible when beauty is treated as state property?

These questions acquire renewed significance in feminist literary criticism. Feminist readings of myth do not simply replace male-centered interpretations with female-centered ones. They investigate how narrative authority is distributed, whose suffering is acknowledged, and which forms of power are naturalized. The apsarâ becomes politically important because she reveals the institutional structure beneath the language of beauty.

Conclusion

Apsarâ narratives offer a sophisticated mythology of embodied and affective power. Menakâ, Tilottamâ, and Urvaúî are not merely decorative women in stories dominated by gods, sages, and kings. They are central to the regulation of ascetic energy, the protection of divine sovereignty, the transformation of royal identity, and the production of dynastic continuity.

As instruments, apsarâs are deployed by Indra and the heavenly court to interrupt tapas and redirect desire. Menakâ's mission against Viúvâmitra and Tilottamâ's intervention against Sunda and Upasunda demonstrate that seduction functions as a form of statecraft. The divine polity uses erotic attraction where military force or direct coercion may fail. Female allure becomes a political resource because it can enter intimate spaces and reorganize relations from within.

As agents, however, apsarâs exceed the purposes assigned to them. Urvaúî negotiates the conditions of intimacy with Purûravas. Menakâ's relationship with Viúvâmitra produces maternal and emotional stakes that cannot be reduced to Indra's policy. Apsarâs as performers shape the affective life of courts and participate in the production of aesthetic authority. Their agency remains constrained, but constraint does not erase action.

The concept of enchanted power makes it possible to hold these dimensions together. Enchantment is neither simple illusion nor unrestricted freedom. It is a mode of political efficacy grounded in embodiment, performance, desire, and emotional transformation. It exposes the dependence of institutions upon forms of power they cannot fully control. It also reveals how women may be made politically consequential without being granted formal sovereignty.

Modern feminist retellings, especially Kavita Kane's Menaka's Choice, recover the apsarâ's subjectivity by granting her narrative voice and moral complexity (Sonawane and Kesur). Such works do not merely humanize mythological figures; they revise the political map of the myth.

They ask what happens when a woman treated as an instrument becomes the narrator of the system that instrumentalizes her.

The apsarâ therefore remains a crucial figure for the study of gender and political thought in Indian mythology. She is neither the powerless victim of patriarchal imagination nor the liberated embodiment of erotic freedom. She is a liminal actor whose power is mediated, desired, appropriated, and feared. Her stories show that political order is maintained not only through law, weapons, and sovereignty but also through the management of beauty, pleasure, and attachment. In this recognition lies the enduring political consciousness of the enchanted power.

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The Politics of Power and Narcissism in Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* Series

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Myth plays a role in shaping powerful stories. Myths begin as whispers of imagination but challenge the limits of what is believed to be possible. They inspire people to explore, to question, and to create. Einstein's Theory of Relativity was first considered a myth. But it proved to be one of the most groundbreaking scientific discoveries. Most myths originated in oral traditions. Over time, these tales were recorded in written form. Many myths are about gods and heroes with supernatural powers. The characters in these myths perform great and daring deeds, often saving the world from danger or destruction. Myths are consistently used as propaganda tools to build, maintain, and legitimise political power. They grant rulers divine or heroic status and make their power appear natural and sacred. Politics is closely intertwined with mythical stories.

Power refers to the capacity to act in a way that creates an impact. Power can be either positive or negative. Power exists in many forms such as wealth, knowledge, influence, and authority. Politics is the strategic use of power to manage relationships and guide authorities. It is an innate human drive and a fundamental aspect of human psychology and biology. Power is the ultimate source for politics to thrive. The fusion of power and politics forms the foundation of the politics of power. As Walter Annenberg stated, "The greatest power is not money power, it is political power" (*BrainyQuote*). It suggests that political power holds greater influence because it shapes laws, directs public policy, and determines how a society is governed.

Narcissism and politics of power are inseparable. A narcissist can be very political, and a politician can be very narcissistic. The word "narcissism" comes from Greek mythology, specifically from the chronicle of Narcissus from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Narcissus is a youthful figure known for his extraordinary beauty. He becomes captivated as he observes the image of himself in the water, believing it to be another being. He says, "You reach out your arms when I do and your smile follows my smile"(Ovid 462). In the end, he takes his own life while still gazing at his reflection. After his death, a flower blooms in the place where he falls, and it is named narcissus in his memory. The story of Narcissus represents more than just a myth. It symbolises self-obsession and excessive pride. Narcissus's behaviour of admiring himself excessively is seen as a warning about vanity and selfishness. Psychologists, including Sigmund Freud, use the term "narcissism" to describe a personality attitude marked by excessive self-focus, a need for admiration, and little concern for others. The psychological study of narcissism leads to the identification of a condition called narcissistic personality disorder.

Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD) is defined as "an individual seeking admiration and lacking empathy when not being admired. This means the person constantly seeks attention from others and feels sad and depressed when many ignore them. Some even go as far as being disapproving or mad at others since they are not getting the attention they need"(Deng et al.1605). The diagnostic criteria for NPD are developed and published by the American Psychiatric Association (APA). The APA specifies nine defining features that clinicians use to assess the disorder. If an individual exhibits at least five of these traits, they may be diagnosed with NPD. The APA outlines the following criteria:

1. Grandiosity
2. Preoccupation with power and Success
3. Sense of uniqueness and exclusivity
4. Craving admiration
5. Sense of entitlement

6. Exploiting others
7. Absence of empathy
8. Envious of others
9. Arrogant and snobbish behaviours

Grandiosity denotes an exaggerated sense of pomposity and superiority. People with this trait believe they are better or more talented than others and expect constant praise. They often overlook or dismiss the value of other people's contributions. Preoccupation with power and success refers to a strong focus on getting greater power, status, or success. A sense of uniqueness and exclusivity refers to believing oneself to be special and understandable only to exceptional individuals. Craving admiration means requiring constant praise and validation from others. A sense of entitlement refers to expecting special treatment and automatic compliance with one's wishes. Exploitativeness is the tendency to take advantage of others for personal gain. Absence of empathy means being unable or unwilling to recognise or understand the emotions of others. Envy and expecting others to be envious involve feeling jealous of others' success while assuming others are jealous of one's own. Arrogant and haughty behaviours are shown through an attitude of superiority and dismissiveness toward others.

Narcissistic personality disorder develops through a combination of biological, psychological, and social factors. The causes can be genetic or related to early childhood experiences. Environmental and cultural factors also contribute to its development. NPD is primarily associated with significant disadvantages for the individual and others in their environment. It leads to substantial complications in interpersonal relationships. It also causes a person to become isolated. Individuals with NPD may experience depression or display aggressive behaviour when their sense of superiority is challenged. Some traits associated with NPD may also offer advantages in certain circumstances. The primary approach to treating NPD is long-term psychotherapy. Several therapeutic approaches are commonly used, including dialectical behavioural therapy, cognitive behavioural therapy, metacognitive therapy, group therapy, and couples or family therapy.

Rick Riordan, an author from the United States, gained major recognition for creating the *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* series. Riordan began his writing by crafting bedtime stories for his son that later evolved into his acclaimed novels. Riordan has portrayed his protagonist, Percy Jackson, as living with dyslexia and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, reflecting the struggles of his own son facing similar challenges. This makes the character relatable and empowering for readers with these conditions.

The *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* series reimagines Greek mythology within a contemporary context, blending ancient stories with modern life. It follows Percy Jackson, a teenage boy who discovers that he is half-human and half-god. He learns that his father is Poseidon, one of the twelve Olympian gods. The main storyline unfolds across five novels: *The Lightning Thief*, *The Sea of Monsters*, *The Titan's Curse*, *The Battle of the Labyrinth*, and *The Last Olympian*. Each novel in the series takes the readers on exciting adventures filled with mythical creatures, powerful gods, and mysterious prophecies. Throughout these adventures, Percy learns about friendship, bravery, and the challenges of being a hero. The success of the series has led to several spin-offs, movies and a new television adaptation by Disney+.

In *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, the term "Olympians" refers to the twelve major Greek gods who rule from their modernised Mount Olympus. Riordan integrates contemporary elements, such as reimagining Mount Olympus floating above the Empire State Building in the United States rather than remaining in ancient Greece. The three major Olympian gods are Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades. They are brothers in Greek mythology. Zeus rules the sky and keeps order among the gods. Poseidon controls the sea and its powerful forces. Hades oversees the Underworld and cares for the souls of the dead. They retain the same authority that defines them in classical mythology. Other Olympians are Hera, Demeter, Athena, Ares, Apollo, Artemis, Hephaestus, Aphrodite, Hermes, and Dionysus.

Rick Riordan presents the Greek gods as deeply human figures. He highlights their emotions, flaws, and moral weaknesses, suggesting that

they share many traits with humans. Among these traits, narcissism is one of the most dominant. The gods often display excessive pride, pomposity, and a desire for attention and control. The present study analyses the narcissistic personalities of the three major Olympian gods from the series.

Zeus is the Greek god of the sky, thunder, and lightning. He serves as the ruler and chief administrator of the Olympian gods. He maintains order and authority among the other gods. He is the son of Kronos, the Titan god. He defeats his evil father and saves the world from destruction. In the series, Zeus wears modern clothes like suits. He is seen as proud and authoritarian. In the first novel, *The Lightning Thief* (*LT*), Zeus places the blame on Poseidon for the disappearance of his master bolt. Percy finds and returns the master bolt. When Percy meets Zeus to return the bolt to Olympus, Percy greets his father first. Zeus becomes angry because he expects to be addressed before any other Olympian god. He angrily utters, "Should you not address the master of this house first, boy?"(*LT* 340). This shows his grandiosity and sense of self-importance. He even disvalues the efforts Percy made to retrieve the bolt.

Zeus's obsession with his power and fear of losing it to Poseidon reflects his narcissistic need to remain superior and powerful. When the master bolt goes missing, Zeus immediately blames Poseidon without any evidence. As Chiron explains, "Zeus believes Poseidon has taken the master bolt, and is now secretly having the Cyclopes build an arsenal of illegal copies, which might be used to topple Zeus from his throne"(*LT* 136).

Zeus's sense of entitlement is evident when Percy turns down his offer of immortality. In *The Last Olympian* (*LO*), Zeus rewards Percy for saving the world by offering to make him an immortal god. However, when Percy refuses and requests something different, Zeus reacts with surprise and disbelief. This moment reveals Zeus's assumption that his gifts should be accepted without question. This is shown through Percy's description of the event, "'No?' Zeus said. 'You are… turning down

our generous gift?' There was a dangerous edge to his voice, like a thunderstorm about to erupt"(*LO* 331).

Zeus fails to save his demigod daughter, Thalia. Thalia is born to Zeus and a mortal mother. She possesses formidable powers and is brave. While making her way to Camp Half-Blood with her friends, she is attacked by deadly monsters. In a desperate attempt to save her friends, Thalia decides to hold off the monsters so that the others can escape safely. She fights fiercely, displaying her courage and strength as a demigod daughter of Zeus. Despite her valiant efforts, Thalia is gravely injured during the battle. As she lies on the ground, near death, her father, Zeus, intervenes. In a moment of divine intervention, Zeus offers Thalia a choice to continue living as a protector tree at Camp Half-Blood. Thalia's body transforms into a towering pine tree. This act highlights Zeus's emotional detachment and lack of empathy. He chooses to immortalise his own daughter rather than truly save her.

Zeus consistently displays arrogance and superiority toward both gods and mortals. He demands to be treated with absolute reverence and becomes angry when others fail to show proper respect. His pride is evident when he questions Poseidon's claim of Percy as his son: "'You still claim him then?' Zeus asked menacingly. 'You claim this child whom you sired against our sacred oath?'" (*LT* 341). Zeus possesses grandiosity, a preoccupation with power and success, an expectation of obedience, a disregard for others, and arrogant and haughty behaviour. These traits together indicate that he exhibits characteristics of narcissistic personality disorder.

The next Greek god is Poseidon. He is one of the powerful Olympians. He is responsible for controlling and maintaining the seas. In *The Lightning Thief*, Chiron, a centaur, tells Percy that Poseidon is "too proud"(*LT* 137) to explain to Zeus that he did not steal the master bolt. If Poseidon had set aside his pride and spoken clearly with his brother, the misunderstanding could have been resolved. The conflict between the gods could have been avoided. His refusal to do so shows how his grandiosity creates unnecessary tension and misunderstanding. The gods

swear to avoid mortal affairs. Poseidon violates this rule and fathers Percy with a mortal woman. His decision shows an entitled belief that the rule does not apply to him.

Poseidon falls in love with Percy's mortal mother and has a child with her. However, he does not visit or meet Percy until the boy turns twelve. Poseidon recognises Percy as his son after the master bolt goes missing. Poseidon sends Percy to find the missing bolt. This shows Poseidon's exploitative nature, as he uses his son to protect his own name. This is evident from the conversation between Chiron and Percy:

'You're saying I'm being used.'

'I'm saying it's no accident Poseidon has claimed you now. It's a very risky gamble, but he's in a desperate situation. He needs you.'

My dad needs me.

Emotions rolled around inside me like bits of glass in a kaleidoscope. I didn't know whether to feel resentful or grateful or happy, or angry. Poseidon had ignored me for twelve years. Now suddenly he needed me (*LT* 145).

Poseidon lacks empathy. He never meets Percy during his childhood. Percy grows up with his mother, Sally, who works several difficult jobs to support him. She even marries a gambler to keep Percy safe from monsters. Tyson is a young Cyclops and a child of Poseidon. In *The Sea of Monsters* (*SOM*), he grows up homeless on the streets without any support or protection. He faces bullying due to his unusual appearance. As Percy notes about Tyson, "He wore tattered jeans, grimy size-twenty sneakers and a plaid flannel shirt with holes in it. He smelled like a New York City alleyway, because that's where he lived, in a cardboard refrigerator box off 72nd Street"(*SOM* 9). These neglects show Poseidon's lack of empathy and responsibility toward his own children.

Poseidon is envious of others, especially Zeus. He frequently feels challenged by Zeus's authority, and this tension is visible to everyone on Olympus. Zeus accuses Poseidon of theft without any consideration,

partly because Poseidon has already tried to overthrow him. Poseidon demonstrates grandiosity, entitlement, exploitative behaviour, a lack of empathy, and envy. All these traits show that Poseidon has narcissistic personality disorder.

The final god for the study is Hades. He is the god who presides over the Underworld, responsible for ruling the realm of the dead. He shares the same grandiose traits as his brothers. He openly declares his power by saying, "For demigods! I am immortal, all powerful! I would not help the other gods if they begged me, if Percy Jackson himself pleaded –" (*LO* 264). This statement reflects his inflated view of himself and his belief that he stands above everyone else. Hades presents himself as superior not only to mortals, but also to the other gods.

Hades yearns for admiration. The other gods often exclude him because of his past actions. He admires his brothers' positions. He feels frustrated that he is confined to the Underworld instead of sharing their status on Olympus. In *The Last Olympian*, Nico calls Hades an outcast. He tells him that helping the other gods is the only way to earn their respect. Nico's words show that Hades craves admiration and respect from the other gods but struggles to achieve it.

Hades frequently uses others to achieve his own goals, showing an exploitative pattern. He uses Percy's mother as bait to trap Percy. He sends his demigod twins to a casino where time never moves. He keeps them there until the prophecy needs them. The prophecy says that a child of the three Greek Olympians will make a choice at sixteen that can either save or destroy Olympus. Hades thinks that one of his children might be that child. So, he keeps them in the casino where time does not pass. He also lacks empathy. His twin children are Bianca di Angelo and Nico di Angelo. Nico grows up with no family except Bianca, and he depends on her for support. When Bianca dies on a quest, Nico becomes devastated. He loses the only person he loves and takes dark measures to bring her back. During this period of grief, he also discovers the truth about his parents. Even after Nico completes the task given to him, Hades fails to offer comfort or praise. Instead, he criticises Nico.

This is evident from their conversation: "'Father,' Nico said. 'I have done as you asked.' 'Took you long enough,' Hades grumbled. 'Your sister would've done a better job'"(*LO* 112).

Hades acts with arrogance, placing himself above others and insisting on his status as an immortal god. When Percy asks Hades to help the gods fight against the dark forces, Hades refuses. He still resents Zeus for causing the death of his mortal wife and wants revenge on Olympus. To prevent the prophecy from being fulfilled, he traps Percy in the Underworld. He traps Percy in the Underworld because he believes Percy is the child of the prophecy. His mischievous and cruel behaviour is clear when he says, "You are spirited. I'll give you credit for that. Have fun in my dungeon. We'll check on you again in—oh, fifty or sixty years" (*LO* 116). Hades shows grandiosity, craves admiration, behaves exploitatively, lacks empathy, and displays arrogance. This indicates that he demonstrates characteristics aligned with narcissistic personality disorder.

Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom and beauty, expresses a love for admiration. Ares, the Greek god of war, uses his daughter to rebuild his name. Apollo, the Greek god of prophecy, shows extreme grandiosity and a strong sense of entitlement. Dionysus, the Greek god of wine, often lacks empathy. As the depictions of the other gods are not clear enough, the study ultimately limits its analysis to Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades.

Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades each show five key criteria of narcissistic personality disorder. While other criteria may apply, they are less prominent in the series. Thus, all three gods display traits consistent with NPD. Their behaviours create conflict and instability in both the mortal and divine worlds. By connecting mythology with modern psychology, the series offers a clear moral message: power without empathy becomes destructive, authority without responsibility leads to injustice, and pride without self-awareness causes suffering. Riordan reminds readers that true strength lies not in dominance, but in understanding, humility, and compassion.

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Women Power and Political Consciousness in Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence*

Varsha Kumari Saini and Anant Dadhich

Introduction

Indian English literature has often focused on the lives of women and their changing roles in society. Among the major voices in contemporary Indian fiction, Shashi Deshpande stands out for her realistic and honest portrayal of middle-class women. Her writings deal with their conflicts, loneliness, and silent struggles in a male-dominated world.

That Long Silence is one of Deshpande's most powerful novels. It tells the story of Jaya, a writer and a wife, who realizes that her silence has become a way to survive in a society that does not allow women to express their feelings freely. The novel reflects the author's deep understanding of women's psychology and their need for identity.

The idea of "Women Power and Political Consciousness" in this novel lies not in public activism or politics, but in women's realization of their rights, thoughts, and individuality. When a woman becomes aware of her position and dares to change it, she becomes politically aware in a true sense.

Women and Patriarchy in *That Long Silence*

Deshpande's novel shows how patriarchy affects every part of a woman's life – her marriage, family, and even her sense of self. Jaya is married to Mohan, a successful man who expects her to behave like an ideal wife – quiet, obedient, and supportive. For many years, Jaya hides her real emotions and sacrifices her dreams just to keep peace at home.

Jaya says, "I had learned the pleasing smile, the tactful words, the charm that wins men." This line shows how women are trained to please

others instead of living for themselves. Her silence is not natural; it is forced by social expectations.

Deshpande uses Jaya's voice to represent millions of women who feel trapped in their homes. Patriarchy not only limits their opportunities but also teaches them to accept their suppression as normal. However, Jaya's realization that her silence is part of her oppression marks the beginning of her political awakening.

The Concept of Political Consciousness

The term political consciousness does not only mean awareness of government or politics; it also refers to understanding one's position in society and questioning injustice. In *That Long Silence*, Deshpande redefines this concept in a personal way.

When Jaya begins to reflect on her silence, she becomes politically aware. She understands that her quietness supports the system that controls her. Her decision to break the silence is symbolic — it means reclaiming her voice and rejecting submission.

This idea matches feminist thinkers like Simone de Beauvoir, who said that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." Jaya's journey is about becoming – realizing her identity beyond the roles of wife and mother. Her voice represents a new kind of political act — the power of self-expression.

Women Power as Inner Strength

In Deshpande's world, women power is not about physical strength or rebellion but about inner courage. Jaya's transformation from silence to self-awareness shows that real power comes from self-respect and truth.

Throughout the novel, she remembers her childhood, her writing career, and her marriage. These memories help her understand how deeply patriarchy shaped her thinking. Yet, she also discovers that she has the power to question and choose differently.

The ending of the novel, when Jaya decides to end her silence, becomes a sign of hope. She says, "I will have to speak, to listen, to erase the silence between us." This moment captures the spirit of women empowerment - the courage to face life with honesty and equality.

Silence as Resistance

Silence plays an important role in *That Long Silence*. At first, it stands for fear, submission, and helplessness. But gradually, silence becomes a tool of reflection and resistance.

Jaya's silence allows her to observe the world around her — the hypocrisy of society, the double standards of men, and the false image of an ideal woman. When she finally decides to speak, her voice carries the strength of truth.

Deshpande thus transforms silence into a weapon of empowerment. It shows that even quiet introspection can become a political act if it leads to awareness and change.

Social Class and Women's Struggles

The novel also touches upon the differences between social classes. Jaya belongs to the educated middle class, but her problems are not very different from those of poor or uneducated women.

All women, regardless of class, face restrictions in a patriarchal culture. Whether rich or poor, they are expected to sacrifice their desires for others. Deshpande highlights that the struggle for women's freedom is universal -it cuts across class and status.

This understanding adds another layer to political consciousness. It shows that women's oppression is not only personal but also social and structural.

Identity and Self- Realization

The central theme of *That Long Silence* is the search for identity. Jaya has lived her life according to others' expectations - as a daughter, wife, and mother. But she has never been allowed to be herself.

Her journey of self-discovery begins when she starts questioning her silence. Writing becomes her tool of expression and liberation. However, her husband disapproves of her stories, especially those that reveal the truth about women's lives.

Jaya's identity crisis represents the condition of Indian women who want to find a balance between tradition and modernity. Her awakening marks a new phase of political consciousness - one that is born from personal experience and emotional courage.

Women Power and Hope for Change

By the end of the novel, Jaya does not completely break free from her struggles, but she begins to hope. Her decision to speak, to face reality, and to continue writing symbolizes her rebirth.

Deshpande leaves the readers with a message that change starts with awareness. A woman who understands her worth becomes powerful, and that inner power can transform society.

In this sense, *That Long Silence* becomes more than a personal story - it is a social and political statement. It invites readers to listen to the voices of women who have been silent for too long and to recognize their strength as agents of change.

Conclusion

Shashi Deshpande's *That Long Silence* is a sensitive portrayal of women's awakening in a male-centered society. It connects personal life with political awareness by showing how silence, when broken, becomes a symbol of power.

Jaya's journey from obedience to self-expression represents the rise of political consciousness among women. Deshpande's simple yet powerful storytelling captures the emotional, psychological, and social realities of Indian women.

Through Jaya, the author teaches that empowerment begins within - when a woman decides to speak the truth and live with dignity. *That*

Long Silence therefore stands as a landmark in feminist writing, blending the themes of identity, selfhood, and political consciousness into a deeply human story.

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Politicizing the Sacred: Feminist Reimagining of Indian Epics

Amit Kumar Soni and Seema Soni

Introduction

India's two great epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, have been boldly reimagined in contemporary literature, with female characters once peripheral or voiceless now taking centre stage as narrators and protagonists. Writers such as Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Amish Tripathi, and Devdutt Pattanaik approach these ancient texts through lenses of postcolonial feminism, deconstruction, and feminist theology, reclaiming them from centuries of patriarchal interpretation. In doing so, they create space for marginalised voices and call into question who holds the authority to define and transmit cultural heritage. These retellings also carry an urgent political dimension: at a time when Hindu nationalist movements increasingly invoke the epics to reinforce traditional gender roles and religious conformity, such rewritings serve as acts of resistance and critique.

To fully appreciate what these feminist retellings are doing, one must engage with postcolonial feminist theory, especially the frameworks articulated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Chandra Talpade Mohanty. Both thinkers grapple with the layered oppressions faced by women in the Global South, where the burdens of colonialism, patriarchy, and indigenous social hierarchies intersect and compound one another. Spivak's landmark essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988) offers a foundational account of how structural conditions prevent marginalised subjects from being heard. She argues that speech requires not merely utterance but recognition within the frameworks of dominant discourse. This insight sheds light on the long history of silencing female epic characters, whose words and emotions, even when recorded in the

texts, are filtered through male narrators and constrained by male-defined notions of dharma.

Feminist retellings take on a task that Spivak's own theoretical framework implies may be fundamentally unachievable: reaching back across centuries to recover and give voice to women who were structurally silenced. The difficulty is compounded when contemporary authors themselves, often occupying positions of relative privilege, claim to speak on behalf of women from vastly different historical moments, social circumstances, and caste backgrounds. This is precisely the tension Spivak identifies when she warns against intellectuals who "speak for" marginalised communities rather than working to create conditions in which those communities can speak for themselves. And yet, Spivak's own notion of "strategic essentialism" provides a partial defence of such literary projects. The concept involves deliberately, if temporarily, adopting essentialist categories such as "women's shared experience" or "a woman's perspective" as tactical tools for political mobilisation, while retaining a critical awareness that these categories are constructed and provisional rather than natural or fixed. When Divakaruni invokes "Draupadi's voice" or "Sita's perspective," she is engaging in precisely this kind of strategic move: building feminist solidarity and contesting patriarchal readings of the epics, while implicitly acknowledging that what she offers is an imaginative reconstruction, not an authentic recovery of a lost original. The political value of such a strategy, however, hinges on preserving its self-critical dimension; the moment an author mistakes reconstruction for recovery, the "strategic" awareness collapses into a new form of essentialism.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty's landmark essay "Under Western Eyes" (1988) offers a complementary theoretical lens. Mohanty argues that Western feminist scholarship has tended to construct the "Third World woman" as a uniform, undifferentiated, and essentially victimised figure an analytical move that, despite its apparent solidarity, reproduces a form of discursive colonisation by imposing Western conceptual frameworks onto experiences that are shaped by entirely different historical, cultural, and social conditions. Her insistence on feminist frameworks

that are autonomous and grounded in specific geographies, histories, and cultures has direct relevance for mythological retellings, challenging authors to resist universalising impulses and attend carefully to the particular contexts from which these stories and their female characters emerge.

Mohanty's framework cautions against sweeping, universalising claims about women's oppression, calling instead for comparative feminist approaches that trace interconnected histories while remaining attentive to difference and specificity. When applied to the feminist retelling of Indian epics, this perspective warns against reading Indian women's experiences through ready-made Western categories such as "individual autonomy" or "sexual liberation," which risk obscuring rather than illuminating the realities they purport to explain. Gender oppression as it operates within these texts is not a generic phenomenon; it is deeply embedded in particular configurations of caste hierarchy, colonial history, and indigenous patriarchy, and any meaningful feminist analysis must reckon with these specificities rather than dissolving them into a universal narrative of female subjugation.

Viewed in this light, contemporary feminist retellings of the epics serve a range of overlapping and mutually reinforcing purposes. They challenge the authority of Brahmanical patriarchy, recover indigenous feminist traditions that have been marginalised or suppressed, offer counter-narratives to the appropriation of these sacred texts by Hindutva ideology, and assert women's right to narrative authority over stories that have historically excluded or diminished them. The significance of these works, however, extends well beyond literary experimentation. By reimagining who speaks, who is heard, and whose experiences are deemed worthy of telling, they participate in a broader process of cultural transformation, reshaping collective memory around questions of gender and power, and fundamentally reopening the question of what sacred tradition is, who it belongs to, and who has the right to interpret it.

Women-Centered Appropriations as Cultural-Political Projects

Contemporary feminist retellings of Indian epics are rooted in the specific historical conditions of post-liberalization India: the cultural shifts after

1991, the rise of Hindu nationalism, growing feminist consciousness, and intensifying debates around tradition and modernity. Yet the impulse to reinterpret canonical texts is not new; across literary history, foundational narratives have consistently invited reimagination, with each era bringing its own critical perspectives to inherited stories. Such reinterpretation is never merely aesthetic; it is bound up with shifting power structures and evolving cultural sensibilities. This is especially visible in mythological retellings, where ancient stories are continuously reshaped to address present concerns. As Luthra (2014) argues, "The appropriation and reworking of traditional narratives has been an important strategy for women to interrogate dominant ideologies and articulate emergent and resistant ideologies and identifications" (135).

At the heart of this literary heritage stands the Ramayana, one of the two great Sanskrit epics that has shaped Indian cultural, religious, and literary traditions for more than two millennia. Attributed to the sage Valmiki and composed roughly between the 7th century BCE and 3rd century CE, it narrates the exile and journey of the divine prince Rama, his devoted wife Sita, and his loyal brother Lakshmana. The epic functions far beyond literature alone; it operates as a paradigmatic narrative that has shaped ideals of kingship, dharma, and gender relations in the Indian cultural imagination. Its moral and cultural weight extends across communities, serving as a shared framework through which diverse groups across generations have negotiated social norms and collective values.

The oral and written reconstruction of India's epics is by no means a recent phenomenon; such retellings have always existed alongside the canonical texts, embedded in the living traditions of Indian society. What distinguishes contemporary literary reproductions, however, is the degree to which they are shaped by new theoretical frameworks emerging from literary, cultural, and women's studies. Recent revisionist readings of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata draw heavily on the aesthetic and political paradigms of these disciplines, and their reimaginings of characters and narrative moments engage meaningfully with postmodern and poststructuralist ideas about language, narration, and power.

Many of these retellings work to expose the patriarchal power relations concealed within sacred narratives, revealing how "grand narratives" have historically been deployed by those in authority to regulate the social and moral lives of ordinary people and of women in particular. This is precisely why contemporary feminist writers and mythologists have turned to these texts as sites for exploring questions of power, gender, identity, and justice.

Rohit Sharma (2016) draws a useful distinction between oral and folkloric adaptations of the epics and their literary rewritings, arguing that the latter carry distinct political and ethical commitments. He characterises "the practice of epic-rewriting" as an act of renewal, driven by one of "two reasons: either the epic misrepresents someone/something, or the epic itself has been misread or misinterpreted (155). In this sense, contemporary rewritings of the Mahabharata and the Ramayana perform a constructive critique of the values embedded in the originals, seeking to resist, reinterpret, and realign ancient moral frameworks with the demands of contemporary social life, texts that have remained central to India's cultural and post-independence political imagination.

Rohit Sharma writes,

Unlike oral culture, the trend of rewriting a story in literature serves for various premeditated designs that the respective authors have in their minds. Because of this intentional element, the act of retelling in written literature tends to become politically and culturally charged. Consequently, the general interpretation of the old saying – a story is new every time it is told – suffers inadequacy while explaining the complexity of retelling in print culture. The moment it is positioned in a particular context – presently in the context of epic-rewriting – the adage ceases to be self-explanatory, as the practice of rewriting in literature invites several pertinent questions of why, what, who, how, whom: Why is it *renewed*? Who makes it new? For whom is it rendered a *new*? What makes it *newer*? How does the process of *newing* go? Stretching a bit, what is the effect of this *newness*? (149).

In his critical essay "The Art of Rewriting Indian Epics," Rohit Sharma (2016) observes that a substantial body of Indian literature has been

devoted to retelling the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. He argues that the sheer volume and consistency of this tradition within Indian literary history has given such works a distinctive generic identity what he terms the Indian epic-rewriting genre. Within this framework, these retellings are more than mere adaptations; they function as critical interventions that reveal how classical narratives continue to shape contemporary socio-cultural understanding.

It is fair to say, then, that modern rewritings of ancient myths, scriptures, and sacred texts have made a meaningful contribution to Indian literary aesthetics and criticism. Far from being derivative, these works operate as counter-narratives, simultaneously questioning and enriching the existing interpretive traditions surrounding the classical epics and other forms of sacred writing, expanding the hermeneutic possibilities of texts that have long been treated as fixed and authoritative.

The Ramayana and Mahabharata offer complex and often ambivalent portrayals of women that have profoundly shaped Indian society's understanding of female agency across centuries. Their influence extends well into the present, where they continue to inform contemporary debates about women's roles, rights, and autonomy. These texts are invoked across a remarkably wide range of contexts, from discussions about women's workforce participation to conversations about domestic violence, and are frequently cited by politicians and social leaders to support competing positions on gender equality, with the same characters sometimes marshalled to argue for opposing viewpoints. This enduring cultural authority means the epics remain active sites of contestation rather than settled prescriptions. While these narratives have historically served to justify patriarchal structures, they also contain within them seeds of resistance and alternative models of female power that contemporary feminist movements continue to cultivate and reinterpret. The relationship between these ancient texts and women's agency in Indian society is therefore neither straightforwardly liberating nor entirely constraining it is a complex and living inheritance that each generation must negotiate and redefine on its own terms.

Cultural Studies has opened productive new avenues for examining how theological texts are reimagined in contemporary contexts, interrogating the ways in which power, identity, and social structures shape both the original reception of religious narratives and their modern adaptations. Contemporary retellings of such texts typically serve multiple, overlapping functions: they make ancient stories accessible to modern audiences while simultaneously challenging the traditional interpretations and embedded power structures that have long governed their reception. In doing so, they frequently centre voices that were marginalised or altogether absent in the original texts, arguing for a more critical, inclusive, and socially conscious engagement with foundational narratives and transforming sacred texts into active sites of cultural and political dialogue.

The present research examines three significant contemporary retellings of the Ramayana that reimagine Sita through distinctive feminist perspectives: Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantments* (2019), Amish Tripathi's *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* (2017), and Devdutt Pattanaik's *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana* (2013). Though differing in approach, all three works participate in the feminist project of reclaiming Sita's character from patriarchal frameworks, engaging with both classical epic traditions and contemporary gender politics. Through diverse narrative strategies, they transform Sita from a silent ideal into a figure of psychological depth and agency.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Gynocentric Mahabharata and Ramayana

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantments* (2019) represents a landmark achievement in feminist revisionist mythology. The novel retells the Ramayana entirely from Sita's perspective in what Divakaruni frames as "Sitayan", Sita's own version, written in conscious response to Valmiki's male-centred narrative. The project took Divakaruni a decade to complete, reflecting the weight of reimagining India's most sacred female figure, long upheld as the epitome of the pativrata ideal.

The novel's central feminist intervention revolves around what critics identify as the "love vs. duty dynamic", an exploration of the destructive imbalance that emerges "when one person gives everything for love, while the other sacrifices love for responsibility." Divakaruni's Sita is not a passive embodiment of wifely devotion but a questioning, thinking subject who challenges Rama's decisions, most pointedly his demand for agnipariksha — the fire test — following her rescue from Ravana. Rather than accepting the trial as a necessary affirmation of purity, Divakaruni's Sita names the gendered injustice at its heart: proof is demanded of the victim while the rescuer is valorised without question. She reflects, "If I have to prove my virtue in fire, what does that say of the trust and love my husband has for me? What kind of love demands proof? (345).

Equally significant is the novel's polyvocality — its insistence on amplifying the voices of multiple marginalised women within the Ramayana universe. Kaikeyi is transformed from a straightforward villain into an accomplished charioteer with layered motivations; Surpanakha is reimagined not as a lustful demoness but as a woman wronged by two men; Mandodari emerges as a figure of wisdom rather than a mere demon consort; and Urmila, Lakshmana's wife who is largely absent from traditional versions, finally receives recognition for her silent sacrifice. This polyvocality creates what feminist scholars identify as "female solidarity" across traditionally enforced divisions, directly challenging the patriarchal strategy of isolating women from one another.

Drawing on Gayatri Spivak's framework in "Can the Subaltern Speak?", Divakaruni's first-person narration attempts to construct a dialogic space in which female subalterns can speak and be heard. Spivak's observation that "the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" finds vivid illustration in traditional epic narratives, where women characters exist within texts but are denied genuine voice; their utterances filtered through male narrators, their interiority interpreted through male perspectives. Yet Spivak's framework also raises an uncomfortable question that shadows the novel: can a privileged contemporary author

truly represent subaltern voices, or does such an act inevitably risk appropriation? Scholars have noted both the achievement and the tension: while The Forest of Enchantments grants narrative authority to historically silenced women, it simultaneously risks what Chandra Mohanty (1988) warns against: the homogenisation of diverse experiences across caste, class, and historical specificity in the name of a unified "women's perspective."

Amish Tripathi's Warrior Goddess and Euhemeristic Feminism

Amish Tripathi's Sita: Warrior of Mithila (2017), part of his Ram Chandra Series, represents a distinctly different approach to feminist epic retelling. Scholar Madhavi Nair characterises it as "post-feminist" in its orientation, assuming women's equality as a given and focusing on demonstrating female capability within traditionally masculine domains. Where Divakaruni foregrounds interiority and emotional complexity, Tripathi emphasises external action and physical prowess, reimagining Sita as a warrior, military strategist, and political leader.

Tripathi's broader body of work employs what scholars identify as a "euhemeristic" approach, depicting gods as humans whose extraordinary deeds elevated them to divinity. Established in his bestselling Shiva Trilogy (2010–2013), this philosophical framework challenges religious orthodoxy by suggesting that all divine figures achieved their status through human capability and choice rather than inherent sanctity. Applied to Sita, this euhemerism carries feminist implications: it positions her not as a figure of innate purity to be venerated, but as a woman whose achievements made her divine a model for human women's potential.

Tripathi's Sita is found abandoned as an infant, adopted by King Janak, rises to become Prime Minister of Mithila, excels as a champion archer and capable ruler, and is ultimately chosen as the next Vishnu, the saviour figure by the secret society of Malayaputras. The novel's opening declaration captures this transformation succinctly: "tall for a thirteen-year-old, already beginning to build muscle" (51). The feminist dimensions of this reimagining can be understood through Judith Butler's

concept of "gender performativity" the idea that gender is constituted through repetitive acts and can be subverted through alternative performances. Tripathi's Sita performs behaviours culturally coded as masculine martial skill, political leadership, strategic warfare while retaining feminine-coded virtues such as compassion and ethical reasoning. This combination challenges essentialist gender binaries by embodying in a single character traits that patriarchal culture has traditionally segregated by sex.

Scholarly critique, however, has noted significant limitations in Tripathi's approach. While his reimagining grants Sita physical agency and martial authority, it engages less thoroughly with structural patriarchy, internalised oppression, or the emotional costs of navigating male-dominated institutions. The emphasis on what Naomi Wolf terms "power feminism" women wielding power and exercising individual choice risks overlooking how patriarchy constrains even the most capable women's decisions. For this reason, some feminist scholars have characterised Tripathi's feminism as essentially liberal in orientation: concerned with individual achievement and visibility within existing systems rather than with the deeper transformation of those systems.

Devdutt Pattanaik's Queer Mythologies and Gender Fluidity

Devdutt Pattanaik occupies a distinctive position among mythological reinterpreters, concerned less with retelling the epic narrative in a conventional literary sense than with excavating the layered symbolic meanings, alternative traditions, and marginalised perspectives embedded within the Ramayana. His work *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana* (2013) approaches the epic not as a fixed sacred text but as a living, contested tradition shaped by diverse cultural, regional, and interpretive contexts. The book's distinctive format, combining narrative retelling with illustrated panels, footnotes, and marginal commentary drawing from over fifty regional versions of the Ramayana, itself embodies his central argument that no single authoritative version of the story exists.

Pattanaik's methodology challenges the authoritative, singular reading of the Ramayana by drawing attention to its many regional variations and oral traditions, demonstrating that no one version holds absolute interpretive authority. By placing these variations side by side, he reveals how different communities across centuries have understood Sita differently as goddess, as victim, as rebel, as ideal exposing the constructed nature of any single interpretation. This comparative approach exemplifies what postcolonial scholars call "decolonising mythology" recovering indigenous knowledge systems from the dominant interpretive frameworks that have sought to fix and standardise them. Where colonial and nationalist interpreters have tended to privilege the Valmiki Ramayana as the definitive text, Pattanaik's retelling insists on the irreducible plurality of the tradition, restoring voices and versions that have been marginalised or suppressed.

Central to Pattanaik's retelling is his reimagining of Sita not merely as Rama's devoted wife but as a figure of considerable inner strength, wisdom, and spiritual authority in her own right. He draws attention to aspects of Sita's character that traditional retellings have minimised or overlooked her origins as a child of the earth goddess, her deep connection to nature and fertility, her capacity for independent moral reasoning, and her ultimate return to the earth as an act of sovereign self-determination rather than defeat. In this reading, Sita's final disappearance into the earth is reframed as a powerful assertion of agency, a refusal to submit any further to the conditions imposed upon her rather than a passive withdrawal or a tragic end.

Pattanaik's approach to the agnipariksha the fire test that Rama demands of Sita following her rescue from Ravana is particularly revealing. Rather than naturalising this demand as a matter of dharmic necessity, as traditional versions tend to do, Pattanaik contextualises it within broader structures of social expectation and male honour, allowing the gendered injustice of the episode to surface without imposing an overtly polemical reading. Similarly, his treatment of Sita's second exile, banished while pregnant on the basis of public rumour. It exposes the vulnerability of even the most devoted and virtuous woman within a social order that

ultimately prioritises male reputation over female experience and suffering.

From a feminist perspective, Pattanaik's retelling serves to quietly but persistently unsettle the patriarchal readings that have calcified around Sita's character. By foregrounding the plurality of her representations across traditions, he implicitly challenges the reduction of Sita to a single, monolithic ideal of feminine submission and purity. His use of footnotes and alternative versions functions as a form of scholarly activism, demonstrating at every turn that the version of Sita upheld by conservative and nationalist discourse is one interpretation among many, not an eternal or divinely ordained truth.

Pattanaik's work can be situated within what scholars identify as "cultural feminism" an approach that emphasises recovering and celebrating feminine principles and indigenous traditions rather than engaging in direct political critique of patriarchal structures. This distinguishes his retelling from more explicitly feminist works like Divakaruni's The Forest of Enchantments, which grants Sita a first-person voice and positions her as an active critic of the injustices she endures. Pattanaik works more obliquely, allowing the multiplicity of the tradition itself to do the subversive work. The effect is nonetheless significant: by demonstrating that Sita has been understood across centuries as a figure of power, agency, and spiritual authority not merely of obedience and suffering he provides a mythological foundation for contemporary feminist reinterpretations.

However, Pattanaik's approach also attracts critique from feminist scholars who argue that his reluctance to adopt an explicitly political stance limits the transformative potential of his retelling. His tendency to frame patriarchal elements of the narrative within a broader metaphorical or symbolic context interpreting Sita's trials as representations of the soul's journey rather than as reflections of women's material oppression risks, in the view of some critics, aestheticising structures of domination rather than challenging them. This tension reflects the broader debate within feminist mythology studies

between cultural and political approaches to sacred texts, and between recovering tradition and transforming it. Pattanaik's *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana* remains a significant contribution to this ongoing conversation, expanding the interpretive possibilities of the Ramayana while raising important questions about the relationship between mythology, gender, and power.

Character Reimaginings: From Archetypes to Complex Subjectivities

The feminist reimagining of female characters from the epics demonstrates multiple strategies for transforming one-dimensional archetypes into complex human subjects with interiority, agency, and moral depth. Examining how key characters are reconceived reveals the politics and possibilities of revisionist mythology.

Sita undergoes the most radical transformation across these three retellings, given her status as Hinduism's paramount ideal woman. Traditional depictions emphasise absolute pativrata devotion she follows Rama into exile without question, endures captivity with unwavering purity proven through the fire test, and accepts final banishment without protest. As Nabaneeta Dev Sen observes, the traditional Sita embodies "mute acceptance of suffering" as feminine virtue, functioning as an impossible standard against which real women are perpetually judged and found wanting. Contemporary retellings fundamentally challenge this construction, though each does so through a distinctly different approach.

Amish Tripathi's *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* (2017) presents the most dramatic departure from tradition, reimagining Sita as a warrior, political leader, and chosen Vishnu — roles historically reserved for men. She walks with weapons, makes strategic military decisions, and embodies what scholars describe as "feminist nationalism." This reimagining enacts what Judith Butler calls gender performativity demonstrating through a single character that traits culturally assigned to one gender are in fact constructed and transferable, rather than natural or fixed. By occupying masculine-coded roles while retaining feminine-coded virtues such as

compassion and ethical reasoning, Tripathi's Sita challenges the essentialist gender binaries that have long governed both epic tradition and Indian social life.

Divakaruni's *The Forest of Enchantments* (2019) takes a markedly different approach, maintaining Sita's essentially non-violent character while granting her something the tradition consistently withholds: voice, interiority, and the capacity for critique. Divakaruni's Sita does not transform into a warrior; instead, she becomes a thinking, questioning subject who refuses to accept injustice as divine will. Most pointedly, she interrogates the agnipariksha the fire test demanded by Rama following her rescue from Ravana — exposing its gendered logic: why must the victim prove her innocence when neither the abductor nor the rescuer is subjected to equivalent scrutiny? In articulating this question, Divakaruni's Sita names the injustice that traditional versions naturalise and sanctify. Beyond her relationship with Rama, the novel grants Sita meaningful solidarity with other marginalised women Surpanakha, Ahalya, Urmila creating what feminist scholars identify as a network of female solidarity that cuts across the divisions patriarchal structures work to enforce. The novel employs first-person narration to grant Sita the subjectivity traditionally reserved for male protagonists, applying what feminist narratologists identify as a crucial shift in focalization moving from a narrative in which women's experiences are mediated through male observers to one in which a woman speaks directly and on her own terms.

Pattanaik's *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana* (2013) operates through a different but equally significant feminist strategy. Rather than granting Sita an explicitly critical or resistant voice, Pattanaik works through the multiplication of perspectives, drawing on over fifty regional versions of the Ramayana to demonstrate that Sita has never been a singular, stable figure but a contested and multivalent one. By placing divergent interpretations side by side, his retelling implicitly challenges the authority of any one version, including those that reduce Sita to a passive embodiment of wifely virtue. His treatment of Sita's return to the earth is particularly significant: reframed not as tragic

defeat or passive withdrawal but as a sovereign act of self-determination, it restores to Sita a form of agency that dominant tradition has consistently suppressed. Pattanaik's Sita thus emerges as a figure of spiritual authority and inner power, whose complexity has been flattened by centuries of patriarchal interpretation.

Taken together, these three retellings reveal the range of strategies available to feminist revisionist mythology. Tripathi demonstrates female capability through action and physical power; Divakaruni recovers female interiority and the capacity for moral critique; Pattanaik unsettles interpretive authority by restoring the plurality that singular, dominant readings have erased. Each approach carries its own possibilities and limitations, but all three share a fundamental commitment to transforming Sita from a silent ideal into a complex subject one whose story, in all its difficulty and contradiction, belongs to her.

Re-gendering Sacred Texts: Meta-Narrative Strategies and Theoretical Implications

The concept of "re-gendering" canonical texts encompasses multiple theoretical dimensions: the transformation of narrative voice, the creation of psychological interiority, the subversion of gender performativity, and the challenge to epistemological authority over interpretation. Together, these strategies constitute what postmodern narrative theory identifies as meta-narrative practice texts that simultaneously tell stories and reflect on the act of storytelling itself, exposing the constructed nature of narrative authority.

Narrative voice transformation represents the most fundamental of these re-gendering strategies. Traditional epics employ third-person omniscient narration by male sages, Vyasa in the Mahabharata and Valmiki in the Ramayana, who speak with divine authority, presenting their interpretations as objective and unquestionable truth. Feminist retellings disrupt this authority by shifting to first-person female narration, producing what narratologists call a "focalization shift," a change in whose consciousness filters and organises the story. This technical shift carries profound political implications. In Divakaruni's *The Forest of*

Enchantments, Sita confronts Valmiki directly after reading his manuscript of the Ramayana through the night and tells him: what occurred when I was alone in the darkness, under the sorrow tree, you don't know. You don't know my despair. You don't even know my exhilaration, how it felt, first in the forest and then in Ayodhya, when I was the most beloved woman in creation. The sage concedes the limitation of his divine vision and responds: "You must write that story yourself, Ma, for only you know it" (3). This exchange articulates the epistemological claim underlying all feminist retellings: that lived experience constitutes a form of knowledge distinct from, and not necessarily inferior to, external observation, however authoritative. The move from third-person narration, "Sita suffered," to first-person declaration, "I suffered," grants the character the standing to interpret her own experience rather than having it interpreted for her.

Feminist narratologists have analysed this strategy as a direct challenge to what they term "androcentric discourse" narrative structures that position male experience as universal and female experience as particular or secondary. Traditional epics employ a "male-as-norm" framework in which female characters appear primarily in relation to male protagonists: as Rama's wife, as the Pandavas' wife, as Dhritarashtra's wife. First-person female narration fundamentally disrupts this relational positioning, centring women's lives as stories worthy of telling in their own right rather than as supporting threads in male heroes' journeys.

The creation of psychological interiority represents the second major re-gendering strategy. Traditional epics rarely explore female characters' inner lives, their hopes, fears, desires, doubts, or moral deliberations. Emotions are externalised through action or inferred by male observers. Feminist retellings reverse this, granting women the rich interior landscapes traditionally reserved for male protagonists. This interiority transforms characters who previously functioned as archetypes into fully realised human subjects. As scholars have observed, traditional narratives present Sita as "a plot device to further the story, instead of a complete character." Feminist retellings grant her full subjectivity, hope and vulnerability in her marriage, terror during abduction, rage at

the fire test, and deliberate moral reasoning about her choices. She becomes human rather than symbol, a complex individual rather than a cultural ideal to be venerated or reproduced.

Gender performativity Judith Butler's concept that gender is constituted through repetitive acts rather than rooted in essential identity provides a key theoretical framework for understanding how these retellings subvert gender norms. Butler argues that gender identities can be "actively reshaped through new forms of performance," opening possibilities for subversion and transformation. Tripathi's warrior Sita in *Sita: Warrior of Mithila* performs behaviours culturally coded as masculine martial skill, political leadership, military strategy while retaining feminine-coded virtues such as compassion and ethical reasoning. This demonstrates that a single individual can embody characteristics that patriarchal culture has insisted on segregating by gender. The political implication is significant: if Sita can be both warrior and compassionate nurturer, the claim that women are naturally unsuited for combat or governance loses its ideological foundation. If Draupadi can be both devoted wife and war strategist, the notion that women are inherently peaceful and domestic is exposed not as nature but as ideology.

Pattanaik's *Sita: An Illustrated Retelling of the Ramayana* extends this analysis through its engagement with the plurality of the Ramayana tradition itself. By drawing on over fifty regional versions of the epic, Pattanaik demonstrates that gender has never been understood in Hindu mythology as a fixed or singular category. His documentation of characters who change gender, transcend gender, or embody multiple genders simultaneously figures like Ardhanarishvara, whose very form combines the masculine and feminine supports his philosophical position that "the soul has no gender; gender comes from the flesh." Grounded in Hindu theological tradition rather than imported from Western theory, this position challenges gender essentialism by locating gender in mutable material reality rather than immutable spiritual essence, undermining claims that rigid gender roles reflect divine or cosmic order.

Meta-narrative self-reflexivity constitutes a fourth re-gendering strategy, and one that is particularly visible in contemporary feminist retellings.

These works frequently acknowledge their relationship to previous versions of the stories they retell, creating what postmodern theory identifies as "intertextuality" texts in active dialogue with other texts. Divakaruni's Sita directly addresses Valmiki, challenging his interpretation and claiming the authority of lived experience over poetic observation. This meta-narrative dimension is crucial because it exposes all retellings including supposedly authoritative originals as interpretations shaped by their authors' social locations and ideological commitments rather than timeless transcriptions of divine truth.

This recognition that there is no absolute or original form of myth is supported by A.K. Ramanujan's seminal essay "Three Hundred Ramayanas," which demonstrates that multiple, often contradictory versions of the epic have always coexisted, with every telling being "unique" while "no telling is a mere retelling." Feminist retellings thus participate in a long and living tradition of mythological interpretation while asserting a specifically feminist interpretive lens. The concept of "palimpsest" a layered text bearing visible traces of earlier erasures and overwrites captures this dynamic well. Sacred texts function as palimpsests in which multiple interpretations accumulate over time, with dominant readings working to suppress alternatives. Feminist retellings excavate these suppressed layers, recovering earlier women-centred traditions such as Chandrabati's sixteenth-century Bengali Ramayana, and adding new layers that future readers and interpreters will in turn engage with and transform.

Collectively, these meta-narrative strategies mount a sustained challenge to the epistemological authority that has historically governed sacred texts. Interpretive monopoly over the epics belonged traditionally to Brahmin male scholars trained in Sanskrit and ritual systems inaccessible to women and lower castes a gatekeeping that postcolonial scholars identify as "epistemic violence," the systematic erasure of alternative knowledge systems and perspectives. Feminist retellings assert women's epistemological authority on the basis of lived experience, challenging this monopoly without necessarily claiming a superior or final truth. In doing so, they reopen the question of who has the right to interpret

sacred tradition and insist that the answer must be broader, more inclusive, and more honest about the interests that interpretation has always served.

Conclusion: Re-mythologizing as Political Practice in Contemporary India

The feminist reimagining of Indian epics constitutes far more than a literary phenomenon it represents a vital form of political practice at the intersection of gender, caste, religion, and nationalism. By repositioning silenced female characters as narrators and protagonists, contemporary authors challenge not merely specific patriarchal interpretations but the very structures of epistemic authority that have historically excluded women from cultural meaning-making. This intervention carries particular urgency at a moment when Hindu nationalist forces deploy these same texts to enforce conservative gender norms and religious uniformity, making feminist retellings acts of cultural resistance as much as literary innovation.

The works examined in this study Divakaruni's psychologically complex first-person narratives, Tripathi's reimagining of Sita as warrior and political leader, and Pattanaik's recovery of the epic's plural traditions demonstrate multiple and distinct strategies for challenging patriarchal authority while simultaneously claiming cultural legitimacy. Applying theoretical frameworks drawn from Spivak's subaltern studies, Mohanty's Third World feminism, and postmodern narrative theory illuminates how these retellings collectively transform women from objects to subjects, from victims to strategists, from one-dimensional archetypes to complex human beings navigating and resisting oppressive systems.

The character reimaginings prove particularly significant in terms of their broader cultural impact. Sita moves from silent, suffering ideal to warrior leader or questioning subject, depending on the retelling; marginalised figures such as Urmila and Surpanakha gain voice and narrative centrality they have long been denied. These transformations offer contemporary women alternative models of femininity beyond

patient endurance, demonstrating possibilities for agency both within and against patriarchal constraints. The commercial success of these works bestseller status, translation into multiple languages, adoption in university curricula reflects a wide cultural appetite for these alternative visions of womanhood and tradition.

A significant question nevertheless remains unresolved: whether patriarchal texts can ever be adequately reclaimed for feminist purposes, or whether truly emancipatory politics requires what might be called epistemological exit rejecting not merely dominant interpretations but the texts themselves. Dalit-Bahujan intellectuals have advanced this position most forcefully, arguing that the epics encode irredeemable caste hierarchy that cannot be reformed through reinterpretation alone. The tension between insider critics seeking expanded interpretation and outsider critics demanding fundamental rejection is unlikely to be resolved, and both positions carry important insights that feminist scholarship must continue to engage seriously.

The broader cultural politics at stake reveal how the reimagining of sacred texts functions as a central site of contestation over national identity, religious authority, and social transformation. In a contemporary India marked by intensifying religious nationalism, growing pressures of censorship, and deepening gender and caste hierarchies, feminist mythological retellings perform vital and irreplaceable work. They assert textual multiplicity against authoritarian impulses to fix meaning; they offer alternative Hindu identities compatible with feminism and social justice; they establish marginalised groups' right to narrative authority; and they create cultural resources for imagining genuinely different gender relations.

The recognition that there is no absolute or original form of myth that the epics have always existed in multiple, evolving, and often contradictory versions fundamentally challenges claims about tradition's unchanging and divinely ordained nature. A.K. Ramanujan's documentation of three hundred Ramayanas demonstrates that multiplicity is itself traditional, positioning feminist retellings as indigenous practice rather than Western imposition. The recovery of historical

women's retellings, from Chandrabati's sixteenth-century Bengali Ramayana to village women's folk songs, further establishes a continuity that conservative discourse has worked to erase.

Feminist reimaginings of the Indian epics ultimately enact what Adrienne Rich described as "revision" the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction as a form of survival. In a context where patriarchal readings of sacred texts continue to shape women's socialisation, constrain their opportunities, and justify violence against them, the creation of alternative readings is not merely an intellectual exercise but a matter of political necessity. These retellings demonstrate that tradition is not a fixed inheritance passively received but a living resource actively interpreted, contested, and transformed by each generation. By asserting that women can tell their own stories, interpret their own experiences, and claim authority over traditions that have long claimed authority over them, feminist epic retellings make a meaningful and lasting contribution to the broader transformation of gender relations in contemporary India demonstrating that cultural heritage can be simultaneously honoured and challenged, preserved and reimagined, celebrated and fundamentally renewed.

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A Parallel Analysis on Reimagining Female Agency through Myth, Identity, and Modernity in the novels of Githa Hariharan and Anita Nair

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1. Introduction

Contemporary Indian English literature today is a major platform for feminist research, in which women writers challenge traditional narratives, social norms, and the changing nature of female identity. In this rich context, Geetha Hariharan and Anitha Nair are two prominent voices reshaping 'female agency' through different narrative methods. Their novels reinterpret women's lives in patriarchal societies; combining mythological elements with modern life experiences, they reveal women's selfhood, sexuality and empowerment [1]. This study places their writings in the broader context of Indian feminist literature, examining how myth, identity and modernity intersect in a new vision of femininity [2].

1.1 Background and Rationale

The development of feminist writing in Indian English literature in the late twentieth century constituted a major phase in the re-examination of women's roles and inner experiences [2]. While early works born of freedom depicted women as figures bound by traditional and familial responsibilities, in later decades women began to write in opposition to patriarchy, presenting individuality and agency. Women such as Kamala Das, Shashi Deshpande, and Nayantara Sahgal shaped the struggle for female consciousness and self-identity. In this context, Geeta Hariharan and Anita Nair represent two different but complementary approaches to feminist expression [3].

Hariharan's novels-The Thousand Faces of Night, When Dreams Travel-reread myths from a feminist perspective, revealing silenced female voices and challenging the patriarchal authority embedded in cultural narratives [1], [3]. In contrast, Anita Nair's Ladies Coupe and Mistress candidly portray the lives of modern Indian women, showing how they seek freedom, emotional honesty, and sexual autonomy [4], [5]. Thus, these two writers represent two major strands of Indian feminist writing: one rooted in myth and the reinterpretation of collective identity; the other foregrounding personal experiences and modern sensibilities.

By comparing the works of the two, this study reveals how mythology and modernity together shape female agency; further enriching the Indian feminist discourse [2], [5].

1.2 Research Gap

Both Hariharan and Nair have received significant critical attention individually, but most studies have looked at Hariharan's use of mythology or Nair's realism and gender perspective separately [1], [4]. Comparative studies that examine their feminist ideas in an integrated manner are scarce. In particular, there are no studies that examine the ways in which mythological reinterpretation and real-life reality are used as combined strategies when addressing issues of women's identity, sexuality, and autonomy [3].

Furthermore, while previous feminist studies have strongly discussed the social and psychological experiences of women, there has been very little research on how mythological tradition and modern individualism work together as integrated modes of resistance [2]. Therefore, by jointly examining how Hariharan and Nair reshape female agency in mythology and the contemporary world, this research fills an important gap [5].

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of this research are as follows:

- To compare Githa Hariharan's and Anita Nair's feminist tactics in denoting women's autonomy and self-realization.
- To explore the treatment of myth, identity, and sexuality as interrelated dimensions of female agency within their novels.
- This study reveals how mythological reframing and empirical realism together enrich the feminist discourse of Indian English literature, and how it changes over time and culture.

1.4 Research Questions

1. How does Githa Hariharan use mythic reinterpretation to rebuild feminine agency and challenge patriarchal traditions?
2. In what ways does Anita Nair's realistic narrative method reflect contemporary forms of female autonomy and emotional freedom?
3. What intersections and divergences emerge between Hariharan's and Nair's feminist visions in terms of narrative method, thematic focus, and ideological orientation?

1.5 Scope and Limitations

This study analyses four major novels-Hariharan's The Thousand Faces of Night, When Dreams Travel, and Nair's Ladies Coupe, Mistress-which represent the feminist voice in modern Indian English fiction [2], [5]. The study explores how women's agency is portrayed by myth, identity, and contemporary experience from thematic, narrative, and conceptual perspectives.

This study does not seek extensive linguistic research, stylistic analysis, translation studies or prose interactions. Its aim is to reveal comparative feminist perspectives on the unique methods used by authors to reshape femininity. The limitations of the study lie in the small number of texts selected and the focus on literary analysis rather than sociological or psychological perspectives. However, within this limitation, it aims to provide relevant insights into the diversity and development of feminist thought in modern Indian English literature [2], [3].

2. Review of Literature

This literature review briefly outlines the development of feminism in Indian English fiction, then critically examines the contributions of Hariharan and Nair. It also points out the gap where mythological reimagining and modern empirical realism have not been explored together as feminist frameworks.

2.1 Feminist Traditions in Indian English Fiction

The development of feminist writing in Indian English literature has marked a shift from portraying women as passive subjects to narratives that emphasize their individuality and agency. As Twinkle (2023) [6] points out, women-centered narratives move away from traditional nurturer/victim images and reveal women's resilience and capacity for self- determination. Pioneering writers such as Kamala Das, Shashi Deshpande, and Arundhati Roy brought female subjectivity to the center of literary discourse.

Kamala Das's confessional poetry provided a new outlet for female emotion and sexual integrity; Shashi Deshpande explored the psychological struggles experienced by middle- class women within the domestic sphere. Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things (1997) extended feminist criticism by linking gender oppression to socio-political issues. As Mandal (2025) [7] and Vatsala et al. (2023) [8] argue, Indian feminist fiction has moved from portraying women as victims to portraying them as activists standing up against patriarchy.

As such, this literary movement has become not only an artistic expression but also a cultural act that challenges the gender structures of Indian society.

2.2 Critical Studies on Githa Hariharan

Geeta Hariharan's fiction has been widely studied for its reinterpretation of myths and the uncovering of hidden women's histories. Kavita (2022) [9] and Tejoswee Milli (2024) [10] argue that The Thousand Faces of Night reinterprets ancient Hindu myths from a feminist perspective,

reinterpreting stories such as Sita, Draupadi, and Ganga in a way that highlights the suppressed voices and inner strength of women. Kavitha (2022) [9] interprets Hariharan's reinterpretation of myths as an attempt to reclaim female identity from patriarchal narratives that defined women as passive.

Similarly, Tejoswi Mili (2024) [10] explains that Hariharan combines mythology and modern sensibilities, empowering the protagonist through her connection to mythological women. Mousumi Basfore (2025) [11] continues this analysis, showing that Hariharan humanizes divine female figures, dispelling the notions of purity and subservience assigned to mythological women; instead, she foregrounds their agency, desire, and resistance.

All these studies show that Hariharan's works recast the mythic from a feminist perspective, transforming them from tools of patriarchal control into a means of liberation. But as Twinkle (2023) [6] and Mandal (2025) [7] point out, most studies have focused only on her use of the mythic and have not explored their relevance to contemporary reality. Thus, there is a gap in comparative research that is integrated with modern feminist experiences.

2.3 Critical Studies on Anita Nair

In contrast to Hariharan's mythological perspective, Anitha Nair explores feminism through psychological realism and the daily experiences of modern women. Imade (2024) [12] describes Ladies Coupé as a journey of self-discovery in which women share their own stories and true feelings. Through these narratives, Nair challenges patriarchal stereotypes and promotes emotional freedom, inner awareness, and self-respect.

Anita Nair's novel Mistress combines art, desire, and autonomy, expressing women's emotional and sexual awareness through Kathakali metaphors. As Reshu Shukla [13] notes, Nair's women reflect the psychological struggle of modern Indian women, caught between social obligations and personal desires; it marks a shift from collective identity to individual self-realization.

Twinkle (2023) [6] and Mandal (2025) [7] both point to Nair's sensitive and realistic portrayal of women coping with marriage, motherhood, and ambition as a major contribution to contemporary feminist thought. However, while her realism is widely praised, few studies have conflated her feminist approach with Hariharan's mythological reinterpretations, creating an analytical gap in feminist theoretical debates.

2.4 Research Gap Identified

The reviewed studies show that while Hariharan's mythological reconstruction of femininity and Nair's realistic portrayal of modern female autonomy have been extensively studied separately, there is little research that combines and compares these two approaches. Current scholarship has largely ignored how mythological reinterpretation and empirical reality converge or diverge in the articulation of female agency, identity, and sexuality.

Thus, this study fills the research gap by combining and analyzing Hariharan and Nair's novels from a feminist perspective. It reveals how their unique literary approaches integrate and enrich the understanding of women's selfhood in Indian English literature.

Table 1: Summary of Key Critical Studies

Author & Year	Focus of Study	Limitation / Gaps Identified
Twinkle (2023) [6]	Overview of feminist evolution and empowerment in Indian English literature	Lacks particular focus on indvidual authors like Hariharan or Nair
Mandal (2025) [7]	Feminist reimagining in 21st-century Indian	Does not offer comparative analysis of feminist tactics
Vatsala et al., (2023) [8]	Evolution of feminist voices in Indian English literature.	General overview, lacks author-specific comparative insight

Kavitha (2022) [9]	Feminist reading of Hariharan's The Thousand Faces of Night highlighting mythic reinterpretation	Concentrated only on one text; no comparative framework
Tejoswee Mili (2024) [10]	Myth and identity in Hariharan's fiction by feminist reconstruction	Ignores contemporary feminist parallels in modern realism
Mousumi [11] Basfore (2025)	Reinterpretation of Sita and Draupadi in contemporary retellings of myth.	Discusses mythic themes broadly, not linked to Nair's realism
Imade (2024) [12]	Psychological and emotional independence in Nair's Ladies Coupé.	Concentrates on realism alone, excluding mythic and collective dimensions
Reshu Shukla (2023) [13]	Critical evaluation of in women's contributions Indian fiction.	Limited to descriptive assessment without myth-modern synthesis

3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study combines feminist literature, myth criticism, and gender-identity theories to explain how Hariharan and Nair frame female agency in their individual narrative structures. While feminist theory positions women's writing as a distinct tradition, myth criticism demonstrates the potential for myths to be transformed into tools for liberation. Identity and sexual perspectives reveal the functional and psychological dimensions of femininity. Together, these constructs provide a holistic understanding of how both writers represent female autonomy and self-realization in mythological and modern contexts.

3.1 Feminist Literary Theory

The development of feminist literary criticism has created a key platform for understanding women's creativity and cultural identity. As Mhamane (2021) [14] notes, feminist criticism in the twentieth century shifted from a male-centered reading to a woman-centered approach, culminating in Elaine Showalter's 'Gynocriticism'. This emphasizes the need to create women's own literary tradition, detached from patriarchal criteria, and to read texts in terms of women's experiences and self-expression.

In her seminal theory, Showalter emphasizes the importance of the study of women writers and explores the themes and patterns that shape women's literary history. Sharma (2023) [15] revisits this in the present context, suggesting that this approach is important in reclaiming

the voices of marginalized women and in establishing a women's literary tradition that expresses emotional authenticity and social critique.

In this study, Showalter's framework helps us identify and understand the unique female voices that emerge in Hariharan's mythological reinterpretation and Nair's empirical reality. It reveals how both writers redefine women's experience from within, positioning women as agents and storytellers of their own lives, not on the margins of male-dominated narratives.

Parallel to Showalter's perspective, Simon de Beauvoir's The Second Sex (1949) is a key philosophical foundation in feminist theory. Her concept of the female 'Other' explains how patriarchy alienates women from the self. Building on this concept, the study explores how both Hariharan and Nair challenge this 'Othering' status by rewriting women's identity in mythological and modern narratives.

3.2 Myth Criticism and Reinterpretation

Myth criticism examines the archetypal patterns and symbols that shape the human imagination and collective consciousness. Joseph Campbell's concept of the 'hero's journey' and Northrop Frye's archetypal design explain recurring narrative patterns across cultures. But these classic

theories often focus on male heroism, presenting patriarchal perspectives as universal truths.

Contemporary feminist scholars have begun to reread mythological structures to reveal the gendered silences hidden in them. As Raghav (2025) [16] argues, feminist mythological criticism refers to the rewriting of gender roles in traditional narratives, transforming myth from an instrument of oppression into a means of liberation. This approach rescues women like Sita, Draupadi, and Ganga from their passive, sacrificial portrayals and presents their virility, agency, and emotional complexity.

In this context, Geeta Hariharan's The Thousand Faces of Night and When Dreams Travel are prime examples of mythological reworking. Reinterpreting Frye and Campbell's mythological theories from a feminist perspective, Hariharan transforms ancient stories into women's journeys of autonomy. To explain her redefinition of myths as stories of liberation rather than submission, this study uses feminist mythological criticism, through which she challenges patriarchal traditions and reaffirms women's cultural place.

3.3 Identity and Sexuality Theories

The study of identity and sexuality occupies a central place in feminist thought. As Sree and Shafi (2024) [17] explain, Judith Butler's theory of gender performance suggests that gender is not something inherent, but a continuous performance of acts, gestures, and discourses that construct identity. Drawing on Foucault's ideas of power-discourse, Butler argues that gender norms are perpetuated through this performance; at the same time, they can be challenged through alternative expressions of identity.

Butler's theory provides a useful framework for understanding Nair's portrayal of challenging socially imposed gender roles through emotional and psychological resistance. In the novels Ladies Coupé and Mistress, her protagonists redefine themselves through autonomy and self-expression, even as they express the constraints of traditional femininity.

Butler's concept of performance explains how these women negotiate their identity in both accepting and defying patriarchal expectations.

Luce Irigaray's psychoanalytic feminism plays a key role in reclaiming female desire and language that has been repressed by patriarchy. As Karo (2023) [18] argues, Irigaray questions masculine-dominated linguistic structures and proposes a feminine mode of expression based on emotion, diversity, and bodily experience. This perspective helps to explain how women's emotional realities and sensual experiences are presented in Nair's work as symbols of self-liberation. Nair's depiction of desire is reported to reclaim women's emotional and linguistic autonomy, rather than following a male-centered discourse.

To understand how women's agency operates and emerges in Nair and Hariharan's stories, Butler and Irigaray's theories combine to provide a nuanced framework for examining identity and sexuality.

Table 2: Theoretical Anchors and Application

Framework	Key Scholar	Application to Study
Feminist Theory	Elaine Showalter	Detecting and interpreting the rise of the feminine voice in both authors' narratives
Myth Criticism	Northrop Frye	Evaluating Hariharan's mythic reworking and her feminist recontruction of archetypal patterns
Gender Peformativity	Judith Butler	Examining identity, sexuality, and subversion of gender roles in Nair's realistic portrayals
Psychoanalytic Feminism	Luce Irigaray	Interpreting Nair's emotional realism and representation of female desire by language and introspection

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study uses qualitative comparative literary analysis to understand the nuances of literature with layers of narrative, culture, and ideology. Since Hariharan and Nair's works are deeply embedded in symbols, cultural references, psychological details, and socio- historical aspects, quantitative methods are not sufficient. Therefore, this qualitative approach helps to explore how they construct feminist meanings using language, narrative form, and characters [19].

This comparative design allows us to examine in parallel how the two writers deal with key feminist questions such as mythological reinterpretation, female identity, sexual autonomy, and the negotiation of modernity. Such a comparative approach is essential in feminist literary criticism because it reveals similarities and differences between the texts [20]. Rather than looking at the novels in isolation, this framework points to shifts in their feminist aims, storytelling styles, thematic focus, and depiction of agency. In doing so, it provides a comprehensive understanding of how Hariharan's mytho-historical imagination and Nair's realist-psychological approach differentiate feminist discourse.

Comparative literary analysis is essential for understanding how storytelling challenges or reframes myth, tradition, gender norms, and social expectations. This method is consistent with the principles of qualitative design emphasized in contemporary humanities research [21]. It reveals not only the individual patterns in each writer's work, but also their collective contribution to the broader feminist discourse in Indian English literature. This design provides in-depth analysis at both the textual and theoretical levels, strengthening the credibility and interpretive power of the study.

4.2 Texts Selected

The primary texts were purposefully selected, to examine novels that best represent how each author portrays female agency. Hariharan's The Thousand Faces of Night and When Dreams Travel were chosen

because they demonstrate her unique style of using mythological motifs and reinterpreting traditional stories. This selection is consistent with feminist close reading methods that focus on symbolism and mythological reinterpretation [22].

In The Thousand Faces of Night, Hariharan uses Indian mythology and epics to critique patriarchy, while When Dreams Travel reinterprets the story of Scheherazade and reveals the power of women's storytelling. Both novels show how women challenge traditional gender expectations by reinterpreting traditional stories.

Anita Nair's novels Ladies Coupé and Mistress were selected because they reveal the personal and social struggles that contemporary Indian women face as they move towards autonomy. These works are suitable for thematic and feminist content analysis [23]. Ladies Coupé offers realistic stories of survival and emotional liberation, while Mistress explores the complexities of sexuality, desire, and love through a psychologically charged narrative.

Taken together, these four texts serve as a balanced collection representing two distinct but complementary feminist paths-one based on mythological reinterpretation and cultural memory, the other centered on experiential reality and psychological depth.

4.3 Analytical Framework

The analysis is structured around four main thematic pillars-Myth, Identity, Sexuality, and Modernity. While Hariharan and Nair's practices differ, they work together towards a feminist purpose. The analysis begins with a close reading, which allows for a detailed examination of narrative voice, symbolism, metaphor, character development, and textual structure, and serves as a feminist critical tool for revealing gendered meanings [22].

Subsequently, thematic coding is used to classify textual sections in novels that deal with issues of autonomy, oppression, desire, identity, and cultural negotiation. Literary thematic analysis provides a systematic means of identifying patterns and generating interpretive conclusions

[23]. A feminist perspective serves as a guide, focusing on how patriarchal norms are questioned, disrupted, or dismantled in stories. This approach reflects key principles of recent feminist textual methods [19].

This framework reveals the intersections between personal and cultural identities-legendary memory shaping collective female identity in Hariharan, and emotional experience shaping individual identity in Nair's stories. This provides a broader understanding of the two writers' different literary strategies for rethinking female agency.

Table 3: Comparative Analytical Parameters

Analytical Focus	Hariharan's Approach	Hariharan's Approach
Minimal depandance on myth; focuses on modern realism and everyday life	Use of Myth	Feminist reintrepretation of classical myths, epics, and legends to challenge patriarchal tradition
Individual, experimental, shaped by personal choices and psychological growth	Female Identity	Collective, historical, shaped by cultural memory and inherited narratives
Open, direct, realistic; presented as emotional and physical self-expression	Sexuality	Symbolic, meta-phorical, culturally coded; provided by allegory
Asserted within modern social limitations and personal circumstances	Modernity	Negotiated by reinter-pretation of conventional stories and mythic histories

5. Analysis and Discussion

5.1 Hariharan's Mythic Reconstruction of Feminine Agency

Geetha Hariharan's narrative strategy finds strength in reinterpreting myth as a feminist tool. Rather than seeing tradition as a fixed cultural form, Hariharan transforms it into a transformative text in which women can reexamine their identities. In The Thousand Faces of Night, she creates a connection between the modern struggles of Devi and the

stories of mythological women like Amba, Gandhari, and Sita. These mythological women, who are usually seen in traditions as symbols of endurance and sacrifice, are renewed and reimagined from a feminist perspective with their emotional depth, layered desires, and unspoken flaws.

Devi's constant struggle between duty and autonomy reflects the constraints imposed on mythological women, revealing how cultural memory and contemporary female experiences influence them. Mythological parallels contextualize Devi's difficult position and illuminate the possibility of reclaiming the self and reinterpretation.

Similarly, When Dreams Travel reexamines the myth of Scheherazade. While traditionally celebrated for its brilliance, her story was only sustained as a living resource under patriarchal systems. Hariharan frees Scheherazade from this bound role and reveals her as a symbol of agency, creativity, and narrative power. In doing so, Hariharan emphasizes storytelling as a feminist act, a way to reclaim history, voice, and subjectivity. Through fragmented narrative structures, shifting voices, and layers of intertextuality, she highlights the diversity of women's experiences that patriarchal myths attempt to erase.

Overall, Hariharan's mythological reconstruction challenges patriarchy in two ways: first, by uncovering how myths are gendered; and second, by revealing ways to rewrite them in ways that empower women. Her emphasis on cultural memory and identity positions women not only as inheritors of tradition but also as agents who participate in its transformation. Through myth, Hariharan provides women with tools to confront subjugation and reclaim hidden histories.

5.2 Nair's Realist Exploration of Identity and Sexuality

Anitha Nair's stories reflect women's experiences through realism, emphasizing lived experiences, emotions, and psychological conflicts. Instead of Hariharan's mythological reconstructions, Nair situates characters in everyday social contexts where patriarchy is manifested through domestic expectations, gender roles, economic dependence,

and emotional states. In works like Ladies Coupé, she transforms ordinary contexts into spaces where women share personal stories, revealing processes of solidarity, healing, and resistance. In this way, Nair emphasizes that power is not an isolated event, but a gradual process of self-recognition and emotional recovery.

The journey of the protagonist Akila reveals personal conflicts burdened by family responsibilities and societal expectations. By sharing the stories of other women, she challenges internalized patriarchy and gains choices for autonomy. Nair thus portrays female solidarity as a catalyst for personal transformation, with shared experiences helping to reclaim a woman's own capabilities.

In Mistress, Nair explores the issues of female subjectivity, desire, and emotionality. Through the character of Radha, the sexual taboos faced by women in Indian society are exposed, and desire is presented as an essential part of their self. In the story, dance is used as a means of emotional exchange, conflict, and expression of bodily organization. Sexuality is presented not as a moral transgression, but as a psychological reality in which women explore their identity and social boundaries. Nair's openness about sexuality disrupts the silence traditionally imposed on women's bodies and emotions, reinforcing the idea that empowerment begins when women reclaim the right to want, feel, and express their inner lives.

5.3 Parallel Analysis: Myth vs Modernity

Although Hariharan and Nair write in different modes - Hariharan mythological and symbolic, Nair realistic and experiential - they share a similar investment in the responsibility of re-centering women's voices in cultural and narrative traditions. Hariharan reexamines the mythologies to uncover the historical origins of patriarchal structures, while Nair shows the persistence of patriarchy in the everyday experiences and social expectations of contemporary women.

Despite their methodological differences, Hariharan and Nair collaborate in reflecting on women's identity as challenging and actionable subjects.

Hariharan's characters reconstitute cultural memory and reclaim agency, while Nair's characters redefine current contexts to achieve the same goal. This reveals two paths in Indian feminism: to reclaim erased voices in mythological narratives, and to express individuality in the modern present.

Their styles reveal unique contributions: Hariharan's layered allegory invites readers into a world of mythological opposition, Nair's emotionally expressive stories are reflected by psychological immediacy. Yet both serve to challenge patriarchal definitions of femininity and expand the possibilities of female subjectivity in Indian English fiction. Their works show how myth and modernity combine to enrich women's agency.

Table 4: Comparative Framework of Feminine Representation

Dimension	Githa Hariharan	Anita Nair	Common Feminist Outcome
Framework	Mythic reconstruction; rewriting cultural memory	Experimental realism; grounded in everyday life	Reclaiming female agency by narrative transformation
Identity	Collective, historical, shaped by mythic archetypes	Personal psychological, shaped by lived experience	Empowerment of subjectivity and self-recognition
Sexuality	Metaphoric, symbolic, culturally encoded	Open, realistic, emotionally and sensually articulate	Liberation of the female body and desire
Style	Layered, intertexual, allegorical	Introspective, emotional, realist	Assertion of autonomous female voice

6. Findings

Githa Hariharan and Anitha Nair, despite their stylistic differences, demonstrate a unified force in their feminist vision. Both place female subjectivity, autonomy, and self-definition at the center of their stories, with protagonists embarking on journeys of introspection, resistance, and emotional awakening in both mythological reinterpretations and contemporary contexts. This shared emphasis presents femininity as

an evolving individual, not a fixed social role. Both writers challenge patriarchy through open rebellion or quiet selfishness. Whether Hariharan's Devi transcends traditional expectations, or Nair's Akhila chooses to be free, both women reclaim their autonomy by recognizing the legitimacy of their inner lives, desires, and decisions.

However, The ways in which feminist consciousness is expressed vary with the narrative structure of the author. Hariharan, through the rediscovery of mythological symbolism and cultural memory, restores strength in characters like Amba and Sita, critiques the historical silence of women, and transforms the retold myth into a tool of liberation. Instead, Nair's realistic stories reveal the emotional, psychological, and social obstacles women face in contemporary Indian society through lived experiences. The characters express their struggles in everyday interactions and internal conflicts. If Hariharan reveals oppression in fiction, Nair situates it in common life and personal stories.

This study showed an evolutionary shift in the representation of women's agency from collective to individual. Hariharan's characters find their strength in a shared mythological or historical tradition, connecting their own lives and the experiences of pioneer women. Agency is transformed into a cultural and social tradition, reclaimed through the reinterpretation of traditional narratives. On the other hand, Nair emphasizes personal experiential development, where individual decision-making, emotional clarity, and physical self-assertion shape a woman's autonomy. From collective female memory in Hariharan to individual empowerment in Nair, Indian feminist literature shows how cultural roots and modern individuality interact with women's identity.

Finally, both authors present sexuality not as a moral transgression but as an integral part of the self, which points to a feminist departure from the critique of patriarchal literature. While in Hariharan sexuality appears as a metaphor, in Nair's realistic stories it is direct, emotionally explicit, and women can reclaim their desires without social constraints. In both cases, sexuality becomes a tool for women to assert control over their bodies and emotions; empowering rather than rebellious, desire. This

challenges conservative norms and aligns with universal feminist principles that base bodily autonomy on personal and psychological liberation.

7. Conclusion

Githa Hariharan and Anita Nair explore two paths of Indian feminist expression: Hariharan in cultural and mythological reinterpretation, Nair in psychological realism and contemporary experience. Through their narrative approaches, they reveal that feminism is not a single ideology; it is an evolving discourse that bridges generational shifts, socio-historical complexities, and tradition and modernity. Hariharan's mythological reconstructions connect present-day struggles with cultural memory, while Nair's experiential narratives reveal the emotional and personal struggles of contemporary Indian women. By connecting the mythological past with contemporary realities, their works enrich Indian feminist discourse and expand literary understandings of women's agency, autonomy, and identity.

8. Suggestions for Future Research

Future research on Hariharan and Nair's feminist ideas could examine how class, caste, religious, and regional identities shape women's experiences and the resulting changes in institutional narratives. Also, how feminist themes are transformed across cultural dimensions such as film, theatre, and digital reinterpretations of their works among global audiences.

Furthermore, by expanding the comparative framework to include other Indian women writers, opportunities will arise to examine a comprehensive feminist narrative within the broader context of Indian English literature, which will help to record shared perspectives, different methodologies, and evolving representations of femininity.

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Divided Selves and Fragmented Desires: A Psychoanalytical Reading of Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana*

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Introduction

Girish Karnad's adaptation of Indian folktales and myths for contemporary theatre is remarkable for its sustained psychological depth and philosophical seriousness. Rather than treating myth as a repository of moral instruction or spiritual resolution, Karnad reworks traditional narratives to interrogate the complexities of modern human consciousness. In *Hayavadana*, he draws upon a story found in Somadeva's *B[hatkathâsaritsâgara*, later reinterpreted by Thomas Mann in *The Transposed Heads*. However, Karnad does not merely retell this tale. He transforms it into a probing modern inquiry into identity, desire, and psychological conflict. While the play retains its mythic structure and ritualistic elements, its thematic emphasis shifts decisively toward the divided and unstable nature of the human self.

Discussions

Krish Karnad's *Hayavadana* lies the question of identity. The transposition of heads between Devadatta and Kapila dramatizes the conflict between intellect and physical vitality. Devadatta represents the life of the mind, learning, and refinement, while Kapila embodies strength, instinct, and bodily wholeness. The accidental exchange of their heads initially appears to offer a perfect solution by combining the intellect of Devadatta with the body of Kapila. Yet this apparent harmony proves illusory. The experiment exposes the impossibility of achieving a unified and complete self. Karnad thus undermines the traditional belief that identity can be fixed, stable, or perfectly integrated. Instead, identity emerges as fluid, fractured, and perpetually in tension.

Karnad's treatment of Padmini further intensifies the psychological complexity of the play. She is not portrayed as a passive figure trapped within a moral allegory. Rather, she becomes the site of competing desires and unresolved longings. Her attraction to both Devadatta and Kapila reveals the inadequacy of rigid moral frameworks in addressing human desire. Padmini's predicament illustrates the psychological truth that desire often resists social norms and rational control. Through her character, Karnad exposes the limitations of traditional ideals of marital harmony and feminine virtue. Padmini's desire is neither condemned nor resolved; it remains a source of anxiety, guilt, and inner conflict.

The play's refusal to offer resolution is central to its modern sensibility. Unlike classical myths that often restore balance through divine intervention or moral closure, *Hayavadana* foregrounds fragmentation as a defining condition of human existence. The tragic outcome of the characters' choices suggests that attempts to reconcile opposing aspects of the self inevitably lead to further division. Karnad's theatre does not promise harmony between body and mind, reason and instinct, or desire and duty. Instead, it reveals the psychological cost of seeking wholeness in a world governed by contradiction.

The figure of Hayavadana himself deepens the play's philosophical concerns. His quest to become fully human reflects the universal longing for completeness and identity. Ironically, his transformation results in the opposite of what he seeks. When he finally becomes whole, he turns into a complete horse rather than a complete man. This outcome underscores Karnad's skepticism toward the idea of perfect fulfillment. Hayavadana's fate suggests that the desire for wholeness may itself be misguided. Human identity, the play implies, is inherently incomplete and resistant to final definition.

By relocating a traditional myth within a modern theatrical idiom, Karnad challenges the assumption that myth provides moral clarity or spiritual consolation. In *Hayavadana*, myth becomes a medium through which psychological contradictions are exposed rather than resolved. The familiar narrative of head transposition is stripped of its allegorical

simplicity and reimagined as a complex exploration of the self as unstable, conflicted, and perpetually divided. The use of folk theatre techniques, such as masks, songs, and the Bhagavata figure, further reinforces this tension between tradition and modernity. These devices remind the audience of the story's mythic origins while simultaneously distancing them from emotional certainty or moral reassurance.

Karnad's reworking demonstrates that ancient stories, when viewed through a contemporary lens, can illuminate modern anxieties surrounding identity, desire, and fulfillment. *Hayavadana* reflects a modern psychological awareness that rejects the notion of a unified self. Instead, it presents human existence as shaped by contradiction, loss, and irresolvable tension. In doing so, Karnad transforms myth into a powerful tool for examining the fragmented nature of modern consciousness. The play ultimately affirms that psychological conflict is not an aberration to be overcome but a fundamental condition of being human.

At the heart of *Hayavadana* lies the persistent conflict between mind and body, intellect and instinct, a division that has long preoccupied both philosophical and psychological thought. Devadatta and Kapila are not merely individual characters within the narrative; they function as symbolic embodiments of this fundamental split within the human psyche. Devadatta represents intellectual refinement, scholarly discipline, and cultural sophistication, while Kapila signifies physical vitality, instinctual energy, and a more organic connection to the body. Together, they dramatize the tension between two essential yet conflicting dimensions of human existence.

Their friendship initially suggests the possibility of balance and mutual completion. Devadatta's intellect appears to require Kapila's bodily strength, just as Kapila's physicality seems to benefit from Devadatta's intellectual guidance. However, this apparent harmony proves fragile. As the narrative unfolds, the bond between the two men transforms into rivalry, revealing the psychological instability that arises when human identity is divided along rigid binaries. Karnad suggests that the separation of mind and body is not merely a personal dilemma, but a cultural construction deeply embedded in social and philosophical hierarchies.

Karnad does not privilege either intellect or physical strength as superior. Devadatta's intellectualism, when detached from bodily vitality, leads to fragility, anxiety, and emotional inadequacy. His obsession with knowledge and self-control results in physical decline and psychological insecurity. Kapila, on the other hand, though initially confident and grounded in his bodily presence, begins to lose coherence once he is alienated from his natural physical identity. His eventual degeneration reveals that instinct alone cannot sustain a stable sense of self. Through this mutual decline, Karnad exposes the dangers of depending exclusively on a single aspect of human experience.

The head transposition episode intensifies this critique by turning an abstract philosophical problem into a lived psychological crisis. The attempt to create a "perfect" individual by combining Devadatta's intellect with Kapila's body exposes the impossibility of such synthesis. Rather than producing harmony, the experiment deepens fragmentation. The body resists the intellect imposed upon it, and the mind fails to adapt to the unfamiliar physical form. This failure underscores Karnad's argument that identity cannot be mechanically reconstructed or hierarchically ordered.

The play thus critiques cultural systems that separate thought from sensation and elevate one over the other. Traditional intellectual hierarchies that valorize reason, discipline, and mental purity are shown to be psychologically damaging when they suppress bodily desire and instinct. At the same time, a purely instinctual existence, devoid of reflection or intellectual grounding, is revealed as equally unsustainable. Karnad's vision resists simplistic binaries and challenges inherited philosophical assumptions about human wholeness. By presenting Devadatta and Kapila as incomplete figures locked in mutual dependence and conflict, *Hayavadana* reveals psychological imbalance as an inevitable consequence of privileging one dimension of the self over another. The play does not offer reconciliation or synthesis. Instead, it presents fragmentation as a defining condition of human life. In doing so, Karnad aligns myth with modern psychological inquiry, transforming a traditional narrative into a critique of the divided self. The conflict

between mind and body, rather than being resolved, remains central to the play's tragic vision, emphasizing the enduring complexity and instability of human identity.

The character of Padmini further complicates the psychological landscape of *Hayavadana*. Her desire cannot be confined within socially sanctioned boundaries, and her dissatisfaction with incomplete forms of fulfillment exposes the limitations of patriarchal definitions of womanhood. Through Padmini, Karnad foregrounds the inner life of a woman caught between instinct, intellect, and social expectation. Her restlessness is not portrayed as moral failure but as a symptom of an environment that denies the legitimacy of complex desire. As Simone de Beauvoir argues in *The Second Sex*, "woman is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* 283). This insight illuminates Padmini's condition, as her identity is shaped and constrained by social norms rather than allowed to develop through self-recognition.

Padmini's psychological conflict reflects the broader cultural process through which female desire is regulated and disciplined. Her inability to reconcile her emotional and sensual needs within the institution of marriage reveals how patriarchal structures demand conformity at the cost of inner coherence. In this sense, *Hayavadana* extends beyond individual psychology to critique social systems that deny women the freedom to integrate desire, identity, and selfhood.

The use of folk theatre conventions in *Hayavadana* is equally significant and extends far beyond mere aesthetic ornamentation. Girish Karnad deliberately incorporates elements such as the Bhagavata, masks, dolls, stylized movement, and songs to disrupt the illusion of realistic representation. These devices prevent the audience from becoming passively absorbed in the narrative and instead encourage an active, reflective engagement with the play's themes. By foregrounding theatricality, Karnad ensures that the stage becomes a space for critical inquiry rather than emotional immersion alone. The presence of the Bhagavata functions as a constant reminder of the play's mythic and performative nature. Acting as narrator, commentator, and guide, the

Bhagavata mediates between the story and the audience, interrupting the flow of action and reframing events within a broader philosophical context. Similarly, the use of masks and dolls externalizes inner psychological states, transforming private conflicts into visible, symbolic actions. These conventions allow Karnad to represent psychological division not as internal monologue but as embodied performance. Inner turmoil is thus objectified and made available for collective reflection.

Songs and ritualistic movement further reinforce this distancing effect. Rather than heightening emotional identification, they often comment on the action or ironize it. The audience is repeatedly reminded that what they are witnessing is a constructed narrative shaped by cultural and ideological forces. This technique aligns closely with Brecht's concept of *Verfremdungseffekt* (alienation or distancing effect), which aims to prevent emotional complacency and stimulate critical awareness. As Bertolt Brecht explains in *Brecht on Theatre*, "The alienation effect consists in turning the object of which one is to be made aware… from something ordinary, familiar, immediately accessible, into something peculiar, striking, and unexpected" (143). Karnad's use of folk theatre conventions achieves precisely this effect by making familiar myths appear strange and unsettling. Through these techniques, psychological conflicts in *Hayavadana* are not presented as purely individual or private experiences. Instead, they are framed as culturally produced and socially reinforced conditions. The divided selves of Devadatta, Kapila, and Padmini are not personal anomalies but reflections of ideological systems that privilege certain forms of identity over others. By disrupting realism, Karnad exposes the artificial nature of these hierarchies and invites the audience to question the assumptions underlying concepts such as wholeness, harmony, and fulfillment.

Ultimately, *Hayavadana* presents fragmentation not as an aberration but as an inescapable aspect of being human. Every attempt to achieve completeness through intellect, physical strength, romantic love, or even divine intervention ends in disappointment. The head transposition fails to unify mind and body; marriage fails to satisfy desire; and divine grace fails to restore human coherence. These repeated failures suggest that

the search for wholeness is founded on an illusion, sustained by cultural myths rather than psychological reality.

Karnad's play thus proposes a profoundly modern vision of identity. The self is not a stable or unified entity but a site of continuous conflict, negotiation, and longing. By exposing this illusion of wholeness through myth, folk theatre, and psychological conflict, *Hayavadana* emerges as a powerful meditation on modern identity. It reveals human existence as marked by division and uncertainty, where meaning is sought not through resolution but through the recognition of complexity and contradiction. In this way, Karnad transforms traditional theatrical forms into instruments of modern philosophical and psychological inquiry.

The consequences of the head transposition in *Hayavadana* reveal the fragile and unstable relationship between personal identity and social recognition. Although Devadatta initially appears restored when his intellect occupies Kapila's powerful body, this restoration is superficial and short-lived. His renewed sense of confidence depends largely on how society perceives him. The apparent harmony between mind and body functions only as long as social validation supports his self-image. Karnad thus suggests that identity is not merely an internal psychological state but one that is constantly mediated by external recognition and cultural expectations.

Freud's observation that the ego is shaped through continuous negotiation between internal desires and external authority is particularly relevant here. As Freud notes in *The Ego and the Id*, "the ego is not master in its own house" (*The Ego and the Id* 25). Devadatta's ego gains strength when social markers education, marital legitimacy, and bodily authority align with his intellectual self-conception. However, when bodily instincts begin to assert themselves and disrupt this alignment, his psychological equilibrium collapses. Anxiety resurfaces, revealing the instability of an identity constructed through external validation rather than internal integration. Karnad exposes the illusion of social coherence by showing how easily Devadatta's confidence disintegrates once the body refuses to remain subordinate to the intellect.

Kapila's psychological deterioration following the transposition is equally significant, though it unfolds in a contrasting manner. Trapped within Devadatta's frail and unfamiliar body, Kapila experiences not only physical confinement but also symbolic disempowerment. His identity, previously grounded in strength, instinct, and bodily confidence, is rendered ineffective within a form that lacks vitality and social authority. This loss mirrors what Freud describes as ego helplessness, a condition in which the ego becomes overwhelmed by forces it cannot control or reconcile (*Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* 284). Kapila's silence and gradual withdrawal reflect a profound psychological dislocation, where neither intellect nor instinct provides a viable foundation for selfhood.

Kapila's retreat into the forest signifies a regression toward instinctual life, suggesting a desire to escape the constraints of social and symbolic order altogether. The forest, traditionally associated with freedom and primal existence, appears to offer refuge from the demands of identity imposed by society. Yet this withdrawal offers no resolution. Instead, it reinforces the play's central argument that identity cannot be sustained outside social structures, even when those structures are deeply flawed. Kapila's regression ultimately leads to isolation and annihilation rather than liberation.

Through the divergent fates of Devadatta and Kapila, Karnad demonstrates that identity is neither purely psychological nor purely social but emerges from a fragile interaction between the two. When this interaction is disrupted whether by bodily displacement, social misrecognition, or psychological imbalance—the self-collapses. *Hayavadana* thus presents identity as a contingent and unstable construct, shaped by external recognition, internal desire, and cultural expectation. The tragedy of the head transposition lies not merely in physical displacement but in the exposure of the illusion that identity can ever be unified, complete, or securely anchored.

Padmini's role becomes increasingly significant within this psychoanalytic framework, as she occupies the intersection of competing identities,

desires, and social expectations. Her shifting perception of Devadatta and Kapila as their bodies and behaviours change reveals not only the instability of attraction but also the psychological complexity of desire itself. Desire, as Freud argues, is never fixed or rational; it is fluid and shaped by unconscious fantasy rather than objective reality. In *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Freud observes that desire "is not determined by its object, but by its aim" (55). Padmini's attraction to Kapila's physical vitality and Devadatta's intellectual refinement is therefore not contradictory. Instead, it reflects the divided and composite nature of desire, which resists containment within a single, unified object.

Padmini's dissatisfaction arises precisely because no individual can embody the totality of her unconscious longing. Each man represents a partial fulfillment, never a complete one. Her desire oscillates between intellect and instinct, mirroring the larger psychic conflict that structures the play. Karnad thus presents Padmini not as fickle or morally unstable, but as psychologically perceptive—acutely aware, even if unconsciously, of the impossibility of wholeness. Her longing exposes the limits of social arrangements that promise fulfillment through fixed roles such as marriage and fidelity.

Padmini's hesitation and delay at critical moments are often interpreted within moral frameworks as signs of weakness or indecision. However, a psychoanalytic reading reveals these moments as symptoms of profound internal conflict. Freud notes that indecision frequently arises when "opposing instinctual impulses press equally upon the ego" (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 68). Padmini's inability to act decisively reflects the collision between instinctual desire, moral obligation, and social expectation. Her silence and postponement are not passive failures but manifestations of psychic paralysis produced by repression. Karnad thus transforms hesitation into a meaningful psychological sign, revealing the cost of suppressing desire within rigid moral structures.

The tragic convergence of Devadatta and Kapila further underscores the destructive potential of unresolved psychic conflict. Their final confrontation is not merely a physical struggle but the external enactment

of an internal division that has remained unresolved throughout the play. What began as a psychological split between mind and body ultimately erupts into violence. Freud suggests that aggression often emerges when repressed desires are redirected outward, noting that civilization itself depends on the transformation of instinctual energy into socially regulated forms (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 59). In *Hayavadana*, this transformation fails, and repressed conflict returns in its most destructive form.

The mutual destruction of Devadatta and Kapila can thus be read as the inevitable outcome of a psyche torn between incompatible ideals. Neither intellect nor physical strength survives in

isolation. Each attempt to assert dominance, yet both are annihilated in the process. Karnad's tragic vision rejects the possibility of synthesis or reconciliation. Instead, the play insists that unresolved psychic division— whether internalized as repression or externalized as rivalry— leads inexorably to loss.

Through Padmini's conflicted desire and the violent resolution of Devadatta and Kapila's rivalry, *Hayavadana* articulates a deeply modern psychological insight: the self is constituted through contradiction rather than harmony. Desire, identity, and social belonging exist in a fragile and unstable relationship. Karnad's play thus transforms myth into a psychoanalytic exploration of fragmentation, revealing human identity as divided, anxious, and perpetually struggling against the illusion of completeness.

Padmini's decision to commit *sati* following the deaths of Devadatta and Kapila intensifies the psychoanalytic tragedy at the heart of *Hayavadana*. While the act appears culturally sanctioned within the mythic framework of the play, it also reveals a deeper psychological compulsion toward self-erasure. From a Freudian perspective, Padmini's death can be read as an expression of the death drive (*Thanatos*), which Freud defines as the impulse toward self- destruction that emerges when psychic conflict becomes unbearable. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud observes that when the psyche can no longer negotiate

between opposing forces, it may seek release through annihilation rather than resolution (38). Padmini's act thus signals not transcendence or moral fulfillment, but the collapse of psychic endurance under sustained repression. Her declaration that she was "left out" is particularly revealing. This statement underscores her exclusion from both male reconciliation and social resolution. While the deaths of Devadatta and Kapila are framed within heroic or tragic paradigms, Padmini's role is reduced to that of an unresolved remainder. She is denied participation in closure and denied recognition as a subject whose desires warrant symbolic acknowledgment. Her decision to die does not restore balance; instead, it exposes the gendered limits of psychological agency within patriarchal structures. Padmini's death functions as erasure rather than empowerment, reinforcing the marginal position assigned to female subjectivity.

From a Jungian perspective, Padmini's fate can be understood as a failure of individuation. Carl Jung emphasizes that psychic wholeness emerges through the integration of opposites conscious and unconscious, instinct and intellect, desire and restraint rather than through the repression or elimination of one dimension of the self. As Jung writes in *Man and His Symbols*, "the goal of psychic development is the self, which is born out of the union of conscious and unconscious contents" (161). Padmini is systematically denied the conditions necessary for such integration. Her desires remain fragmented, unacknowledged, and socially illegitimate, leaving no pathway toward psychological wholeness.

The society depicted in *Hayavadana* offers Padmini no symbolic space in which contradictory impulses might coexist. Marriage demands fidelity without fulfillment, morality demands silence without recognition, and cultural norms demand sacrifice without agency. Unlike the male characters, whose psychological conflicts are externalized and dramatized, Padmini's conflict is internalized and ultimately extinguished. Her death thus marks not a personal failure but the collapse of individuation under cultural constraint.

In this sense, *Hayavadana* exposes the tragic consequences of a social order that resolves male conflict through violence while resolving female conflict through disappearance. Padmini's *sati* completes the play's bleak psychoanalytic vision: when desire, identity, and social recognition cannot be reconciled, the psyche turns inward, seeking release through negation. Karnad's treatment of Padmini ultimately reveals that the most devastating cost of fragmentation is borne not by those who fight, but by those who are denied the right to integrate their divided selves.

The subplot of Hayavadana significantly deepens the play's exploration of psychic incompleteness by abstracting inner conflict into overt symbolic form. His horse's head functions as a grotesque visual representation of fragmentation, making visible what remains partially concealed within the human characters. While Devadatta, Kapila, and Padmini experience division internally, Hayavadana embodies it physically. His split identity is not hidden within the psyche but displayed openly before society, rendering him an object of curiosity, ridicule, and exclusion. This public visibility intensifies his psychological distress, as inner conflict is no longer private but socially exposed.

Freud observes that anxiety escalates when internal tensions are externalized and made visible, noting in *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* that psychic disturbance becomes more acute when the ego is unable to contain or disguise its conflict (91). Hayavadana's suffering emerges precisely from this exposure. His longing to become fully human reflects an attempt to resolve psychic contradiction through physical unity. He believes that bodily completeness will restore psychological coherence and social acceptance. Karnad thus presents Hayavadana's quest as a literalization of a deeply human fantasy—the belief that inner conflict can be cured through external correction.

Yet the irony of Hayavadana's transformation lies not in its failure but in its excess. Instead of becoming fully human, he becomes a complete horse, losing his human body while retaining a human voice. This disturbing outcome destabilizes conventional notions of fulfillment and completion. The persistence of his human voice within an animal form

suggests that psychic identity cannot be erased or simplified through physical alteration. Rather than resolving contradiction, the transformation produces a new and more alienating form of dissonance. Karnad thereby exposes the limitations of divine intervention and expresses deep skepticism toward metaphysical solutions that promise harmony without acknowledging complexity.

A Jungian reading reveals Hayavadana's fate as a failure of individuation. Jung argues that psychic wholeness is possible only through the conscious integration of opposites, not through the rejection or elimination of one part of the self. In *Man and His Symbols,* Jung states that "there is no coming to consciousness without pain," emphasizing that psychological growth requires confronting inner contradiction (94). Hayavadana's desire to become "whole" reflects an attempt to evade this painful process rather than engage with it. By seeking physical completeness as a solution to psychic conflict, he avoids integration and instead deepens his alienation. His final state—animal in body yet human in voice places him outside both realms, demonstrating that wholeness achieved through denial results in estrangement rather than unity.

Hayavadana's final condition physically complete yet psychologically displaced reveals the futility of seeking absolute resolution. His story parallels the central tragedy of the play: attempts to achieve wholeness through substitution, transformation, or transcendence invariably intensify alienation. Karnad suggests that fragmentation is not a flaw to be corrected but a condition to be acknowledged. Through Hayavadana's grotesque transformation, *Hayavadana* ultimately affirms that the pursuit of absolute completeness is founded on illusion, and that harmony cannot be achieved by erasing contradiction. Instead, the play insists on the necessity of living with psychic tension, reinforcing its vision of identity as unstable, divided, and perpetually incomplete.

The persistent presence of the Bhagavata reinforces the play's psychoanalytic dimension by functioning as a mediator between conscious narrative and unconscious meaning. His commentary repeatedly interrupts linear progression and reminds the audience that

what unfolds on stage is not destiny but a recurring pattern of human behavior. This structural strategy aligns closely with Freud's observation that repetition compulsion governs much of human life, compelling individuals to reenact unresolved conflicts rather than consciously resolve them. As Freud explains in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, the psyche often repeats trauma "beyond the pleasure principle" itself (21). The cyclical movement of *Hayavadana* reflects this compulsion, suggesting that fragmentation is not a temporary disturbance but a persistent feature of human existence.

The final image of the child laughing at Hayavadana's song offers an intentionally ambiguous closure. On one level, it gestures toward renewal and continuity; on another, it suggests the inheritance of unresolved psychic tension. Freud's claim that civilization transmits not only values but neuroses across generations is particularly relevant here (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 76). The child's laughter does not resolve the conflicts dramatized in the play but absorbs them into the future, reinforcing the idea that identity remains perpetually unfinished. Taken together, these elements reveal *Hayavadana* as a sustained psychoanalytic meditation on the impossibility of psychic unity. Karnad dismantles the illusion that identity can be stabilized through intellect, physical strength, romantic fulfillment, or divine intervention.

Instead, the play exposes the human subject as irreducibly divided, driven by desires that resist moral regulation and social containment. Fragmentation emerges not as a defect to be corrected but as an intrinsic condition of being human. Situated within this psychoanalytic reading, Padmini stands out as one of Karnad's most complex and disturbing figures. She represents repressed female desire operating within a patriarchal order that refuses to recognize women's psychological multiplicity. Her simultaneous attraction to Devadatta's intellectual refinement and Kapila's physical vitality resists any singular or stable model of fulfillment. As Freud notes, repression becomes most forceful when desire threatens established social norms (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 44), and Padmini's longing directly challenges the ideals of marital fidelity and patriarchal authority. Consequently, her restlessness

and dissatisfaction are repeatedly marked as dangerous, exposing the cultural anxiety surrounding autonomous female sexuality.

Despite her intelligence and agency, Padmini remains trapped between desire, duty, and social expectation. Her final act of self-immolation cannot be understood solely as devotion or moral sacrifice. Freud's concept of the death drive—the impulse toward self-annihilation when psychic conflict becomes unbearable—offers a compelling explanation (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 38). Padmini's death underscores the tragic consequences of unresolved desire within a social order that denies women psychological wholeness. Her silence at the end becomes an indictment of cultural ideals sustained through female sacrifice rather than reconciliation.

The subplot of Hayavadana further reinforces the play's central concern with incompleteness by translating inner psychological conflict into an overt and highly symbolic form. Hayavadana's grotesque body—human in voice yet animal in form—externalizes the condition of psychic fragmentation that remains partially concealed in the human characters. His intense longing to become fully human mirrors the universal desire for psychic integration and self-coherence. This desire closely corresponds to Carl Jung's concept of individuation, which he defines as the process through which the conscious and unconscious elements of the psyche are brought into a meaningful relationship (Man and His Symbols 161). Hayavadana believes that physical wholeness will resolve his inner division and secure both social acceptance and psychological harmony.

However, Karnad deliberately subverts this expectation. Hayavadana's transformation does not lead to human completeness but results instead in an exaggerated and ironic form of fulfillment: he becomes a complete horse while retaining a human voice. This unsettling outcome exposes the paradox at the heart of the quest for wholeness. Physical unity, rather than producing psychological integration, generates a deeper form of alienation. Hayavadana's retained human voice suggests that psychic identity cannot be erased or simplified through bodily transformation

alone. His condition reveals that the psyche resists total closure and cannot be stabilized through external correction.

From a Jungian perspective, Hayavadana's fate illustrates the danger of mistaking completeness for wholeness. Jung repeatedly warns that individuation does not involve the elimination of contradiction but its conscious integration. As he observes in *Man and His Symbols*, "there is no coming to consciousness without pain," and attempts to bypass this process by seeking perfection result in psychological distortion rather than harmony (94). Hayavadana's desire to abolish contradiction leads not to integration but to estrangement from both human and animal realms. He belongs fully to neither, occupying a liminal space that intensifies his isolation.

Through Hayavadana's failed transformation, Karnad articulates a powerful critique of metaphysical and cultural ideals that promise absolute fulfillment. The subplot underscores the play's broader argument that fragmentation is not a defect to be cured but an intrinsic condition of human existence. In seeking to escape division altogether, Hayavadana achieves only a more visible and disturbing form of incompleteness, reaffirming the play's insistence that psychic wholeness can emerge only through the acceptance of inner contradiction, not through its denial.

Karnad's use of folk theatre techniques intensifies these psychoanalytic insights. Masks destabilize the notion of an authentic or unified identity, suggesting instead that the self is composed of performed roles. Jung cautions that mistaking the persona for the whole self leads to alienation (*Man and His Symbols* 83). The Bhagavata, dolls, songs, and narrators externalize unconscious conflict and create a Brechtian distancing effect. As Brecht argues, theatre must reveal "the conditions under which people act" rather than presenting fate as inevitable (*Brecht on Theatre* 37). In *Hayavadana*, fate is shown to emerge from psychological conflict and rigid social structures rather than divine will.

The circular structure of the play ultimately reinforces the persistence of fragmentation. The child's laughter at the end suggests continuity rather than closure. Freud's insight that psychic conflict is transmitted

through cultural and familial structures (*Civilization and Its Discontents* 76) resonates strongly here. Karnad deliberately refuses catharsis, offering instead a vision of human existence marked by repetition, desire, and unresolved tension. *Hayavadana* dismantles the myth of a unified self and presents identity as inherently divided, shaped by repression, longing, and social expectation. In exposing the fragile constructions upon which identity rests, Karnad transforms myth and folk performance into a profound psychoanalytic drama that speaks powerfully to modern anxieties about selfhood, desire, and the limits of human fulfillment.

Girish Karnad's *Hayavadana* offers a profound psychoanalytic exploration of human identity, desire, and the inherent incompleteness of the self. Through the interwoven narratives of Devadatta, Kapila, Padmini, and Hayavadana, the play dramatizes the enduring tension between intellect and instinct, conscious intention and unconscious desire. Karnad exposes identity as inherently divided, shaped by repression, social expectation, and the persistent impossibility of achieving wholeness. The characters' failures whether in the head transposition, the unfulfilled desires of Padmini, or Hayavadana's grotesque quest for completion underscore the limits of human agency and the illusory nature of perfect integration.

The play's innovative use of folk theatre conventions, including the Bhagavata, masks, dolls, songs, and ritualized movement, intensifies this psychological inquiry. By externalizing inner conflict and creating Brechtian distance, Karnad invites the audience to critically examine not only the characters' struggles but also the social and cultural structures that shape human consciousness. Myth, in Karnad's hands, becomes a lens for modern psychological insight, revealing that fragmentation, longing, and unresolved tension are not aberrations but defining aspects of existence.

Conclusion

From both Freudian and Jungian perspectives, *Hayavadana* demonstrates that psychic wholeness cannot be imposed externally whether through intellect, physical completeness, or cultural ritual but

must emerge from the conscious engagement with contradiction. Padmini's tragic erasure, Hayavadana's liminal transformation, and the annihilation of Devadatta and

Kapila together emphasize that the pursuit of unity is inevitably mediated by social norms, desire, and unconscious impulses. Fragmentation, therefore, is neither a moral failing nor a temporary state; it is a fundamental feature of human experience.

Ultimately, Karnad transforms an ancient myth into a modern meditation on identity, desire, and the limits of fulfillment. *Hayavadana* affirms that human existence is defined less by resolution than by the conscious navigation of division. By refusing closure and embracing contradiction, the play offers a compelling vision of identity as dynamic, precarious, and perpetually in search of meaning a reflection of the enduring relevance of psychoanalytic thought in understanding the complexities of selfhood in both mythic and contemporary contexts.

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Voices of the Unspoken: Reclaiming Black Identity in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

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Introduction

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) stands as one of the most powerful literary representations of slavery's psychological and cultural afterlives. Set in the aftermath of the American Civil War, the novel explores how history, trauma, and identity intersect within the African American experience. Through *Beloved*, Morrison— the first African American woman to win the Nobel Prize in Literature—renders visible the silenced realities of those who lived through or inherited the legacy of enslavement. Her narrative both reclaims an erased chapter of American history and redefines Black identity as a continual act of survival and reconstruction.

Sethe, the novel's protagonist, embodies the tension between remembering and forgetting, survival and guilt. Haunted by the ghost of her dead daughter—an incarnation of both historical trauma and maternal grief—Sethe's struggle mirrors the fractured yet resilient nature of post-slavery Black identity. As bell hooks observes, Black women's self-recovery is "the collective effort to reclaim the self from a history of imposed silence" (*Hooks* 12). Through Sethe, Morrison transforms storytelling into resistance, where voicing pain becomes an act of self-affirmation.

From a sociological lens, *Beloved* interrogates how racial oppression structures both memory and belonging. Paul Gilroy's concept of "diasporic consciousness," defined by hybridity and dislocation, illuminates Morrison's fragmented narrative style, which mirrors trauma's psychological rupture (*Gilroy* 19). The novel's nonlinear form and shifting

voices reveal how the past insists on presence—demanding acknowledgment before healing.

Ultimately, *Beloved* locates identity not in isolation but within the collective. The community's role in Sethe's redemption underscores that recovery from historical trauma requires shared recognition and solidarity. In this sense, Morrison affirms Homi K. Bhabha's idea of identity as a "process of becoming" (1). By transforming silence into voice and memory into survival, *Beloved* becomes both a work of historical reparation and a testament to the endurance of Black identity.

Historical Context and the Silenced Black Voice

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* cannot be separated from the historical realities of American slavery and its lasting effects on Black consciousness. Slavery did not merely exploit labour—it sought to erase identity, memory, and humanity. Morrison exposes this erasure by giving voice to the silenced, declaring her goal was to "plough through the pain and make it available to readers so that it cannot be forgotten again" (*Conversations with Toni Morrison* 96). In *Beloved*, she reimagines the past not as distant history but as a living force that continues to shape identity.

The story draws inspiration from the real-life case of Margaret Garner, an enslaved woman who, in 1856, killed her daughter rather than allow her to be recaptured. Morrison transforms this event into a profound reflection on the cost of freedom and the moral paradox of survival under slavery. As the narrator observes, Sethe's act "was absolutely the right thing to do, but she had no right to do it" (*Beloved* 251). Through Sethe, Morrison embodies the trauma of enslavement, where love and violence become tragically intertwined.

Enslaved Africans were stripped of names, kinship, and language—the essential elements of identity—producing what W. E. B. Du Bois termed "double consciousness," the fractured awareness of seeing oneself through the eyes of a racist society (*The Souls of Black Folk* 2). Sethe's haunting by her dead child reflects this psychic fracture,

illustrating that emancipation did not bring immediate liberation. "Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another" (*Beloved* 95). Morrison shows that freedom without healing remains incomplete; the past must be spoken to be overcome. As Deborah Horvitz notes, "healing can only begin when the community dares to confront its own past and voice the unutterable" (Horvitz 157).

Historically, Black voices were filtered through white narrators, reducing them to symbols rather than subjects. Morrison resists this by re-centering the story within Black consciousness itself. Her polyphonic narrative—shifting among Sethe, Denver, Paul D, and Beloved—embodies the communal nature of memory and truth. Patricia Hill Collins argues that "Black women's self-definitions are a form of resistance" (111), and Morrison's characters affirm this through the act of telling.

Language, once a tool of oppression, becomes Morrison's medium of liberation. By weaving oral tradition into written form, she transforms silence into speech and trauma into testimony. The haunting refrain "This is not a story to pass on" (*Beloved* 324) encapsulates the paradox of remembrance: pain must be faced, not buried.

In this sense, *Beloved* transcends historical fiction—it becomes a social act of remembrance and reparation. The ghostly presence of Beloved symbolizes the repressed voices of the enslaved, compelling acknowledgment of a history long denied. As Morrison asserts, "The past has to be dealt with, not discarded" (Interview with Bonnie Angelo, 1987). Through reclaiming these unspoken voices, Morrison restores agency and humanity to those silenced by slavery, demonstrating that healing begins where silence ends.

Slavery, Trauma, and the Fragmented Self

In *Beloved*, Toni Morrison exposes how the trauma of slavery extends beyond physical violence to shatter the psyche, memory, and sense of self. Slavery did not only enslave bodies—it dismantled identity and fragmented the consciousness of generations. Morrison's narrative portrays this trauma as transhistorical, revealing how the wounds of

slavery continue to haunt both individuals and the collective Black community.

At the center of this trauma stands Sethe, whose act of killing her daughter functions as both resistance and tragedy. In killing Beloved, she attempts to protect her child from the horrors of slavery, declaring, "She was mine and I had the right to kill her" (*Beloved* 236). The act, however, ruptures her identity as a mother—affirming her agency while annihilating her selfhood. Cathy Caruth's concept of trauma as an "unclaimed experience" that defies comprehension (*Unclaimed Experience* 4) captures Sethe's condition: she carries a wound that resists narration. The ghost of Beloved embodies this unspeakable past, returning as a haunting reminder that the trauma cannot be repressed or forgotten.

Morrison's fragmented narrative mirrors this disordered psychology. The novel's non-linear form—where memories intrude upon the present—mimics the instability of trauma. As Linda Krumholz observes, "The form of *Beloved* enacts the process of memory as a painful but necessary act of reconstruction" (Krumholz 395). Sethe's recollections of Sweet Home oscillate between moments of tenderness and horror, revealing the contradictory intimacy of slavery. Her body, exploited and violated, becomes what bell hooks calls "a terrain of conquest" (*Ain't I a Woman* 39). Through Sethe's bodily and emotional scars, Morrison demonstrates how trauma operates within and beyond the flesh, leaving identity fragmented between past and present.

Paul D represents another dimension of fractured selfhood. His "tobacco tin" heart—a metaphor for repressed emotion—illustrates the defense mechanisms forged under slavery: *"a rusted shut place in his chest where a red heart used to be" (*Beloved *73).* His emotional detachment ensures survival but prevents authentic human connection. When Beloved's presence forces him to confront his repressed memories, he struggles to reclaim his manhood and humanity. "You got two legs, Sethe, not four," he tells her (*Beloved* 194), revealing his own internalized dehumanization.

Morrison expands this psychic fragmentation to the collective level. The haunted house at 124 Bluestone Road symbolizes what Ron Eyerman terms "cultural trauma"—a wound shared by a community that persists across generations (*Cultural Trauma* 60). The haunting becomes a metaphor for memory's endurance: slavery's ghosts inhabit not just history but everyday life. "124 was spiteful. Full of a baby's venom" (*Beloved* 3), Morrison writes, suggesting that trauma is inherited, echoing Saidiya Hartman's notion of slavery's "afterlife," the ongoing presence of the past in the conditions of Black life (6).

Beloved herself personifies this inheritance. She is simultaneously Sethe's daughter, her guilt, and the collective voice of the enslaved dead. "I am Beloved and she is mine," she declares (*Beloved* 248), collapsing the distinction between self and other. Her fragmented monologues—"I am not separate from her... her face is my own" (*Beloved* 210)—evoke the disordered syntax of trauma, where memory and identity dissolve. Through Beloved, Morrison dramatizes how the past continually intrudes upon the present, demanding to be recognized.

Yet, amid this fragmentation, Morrison envisions the possibility of healing. Denver, Sethe's surviving daughter, represents the next generation's attempt to reclaim wholeness through connection. Her decision to reach out to the community marks a crucial shift—from isolation toward collective restoration. The climactic exorcism of Beloved, where women gather to sing, symbolizes the communal reclamation of voice. "In the beginning there were no words. In the beginning was the sound" (*Beloved* 259). Sound here becomes the primal language of survival and solidarity, preceding and transcending speech.

Trauma in *Beloved* is not a private wound but a shared historical condition. Morrison transforms storytelling into an act of healing—what Teresa N. Washington calls "ancestral communication," a bridge between the living and the dead (*Our Mothers, Our Powers, Our Texts* 85). Through narrative, Morrison reconstructs the fragmented self, showing that memory, though painful, is also redemptive.

Ultimately, *Beloved* portrays trauma as both destructive and regenerative. The process of remembrance—painful though it is—

enables Sethe and her community to reclaim identity from the ruins of history. As Morrison suggests, healing begins not in forgetting but in voicing the unspeakable. Through this reclamation, *Beloved* becomes a testament to endurance: a narrative of how fragmented selves, through memory and community, begin the long journey toward wholeness.

Motherhood and Memory as Acts of Resistance

In *Beloved*, Toni Morrison reimagines motherhood as a radical form of resistance against the dehumanizing legacy of slavery. Within a system that commodified Black women's bodies, to love and nurture one's children was itself an act of defiance. Sethe's maternal devotion, however tragic, becomes a means of reclaiming agency over her own life and the lives of her children. As Barbara Christian observes, "Morrison's mothers love dangerously because they must love in a world that denies them the right to love at all" (*Black Feminist Criticism* 234).

The institution of slavery systematically stripped enslaved women of their maternal rights, severing familial bonds at will. In this context, Sethe's desperate decision to kill her daughter rather than see her enslaved must be understood as both rebellion and tragedy. "If I hadn't killed her, she would have died and that is something I could not bear to see" (*Beloved* 236). Morrison does not excuse or condemn Sethe's act; instead, she exposes the impossible choices imposed upon Black mothers by an inhuman system. Sethe's love, fierce and all-consuming, reflects the paradox of survival under slavery—love as both liberation and imprisonment. "Love is or it ain't. Thin love ain't love at all" (*Beloved* 164).

Beloved's return literalizes Sethe's unhealed guilt and the cyclical nature of generational trauma. The daughter's ghost feeds upon her mother's remorse until Sethe becomes emotionally and physically drained: "Beloved ate up her life, took it, swelled up with it" (*Beloved* 250). This parasitic bond illustrates how unprocessed trauma can reproduce oppression within personal relationships. Morrison suggests that remembrance without reconciliation can entrap rather than free the self.

Memory, like motherhood, is both burden and resistance. To remember is to confront pain; to forget is to perpetuate erasure. "It was not a story to pass on" (*Beloved* 324) captures the paradox of historical memory—its necessity and its danger. Morrison's narrative form, fragmented and polyphonic, reflects this tension, compelling readers to engage with the broken continuity of history. Through Sethe's memories, Morrison exposes slavery's theft of motherhood and bodily autonomy. When Sethe cries, "And they took my milk!" (*Beloved* 19), she reclaims her violated motherhood as a site of outrage and resistance. The stolen milk becomes a symbol of both the physical and spiritual plunder of Black womanhood.

Denver, Sethe's surviving daughter, represents the transformative potential of memory and motherhood. Isolated within the haunted house of 124, she inherits her mother's trauma but refuses to remain trapped by it. When she ventures into the community seeking help, she initiates a process of collective healing. "Denver was seeing it now and feeling it—through Beloved" (*Beloved* 301). Denver's awakening signifies renewal—a bridge between the paralyzing weight of the past and the redemptive strength of the future.

Morrison situates Black motherhood at the intersection of race, gender, and power. As Patricia Hill Collins explains, "motherhood has been a site where Black women have negotiated the contradictions of oppression and autonomy" (119). For Sethe, motherhood becomes a means of reclaiming ownership over her body and history. Memory, too, functions as resistance: by speaking and remembering, Morrison's women refuse the silence imposed by white historical narratives.

The novel's climax—the women's communal exorcism of Beloved—transforms private grief into collective catharsis. Their unified song, "In the beginning there were no words. In the beginning was the sound" (*Beloved* 259), recalls ancestral memory and restores solidarity. Through this act, Morrison links spiritual healing to social restoration: motherhood and memory unite the community in reclaiming its humanity.

In *Beloved*, Morrison redefines motherhood not as suffering alone but as an act of creation, survival, and political defiance. Sethe's maternal love and her memories, however painful, ensure that history cannot be silenced. Denver's emergence into the world embodies the balance Morrison envisions—acknowledging the past while moving forward. Ultimately, motherhood and memory converge as intertwined forms of resistance through which Morrison's women reclaim selfhood, transforming trauma into legacy and silence into voice.

Community, Healing, and the Reclamation of Identity

While *Beloved* explores the depths of individual trauma, Toni Morrison ultimately grounds healing in community. The novel argues that the reclamation of Black identity—stolen, silenced, and fragmented by slavery—can only occur through collective remembrance and solidarity. As Ashraf H. A. Rushdy notes, Morrison's narrative "moves from the isolation of trauma toward the reconstruction of social memory" (125).

The haunted house at 124 Bluestone Road—"spiteful" and "full of a baby's venom" (*Beloved* 3)—embodies Sethe's isolation and the haunting legacy of slavery. Her separation from the community mirrors the post-slavery fragmentation of Black life, where mistrust and pain perpetuate alienation. Morrison insists that only communal acknowledgment can restore wholeness.

Denver's decision to leave the haunted home and seek help signifies the shift from solitude to interdependence: "She would have to leave the yard… and go ask somebody for help" (*Beloved* 243). In reaching outward, Denver reignites the communal spirit destroyed by slavery, revealing that identity and survival emerge through relationship, not isolation. Her courage activates a process of collective healing, reminding readers that resistance depends upon unity.

The women who gather to exorcise Beloved embody this restoration. Their voices merge in a rhythmic chant—"searching for the right combination, the key, the code, the sound that broke the back of words" (*Beloved* 261)—that transforms sound into solidarity. Rooted in African

spirituality and the Black church's call-and-response, their singing represents both a spiritual cleansing and a social reawakening. This ritual reflects the African philosophy of *ubuntu*—the belief that one's humanity is bound to the humanity of others. As bell hooks observes, "healing happens in community; it is an act of communion, not isolation" (*Sisters of the Yam* 42).

Paul D's return reinforces this theme of collective redemption. Having wandered in search of meaning, he reclaims belonging through love and empathy. "You your best thing, Sethe. You are" (*Beloved* 322) affirms Sethe's humanity beyond guilt or trauma. His recognition restores her sense of worth and reconnects her to the communal web from which she had withdrawn. Morrison thus suggests that identity emerges not from solitary introspection but from reciprocal recognition.

Sethe's earlier withdrawal, however, reflects the psychological legacy of racial domination. Her internalization of shame and silence exemplifies what Frantz Fanon calls the "epidermalization" of inferiority (14)—the internal absorption of oppression. The novel's movement toward communal restoration therefore functions as political resistance: by healing together, Morrison's characters reject white supremacy's isolating logic.

Baby Suggs embodies the novel's spiritual core, preaching a radical gospel of self-love in the Clearing: "Here, in this place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass" (*Beloved* 88). Her call to "love your heart, for this is the prize" (*Beloved* 89) transforms the devalued Black body into a sacred vessel. Through her message, Morrison links personal restoration to collective affirmation, asserting that liberation begins with bodily and spiritual wholeness.

The community's exorcism, then, is both literal and symbolic—a social rebirth. The act of collective song and prayer restores moral order where trauma once reigned. Marianne Hirsch's concept of "postmemory"—the transmission of trauma and responsibility across generations (*Family Frames* 22)—illuminates Morrison's broader aim: to turn inherited pain into shared narrative. Storytelling becomes ritual, converting grief into testimony and silence into speech.

From a sociological standpoint, Morrison contrasts the alienation of Western individualism with the relational identity central to Black survival. The women's unified voices reclaim belonging and continuity, reversing history's fragmentation. After the exorcism, 124 becomes a space of renewal. Beloved's disappearance does not signal forgetting but release— acknowledgment without erasure. Morrison's final refrain, "It was not a story to pass on" (*Beloved* 324), encapsulates the paradox of healing: remembrance as both burden and necessity.

Ultimately, *Beloved* envisions community as the foundation of recovery and identity. Through song, ritual, and shared memory, Morrison's characters reassert the right to define themselves. The reclamation of Black identity, she shows, depends not on solitary redemption but on collective voice—where remembering together becomes the truest form of freedom.

The Ghost as Metaphor for Collective Memory

In *Beloved*, the ghost is not a Gothic ornament but a metaphor for history's lingering presence — a manifestation of repressed collective memory. Toni Morrison stated that *Beloved* "was not about a ghost story; it was about history as haunting" (*Conversations* 108). Through the spectral, Morrison gives voice to what realism cannot: the unassimilated trauma of slavery that continues to haunt the descendants of the enslaved.

Beloved's haunting of 124 Bluestone Road embodies both Sethe's personal guilt and the historical wound of Black enslavement. "124 was spiteful. Full of a baby's venom" (*Beloved* 3) signals that the past remains alive, malignant when unacknowledged. Morrison's ghost dramatizes how suppressed memory festers into psychic poison — a metaphor for the nation's refusal to confront its history.

When Beloved materializes as flesh, she renders trauma visible. The scars on Sethe's back — a "chokecherry tree" (*Beloved* 18) — testify to how history marks the body. Beloved's physical return enforces recognition; she is memory incarnate. As Morrison explained, "The

haunting was a way to make memory visible" (Angelo, *Time Magazine*). In this way, haunting becomes history's demand to be seen.

Sociologist Avery Gordon defines haunting as "a constituent element of social life" (7), arising when repression structures the present. Morrison's haunting of 124 exposes slavery's unresolved legacy — not only Sethe's burden but America's. Beloved's presence insists that the nation's moral debt endures. Susan Bowers similarly observes, "Beloved is not an individual ghost; she is the ghost of the history of slavery itself" (30). Morrison transforms haunting into an ethical framework for remembrance.

Beloved's shifting identity — daughter, victim, ancestor — underscores her role as a vessel of collective grief. For Sethe, she is guilt embodied; for Paul D, a reminder of dehumanization; for Denver, both sister and rival. This multiplicity reflects what Homi Bhabha calls "the interstitial" (224), a liminal space where memory and identity intermingle. The fragmented narrative — merging monologues and dissolving syntax — enacts trauma's cyclical temporality, where past and present blur into a single haunting continuum.

By grounding the supernatural in Black experience, Morrison reshapes the Eurocentric Gothic into what Teresa Goddu calls "the African American Gothic" (*Gothic America* 128) — a genre where haunting becomes resistance. The women's collective exorcism of Beloved reclaims spiritual agency through sound and ritual. Their chant, rhythmic and embodied, transforms fear into communion. Unlike Western narratives where ghosts are expelled by male reason, Morrison's haunting is confronted through feminine solidarity and spiritual energy, aligning with African diasporic cosmology rather than Western rationalism.

Beloved's consuming hunger — emotional, physical, narrative — symbolizes history's unrelenting demand for acknowledgment. "Sethe was licked, tasted, eaten by Beloved's eyes" (*Beloved* 250) captures the vampiric quality of unresolved memory: unspoken trauma devours the present. Only through collective remembrance — the women's song and communal ritual — can this hunger be sated. In acknowledging the ghost, they integrate the past rather than erasing it.

Morrison also draws from African spiritual traditions, where ancestors bridge the living and the dead. Beloved occupies this ancestral space — both child and elder spirit — embodying cyclical time. This vision counters Western linearity, proposing a holistic model of memory and survival. Karla F. C. Holloway notes, "Morrison's ghosts are both haunting and healing; they inhabit the liminal space between mourning and memory, where history becomes voice" (*Moorings and Metaphors* 91). The ghost's duality — pain and restoration — transforms haunting into pedagogy.

In the novel's final paradox — "It was not a story to pass on" (*Beloved* 324) — Morrison fuses memory with moral obligation. Forgetting becomes complicity; remembrance, an act of justice. The haunting, then, is not merely literary but ethical — a call to witness. Through Beloved, Morrison transforms the ghost into a symbol of communal survival, proving that identity is reclaimed not through erasure but through the courage to remember what history silences.

Language, Storytelling, and the Politics of Remembering

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is, above all, a novel about the power of language—its ability to heal, to testify, and to reclaim what has been denied. In a society where Black voices were systematically silenced, Morrison transforms storytelling into an act of resistance. Language becomes the means by which history, identity, and community are reconstituted. As Morrison asserted, "Language alone protects us from the scariness of things with no names. Language alone is meditation" (*Nobel Lecture* 1993). In *Beloved*, speech and silence form a dialectic: silence represents trauma's residue, while speech represents the struggle to reassert selfhood and memory.

From the beginning of the novel, Morrison establishes language as a contested site. Slavery had robbed the enslaved not only of freedom but of the right to define themselves. Naming and storytelling were acts of power monopolized by the oppressors. As critic Henry Louis Gates Jr. notes, "to tell one's story in one's own terms is to claim the power of self-definition that slavery sought to obliterate" (45). In this sense,

Morrison's narrative project functions as a reclamation of linguistic agency. Her characters use language not simply to communicate but to reforge their identities from the fragments left by history.

Sethe's relationship to language exemplifies this process. For much of the novel, she struggles to articulate her pain. The unspeakable nature of her trauma—the murder of her child—renders her nearly mute. "There is no bad luck in the world but whitefolks," she says bitterly (*Beloved* 104), expressing both her rage and the limits of language to encompass suffering so profound. Her silence is both protection and prison. As Gay Wilentz observes, "Morrison's characters learn that voice is both the medium of healing and the mark of trauma's depth" (64). Only when Sethe begins to narrate her story—to Paul D, to Denver, to Beloved herself—does she begin to reinhabit her own past on her own terms.

Morrison's narrative structure mirrors this process of rediscovery. The fragmented, nonlinear form of *Beloved* reflects the disjointed nature of traumatic memory. Rather than presenting history as a coherent sequence, Morrison reconstructs it through fragments, repetitions, and shifts in perspective. This aesthetic strategy enacts what Cathy Caruth describes as "the belatedness of trauma," where the past continually intrudes upon the present (8). The novel's circular structure suggests that storytelling is not about closure but about the ongoing negotiation between memory and forgetting. Each retelling alters the meaning of events, allowing the characters—and the reader—to approach the truth from new angles.

The motif of storytelling recurs throughout the novel as both personal and collective ritual. Baby Suggs's sermons in the Clearing epitomize the healing power of speech. Her exhortation—"Here, in this place, we flesh" (*Beloved* 88)—invites the community to celebrate the body and reclaim the language of love denied to them under slavery. Her words counter the dehumanizing discourse of the oppressor by restoring language to its sacred, creative function. As critic Trudier Harris notes, "Baby Suggs preaches a theology of Black embodiment and linguistic

reclamation, a new Word that redeems the self from silence" (112). Morrison thus reimagines speech as both spiritual and political liberation.

The novel's emphasis on oral storytelling aligns with African diasporic traditions, where memory and identity are transmitted through spoken word, song, and ritual. The oral mode contrasts with Western written history, which often excluded Black voices. Morrison's blending of oral and written forms resists the authority of the dominant archive, asserting that truth resides not only in official documents but in lived experience. Her language pulses with rhythm, repetition, and song, evoking the cadence of Black speech. "Beloved" is itself a form of oral memorial—a spoken elegy for the unrecorded dead. The repetition of the word "Beloved" in the novel's epigraph, drawn from Romans 9:25 ("I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved"), transforms scripture into testimony for the dispossessed.

For Morrison, storytelling is also an ethical act. To tell a story is to bear witness, to prevent erasure. The danger, she warns, lies in the refusal to speak or to listen. When stories go untold, trauma festers; when they are commodified or distorted, history loses its moral force. "This is not a story to pass on," the novel ends (*Beloved* 324)—a phrase that embodies this tension between remembrance and repetition. It does not mean the story should be forgotten; rather, it warns against the passive consumption of trauma. The story must be engaged with, not "passed on" as mere spectacle. Morrison's language thus enforces a politics of remembering rooted in responsibility.

Denver's evolution illustrates how storytelling becomes a means of self-assertion for the next generation. Having grown up in the shadow of her mother's silence, Denver must learn to narrate her own version of the past. By listening to Sethe's story and sharing it with the community, she bridges the gap between isolation and connection. "It was the first time she had ever looked at her mother as a separate person," Morrison writes (*Beloved* 205). This recognition marks Denver's coming-of-age: she claims agency through her capacity to tell and to listen. Storytelling

thus functions as intergenerational healing—a way of transforming inherited trauma into collective wisdom.

The polyphonic narrative form—shifting between first-person, third-person, and stream-of-consciousness—reinforces Morrison's democratic vision of voice. No single perspective dominates; instead, truth emerges through a chorus of testimonies. This narrative pluralism embodies what Paul Gilroy calls "the Black Atlantic counterculture of modernity," where diasporic identity is constructed through shared memory and dialogue (122). Morrison's novel, like the spirituals and blues that echo through its pages, turns pain into rhythm, fragmentation into harmony. Language becomes the vessel through which the unspoken finds articulation.

In *Beloved*, even the act of naming carries profound significance. The stolen names of the enslaved symbolize the theft of identity, while the reclamation of names signifies the restoration of self. Sethe's insistence on naming her child "Beloved" transforms language into memorial. The engraved word on the baby's tombstone—paid for "with ten minutes of sex" (*Beloved* 5)—exposes both the violence of commodification and the defiance of remembrance.

Through that single word, Sethe preserves her child's humanity in a world that would deny it. Naming, therefore, becomes an act of rebellion against erasure.

Morrison's linguistic innovation also challenges Western literary conventions. Her prose blends the sacred and the vernacular, the lyrical and the colloquial, creating what Barbara Christian terms "a language of survival" (*Black Feminist Criticism* 178). By embedding African American idioms, spiritual references, and oral cadences into the structure of the novel, Morrison redefines the boundaries of literary expression. Her language refuses translation into dominant cultural norms, insisting instead on the legitimacy of Black experience as its own aesthetic and intellectual system.

From a sociological standpoint, this emphasis on language underscores the intersection between power and representation. Control over language determines who is visible in history and whose story is told. Morrison's project, then, is not only literary but political: she reclaims narrative authority from systems that rendered Black life unspeakable. As bell hooks observes, "Speaking becomes both a way to engage domination and a way to transcend it" (*Talking Back* 8). In *Beloved*, every word, every story, is a gesture of defiance against historical silencing.

Ultimately, *Beloved* transforms storytelling into an act of cultural rebirth. Through speech, song, and narrative, Morrison's characters reclaim their right to exist as subjects of history, not its objects. The novel enacts a process of linguistic reparation, turning the fragmented, haunted language of trauma into a coherent, collective testimony. In doing so, Morrison reminds readers that the politics of remembering begins with the courage to speak—and the compassion to listen.

Conclusion — Reclaiming Black Identity and Historical Memory

In *Beloved*, Toni Morrison transforms historical silence into a chorus of reclaimed voices. Through the haunting of 124 Bluestone Road, she exposes how slavery fractures identity and memory, yet also how remembering can heal what was once broken. The ghost of Beloved embodies both trauma and testimony—an insistence that the unspoken must be heard for wholeness to emerge. Morrison's vision suggests that confronting the past, however painful, is essential to restoring selfhood and community.

Sethe's journey from isolation to reconnection mirrors the broader African American struggle for identity amid historical erasure. Morrison portrays healing not as an individual act but as a collective process—rooted in storytelling, song, and shared memory. The women's communal exorcism becomes a symbolic reclamation of agency and voice. In transforming pain into narrative, Morrison performs an act of historical

justice: she turns silence into speech, loss into meaning, and suffering into survival.

Ultimately, *Beloved* redefines Black identity as dynamic and resilient—shaped by memory but not confined by it. Morrison's art honours those "disremembered and unaccounted for," insisting that through language and imagination, the unspoken can be redeemed. Her novel stands as a memorial and a call to remembrance, reminding us that to speak the unspeakable is itself an act of freedom.

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An Eco- Feminist Reading of Mahasweta Devi's Breast- Giver

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Introduction

Mahasweta Devi's *Breast-Giver* is a piercing critique of the ways in which women's bodies are commodified under patriarchal capitalism. The protagonist, Jashoda, embodies the archetype of the "Mother" endlessly nurturing, yet ultimately discarded when she is no longer useful. Ecofeminism, combines feminism and environmentalism, arguing that the domination of women and the domination of nature are interconnected and stem from patriarchal structures which provides a powerful theoretical framework for interpreting Devi's text. As *Breast-Giver* unfolds, Jashoda's body becomes a site of ecological allegory, reflecting the Earth's own exploitation and exhaustion in the face of relentless demand. Ecofeminist theorists such as Vandana Shiva argue that the logic that exploits environment also oppresses women, particularly in postcolonial societies. Mahasweta Devi's *Breast-Giver* is ripe for Ecofeminist criticism since it highlights the woman's body, labor, and nurturing capacity in a system that parallels ecological exploitation.

Discussion

Mahasweta Devi writes about the lives of ordinary men women and in particular about tribal's like Santhals, Lodhas, Shabars and Munda's and also other topics of social political relevance. She has also spent many years crusading for the rights of the tribals. Mahasweta Devi has her own peculiar motif to depict stories from the sect of those disregard group of people. She believes in writing for the oppressed, and needy. Her writing portrays the condition of India's aboriginal people. She slings light on female within them with their power and modes of circumstances.

Feminist theories have given rise to different schools of thought and well-known among them is Eco-feminism. Feminism with ecological anxiety has started enthralling human society all over the world. Feminist scholars have started the process of intertwining feminism with ecological concerns as soon as environmentalism turned a global matter of concern and many have found juxtaposition amid profound demolishment of environment misemploy and exploitation suffered by women. The term Ecofeminism was coined only in 1974 by Francoise d Eaubonne a French feminist. In general, it is a term used by feminists to label the reciprocal correlation between feminist and environmental concern. Neeru Tandon observes "Ecofeminism is a theory that rests on the basic principle that hegemonic ways are unfavourable to women children and other living things" (Neeru Tandon 56). The dominance of men over women and nature often subjected to close scrutiny of eco-feminists. According to Neeru Tandon Exploitation of nature and women go hand in hand. Nature is being contaminated and spoiled by business and modern technology (161). Many women endeavour for the egalitarianism of women as well as the prudent use of natural resources. And a few of them integrate their writings to impart the subject of both women and environment and Mahasweta Devi is distinguished one among them.

Short story Breast-Giver is the narrative of an ordinary woman named Jashoda. Her husband Kangalicharan's untimely accident crippled him. The utmost poverty constrains Jashoda the protagonist to take up the job of a cook in a wealthy Haldar household despite her high Brahminical origin. But in that house, she is sexually mishandled and stamped as a pincher by a male member of this family. Yet she endures still for the welfare of her penury troubled family consisting her crippled husband and young children. The acquisitiveness and temporal gratification of the male members of the Haldar family defines her profession as a wet nurse. Jashoda thus becomes a professional mother who breeds yearly in order to keep the milk flowing in her breasts. And thus, she suckles twenty of her own children and thirty children of her employer's family. The excess suckling circumspectly declines her health and she is ultimately diagnosed with breast cancer. In this story the imageries used

by Mahasweta Devi importunes up two identical images of endure women and Mother Earth. When the story opens Jashoda- the protagonist is an aphonic observer whose peculiarity is just the wife of Kangalicharan. She is a typical woman who is incapable of seeing anything afar her family. Her past is also vague. "Her existence is just to truly satisfy her husband, whose desire grounds her body like a geologist in a darkness lit only by an oil lamp" (Breast-Giver 38).

She is just a sexual object in the hands of her husband. Here Jashoda's body is collated to the Earth. Though both women and nature are life sustaining and resource giving their role in the society is overlooked. Jashoda undergoes assault not just because of the utmost dearth in her family but also due to the well-received social system, which inaudibly tells women of poor backdrop to obey and surrender to the whims and fancies of their master's family. Mother Earth are often being traumatized and abused and they are suffering victims of men's uninterrupted lust and rapacity. Here ravishment is used as a metaphor of abuse towards nature like mining, destruction of hills and mountains, sand mining and varied other activities that destroys the ecological equilibrium. The male influence society often views housemaids as instruments of servile and they are always in peril to erotic and other vogues of invasion by male members of the families for which they work for.

The predicament of Jashoda depicts the wretchedness and plight of housemaids in our country. Jashoda embodies her motherhood her inclination is "to become the earth and to cater for her crippled husband and helpless children with a fulsome harvest" (Breast- giver, 46) this can be seen as an attempt to recognize her with mother earth. She has no one to look to and consequently tries to find consolation from her anguish in the lap of nature. She knows clearly that she is the only emancipator of her physically challenged husband and her poor young children and closely resolves to take care of them even at the cost of her life. Nature is beautiful so are women. But dolefully both are mostly ill-treated. The utmost aridity of men is levelling and is highly dangerous to both women and nature. The lives of these women disclose a lot

about the state of life of the women in India in correspondence to their male counter parts there by giving more material for feminists.

Once Jashoda becomes a professional mother she obtains the dubious distinction of a universal mother. Like Mother Earth undergoes life on the planet Jashoda finds unanimity with nature and earth too. In another facet she herself is the Mother Earth that assists to grow off springs. Her question "Does it hurt a tree to bear a fruit?" (Breast-giver 50). This explains her misery. Though it is a means of livelihood Jashoda executes the role of a breast giver with utmost commitment and that is the cause she feels countless pain when the children whom she has fed ignore her when hospitalized. This concurrence of women in the Indian society is restored as the new wind by Devi in this story. Unfortunately, this new wind marks the beginning of all the misfortunes in Jashoda's life. Haldar's household rends into conjugal families and the grand-daughters in-law never breeds yearly. Kangalicharan find another mate in Golapi. She grasps that "her usefulness had ended not only in the Haldar household but also for Kangali" (Breast-giver 58). This also incidentally tells that Jashoda is pertaining to a society where women regretfully dance to the tunes played by men. It is exceedingly strenuous for Jashoda's sons to digest the reality that the woman affected with breast cancer is the same woman who rendered them breast milk and initiated them into the world around with love and cosiness.

Now she looks unattractive and lacking of anything that cohere a child with his mother. It again prompts us of the way how men harm the ecological system and make it grimy and get rid of it. The story of Jashoda is titled capably as Breast-Giver by the author because the whole deprivations of Jashoda are mirroring of the pangs being suffered by the Mother Earth. Breasts in the story stand for life. Breast milk is the life cherisher. Her regret is the sorrow of the dying mother Earth exhausted by the extra weight of her own children and rapacity of human beings. When the balance tips over we will have apocalypse. Here the breast is evolving as powerful metaphor of how Earth pervades life and nobility on each brute in this world like the breast milk of Jashoda comforts the lives of fifty children. The Mother Earth feeds her children

with her remuneration and without anticipating much in repay. But both the Earth and Jashoda are used and inclined by an exceedingly biased and gluttonous patriarchy. Though women and nature are life enduring and resource giving their role in the society is disregarded and ignored. As nature she gives exuberantly. Finally, when her children grow up they neglect her, neglecting the fact that they have inebriated her life. It is important to note in these circumstances Jashoda contrasts herself to a fruit posture tree. Man has flourished up in the lap of nature amused with nature's remuneration but has never concerned to retaliate. Once he becomes self-reliant, he ignores and exploits nature in all feasible ways. At the end Jashoda is discarded by all her children and also by her master's family.

Jashoda's role as a professional mother is a double-edged sword. Revered for her nurturing capacity, she is also reduced to a function to feed. Jashoda became the professional mother not just to her own children but to the sons of the house. Like the Earth, she is seen as an infinite source, celebrated and consumed simultaneously. This archetype aligns with Eco-Feminist notions of the Earth-Mother: the giver of life, yet continuously violated. Jashoda's breast cancer becomes a metaphor for environmental collapse. Just as ecosystems collapse under excessive extraction, her body once celebrated succumbs to decay. Her illness is not personal; it is systemic. It exposes the unsustainable logic of overuse without renewal, a central concern of Ecofeminism.

Eco-feminism can be seen not only in the writings of Mahasweta Devi but in her way of life too. In the documentary film *Journeying with Mahasweta Devi* directed by J Joshy Joseph says "I don't want to be cremated after death. Instead, I wish to be buried at Tejgadh in Gujarat and a Mahua sapling should be planted there as I am very fond of Mahua trees". According to Devi human beings come from the Earth and they do not give anything back to her. So I wish to give my body back to the Earth to get it fertilized as in the case of an organic farming. Here the writer and her characters together are having a common mission and an approach to the way exploitation happens in the country sides. They return to Mother Earth and in that process they highlight the need

for the harmonious existence and judicious use of natural resources. Devi emphasizes through her life philosophy and writings that greed is the cause of inequality and imbalances in the country sides. There she opens up a new confabulation on feministic and eco-feministic thoughts based on her concepts of life with dignity and lesser exploitation of the nature. To live a peaceful life on this earth, it is important to treat the women and nature with dignity. Ecofeminism attains as a movement to save nature and women. And developments should not be at the cost of natural resources.

The ideology of sacred motherhood is a powerful tool of patriarchal control. Jashoda is revered as "Ma" but is denied autonomy or respect. Her role as a mother is used to justify her exploitation. Like the Earth, which is invoked as "Mother Nature" but mined and polluted, Jashoda is venerated and violated. This duality analyses the idealization of motherhood as a means of social control. Ecofeminist argue that the language of sanctity masks violence, making it harder to resist. Jashoda's degradation is not an anomaly but inevitability within this structure. In the end, Jashoda's story is a call for ecological justice and gender equity. Her death is not just a tragedy; it is a warning about what happens when society devalues the very sources of life.

Conclusion

Through an Ecofeminist lens, *Breast-Giver* becomes not just a critique of gendered labor but a broader allegory for ecological exploitation**.** Jashoda's body, like the Earth, is sacred yet expendable. Devi dismantles the myth of selfless motherhood**,** exposing it as a strategic ideology to sustain capitalist patriarchy. Her suffering is a call for resistance against systems that exploit life-giving forces—human or ecological—until they are spent and discarded.

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The Priest and The Officer: Parallel Journeys of Guilt and Conscience in Graham Greene

J. Semmalar and P. Thiyagarajan

Graham Greene was fascinated by men who are neither saints nor villains but a troubling combination of both. His whisky priest and his Major Scobie stand as two of his most vivid achievements, each caught in circumstances that force a confrontation with their moral beliefs. While the whisky priest lives in hiding and Scobie lives in uniform, they are united by a shared struggle with conscience, guilt, and the elusive possibility of grace.

The whisky priest in *The Power and the Glory* is introduced not as a hero but as a frightened, shabby man. He has a taste for alcohol so strong that it has earned him his nickname. He has fathered an illegitimate child and seems unable to live up to the standards of his priestly vocation. Yet he continues to minister in a region where the government has outlawed Catholicism, risking capture and death every time he says Mass or hears confession. Greene allows us to see his moments of cowardice, his shame when he drinks again, his awkwardness with his daughter, and his anger at himself. Yet in every act of his ministry he becomes something greater than his failings. His decision to return to a village knowing that it is a trap so that he can hear the confession of a dying man shows a willingness to accept martyrdom. Greene suggests that true faith is not the absence of sin but the courage to act in spite of it.

Major Scobie in *The Heart of the Matter* also begins as a man respected by his peers. He is known for honesty and fairness, yet within him lies a profound insecurity. His wife Louise is lonely and resentful, and Scobie tries to protect her by borrowing money he cannot repay. His pity for others leads him into a secret affair with Helen, a young widow whose

sadness touches him deeply. Scobie's Catholic faith makes his actions intolerable to his conscience, yet he cannot bear to hurt either woman. This indecision, combined with a deep sense of inadequacy, traps him in a spiral of lies and spiritual despair. Unlike the whisky priest, Scobie does not move toward martyrdom but toward self-destruction. His suicide, while a mortal sin in Catholic teaching, is portrayed by Greene as the act of a man crushed by pity and guilt. In both figures we see Greene's refusal to reduce morality to simple rules; he shows us how complex motives can lead both to acts of grace and to tragic ends.

The whisky priest and Scobie share an acute awareness of their own failings. Both men are deeply self-critical, and this awareness shapes their decisions. The whisky priest drinks in secret, berates himself, yet still takes the Eucharist to isolated Catholics. His sense of unworthiness does not prevent him from acting; instead it makes his service all the more meaningful. Scobie's awareness, however, leads to paralysis. He confesses his sins but does not stop sinning, and his attempts to reconcile his love for Helen with his duties as a husband and a Catholic become impossible. Greene uses these internal battles to show that the human conscience is never simple; it is a landscape of competing loyalties and fears.

Their environments also shape their choices. The whisky priest moves through villages where poverty and suspicion reign. He is hunted by the lieutenant, who believes the Church corrupts people by turning their eyes away from material progress. Every act of kindness becomes an act of resistance, and the priest's martyrdom carries a public meaning: the faith will outlive persecution. Scobie, by contrast, is isolated in the colonial world, surrounded by gossip, ambition, and boredom. His struggle is private, a matter of personal relationships rather than public rebellion. Yet both men live under systems that demand conformity and sacrifice, and both resist in their own ways, though with different outcomes.

A crucial point of comparison is how each man relates to the idea of God. The whisky priest, despite his sins, never ceases to believe. His actions are not motivated by abstract theology but by a lived sense that

his priesthood still matters to the people who seek him out. When he prays, it is often with words of regret, but always with the hope that God can use him even in his weakness. Scobie's relationship with God is more tortured. He believes in God's justice but doubts God's mercy. His failure to accept forgiveness contributes to his downfall. Even after confession, he continues in his affair and then despairs of God's love, leading to his suicide. Greene presents these two trajectories to suggest that belief is not static but shaped by human responses to suffering and guilt.

Another striking similarity is their attitude toward others. Both men are moved by pity. The whisky priest stops for strangers, baptizes children, and comforts the dying, even when it risks his life. His compassion grows from his own awareness of sin. Scobie's pity is equally genuine but becomes entangling. His inability to cause pain leads him to decisions that ultimately hurt everyone, including himself. Greene seems to argue that pity, while a virtue, can also be dangerous when it clouds moral judgment.

Their deaths are the ultimate contrast. The whisky priest dies by execution, a public spectacle that transforms him into a kind of martyr, even if he never saw himself as one. His death affirms his role as a servant of faith, and the novel closes with a suggestion that another priest will come, continuing the work. Scobie dies alone, leaving behind confusion and sorrow, his death interpreted by others as an act of weakness rather than courage. Yet Greene does not condemn him; instead, he portrays his end as the tragic consequence of a conscience that could not find rest. In both deaths, Greene shows the high cost of moral struggle in an imperfect world.

What emerges from this comparison is Greene's consistent vision of humanity as both sinful and redeemable. The whisky priest and Scobie are not models to imitate, yet they are profoundly human, their failings recognizable, their small acts of courage moving. Greene's Catholicism informs his belief that grace often enters through wounds, that a man who drinks too much or lies too often can still, in moments of decision,

reflect divine love. Their journeys invite readers to consider their own flaws and the possibility that redemption is not beyond reach.

The Power and the Glory and *The Heart of the Matter* stand together as two sides of Greene's exploration of conscience. In the former, the whisky priest meets death in service, while in the latter, Major Scobie meets death in despair; yet both leave behind a haunting testament to the complexity of moral life. These novels show that faith is not the privilege of the sinless but a struggle lived out by those who stumble and rise again—or who stumble and are lost forever. Greene's art lies in making these struggles unforgettable, reminding us that in every flawed heart there may still beat the quiet, persistent possibility of grace. Their stories continue to speak beyond their settings, reaching readers who themselves wrestle with loyalty, guilt, and hope. Through these two unforgettable figures, Greene offers not easy answers but a mirror in which we see our own fragile humanity and the difficult, beautiful work of seeking light in darkness.

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Food as a Cultural Anchor in Diaspora: A Study of Select Fiction

Preeti Bissa

Introduction

Food has been an important part of human life since the beginning of civilisation. It carries traditions, memories and cultural values across generations. Over time, food has become deeply tied to who we are and how we connect with others. Culinary traditions and old family recipes help migrants stay linked to their homelands. Food habits often shape identity because they reveal a person's background, beliefs and way of life. Different cuisines now mix and adapt in many parts of the world, yet authentic cooking still holds deep cultural and emotional meaning. For migrants, food offers comfort and familiarity in strange surroundings. It helps them remember home and keep their culture alive. Every meal that blends the familiar taste with the unfamiliar, every ingredient substituted out of necessity, and every dish prepared in a new kitchen using old methods constitutes an act of identity formation, one that belongs neither wholly to one culture nor entirely to the other, but emerges as something new and vibrant.

However, migrants also start adopting the host country's food habits to connect with the people around them. The first step towards becoming part of a new culture is often about survival. Learning to eat local foods helps migrants fit in and manage daily life. A second reason is lack of resources. Migrants may not have enough money or access to obtain original ingredients from home. In these cases, they turn to local options out of necessity. At the same time, many migrants remain more comfortable with their own cuisine. They cook traditional meals whenever possible because these foods feel familiar and safe. The

food of the host country therefore becomes a medium for acceptance and adoption. It allows migrants to build new relationships while gradually shaping a blended identity. Deb argues that food works "by unravelling the various ambiguities of multilayered identity formation" (Deb 122). In diaspora studies, food plays a key role. Migrant communities often rely on their cooking traditions to preserve a sense of belonging. Traditional meals, ingredients and methods allow people to continue their cultural practices even far from home. Yet food also helps them adapt to a new culture. It bridges the difference between the old world and the new, links the past to the present, and helps migrants maintain their identity while embracing change. Migrants do not merely seek a specific location on a map, but rather a feeling: a sense of safety, familiarity and rootedness, a sentiment that can be recreated even within the most mundane and everyday acts of cooking and eating, regardless of how many thousands of miles separate them from their homeland. In these four narratives, food acts as an anchor to both the homeland and the host land.

Theoretical Framework

To understand how food becomes an anchor for migrants in diaspora literature, this study draws on three theoretical frameworks: Homi K. Bhabha's concept of hybridity, Avtar Brah's idea of homing desire, and Paul Rockower's theory of gastrodiplomacy. Each framework explains a different aspect of migrant experience, and together they offer a meaningful way to examine the everyday acts of cooking, eating and sharing food in the selected literary texts. Through these ideas, food appears not only as a source of nourishment or memory but also as an important medium through which migrants shape identity, create belonging and negotiate between cultures.

In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha explains hybridity as a way to understand identity in the space between two cultures. He argues that migrants often live in what he calls the "Third Space," which exists between the homeland and the host land. This space challenges old identities and encourages the formation of new ones through cultural interaction. Bhabha believes that all cultures borrow from one another,

and that migration makes this process easier to see. Therefore, when migrants adopt the food habits of the host country while preserving traditional meals from home, they do not simply move from one culture to another. They create a new cultural identity through daily choices. For example, a Pakistani father in London eating bacon with mushrooms does not only show a change in diet. It reflects a life shaped by cultural negotiation and adaptation.

Similarly, in *Cartographies of Diaspora* (1996), Brah develops the idea of "homing desire." She makes an important distinction between the desire for home and the desire for a homeland. According to Brah, home does not exist only as a geographical place. It is a psychological and emotional need for rootedness, comfort and a sense of belonging. Homing desire therefore reflects the wish to feel settled and connected in a new environment rather than only the wish to return to one's country of origin. The return itself is largely a myth. Food often becomes central to this process. When migrants prepare meals from childhood memories, they do more than feed themselves or their families. They recreate comfort and familiarity in an unfamiliar place. Even when traditional dishes change because of local ingredients, migrants continue to build a connection between memory and present life.

Finally, Rockower uses gastrodiplomacy to describe how food creates cultural understanding between communities. He argues that food offers one of the easiest ways for people to learn about unfamiliar cultures, because taste creates an immediate emotional connection. According to Rockower, cuisine acts as a form of soft power, since food carries history, values and identity. His own subject is the state rather than the individual, and this study applies his idea at a smaller scale. For migrant communities, preparing traditional meals in a foreign country means more than satisfying hunger. It also expresses cultural presence and identity. When people from the host culture accept or appreciate these foods, moments of mutual understanding emerge. A child accepting food from an immigrant caregiver, or a neighbour trying an unfamiliar dish, may seem like an ordinary action. Yet such moments quietly reduce cultural distance and encourage acceptance.

These three frameworks are complementary to each other, not competitive. Bhabha explains the cultural space in which migrant identity is defined. Brah highlights the emotional desire that drives migrants to recreate home. Rockower shows how food becomes a shared expression of identity and relationships. Through food, these texts show how migrants preserve memory, construct identity and form relationships in unfamiliar places.

Understanding Food and Identity through Four Narratives

Many researchers have studied food from the perspectives of nostalgia, alienation, the sorrows of detachment and cultural clash. South Asian food abroad negotiates issues of race, class, gender, ethnicity and national identity. But through this paper we come to understand these four narratives in a way that shows how difficult it is to simplify the role of food in human life. For migrants, food cannot mean only survival, comfort, sorrow or hope, because it often holds all of these emotions at once. Through these stories we learn that identity is not a one- time choice but something that is always being shaped by the people who prepare, eat and share food every day.

All four stories centre on people who moved from South Asian cultures, mainly from India and Pakistan, to the West. These narratives explore feelings of nostalgia, hybridity, security, identity and culinary memory. Through them we will see how food becomes a bridge between the homeland and the host country. The concept of sharing food opens new spaces in each narrative and offers a window into how migrants remember their past, adapt to their present space and shape their identity through the everyday practices of eating and cooking.

Food as the Anchor of the Homeland

Food is never just meant to nourish the body. It also nourishes the mind and soul of a person. Home-cooked dishes always hold a special place in everyone's life, containing memories, comfort and a sense of peaceful belonging. When people migrate from their country, they may leave

behind their language, familiar streets and the faces with whom they grew up. But they cannot leave their food behind so easily. The hand that once stirred the lentils and the nose that knew when the mustard seeds were ready to pop in hot oil are not forgotten, nor are the people who carry them along. Brah's homing desire refers not to the longing to return but to the deep emotional need to recreate the feeling of home even when that place is far away, and this longing is most alive in the kitchens of the female characters in these narratives, who cook in the authentic style of their homeland as though the act itself were a quiet safeguard of their culture.

For example, let us take tea. In Indian culture, tea is not just a drink. It is a daily ritual that marks the start of the morning and the middle of the afternoon, serving as a moment of connection. In "Mrs. Sen's," "When Mr. Pirzada Came to Dine" and *No New Land*, the characters all emphasize the habit of serving and drinking tea. On the surface it may appear a small act, yet it carries immense emotional weight. When a character prepares tea in a foreign kitchen, they are not just making a drink. They are reaching towards home. Lilia notices that Mr. Pirzada "took off his shoes before entering a room, chewed fennel seeds after meals as a digestive, drank no alcohol, for dessert dipped austere biscuits into successive cups of tea" (Lahiri, "Pirzada" 23).

Then there is the highly personal act of preparing food. Chopping vegetables, taking a specific spice from the shelf, the aroma slowly rising from the pan and spreading throughout the kitchen: these are not just steps in a recipe. These are acts of remembrance. The smell of familiar spices is a way to soften time, to gently draw someone towards the kitchens of their childhood, their mother's hands, and their grandmother's voice saying that the meal is ready. In M. G. Vassanji's story, in a place called Don Mills, the smell of food, especially curry, brings a sense of comfort and belonging to some residents. The parents coming to pick up their children are welcomed by these familiar aromas, which remind them of their cultural roots and the homemade food of traditional homes. These scents evoke warmth and old memories, making them feel emotionally connected to family and home.

Through these sensory experiences, for a moment, the characters overcome the feelings of distance and displacement. In these stories they eat and prepare samosas, whole fish, chicken, rose syrup, semolina halva, mango pickle, roti, rice, spicy cashews, kebabs with coriander chutney, and rich slow-cooked curries. There is more in all of these than just food. Each is a point of reference, a quiet proclamation of where the heart still resides. It represents culinary authenticity, as when Mrs. Sen prefers fresh fish from the sea with rice. Pickles hold a special place in the lives of migrants. In Lilia's home, mango pickle is served with meals, and at the tiffin centre in *No New Land* people make and sell roti and pickle together, which demonstrates the same continuity. In Bhabha's terms, these everyday food rituals are how migrants hold on to their identity within the Third Space, not by refusing the host culture entirely, but by keeping the taste of home alive within it.

There are many food choices available in a foreign land, yet the specific food one reaches for tells a deeper story. South Asian people consume fresh food rather than packaged food, as the cooking habits in these narratives clearly show through the chopping of vegetables for preparing meals. They are living in a culture where tinned food is available but they are not using it, and this presents a cultural connection that runs deeper than convenience. Lilia's mother is busy at the stove, frying spinach with radishes, onions and green beans with coconut, and cooking raisins in a yoghurt sauce for her family. Similarly, in *No New Land*, Zera runs a shop where she sells tea and kebabs, and Gulshan Bai and Sheru Mama prepare full meals twice a day, serving roti through their tiffin service. Mrs. Sen also appears as a typical Indian woman who uses a blade brought from India to cut vegetables like cauliflower, cabbage, aubergine, cucumber, onion and spinach, and who peels potatoes in seconds. A meal cooked with ingredients sourced with great effort and care, and prepared the way it was always made back home, is what Rockower would recognise as an act of cultural identity expressed through food, a way of saying through the kitchen what cannot always be said through words. It says we are still here and we still remember who we are.

Religious dietary practices add another dimension to this experience. Hindus observe rules against consuming beef, and Muslims against pork and alcohol; the significance of these rules becomes even more pronounced among people who do not share these beliefs. In the countries where they reside, these boundaries are often invisible or unknown to those around them. For the migrant, every meal becomes a kind of silent negotiation between mingling with society and preserving one's own identity. Bhabha describes this everyday cultural negotiation as the function of the Third Space. In *No New Land*, when Nurdin's family is en route to Canada, only vegetarian food is served on the plane, likely because the only meat available is pork. Zera quietly observes this, as consuming pork is forbidden in Islamic tradition. Similarly, Ali cannot accept his father, Parvez, because he eats pork and drinks whisky; "he had ordered his own wife to cook pork sausage" (Kureishi 104), and in Ali's eyes this amounts to a betrayal of their religion and identity. The narrative rarely features dramatic incidents. It is a daily, ordinary kind of courage that often goes unnoticed, and it is through these quiet food refusals that identity is most firmly protected.

And yet the same food that protects identity also opens hearts, because when shared across a table it has a way of making a foreign world feel a little less cold. Lilia's family shares meals with Mr. Pirzada every evening, and Lilia's mother always prepares a variety of dishes for them. When the war in Dacca worsens, "my mother refused to serve anything other than boiled eggs with rice for dinner" (Lahiri, "Pirzada" 33), and she cooks properly again only when word arrives that his family is alive. At Sixty-Nine Rosecliffe Park the residents sit over tea, samosas and kebabs for hours, and build something like a neighbourhood inside a country that has not offered them one. Mrs. Sen gives Eliot's mother breaded mincemeat with raisins, semolina halva and rose syrup in yoghurt, because in the Indian tradition feeding a guest is not simply an act of hospitality: a guest is not left unfed. This is Rockower's mechanism at the smallest possible scale, and it works. The distance closes without anyone discussing it. What these characters are protecting is not their diet. It is themselves. The fear running under all four texts is of being

slowly rubbed out, and food is what holds. Brah's homing desire is clearest here, since none of them is packing to leave. They are keeping a place alive inside the one they live in. Food is their anchor and their archive.

Food as a Bridge in the Host Land

Food is not merely a matter of taste or habit. It becomes a vehicle for survival, for adapting to a new environment, and for discovering a new version of oneself in an unfamiliar world. Bhabha reminds us that migrants do not simply leave one culture to step directly into another. Instead, they inhabit a Third Space, where their identity is constantly shaped and reshaped by the small decisions of daily life. In "My Son the Fanatic," Parvez stands as the clearest example of the complete assimilation of another culture. He drinks whisky, enjoys bacon-wrapped mushrooms, and starts his day with a fried-bread sandwich. He also asks his wife to cook pork sausages. Through these dietary choices, Parvez not only adapts to the British way of life but embraces it so profoundly that he becomes estranged from his own culture and faith. His plate becomes a mirror of his identity, since he is quietly seeking to leave his own culture behind. Similarly, in *No New Land*, Ramesh demonstrates the same acceptance. He consumes beef sausages without a hint of hesitation, believing that all religious dietary restrictions are nothing more than superstition, and he crosses that boundary without any particular struggle. In both Parvez and Romesh a kind of colonial hangover can also be observed, in which consuming the cuisine of the host society becomes a means of demonstrating to others that they too belong to the very world into which they have stepped. In the words of Bhabha, these are symbols of hybridity that have gone so deep into the Third Space that their everyday dietary choices quietly forge a new identity. Food is the first door into a society, and it opens before language does. For some the change is easy. For others it means giving up what they have always liked, which is harder than it sounds.

Mrs. Sen offers a tenderer example. As the caregiver for a young American boy named Eliot, she connects with him through the very

food she serves him. She prepares items such as peanut butter on crackers, popsicles, soda and sandwiches, which belong not to her world but to his. And yet she herself begins to acquire a taste for the host land, liking clam cakes with Tabasco sauce and black pepper, foods imbued with the flavors of the land where she now resides. Nothing is surrendered. She has found a way to reach the child, and this act of reaching out holds great significance. She is using food to bridge cultural divides and to create a small but genuine moment of mutual understanding between herself and the world she inhabits.

Mr. Pirzada visits Lilia's home bringing along small plastic eggs filled with cinnamon hearts, honey lozenges, raspberry truffles, slender rolls of sour pastilles and peppermint lollipops. In American tradition, sweets are considered a language of affection; by adopting this custom, he conveys something that cannot easily be expressed in words. Far from home and deeply missing his daughters, he finds in Lilia a place for his memories and longing. He does not fully assimilate into the culture he inhabits. Instead, he adopts only as much of it as is necessary to articulate his inner emotions. Homing desire manifests in its most tender and human form in his case, for he harbors no yearning to return to his physical home but rather cultivates a small, fragile sense of home in Lilia's company.

The traffic runs both ways. After trick-or-treating, Dora's mother patches the girls' blisters and serves "warm cider and caramel popcorn" (Lahiri, *Pirzada* 32). A host mother extends her hand to welcome Lilia in her own familiar and most natural style. It is not the migrant reaching out towards the host culture, but the host culture extending a hand towards the migrant child. Lilia accepts this without hesitation. Being young, she does not feel it as compensation for something lost, but rather as though her home has simply expanded a little, making room for something new, and she steps into this Third Space with effortless ease. In Bhabha's words, Lilia inhabits the Third Space with far greater freedom than any adult depicted in these narratives. Food is the easiest and most natural medium through which this connection is established.

There is another aspect of these stories that warrants attention. In *No New Land*, both Sheru Mama and Gulshan Bai sell tiffins to make a living, and the act of sharing home-cooked meals reveals certain implicit compromises. Along with their roti and rice they rely on butter or jam, tinned curry and bought pickle, because fresh ingredients cost too much or cannot be found. The memory is still on the plate. As Rockower observes, "A major part of culinary diplomacy revolves around the people-to-people role that gastrodiplomacy plays, and the manner in which food is used to shape and expand perceptions and understanding" (Rockower 243).

This seemingly minor detail is significant, as it illustrates that the desire to prepare home-cooked meals cannot always be fulfilled. Mrs. Sen faces similar challenges in her own kitchen. She cooks with great care and affection, incorporating butternut squash alongside cauliflower and cabbage, and carefully maintaining the textures and flavor combinations that feel familiar to her. However, it is a "whole fish she desired, not shellfish, or fillets" (Lahiri, *Mrs. Sen's* 85). Consequently, when she cannot find a whole fish, she substitutes it with chicken. This is a small change, yet it conveys a profound message. Whenever Mrs. Sen makes such a substitution she is not abandoning her culture; rather, circumstances compel her to adapt, and she selects the closest available alternative to recreate the comforting sense of home through her cooking.

In countries like the United States, food culture is profoundly influenced by mass production and genetically modified crops. Food is produced on a massive scale, preserved for long periods and sold in packages at low prices. Immigrants arriving from the eastern parts of the world often have limited funds and lack access to authentic products, and consequently such inexpensive, packaged food becomes a practical choice. In works like *No New Land* and "My Son the Fanatic," characters readily embrace this food culture as they struggle to survive in a new world.

Conclusion

In the four narratives discussed in this research paper, food emerges not merely as a backdrop but as a central, tangible medium through which migrants confront the reality of displacement, navigate memories and resistance, and ultimately find a way to move forward. Collectively, these works reveal that a migrant's relationship with food constantly shifts and evolves under the pressures of new environments, economic hardships, cultural expectations and personal desires. These characters exist in a state of perpetual conflict, caught between the past and the present. Food becomes the arena where this tension is most authentically felt and most quietly resolved. These perspectives allow us to view these narratives not merely as tales of loss or victimization, but as stories of extraordinary courage and resilience. They highlight the creativity, determination, love and everyday bravery of individuals who refuse to abandon their identities, even when everything around them urges them to become someone else. They share meals in solitude, and they seek out familiar ingredients with a resolve far stronger than hunger itself. Among the many resources available to migrants, food is the most profoundly human, for it requires no translation; it transcends barriers of language and class, speaking directly to both the body and the heart.

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Percolation of Trauma: Exploring Narrative Dichotomy as an Anti-War Element in Doris Lessing's *Alfred and Emily*

Kopal Vats

Alfred and Emily, first published in the year 2008, is among the final writings of Doris Lessing and is often neglected in the shadows of her much earlier and more popular works such as *The Grass is Singing, The Golden Notebook, Children of Violence* or *The Good Terrorist.* She wrote this part-fiction part-memoir at the age of eighty-nine, close to five years before her death in 2013. The book is a remarkable closure to her difficult childhood and her troubled relationship with her parents; the agony of which became the backdrop of her most writings and of her life as well.

As a book, *Alfred and Emily*'s structure presents a unique dichotomy. The book opens as a fictional novella about the independent but fictional lives of her real parents Alfred and Emily, wherein they never marry and subsequently, Doris and her real-life brother are never born. In the novella, Alfred and Emily do cross each other's paths but not to the extent of falling in love and getting married. They are introduced as two independent characters who remain mostly indifferent to each other's presence except for when they meet through a shared maternal figure Mrs. Lane who dotes on both of them. Mrs. Lane's daughter Daisy is a friend of Emily's. Daisy and Emily move to London to be trained as nurses in a hospital and this becomes a consequential decision for Emily because she takes up the training against the wishes of her father who feels that the job of a nurse is way beneath her and thus disinherits her. With the passage of time, Emily grows very close to Mrs. Lane who welcomes her in her times of distress and offer her warmth and love like a mother. Similarly, Mrs. Lane plays a crucial role in the life of

Alfred as well. Alfred is taken by her under her wing like an adoptive son because his own mother does not take any interest in his life. He eventually grows close to the family of his moody and alcoholic friend Bert and works as a farming apprentice with them. Hence, the only reason why Alfred and Emily even get to know each other is through Mrs. Lane and that is sole extent of their acquaintance.

The trajectory of their paths thus separates beyond Mrs. Lane and each goes on to lead a different life. Alfred falls in love with a girl called Betsy and enjoys a satisfactory phase of matrimonial bliss. Betsy supports him in his decision to take care of Bert who suffers from mental health issues. Alfred is a farmer at heart and takes great pleasure in managing the family farm of sickly Bert. Emily as a dedicated nurse grows in rank and marries a respectable but inordinately conventional doctor but the turn of events is such that she is left a widow and using the opportunity she turns back to her work after an unpleasant break and successfully sets up a charitable trust to run schools for poor children. As a determined and an enterprising woman, Emily avoids the shackles of a conjugal relationship and lives her life on her own terms until she meets her tragic death in a scuffle with young boys.

The literary oeuvre of Doris Lessing comprises of persistent references to her tough childhood which she spent partly in Persia, now Iran and Rhodesia, modern-day Zimbabwe. It is noteworthy that the First World War or the Great War had a major role to play in the life of the Lessing family. Even though, she was born after the war but she has been openly bitter about how the Great War played a traumatic role in her life. Her whole childhood has been tainted by the atrocities of the war. In the foreword to *Alfred and Emily,* she expresses her anguish about consequences of the war:

> That war, the Great War, the war that would end all war, squatted over my childhood. The trenches were as present to me as anything I actually saw around me. And here I still am, trying to get out from under that monstrous legacy, trying to get free. (Lessing vi)

In reality, the war had a significant role to play in bringing her parents together. Her father Alfred Taylor was badly wounded in the war as a soldier and met Emily McVeigh in the hospital where she nursed him back to health after his leg had been amputated. They were brought together in such circumstances and after the war had ended, they moved to Persia where Doris was born. From Persia the couple shifted to Rhodesia where Alfred wished to fulfil his life- long desire of becoming a farmer. However, the means were inadequate and the results were far from satisfactory pushing them to acute shortage of money. Over time, the penury resulted into bitterness among the domestic environment of the family. Emily McVeigh longed for the refined life of Edwardian England where she could thrive as a cultured woman but she did not get her due. She was an intelligent and zealous woman whose talents were dissipated in the dull and rustic surroundings of Rhodesia. Therefore, Doris as a child had to endure nerve- wracking hardships since her parents no longer got along and the state of poverty compounded the struggles at her home. She felt that her parents were ill-suited for each other and their union had resulted into deep misery instead of marital harmony, the burden of which had to be endured by her and her brother. This is where she detested the Great War which was responsible for the union of his parents. The war thus, became the very backdrop of her birth and loomed large over her entire life as a traumatic event.

In her pioneering book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and Memory,* Cathy Caruth states that "trauma is understood as a wound inflicted not on the body but on the mind" (3). She also writes that "trauma repeats itself, exactly and unremittingly, through the unknowing acts of the survivor and against his very will" (2). With a lasting wound on the mind which results in the hampering of meaning-making; subsequently the trauma survivors need a recuperative narrativizing of the painful events to lead more fulfilled lives. Hence, trauma narratives play a significant role for the survivors as:

> The literary imagination, with its ability to fictionalize and symbolize, can create a space in which experiences that appear to defy understanding and verbalization, that concern existential dimensions

> of the human condition – especially threatening experiences of vulnerability or mortality – can be explored from multiple perspectives. Literary texts and their fictional worlds allow for nuanced engagements with the subject of trauma, which is often personalized and contextualized, fictionalized and historicized, as well as psychologized and metaphorized at the same time. Literary approaches to trauma, then, have the potential to engage readers' powers of emotional identification and sympathy on the one hand and critical reflection on the other. (Schonfelder 29)

The significance of trauma studies cannot be over-emphasised because "[s]ituated at the intersection of clinical practice and literary and cultural theory, trauma theory has established itself as a productive and influential theoretical framework with which to consider cultural production dealing with the destructive legacies of painful histories" (Hensey 139). A close reading of these narratives reflects the intensity and the extent of the trauma wound. The intensity of the trauma wound can be in direct correlation with the mental suffering endured by the survivor while the extent of the trauma wound can demonstrate the range of trauma in terms of the pain endured by those around the survivor and also, the successive generations of the survivor. There is no doubt to the possibility that a trauma survivor with a distorted emotional frame will inadvertently cause disruption in the general harmony of relationships around her. This is best elucidated through the concept of introjection:

> . . . introjection is about the capacity, facilitated by the previous generation, to transform needs and desires into words, to develop a language of self- discovery and self- fashioning and speak it to others. As they write, introjection, by its very nature, ensures independence between generations as it is synonymous with the articulation, through words, of inner desire with an outer world always different, always changing in time, always providing unique vehicles for self-expression. Introjection describes the process by which one generation moves coherently forward in time, facilitated by those from the previous generation who both tolerate and encourage that movement. (Prager 19)

A trauma survivor's act of introjection will be interfered because "[w]hen traumatic moments intervene, the facilitative environment provided by parents is thwarted. The disarray in the parents' own state of desire—introjection frustrated—passes itself on to the children" (Prager 19). The disruption of the process of introjection not only inhibits the natural and independent possibilities of a growing child but also pulls her into the chain of trauma inevitably. The trauma wound of the parent thus, not only disarrays the parent; it also emerges as the shared background for the cognitive and emotional maturity of the child causing her to be entangled in the turmoil as well. This disruption to the process of introjection as a consequence, results into percolation of trauma through the generations.

In *Alfred and Emily*, the fictional part makes way for the raw memoir which is real and contrasting to the wishful imagination of the first part. The memoir *Alfred and Emily; Two Lives* begins with a real-life description of Alfred Taylor after he was badly wounded in the first world war. Lessing tells her readers about the gradual impact of the War on her father as "Alfred Tayler, a vigorous and healthy man, was wounded badly in the First World War, tried to live as if he were not incapacitated, illnesses defeated him, and at the end of a shortened life he was begging, 'You put a sick old dog out of its misery, why not me?'" (152). The constant irritability and the wish for death is a common feature among the survivors as:

> The clinical picture of depression consists of low mood and/or loss of interest or pleasure in regular activities, together with appetite and sleep disturbances, restlessness or agitation, fatigue or low energy, feelings of worthlessness or guilt, loss of concentration, and possibly suicidal thoughts. (Kaminer and Eagle 42)

She goes on to give vivid details of his determined struggle in face of his disability because she had always seen her father with the wooden leg and despite all hardships he had made the best of strength. He was perfectly capable of:

> . . . impressive things. He would ride, in Kermanshah, Persia, to his work at the bank. I've seen him go down a rough mine shaft in a bucket, his wooden leg sticking out and banging against the rocky sides. He ran, or hobbled, in fathers' races at my brother's school. He climbed a difficult tree to a tree-house made by my brother and me. He would go stomping through the bush, more than once taking a fall, or clamber over the great clods in a ploughed field. (152)

Through the above lines, Lessing wishes to reiterate her father's undying spirit despite all troubles. However, the fuel of resilience was bound to be exhausted over time especially in the poor living conditions of Rhodesia and a prominent lack of mental health drugs. As a war survivor, he had endured terrible bouts of depression which intensified later. Lessing writes:

> And now, looking back at that life, it is evident to me that my father, during the dreadful slow end of it, was depressed. Now the grim and ghastly depressions of old people are common knowledge. He would be medicated out of the worst of it. But no one then suggested that my father was ill with bipolar or any other depression and needed serious medicines. My father slept badly for all his life, what there was of it; he dreamed of his old comrades, and grieved for them. (154)

Similarly, Lessing was also observant of her mother's deterioration. Emily Taylor had not been physically wounded like her husband but she suffered terribly inwardly from her unfulfilled desires. Her frustration and helplessness results into her failure to cope with motherhood as "[t]hrust into the role of survivor, trauma victims often fail to understand and navigate their new position, since trauma initially exists as an absence in the mind" (Wicks 135). She was ill- suited to live as a wife of an incapacitated soldier away from the glamour of England. Lessing writes:

> Nothing that she ever told, or was said about her, or one could deduce of her in that amazing girlhood, so busy, so full of achievement, or of her nursing years, about which we had the best

> of witnesses, my father himself, or the years in Persia, so enjoyable and so social, nothing, anywhere, in all this matches up with what my mother became. (156)

Lessing had a troubled relationship with her mother for she felt excessively burdened under her expectations. She writes:

> To this day I can feel the outrage I felt then. I was outraged, in a rage, furious, and of course desperately sorry for her. Was she ill? She was, if not with a heart-attack. She was ill, all right. And not herself. That was the point. And what were we supposed to do? Kiss her? Give her a good hug? But she did not only demand our pity with tears to match hers. That was not all she did. (156-57)

The transformation of Emily Taylor from an ambitious social butterfly to a despondent mother is an ironic twist of consequences of an unfolding trauma. She was naturally blessed with a talent for social gatherings but her marriage with Alfred slowly destroyed her charisma. The right environment might have allowed her a flight of wish-fulfilment but she is left behind like a helpless bird whose wings have been clipped. Hence, trauma does not play out for Emily and her children in the form of haunting memories like for her husband; instead, the consequences of the war have manifested in her life as a disruption of her present potential. This is why the "traumatic experience is not "remembered" as a past event, integrated into a "normal" structure of a self-centred, embodied narrative time, but rather irrupts as a "present" experience, and that accounts for its overwhelming disruptive power and opens up profound aporias concerning the referentiality of trauma" (Moura 77). The percolation of trauma works in such a way that her otherwise unutilised talent would have been transformational for her children too but all of the potential of a poor family lay waste on a farm in Rhodesia. Lessing emphasises the very feeling here:

> In the trunk behind the Liberty curtain lay the evening dresses, the gloves, the feathers, the hats. In a purse put away somewhere the visiting cards she had made especially for this life. But the piano stood in the living-room, whose windows were shaped like portholes,

> looking out over that bush, and she played. She played, well, everything – but I was brought up knowing that the right accompaniment to Chopin and Beethoven was the thudding of native drums. (158)

The intermingling of the symphony of Chopin and Beethoven with that of the thudding of native drums creates a cacophony much like the parody of their own life where Emily's longing for Edwardian England is intermingled with the hardships of life in Rhodesia.

In the memoir, Lessing recollects her family's life in Rhodesia which has none of the dreamy poetic-justice of the first part, the novella. She describes the challenges of living in penury with depressed parents in the dry rustic environment of Rhodesia with the horrors of the second world war in the background. Her father is left a frail diabetic and in the inadequacy of medical aid, he suffers and deteriorates over the years. Her mother serves her husband as a constant caregiver but is exhausted beyond relief in the process. As children, Doris and her brother Harry are far removed from the comforts of a normal childhood. The trauma of the parents leaves an indelible mark on the lives of their children who also turn into its survivors. The memoir with its real-life reminiscences function as a subject of Lessing's traumatic memory which by its very nature has elements that "follow automatically, but not sequentially or logically, rather in haphazard fragmentary form" (Morrissey and Mclaughlin 28). In psychotherapy however, it is believed that "one of the main goals [of psychotherapy] is to assist the traumatized victim to move the event from traumatic memory to narrative memory" (Morrissey and Mclaughlin 28). Narrative memory consists of mental constructs which help the communicator to make better sense of situations; the communicator has the power to include or exclude details based on choice. While the memoir is a haphazard, disjointed collection of painful memories from the past; through the novella, Lessing asserts her choice in releasing her whole family from the burden of the past.

[Such] novels and limit-cases, which explore self-narration and self-representation in the face of trauma within fictional and literary structures,

allow authors to experiment with self-reflexivity in ways that non-fictional trauma writing may not permit, thus enabling writers to explore different perspectives on writing trauma and writing the self. (Schonfelder 30)

Thus, the dichotomy of the narration in *Alfred and Emily* is a trauma response from Lessing to strive towards a recuperative culmination given that this book is one of her last writings. It becomes an act of resilience because "analysis of trauma as an intergenerational conflict also demonstrates [is] that resilience is a major element in the positive adaptation to traumatic events or experiences" (Visser 124). Through the novella, Lessing imagines alternate and more suitable lives for her parents; as a token of honour for their unlived experiences. A positive trauma response is often characterised by "crossroad or choice-point in the survivor's life in which previous values, priorities and ways of being can be re-considered, and a change in the 'plot' of the survivor's life-narrative towards a more purposeful and significant one becomes possible" (Kaminer and Eagle 76). The novella is an act of release from the past by articulating a meaningful alternative.

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A Study of Thematic Concerns in The Selected Works of Ruskin Bond

M. Chandrasekaran and P. Thiyagarajan

Introduction

Ruskin Bond is a renowned and celebrated Indian English writer. He has been creating a variety of literary works in various genres till now. He engages with themes such as human relationships, the connection between man and nature, love, childhood, family, life, and the concept of Indianness. Despite being of British decent, his vision is not at all British in colour. His thematic concerns and sketches are vibrant with the essence of life. His writing mainly focuses on the foothills of Himalayas and the surrounding of Uttarakhand. He depicts nature in terms of its relationship with humanity. His stories reveal a deeper understanding of human situations that are complex and multifaceted.

Bond's thematic foundation is deeply rooted in the countryside and social surroundings of the places he often visited during his early life, as well as his personal experiences that shaped his vision. His descriptions encompass an admirable blend of landscapes and plains. He consistently sketches all the things vividly with all vibrant of life. He depicts the landscapes that are seen as closely connected to the lives of his characters. He sets up a link between nature and humanity. The portrayal of landscape introduces the reader to a scene that is unique in both landscape and atmosphere. His theme invariably centers on human relationships and whatever they symbolize. He places his characters in an environment that demands multifaceted relationships.

Bond's thematic exploration is characterized by a remarkable and enjoyable diversity. His creative works are based on plots that drawn from love and friendship, pet animals, orphans, children, Indian heritage,

contemporary life and mainly about nature. Each of his stories serves as an experiment in theme and technique. Accordingly, his stories can be categorized into certain groups according to the themes that are based on an objective evaluation of his varied experiences in relation to the materials that comprise his storytelling.

Theme of Nature and Animals

Bond is a devoted lover of nature. In general, he lives by breathing from the true essence of her beauty and he uses her as central themes for many of his stories. It is an ever-lasting bond and that has no limit. His literary journey takes a different way in pursuit of a winter garden, sparked by the alluring beauty of nature that blends with the unpleasant view of social and political humbag. He finds satisfaction in depicting the heavenly beauty of the Garhwal Himalayas whether it's a cherry tree in Maple Wood, a panther or leopard, a secret pool, a tea shop by the roadside, a tiny railway station, or landscape from a village. Bond uses nature as his primary weapon in all his stories. He illustrates the profound connection between trees and humanity. This is not merely an instance of nature being described as a narrative device, but rather an authentic respect for the natural environment.

His short stories are a celebration of nature; he is full of positive sentiments. According to Bond, the natural world is a pure, essential life energy which promotes the actions, reactions, growth, and death of things and creatures.

> If some were to ask me to choose between writing an essay on Taj Mahal on the last rose of the summer, I'd take the rose even if it were down to its last petal. (Bond 185)

Nature plays a vital role for Bond. It gives him fresh concepts, a wide range of themes, and solid backdrops for his narratives. It also recharges and reenergizes his creative energies. Even a tiny bird or flower outside his window gives him a deep sense of refreshment throughout the challenging process of writing a short story. His stories are expressed with an exquisite affection by the sounds of rains clattering, birds warbling, rivers rippling gurgling, plants whispering and summer breeze dancing.

According to Bond, nature is an essential component of the human world. He can perceive her secret goodness thanks to the blessing of nature. Autumn, hunger, drought, heat, and storms are all realities that he is aware of. He understands that everything, no matter how huge or small, demonstrates God's omnipotence, and that man might approach him by balancing the infinite and the limited.

He has a remarkable, natural sensibility as a writer. His senses are acutely aware of every vibration in the surrounding natural environment. His senses always pick up on the sound of a petal falling, the drift of snow falling, and water seeping through the ground.

The clouds hanging over the hills, the moonlight, the stars, the creepers at his window, the birds on the hill, and the scent of the earth at the touch of the first shower all absorb the weariness and stress of his existence. Through all such bodily visions, nature unveils her hidden greatness.

The story "Love is a Sad Song", was, in fact, written beneath the cherry tree and other stories such as "The Coral Tree", "My Father's Trees in Dehra", "When you can't Climb Any More", are examples of these genres. In "The Last Tonga Ride", the protagonist returns to his ancestral home to revive his bond with the tree.

It is an appealing one to know how the men and beast have correlated to each other's mode of existence; they survive against the regular threatening and a dreadful life because they depend and live with the laws of nature. Many of his stories expose an interesting account of human connection with animals and birds. Such as , "Monkey Trouble", "The Tiger in the Tunnel", "The Monkeys", "Eyes of the Cat", "Grandpa Tickles a Tiger", "The Eye of the Eagle", "A Cow for all Seasons" are noteworthy. The leopard, known as "the crouching terror" of the hills, takes an important role in some of his remarkable stories, like "The Panther's Moon", "The Leopard", and "Tiger, Tiger Burning Bright".

The beauty of small creatures such as butterflies, caterpillars, beetles, squirrels, blue jays and hoopoes are equally attracting and even snakes, lizards and leeches also have a place in his works. His keen observation

of nature never spares any living or non-living organism, and he never fails to highlight these creatures in his stories. This proves that Bond is considered a lover of nature.

The story "Cow for All Seasons" brings out an interesting fact of reality of cow's nature and shows the foolishness of human being. The cow's truthful assertion, "how much we depend on humans reveals the law of interdependence in nature. Likewise, another story, "All Creations Great and Small" reveals a python that accidentally entered a bedroom and became enamored with its own reflection in the mirror. Bond elevates these animals and birds to be equal to the real heroes of our environment, and he doesn't consider them inferior to humans; he considers them an integral part of our life.

Themes of Love

Ruskin Bond highlights the concept of love and intimacy, which leads to a deep connection that is far better than any compromise. The powerful emotions evoked by love reveal no significant difference in their impact on men. Therefore, one does not necessarily discover anything new about love. Instead, it is well-established understanding that love is timeless, along with its accompanying emotions, and it crosses political, linguistic, philosophical, and religious boundaries. In short, love is an ageless attraction to each other, but there is no fulfillment or lasting relationship because their love is selfless, without any expectation. His love stories represent unrequited love, where the "joy" of the lover lies in remembering past happy moments rather than possessing the beloved. As Bond mentions in the introduction to Night Train at Deoli and Other Stories "I can't really write unless I am in love with my subject"

Love emerges as a prominent theme in Ruskin Bond's short stories. His concept of love is encompassing all creatures, both men and beast alike. Love is essential for life. Human beings, beasts and birds, along with flowers and trees too, respond to love. The relationship between Men and women is just a part of this universal life force. He is in constant search of love. Characters like Rusty, in "The Room on the Roof" "The Sensualist", the writer in "Delhi is not Far", the narrator in

"The Night Train at Deoli", Sushila in "Death of a Familiar" represent different stages of love. It seems that love is an enigma, and everyone is trying to resolve it in his own way. The hero of Delhi is Not Far says:

> Few things, reassure me. . . . The desire to love and be loved, the beauty and ugliness of the human body, the intricacy of its design**…** Sometime I make love as a sort of exploration of all that is physical. Falling in love becomes an exploration of the mind. (Bond 778)

In most of Bond's stories love is presented as a sad song or a passing fancy. Those who cherish the sensation of being in love are undoubtedly remarkable individuals; they renew their spirits and live gracefully. The majority of Bond's lovers are in their teens; they display a peculiar softness and grace in their longing. In the story "The Night Train at Deoli," the eighteen-year- old boy waits for the basket girl whom he saw first at the Deoli Platform. He never meets her again and never dares to find a reason for her not being at the station. Similarly, in another story, "Love is a Sad Song", the desperate lover is unable to determine the fate of his love. He is portrayed as a mature writer of thirty-two, just double the age of his beloved, Sushila, a school girl. Like an impatient lover, he speaks of his love, and like an innocent girl of her age, she responds to it waywardly. Sometimes sheer physical attraction is misunderstood as love. Such attraction cannot abide by time. Therefore, Sushila chooses security instead of love and lover surrenders despondently.

Marriage without love and love without marriage is a general theme of man-woman relationships. Bond has not created a single couple enjoying a happy marital life in his stories.

Perhaps the suffering of his parents' separation does not allow him to conceive of a pair of lovers living in a blissful married life.

In the story "Time Stops at Shamli" Sushila is the wife of a hotel owner, Mr.Satis Dayal. He is an aged widower and always remains busy in his business. By using this opportunity, Sushila's former lover convinces her to elope with him. But Sushila rejects the idea and tells she will

never commit any betrayal to her husband or daughter despite her life is going very roughly. Through this story, Bond highlights the truth of married life: it is not just love, but rather the individual and traditional foundations, that keep the marriage life intact.

In short, Bond's love stories and affairs are unfulfilled. In all case, but he never forgets them. In the introduction of "The Night Train at Deoli and Other Stories" he says "well that's it. I am fifty-four now, No more love stories, and no more falling in love" (Bond: 1998; III)

Theme of Childhood

Ruskin Bond's most beloved themes revolve around childhood and boyhood. He has crafted a variety of stories that explore these themes. He is particularly adept at evoking a sense of nostalgia for the lost sights and experiences of childhood and boyhood, as well as the melancholy that comes with the unyielding march of time. Bond is widely recognized for his work in children's literature; indeed, he is considered one of the pioneers of modern literature in India. His stories for children are in the pattern of fables depicting the present day of people. His sense and perception of the young world are entirely amazing. Hence, Bond is the most favourite author for children and adults. He began to write stories in his late thirties. But, his first novella, "The Room on The Roof" was written at the age of seventeen.

He recalls,

> My early stories, written when I was about my 20's were about my own childhood in India and some of the people I knew as I grew up. They were written for adults. Then in my 30's, I began writing for children. By then, I probably had a better perspective on my own childhood and more insight into the loves of other Indian children (Bond 115)

Bond's children's stories can be classified into two categories: personal and impersonal. Personal stories are either autobiographical or semi-autobiographical. In personal stories, he reflects on his own experiences, such as unfulfilled desires and minor adventures. His personal stories

include "My Father's Trees in Dehra", "The Funeral", "When I Can't Climb Any More", "The Tiger in the House", "The Cherry tree", "The Last Tong Ride", "Coming Home to Dehra", "All Creature Great and Small", and " The Tree Lover". These stories illustrate young Bond's affection and love with the trees and animals, as well as his affection for the town, Dehra. "All Creatures Great and Small", and "The Tree Lover", illustrate young Bond's affection and love with trees and animals, as well as his affection for the town, Dehra.

Some of his children's stories revolve around adventure and the exploration of new aspects of life. The story "Four Boys on a Glacier" depicts a vivid image of the snow-covered peaks of the Himalayas. During their adventurous journey, the boys witness the divine beauty of nature. The story "How Far is the River?" is also filled with the spirit of reckless enthusiasm typical of young people. The murmuring sound of water in the dense forest arouses a spirit of exploration. The story "Riding through Flames" exposes a different kind of adventure in the woods. The boys are deeply terrified by the forest fire, which endangers the lives of countless animals and birds along with various forms of vegetation.

In some of Bond's children's stories, he highlights the presence of affectionate grandmothers and fun-loving grandfathers. When parents are immersed in domestic tasks, grandparents share their experiences with their grandchildren. Children move to the imaginary world when their grandparents tell them stories, especially ghost stories and tales of their past experiences. Bond has revealed this kind of scenario in his children's stories, such as "The Photograph", "The Kitemaker", "Along Walk with Granny", "The Cherry Tree', "Animal on the Track" rendering an interesting account of mutual sharing between the young and the old.

Bond aims to spread love and understanding among all creatures of the world, especially children, who are the most active recipients of his vision. They are remarkably quick at making friendships. They use small objects like a flower, a marble stone, a flute, a coin. or some beads to

initiate their friendship. For example, in the story "a Rupee Goes a Long Way", Raj gives a pretty necklace of bright stones to Koki and becomes her friend. In "The Fight", two boys of the same age group fight each other for the right to bathing first in the river. Later, they realise their mistake and become friends.

In some of his stories, Bond creates purely humorous accounts of children's little cunning, which is also a part of their innocent world. In the story "The Window" Koki imitates her elders while pursuing her innovative ideas-sowing pumpkins and making flowerbeds on the roof. In "Chachi's Funeral" Madhu crates the fake murder and cremation of Chachi. It shows that there is a constant ebb and flow of emotion in his mind.

Bond ardently maintains that literature plays a pivotal role in shaping the life and character of a child. His own experiences illustrate this point effectively. Books are like windows to see the world clearly, and quitE often children are so absorbed in their books that they appear in a trance. They possess their own individual parameters to interpret the stories conveyed by their elders. Children love Bond's stories for his humour and fantastic illustrations and they feel a strong connection to the characters and events depicted in the story.

Theme of Indianness

Bond was not the only victim of alienation in a foreign land. There are many writers who find it difficult to adjust or return to their homeland; only a few have ventured back to their country. It was Bond who followed the call of his mind and conscience and returned to India to merge his own self with its soil. He made up his mind to struggle against economic hardship and poverty and wanted to play a prominent role in the world of Indian Literature. Even unhygienic conditions, gruesome heaps of garbage, flies and mosquitoes, and above all, career uncertainties could not stop him from his strong, steadfast belief of his identity as an Indian.

The India he loves is not one that makes headlines, but one that comprises the goodwill and humour of ordinary individuals, a tolerance for all

customers, a non-intrusion into others' private lives, a philosophical acceptance of adversity, love, and affection, particularly towards children. His stories tell about the rural and middle urban class. The People are farmers, shopkeepers, grass cutters, small children, Postmen, Tonga drivers, Schoolmasters, gardeners or retired officials etc. His stories move around the rural or middle urban class. They truly represent the Indian spirit of universal love and brotherhood. Glamour and competition are the two primary aspects of western culture, yet these have not yet disrupted the sanctity of their lives. The love for humanity resides at the centre of their hearts.

Bond has portrayed real Indian society. His characters are not confined to their own separate world. While Ram Bharosa in the story "The Blue Umbrella" is excommunicated due to his own wicked nature, the girl Binya offers her friendship and brings him back to the mainstream of life. Social cause has always been given priority over individual interest in Indian culture.

Therefore, his characters symbolize a remarkable balance between social and personal concerns.

Bond has creatively reflected the spirit of diversity of faith in Indian culture. In his view India is not merely a mode of ritualistic worship; it teaches the art of living in full conformity with nature. Bond has described Haridwar and Rishikesh as the spiritual states of India. Depiction of Indian life with its vivid and varied colours can be discerned in all aspects. In the story "The Kitemaker" one can find Mahmood Ali, the kitemaker, sitting under an old banyan tree and contemplating the glorious bygone days with half-shut eyes ana a thread in his hand. Likewise, in the story "The Blue Umbrella" a girl named Binya, running after her cow Neelu, can be easily traced on the slopes of the hills. In the story "Sita and the River", Sita, caring for her old sick grandmother and chattering with her doll Mumta, can be seen in any village house. In the story "Panther Moon" Bisnu represent every schoolboy in the hills who walks miles daily to reach his, amidst the lurking fear of a panther.

Bond stories are reflecting the various shades of Indian life, culture, humanity, love and care, sentiment, sympathy, and Indianness. Unity in diversity is one of the most fascinating features of Indian culture. People of various sects and creeds live in peace and harmony; they respect each other's views and faith. Such a broad concept of individual liberty and social coherence has made this land democratic. He writes:

> Ours is a land of many people, many races; their diversity gives it a colour and characters for all Indians to be alike would be as dull as for all sexes to be the same for all humans to be normal. (Bond 817)

Bond shares many Indian conceptions about nature. His attitude is not that of a naturalist only. At times he is very close to paganism, which forms a part of the Indian psyche. He is an ardent worshipper of nature, diligently raising the cause through fiction. He strengthens his point by quoting from myths and legends prevalent among common folk. His relationship with Indian soil is highly remarkable and appreciable. His contribution to the Indian society through his writing is always strengthening Indian literature and the people of India.

Conclusion

The study is undertaken to find out the theme-based classification of Bond's short stories and to focus especially on the thematic concerns of Bond's stories. Through this study, it is possible to comprehend very clearly about the variety of themes, including religious, ritualistic, human relationship, and autobiographical once and how he depicts these themes very skillfully in all his stories. He is known for his simplistic style of writing and his ability to capture the essence of life. His ability to draw from his impactful experiences and use them in his writing makes

his work so relatable and impactful. His writing is characterized by simplicity and nostalgia, reflecting his personal experiences.

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Society, Power and Social Learning in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Conch Bearer*

Navedita

Introduction

Contemporary literature demonstrates that myth often functions as a bridge between inherited cultural values and the evolving realities of modern society. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is one of the acclaimed writers who skillfully reinterpret mythic frameworks to address the moral, social, and spiritual concerns of the present age. She was born on 29 July 1956 in Kolkata into a traditional middle-class family. Divakaruni is an award-winning author, fiction writer and professor of Creative Writing who has also written several significant books for children. Her novel *The Conch Bearer* (2003) exemplifies this concern by transforming a myth-inspired narrative into a reflection on ethical growth and social awareness. She migrated to the United States in 1976 and completed her postgraduate studies at Wright State University and her Ph.D. at the University of California, Berkeley.

The novel *The Conch Bearer* is the first part of the trilogy Brotherhood of the Conch, which weaves together the themes of myth, morality, and modernity in order to promote social learning and moral development among young readers. In the Himalayan region, the narrative presents a group of spiritual healers known as the Brotherhood, who protect the magical conch and possess the power to heal people and the world. Anand, the protagonist, becomes associated with this Brotherhood and gradually develops into a true healer.

The novel offers more than a fantasy adventure; it presents a microcosm of modern society and provides a platform for children to learn social values. This paper explores how *The Conch Bearer* reflects

contemporary social values, cultural hybridity, ethical decision-making and processes of social learning. Through this narrative, Divakaruni portrays the challenges of living in a multicultural world. The study therefore examines the relevance of myth in modern society and ethics required in power and analyzes the process of social learning represented in the novel. Through the engaging story of the protagonist and his companions, the narrative conveys moral values such as compassion, friendship, honesty and virtuous conduct.

The study further examines Anand's process of social learning through his interactions with family, friends, mentors and the wider community and traces his transformation from an inexperienced child into a responsible and socially conscious individual. It explores how his experiences of education, friendship, guidance, hardship and community shape his understanding of responsibility and ethical conduct.

Review of Related Studies

V. Gunasundari and Dr. N. S. Vishnu Priya, in *Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Literary Works: A Review*, examine recurring themes such as alienation, feminism, patriarchy, cultural conflict, social realism, magical realism, and self-identity in Divakaruni's writings. They also highlight the writer's engagement with social realities and her experiences as an Indian-born writer settled in America. Their study points to the limited critical attention given to male characters and the social factors that contribute to migration, indicating scope for further research into gender relations, social circumstances, and displacement in Divakaruni's fiction.

Jagat Singh and Dr. Shweta Singh, in *A Study of Magic Realism in The Conch Bearer*, examine Divakaruni's use of magical realism through the journey of Anand, Nisha and Abhaydatta. The study emphasizes the author's narrative techniques and the blending of magical and realistic elements. However, it does not sufficiently examine the symbolic and cultural significance of the conch, particularly its spiritual and transformative dimensions.

Manreet Dhaliwal, in *Fantastic Quest for Self-revivification of Humanity in The Brotherhood of the Conch Trilogy*, explores the moral, cultural and spiritual values represented in the trilogy, drawing upon Hindu philosophy and mythology. The study emphasizes ethical values and their relevance to younger generations but gives comparatively less attention to the role of significant objects in conveying these values.

In another study, *Food as a Metaphor in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's The Brotherhood of the Conch Trilogy*, Dhaliwal examines food as a metaphor for memory and Bengali cultural identity. The study demonstrates how everyday material practices can preserve cultural memory and introduce Indian culture to global readers. However, its focus on food leaves scope for examining other material objects, particularly the conch, as carriers of cultural memory, spirituality, identity and social values.

Methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative, interpretative and analytical approach to examine Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Conch Bearer*. The research is based primarily on close textual reading of the novel, with particular attention to significant events, character development, narrative techniques, symbols and recurring themes. The study examines how the novel represents aspects of modern society, social learning, childhood development, morality, responsibility and community life.

The analysis focuses especially on Anand's journey and transformation throughout the narrative. His interactions with family members, friends, teachers, guides and other characters are examined to understand how social relationships and experiences influence his behaviour, values, decision-making and moral awareness. His movement between the ordinary world and the magical world is also studied as an important element in his growth from an innocent child into a more responsible and socially conscious individual.

The study is informed by the Social Learning Theory, which emphasizes the role of observation, interaction, imitation, cooperation and social

environment in shaping an individual's behaviour and understanding. Through this theoretical perspective, the research explores how Anand learns from the people around him and how his experiences gradually develop his sense of responsibility, empathy, cooperation and ethical awareness.

The primary source of the study is Divakaruni's *The Conch Bearer*. Secondary sources include relevant books, research articles, journals, essays, and critical studies related to children's literature, social learning, fantasy literature, morality, childhood development and Divakaruni's literary works. These sources are used to support and contextualize the interpretation of the primary text.

The research also examines the role of magic, spirituality, and symbolism in the novel. The magical conch is interpreted not merely as a fantastical object but as a symbol connected with wisdom, responsibility, purity and personal transformation. Through a close reading of these elements, the study explores how Divakaruni connects the experiences of childhood with broader social and ethical concerns.

Research Gap

The existing studies on Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Conch Bearer* and *The Brotherhood of the Conch* trilogy primarily focus on magical realism, spirituality, morality, cultural values, memory and self-discovery. Although these studies establish the significance of Divakaruni's engagement with social and cultural concerns, relatively limited attention has been given to social learning, social consciousness, ethical power and the relationship between childhood development and contemporary society. Similarly, the conch has largely been considered in relation to its magical and spiritual dimensions, leaving scope to examine it as a symbol of power, wisdom, responsibility, mystery and purity. The present study addresses these areas by examining *The Conch Bearer* as a narrative of social and moral learning and by exploring how the novel represents contemporary society, social values, community life and social responsibility. It also considers the ethical dimensions of power and authority, thereby connecting the literary representation of the novel with the broader concerns of literature, society and politics.

The Magical Power of the Conch

The conch functions as the central symbol of power in the narrative. The power of the conch is natural, but its effect depends upon the intention and moral disposition of the human heart. The conch shell, known as Shankha in Sanskrit, is considered a sacred symbol of purity, brilliance, unity and auspiciousness in Hinduism.

Divakaruni employs the theme of magic to attract young readers and to encourage them to understand and practice moral and social values through fantasy. In this way, the narrative suggests ideals that may contribute to a peaceful and harmonious society. Magic often blurs the boundary between reality and imagination, blending everyday experience with fantasy, supernatural elements and extraordinary abilities.

Divakaruni's *The Conch Bearer* presents a narrative shaped through diverse characters that represent both good and evil. The novel is both a magical tale and a quest that traces a spiritual and moral journey in which the protagonist, Anand, gradually learns that true power lies in compassion, humanity and ethical choices. The story follows Anand and his friend Nisha as they undertake a challenging journey filled with both physical and psychological obstacles.

The narrative begins with Anand, a twelve-year-old poor but kind-hearted boy. He works at a small tea shop to support his mother and sister and to meet the needs of the family. Anand possesses a vivid imagination and strongly believes in magic. As the breadwinner of the family, he often wished something magical that could solve his problems. He would imagine of receiving a magic apple like the one he once read about, along with a magical telescope. With such powers, he would believe that he could heal his dear sister Meera and also find out where his father is, ensuring that he is safe and well (Divakaruni 4).

However, his mother dispels this imaginative hope by reminding him of reality, "Those things happen only in the story books, son. Don't you know that by now?" (Divakaruni 5). One of the most significant elements of the novel is the conch itself, which begins to speak to Anand as he

moves toward becoming a true healer. After the first major obstacle, when he loses Abhaydatta, the conch speaks according to its own will. It instructs Anand to take it out and use it to defeat the enemy of Silver Valley, although Anand initially does not understand how to use its magical power. "Stand up, Anand," the conch said, "and take me out. Don't be afraid. Use me. I give you permission." Anand asks, "How shall I use you?" but already "an image had flashed inside his head" (187–88).

Ethics of Power and Responsible Leadership

In *The Conch Bearer,* Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni presents power as a form of responsibility rather than as a means of personal privilege or domination. The magical conch occupies a central position in this representation because its extraordinary powers make its possessor responsible for determining how those powers will be used. Through the characters of Abhaydatta, Anand and Surabhanu, Divakaruni establishes a contrast between power exercised for collective welfare and power pursued for individual advantage. Abhaydatta represents the former model. His role as a guide and healer demonstrates that authority acquires ethical value only when it is accompanied by wisdom, compassion and concern for others. The political dimension of the novel therefore emerges through its underlying question of how power should be acquired, exercised and controlled.

Abhaydatta's relationship with the conch is particularly significant in this context. He does not regard the conch simply as an object that can provide extraordinary abilities or personal benefits. Instead, he treats its power as something that carries a moral obligation. His decision to guide Anand towards the responsible use of the conch establishes the principle that possessing power requires the capacity to exercise self-control. Anand's selection is also significant because he does not belong to a socially privileged group. He is introduced as a poor boy living in Kolkata and working as a tea seller, while Nisha is similarly positioned on the margins of society. Their social background challenges the assumption that authority or leadership naturally belongs to the wealthy

and powerful. Divakaruni thereby associates moral worth with character rather than social position. The author's description of Anand's journey also emphasizes his responsibility to return the conch to its rightful place, reinforcing the idea that the object is associated with duty rather than ownership.

The opposition between Abhaydatta and Surabhanu further develops this idea of ethical and unethical power. Surabhanu's desire to obtain the conch is motivated by the possibility of using its power for himself. His pursuit consequently represents a form of authority based on possession, ambition and self-interest. In contrast, Abhaydatta's approach is founded upon restraint and service. A critical study of the novel similarly interprets Surabhanu through the idea of a "greed for power" and associates his desire for the conch with personal gain. This distinction is important because it transforms the conflict surrounding the conch from a simple struggle between good and evil into a conflict between two different understandings of power. One regards power as something to be possessed and exploited, whereas the other understands it as a trust that must be exercised for the benefit of the larger community.

This interpretation is supported by Metka Zupanèiè's critical discussion of Divakaruni's fiction, in which she identifies "wisdom and compassion" as important ethical principles in the author's treatment of human relationships. In *The Conch Bearer*, these principles are particularly relevant to the question of authority. Abhaydatta's wisdom is not demonstrated through the mere possession of supernatural knowledge; rather, it is reflected in his understanding that power without moral discipline can become destructive. His role as a teacher is therefore as important as his role as a powerful spiritual figure. He prepares Anand not merely to possess the conch but to understand the responsibility attached to it. Social learning in the novel consequently becomes a process of ethical and political education.

From this perspective, Anand's journey can be read as a gradual movement from social marginality towards responsible agency. His transformation is not simply an individual achievement; it has implications

for the wider community because the knowledge and power he acquires are directed towards a collective purpose. Divakaruni thus links personal development with social responsibility. The novel suggests that genuine leadership does not depend upon status, wealth, or the ability to command others. Instead, it is grounded in the capacity to recognize one's obligations towards society. Power becomes meaningful when it protects rather than exploits, serves rather than dominates and promotes collective well-being rather than individual ambition.

The political significance of *The Conch Bearer* therefore lies less in direct references to political institutions and more in its exploration of power, authority, inequality, responsibility and ethical leadership. By contrasting Abhaydatta's responsible stewardship with Surabhanu's desire for personal power, Divakaruni questions the legitimacy of authority that is motivated by selfish interests. At the same time, Anand's social background enables the novel to suggest that ethical leadership can emerge from marginalized spaces. The conch consequently functions as more than a magical or spiritual object: it becomes a symbol of entrusted power whose value depends upon the moral character of the person who holds it. Through this representation, Divakaruni connects social learning with political ethics and proposes that the most legitimate form of power is one exercised with wisdom, compassion, and responsibility towards others.

Fantasy as a Medium of Social Learning

Children's literature is an important form of literary expression written specifically for children and young readers. Its major elements include imagination, adventure, fairy tales, picture books, magic and fantasy. Through imaginative characters and fictional worlds, children learn about friendship, courage, responsibility and the distinction between good and evil. Such literature serves as a powerful medium for education, moral development and social learning while simultaneously entertaining young readers.

Children's literature also provides insight into the complexities of life and helps readers develop the courage to face its challenges. Really

children's literature originates with "such retellings and adapting the familiar stories of a culture- folktales, legends and stories about historic and fictional individuals memorialized for their heroism or holiness, adventurousness or mischief" (John Stephens 91). These lessons are conveyed through the moral messages embedded in stories. Barbara F. Harrison observes that children's writing "is concerned with human experiences, with heroic possibilities fulfilled and unfulfilled, with longings which are gratified and longings brought down by circumstances" (234).

Fantasy is a significant contemporary genre of literature. Childhood represents a stage of learning in which individuals gradually bridge the gap between inner imagination and the external world. Fantasy therefore functions not only as entertainment but also as a meaningful educational platform for children. Ursula Le Guin regards fantasy as "the natural, the appropriate language for the recounting of the spiritual journey and the struggle of good and evil in the soul" (64).

In fantasy narratives, magical or supernatural elements frequently shape the plot, setting, characterization and narration. Such narratives allow imaginative possibilities beyond the constraints of reality. Ordinary individuals may become heroes, objects may speak and magical forces may appear as natural parts of life.

In the novel, Abhaydatta selects Anand to undertake the important task of returning the magical conch to its rightful place because of his inherent goodness, honesty and compassion. He also warns Anand about the evil force of Surabhanu. Driven by selfish ambition, Surabhanu steals the conch in order to gain power and domination.

Guided by Abhaydatta, Anand and Nisha begin their journey toward Silver Valley. During this journey Surabhanu attempts to deceive Anand by offering delicious food and attempting to control his mind in order to obtain the conch. Anand and Nisha face numerous physical and psychological challenges throughout their journey. Through these experiences, Anand gradually learns that evil may appear attractive and powerful at first, but truth ultimately triumphs after many difficulties. Anand also develops a strong bond with the conch, which functions as

a guiding mentor. At one point he calls himself a fool for failing to understand the condition set by the voice from Silver Valley. The conch gently rebukes him: "It's a wise fool who knows his own folly" (Divakaruni 197).

Later, one of the three voices asks him to choose a single virtue of honesty, loyalty or compassion, before he can enter Silver Valley. After thoughtful consideration, Anand reply, "I can't choose just one. The three virtues are connected: one can't exist fully without other." (203) explains that it is impossible to select only one virtue because the three are deeply interconnected and depend on each other. He understands the nuances of ethical values and the interdependence of honesty, compassion and loyalty. His reply to the conch reflects that though being young in age he still does understand that moral virtues cannot function effectively in isolation; rather, they must operate in balance to produce meaningful ethical action.

Thus the narrative demonstrates the importance of moral discernment and equilibrium in ethical conduct. It suggests that true virtue lies not in the dominance of a single moral quality but in the harmonious integration of multiple values that guide individuals toward responsible action and just leadership within society. If one virtue is missing, the others lose their true value. According to him, honesty without compassion becomes overly severe and fails to bring real benefit. Likewise, compassion without loyalty lacks the strength needed to support and protect those one cares about. In the same way, loyalty without honesty can lead a person to follow an unjust leader or an incorrect cause. The voices praise Anand for his presence of mind and sincerity and welcome him into the magical world of Silver Valley. Although he is close to achieving his goal, he refuses to abandon his friends and chooses loyalty and compassion instead.

Traditional Values in Modern Society

Modern society demands adaptability, moral awareness, social responsibility, and ethical consciousness. Literature, particularly young adult fiction, plays an important role in nurturing these qualities. In *The*

Conch Bearer, Divakaruni portrays Anand's transformation from an insecure boy into a responsible individual, reflecting the processes of social learning that are essential in contemporary life. Anand's initial fear and confusion reflect the uncertainty experienced by many young individuals in modern society: "I had always believed that the world was a place where bad things happened suddenly, without warning." This feeling of instability mirrors the anxieties of contemporary life, where individuals must learn to face rapid social changes and uncertainties.

Divakaruni blends modern life with ancient traditions, showing how traditional values continue to guide individuals in a changing world. The narrative begins in modern day Kolkata, a city characterized by poverty, traffic and everyday struggles. This realistic setting reflects the modern world, where faith and spirituality often seem distant from daily life. Through Anand's journey, Divakaruni suggests that modernity and tradition are not contradictory but can coexist harmoniously. Anand relies on intelligence, courage and rational thinking while also learning to trust intuition, spirituality and moral truth. His success arises from his ability to combine modern awareness with timeless wisdom.

The conch symbolizes collective welfare, much like institutions in modern society that function for the benefit of the community: "The conch was never meant to bring power to one person. Its purpose was to heal the worlds." Anand ultimately realizes that success and survival depend upon cooperation and collective effort: "Alone, I would have failed long ago. Together, we had a chance" (117).

Conclusion

The analysis of *The Conch Bearer* demonstrates how Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni reinterprets myth and fantasy in order to connect traditional moral values with the ethical concerns of modern society. As a diasporic writer who remains culturally connected to India, Divakaruni portrays Anand's transformation from an ordinary boy into the true bearer of the sacred conch. Through this journey, the narrative emphasizes that the greatest power lies not in magic or physical strength but in goodness, faith and selflessness.

The Chief Healer of the Brotherhood recognizes Anand's unique ability and states: "Amongst all of us in the Brotherhood who have been blessed with gifts, you have a unique one. We meditate on the Conch and draw our strength from it, but you have spoken to it. And, more importantly, it has spoken back to you" (258).

Through symbolic storytelling and character development, the narrative demonstrates how social learning operates within modern society. It suggests that true growth arises not merely from destiny or power but from socially responsible actions. The Conch Bearer celebrates the richness of Indian cultural traditions by integrating spiritual, mythological, and moral values into its narrative. The novel ultimately illustrates how ancient beliefs and cultural values continue to influence modern life and contribute to the formation of ethical identity.

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Governance, Power and Ethical Order in Amish Tripathi's *The Immortals of Meluha*

Neeta Lalwani

Introduction

Present-day Indian society is witnessing a growing awareness and resurgence of interest in Hinduism. Indian society and religion are closely interconnected and may be regarded as two sides of the same coin. This renewed awareness can be attributed to several factors, including cultural consciousness, social interest and the search for self-identity. Literature has always played an important role in shaping society and reflecting its values and transformations. In recent years, a considerable number of Indian writers have incorporated India's culture, traditions and mythologies into their works. Their writings reinterpret ancient narratives for modern audiences, making them relevant to contemporary society. Among the most influential and modern mythological writers, Amish Tripathi occupies a significant place because of his rational and humanistic reinterpretation of mythological figures. In *The Immortals of Meluha,* Tripathi transforms Lord Shiva from an inaccessible deity into a relatable human being whose divinity emerges through ethical action and social responsibility.

Amish Tripathi was born on 18 October 1974 in Mumbai and grew up in Rourkela, Odisha. He is best known for his series, *The Shiva Trilogy* and *The Ram Chandra Series*, which have sold over seven million copies and have been translated into twenty languages. Amish Tripathi has been described by the BBC as "India's Tolkien and Asia's Paulo Coelho," reflecting his immense popularity and influence in contemporary Indian mythological fiction. Tripathi is the recipient of several awards, including the Raymond Crossword Book Award, the Dainik Bhaskar

Literature Award, the Society Young Achievers Award for Literature, the Man of the Year Award by Radio City, the Communicator of the Year Award by the PR Council of India, and the Pride of India Award (Literature). In 2019, Amish was appointed Director of The Nehru Centre in London, showcasing his cultural influence beyond literature.

The Immortals of Meluha (2010) is the debut novel of Amish Tripathi. It is the first novel in *The Shiva Trilogy*, followed by *The Secret of the Nagas* (2011) and *The Oath of the Vayuputras* (2013). *The Immortals of Meluha* is a rich narrative that amalgamates mythology, history, adventure, philosophy, and fiction, creating a mesmerizing saga while depicting the requisites of an ideal society. The novel narrates the story of Shiva, a mythological figure who is humanized in the narrative. Shiva is portrayed as a warrior and the chief of a Tibetan tribe. Despite inhabiting the tranquil and beautiful region around Lake Mansarovar, he and his tribe face a tumultuous life marked by relentless conflicts with rival tribes. They are invited to the foreign land of Meluha in search of refuge from their harsh existence. Meluha is presented as an ideal and highly organized society established by Lord Ram. The research explores the philosophical values, concepts and implications embedded in the novel that are essential for building an ideal society in contemporary times.

Review of Related Studies

Amish Tripathi's *The Immortals of Meluha* has received critical attention primarily for its reinterpretation of Indian mythology, humanization of Lord Shiva, philosophical dimensions and contemporary relevance. Existing discussions of the novel frequently focus on Tripathi's transformation of mythological narratives and his attempt to present familiar religious figures through a rational and human-centered perspective. Scholars and critics have also examined themes such as morality, individual choice, social values, duty, leadership and the conflict between good and evil. Such readings establish the novel as more than a retelling of a traditional religious narrative and emphasize its engagement with questions of human conduct and social organization.

Critical approaches to Tripathi's fiction also indicate the significance of Meluha as an imagined social order governed by rules, institutions, hierarchy and collective values. The novel presents systems of governance, social classification, military organization, law and authority alongside questions of individual freedom and responsibility. However, these dimensions have generally been discussed as supporting elements of the novel's mythological, philosophical or social framework rather than as a sustained study of its political ideas. The present study therefore brings together the ethical, social and political dimensions of *The Immortals of Meluha* to examine how the novel constructs and questions an organized society.

Research Gap

Although previous studies have examined *The Immortals of Meluha* in relation to mythology, morality, philosophy, social values and the humanization of Shiva, limited critical attention has been given to the political structures and principles represented in Meluha. In particular, the relationship between political authority, governance, law, social hierarchy, duty and individual choice has not been sufficiently examined as an interconnected system. The novel's representation of an idealized state, its mechanisms of order and discipline, and the authority exercised in the name of social welfare provide significant material for a political reading.

The present study addresses this gap by examining *The Immortals of Meluha* through the interconnected frameworks of politics, ethics and society. It investigates how the novel represents governance, authority, social organization, justice, duty and individual responsibility, while also considering the tensions between collective order and personal freedom. By bringing these dimensions together, the study seeks to demonstrate how Tripathi uses a mythological-cultural narrative to engage with questions of political power, ethical leadership and the organization of society.

Objectives of the Study

The present study aims to examine the representation of political structures, governance and authority in Amish Tripathi's *The Immortals of Meluha*. It seeks to analyse the ethical principles underlying the actions of political and social leaders and to explore how concepts such as justice, duty, responsibility and social welfare contribute to the construction of an ideal society. The study also aims to examine social hierarchy, law, discipline and individual freedom in Meluha and to identify the tensions between political order and personal choice. Finally, it seeks to establish the contemporary relevance of the novel's political, ethical and social ideas and demonstrate how Tripathi's reinterpretation of the Shiva narrative provides a framework for reflecting on governance, leadership and social organization.

Research Methodology

The present study employs a qualitative and interpretive methodology to examine the representation of governance, power and ethical order in Amish Tripathi's *The Immortals of Meluha* (2010). The novel serves as the primary text and is analysed through close textual reading, with particular attention to its depiction of political authority, systems of governance, law, social hierarchy, leadership, justice, duty and individual responsibility. Significant characters, events, dialogues and social practices are examined to understand how power operates within Meluha and how political authority is connected with ethical values and social order.

The study also makes use of relevant secondary sources, including scholarly books, research articles, critical studies and other academic materials related to Amish Tripathi, Indian writing, mythology, political thought, ethics and governance. A thematic approach is adopted to identify and interpret recurring ideas concerning authority, leadership, justice, social discipline and the relationship between individual freedom and collective welfare. The study does not treat Meluha as a historical model but examines it as a fictional and culturally informed social and political system. Through close textual analysis and contextual

interpretation, the research explores how Tripathi's reinterpretation of the Shiva narrative raises questions about political power, ethical leadership, governance and the construction of an ordered society

Shiva's Arrival and his Observation of the Ideal Society in Meluha

In *The Immortals of Meluha*, Shiva's arrival in Meluha marks the beginning of his transformation from a tribal leader into the legendary Neelkanth. Coming from the harsh and conflict-ridden region near Lake Mansarovar, Shiva is astonished by the discipline, prosperity, and organization of Meluhan society. The roads, cities, administration, and orderly lifestyle of the people reflect the ideals upon which the kingdom was established by Lord Ram. The perfection of Meluha leaves a deep impression on Shiva, who had never witnessed such a well-structured civilization before. Shiva admires and feels, "If there was a paradise somewhere, it couldn't have been very different from Meluha. This was a land of abundance, of almost ethereal perfection! It was an empire ruled by clearly codified and just laws, to which every Meluhan was subordinated, including the emperor" (Tripathi 35). This description highlights the ethical and administrative strength of Meluhan civilization, where justice and law prevail equally for all citizens.

Tripathi further emphasizes the social philosophy of Meluha through the statement: "People do what their society rewards them for doing. If the society rewards trust, people will be trusting" (4). This idea becomes evident to Shiva as he observes the honesty, civic sense and disciplined behaviour of the Meluhans. He realizes that the greatness of Meluha lies not merely in material prosperity but also in its ethical foundation. Similarly, Shiva is deeply impressed by the concept of collective duty embedded in Meluhan culture, reflected in the line: "If the entire society was conscious of its duties, nobody would need to fight for their individual rights." Through these ideas, Tripathi presents Meluha as an ideal society governed by discipline, justice, and moral responsibility. Thus, Shiva's arrival in Meluha symbolizes not only a geographical journey but also an intellectual and philosophical awakening toward the ideals of an organized and ethical society.

Political Philosophy and the Ethical Structure of Meluha

The ideas of political philosophy proposed by Niccolò Machiavelli can be used to understand the ethical and social framework represented in *The Immortals of Meluha*. Often regarded as the founder of modern political philosophy, Machiavelli departs from the classical understanding of virtue-based politics. According to him, the success of a state does not primarily depend upon moral virtue but upon practical goals such as stability, security, glory, and the protection of society (Strauss 2017). Virtue, therefore, is not an independent moral ideal; rather, it becomes a set of qualities that helps achieve the common good of the state. This marks a significant shift from earlier political traditions in which ethics guided political action.

Machiavelli further argues that human beings are naturally selfish and morally weak. Hence, political authority becomes necessary to regulate society and maintain order. His belief that people can be compelled toward socially beneficial behaviour through law, discipline, and political power anticipates later ideas such as Thomas Hobbes's famous assertion that "man is a wolf to another man" (Jessop 1968). In this framework, ethics and politics operate separately, and political leadership often requires pragmatic decision-making rather than strict adherence to moral ideals.

These political ideas can be connected to the social and ethical system portrayed in *The Immortals of Meluha*. The Meluhan empire is founded upon discipline, law, and collective order. King Daksha believes that strict governance and social regulation are essential for protecting the empire from chaos and external threats. The emphasis on order and stability reflects a political structure where the welfare of society is placed above individual interests. However, Amish Tripathi does not present Meluha as a completely rigid civilization. Through the conversation between Shiva and the Pandit of Mohan Jo Daro, the novel introduces a more balanced understanding of society and governance. The Pandit explains:

> What any successful society needs, O Neelkanth, is flexibility with stability. Why would you need flexibility? Because every single

> person has different dreams and capabilities. The birth son of a warrior could have the talent to be a great businessman. Then society needs to be flexible enough to allow this son to change his vocation from his father's profession. Flexibility in a society allows change, so that all its members have the space to discover their true selves and grow to their potential. (Tripathi 211)

This statement presents an important ethical critique of rigid social structures. While Meluha values discipline and social order, the Pandit emphasizes that excessive rigidity can suppress human individuality and social progress. The idea of "flexibility with stability" suggests that an ideal society must maintain order while also allowing freedom for personal growth and change. This reflects a more humane and ethical political vision in contrast to purely authoritarian governance.

The passage also highlights Amish Tripathi's critique of hereditary social systems and predetermined social roles. By suggesting that an individual's talent should determine vocation rather than birth, the novel promotes merit, individuality, and social mobility. Shiva's interaction with the Pandit broadens his understanding of leadership and ethical responsibility. He gradually realizes that the protection of society requires not only military strength and political control but also compassion, adaptability, and justice. Thus, the novel presents a complex relationship between ethics and politics. While political authority and social discipline remain necessary for maintaining civilization, Tripathi simultaneously argues that ethical governance must provide individuals the freedom to realize their potential. Through this balance between stability and flexibility, *The Immortals of Meluha* offers a broader reflection on the nature of an ideal society and responsible leadership.

The vision of Meluha as an ideal civilization is not presented by Amish Tripathi as flawless or permanently stable. Despite its prosperity, discipline, and ethical foundations, the society gradually reveals structural rigidity and social limitations. In this context, the observations of T. S. Eliot become highly relevant. Eliot argues that every attempt to construct an ideal society ultimately remains incomplete because human nature

itself is imperfect. He observes that "whatever reform or revolution we carry out, the result will always be a sordid travesty of what human society should be" (59). Eliot further explains that every social ideal undergoes transformation when applied to the realities of ordinary human society, where "the overwhelming pressure of mediocrity" weakens even the most ambitious visions (59–60). Such an argument resonates strongly with *The Immortals of Meluha*, where the seemingly perfect social order of Meluha ultimately reveals ethical contradictions, excessive rigidity, and institutional limitations. Tripathi thereby suggests that no civilization can remain ideal unless it continuously adapts itself to changing human realities and moral challenges.

Ethical Leadership and the Humanization of Shiva

One of the most significant aspects of the novel is the portrayal of Shiva as a human being rather than a supernatural god. Tripathi reconstructs Shiva as a man who possesses courage and compassion but also experiences uncertainty, anger and emotional conflict. He is portrayed as a tribal chief with human emotions, doubts and weaknesses. This reinterpretation allows readers to connect with Shiva not as an unreachable deity but as an ethical human being. Shiva never considers himself a divine personality. In an incident where Sati had just been recovered from bed of death by the treatment of Ayurvati who is being complimented as the best doctor for her work, she would attribute to shiva, "There are many far greater than me. But in this case, the miracle was Lord Neelkanth's and not mine" (Tripathi, 278), with the compliment added by Daksha. Shiva would feel humble and shy over as being undeserving. "An astounded Shiva stared at Daksha, his expression serious. He knew who the previous *Mahadev*, the *God of Gods*, was. He did not believe he deserved to be compared to Lord Rudra. His deeds did not qualify him for that honour" (Tripathi 279).

At the beginning of the novel, Shiva does not consider himself divine. When the Meluhans identify him as the Neelkanth, he remains skeptical and uncomfortable with the expectations imposed upon him. He states, "I am not the man you think I am" (Tripathi 57). This statement reflects Shiva's humility and existential uncertainty.

Tripathi thereby challenges traditional notions of divinity by suggesting that greatness emerges through ethical action rather than supernatural privilege. Shiva becomes respected because he consistently chooses justice and social welfare over personal comfort.

Joseph Campbell writes, "A hero is someone who has given his or her life to something bigger than oneself " (18). Shiva embodies this heroic ideal because he sacrifices personal peace in order to protect society and challenge injustice.

Shiva's leadership style also reflects modern democratic values. Unlike authoritarian rulers, he listens to ordinary people, questions rigid systems and remains willing to reconsider his beliefs. His leadership is based upon empathy and accountability rather than fear and domination.

The modern relevance of this portrayal is significant. In contemporary society, ethical leadership has become increasingly important because political and social institutions often face crises of corruption, inequality and mistrust. Shiva's character therefore symbolizes the possibility of humane and morally responsible leadership.

The Pandit further emphasizes the importance of stability in the development of civilization and human potential. During his conversation with Shiva, he observes:

Stability allows a person the freedom of choice, my friend. People can pursue their dreams only when they are living in a society where survival is not a daily threat. In a society without security and stability, there is no intellectuals or businessmen or artists or geniuses. Man is constantly in fight or flight mode. Nothing better than an animal (Tripathi 211).

The statement foregrounds the interrelationship between social security and human advancement. The Pandit argues that intellectual creativity, artistic expression, scientific inquiry, and economic progress become possible only within a stable and secure social framework. In the absence of security, human existence is reduced to the fulfillment of basic survival needs, leaving little scope for cultural, intellectual, or ethical development. Stability, therefore, emerges not merely as a political necessity but as an essential condition for the growth of civilization.

The passage also reinforces the broader ethical and political philosophy underlying Meluhan society. While flexibility enables individuals to identify and cultivate their abilities, stability provides the social environment necessary for exercising such freedom. Amish Tripathi thereby presents an ideal social order founded upon a balance between discipline and liberty. Excessive rigidity may restrict individuality and social mobility, whereas complete disorder threatens the very foundations of civilized life. Ethical governance, according to the novel, requires the maintenance of social order alongside opportunities for personal growth and self-realization.

Considerable relevance of the argument can be observed in the contemporary global context. Societies affected by war, terrorism, economic instability, or political conflict often experience limitations on education, creativity, and intellectual production. In regions marked by insecurity and violence, individuals are compelled to prioritize survival over self-development, resulting in social and cultural stagnation. Conversely, stable societies with effective institutions, rule of law, and social security create conditions that encourage innovation, literature, business, and scientific progress. The Pandit's observations therefore reflect a universal principle of political and social organization: peace and stability constitute the foundation upon which human civilization advances.

At the same time, the novel cautions against transforming stability into authoritarian control. Sustainable social progress becomes possible only when order is accompanied by justice, flexibility, and freedom of choice. Through such reflections, *The Immortals of Meluha* establishes a dialogue between ancient political philosophy and modern social realities, presenting a vision of ethical governance that remains highly relevant in contemporary society.

Conclusion

The *Immortals of Meluha* presents a significant reinterpretation of Indian mythology by connecting ancient philosophical ideals with contemporary social and ethical concerns. Through the depiction of

Meluha as a disciplined and organized civilization, Amish Tripathi examines the principles necessary for the construction of an ideal society, including justice, collective responsibility, stability, ethical governance, and social harmony. The novel suggests that a prosperous society cannot be sustained merely through material advancement; rather, it requires a strong ethical foundation supported by law, civic consciousness, and moral accountability.

The character of Shiva emerges as the central embodiment of ethical leadership and humanistic values. Unlike traditional mythological representations that emphasize divine perfection, Tripathi humanizes Shiva by portraying him as a leader shaped by doubt, compassion, responsibility, and moral struggle. Shiva's transformation from an ordinary tribal chief into the Neelkanth demonstrates that greatness is achieved through ethical action and commitment to social welfare rather than supernatural power. Such a portrayal makes the character deeply relevant to modern society, where leadership increasingly demands empathy, accountability, and moral integrity.

The novel also critically examines the relationship between ethics and political authority. Drawing upon ideas associated with political realism, the narrative acknowledges the importance of discipline, law, and social stability in preserving civilization. At the same time, it warns against excessive rigidity and authoritarianism by emphasizing the necessity of flexibility, individuality, and freedom of choice. Through the philosophical reflections of the Pandit, the novel advocates a balanced social order in which stability coexists with personal liberty and social mobility. Such ideas challenge hereditary hierarchies and promote merit, adaptability, and human potential.

Considerable contemporary relevance can be identified in Tripathi's reflections on security, governance, and civilization. In a world increasingly affected by political conflict, economic instability, social inequality, and crises of leadership, the novel foregrounds the importance of ethical governance and social responsibility. The argument that intellectual, artistic, and cultural advancement becomes possible only

within a stable and secure society remains highly significant in the present global context. Simultaneously, the text emphasizes that social progress must be accompanied by justice, compassion, and respect for individual freedom.

Therefore, *The Immortals of Meluha* transcends the boundaries of mythological fiction and functions as a philosophical and social commentary on contemporary civilization. By reinterpreting mythology through a rational and humanistic lens, Amish Tripathi creates a narrative that encourages readers to reflect upon ethics, leadership, governance, and the values required for building a just and progressive society.

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The Study of Ecological Violence in the Select Retold Egyptian Mythological Stories of Roger Lancelyn Green

R. Madhiyarasan, K. Kaviarasu and G. Parvathy

Roger Lancelyn Green is a British writer who has written so many books for the crown of British Literature, His writings are focused on the young minds of children in the world. He has completed several books based on mythological stories in the world for the younger generation to know something about the world and its mythological beliefs. His writings are considered to be the parts of children's literature. He is a good pioneer of C. S. Lewis. He has written more than twenty six books for children of all over the world to learn some extra knowledge.

His book *Tales of Ancient Egypt* is being explored his well knowledge on the mythical reference of Egypt that is in the continent Africa. This book contains twenty stories related to the myth of Egyptian. They are all talked about the origin and growth of Egyptian mythology among other mythologies in the world. The select stories "Ra and His Children" and "Isis and Osiris" are the first two stories in the book. In the beginning of the book, Green discusses the form of the world especially Egyptian land.

The first story "Ra and His Children" informs the reader to know the basic gods in the Egyptian land. The story is very similar to the story of Genesis in the *Bible*. The prime God Ra, the shining one, is the first person of the land. He has started to create the entire universe after the first day of world, by rising in the east and setting in the west across the sky. He is the most powerful god in that land and it is he who has spelled Shu, the wind, Tefnut the spitter, Geb the earth, Nut the Sky, and Hapi the sacred river Nile to get form in this universe. After creating all

the godly beings and natural beings in the world, he spells man and woman and at once man and woman form in the world. Even Ra also takes the form of human being and starts to rule the world as the first Pharaoh of Egypt. Ra is the sun god. He has to fight against all the Dragon of darkness to preserve this world. But the human beings are corrupted by the dragon of darkness and start to follow the evil spirits and become disobedience to Ra. This action of the people gives disrespect to the creator of the world. So, Ra has called for a meeting of all the gods in a secret place and plans to send his rays for punish them. But his burning eye is not good for the entire universe and Nut, the goddess, begs Ra to be calm in this regard. Later Ra has created Sekhmet the Lioness and commands her to kill the evil spirited human beings in the world. Sekhmet has done her duty in a grand manner by killing entire evil spirits without mercy. After fading the demonic beings, Sekhmet gets habitual ideology of killing the human beings for their blood. She is not controlled by the gods in the world. This crucial matter is reached the court of Ra and Ra has decided to stop the sense of blood drinking in Sekhmet by keeping red ocre mixed water in the land. At last the thirst of Sekhmet, the slayer is fulfilled and she is changed to be Hathor, the goddess of love, by the spell of Ra and worshipped by the entire people of the world as Hathor.

The second story "Isis and Osiris" is being told about the life of Osiris and Isis, the prime gods of Egypt. As per the prophecy, after Ra, the children of Nut, will rule the entire world. As it is known by Ra, the ego of Ra makes him to forbid children for Nut in the world that is created by him. So, Nut is not able to beget child. After several tricks done by Thoth the god of Wisdom, with the help of Khonsu, the moon god, Thoth extends five days from 360 to 365. These five days are created by the trickery of Thoth and Nut uses these days for beget five children in five days. They are Osiris, Harmachis, Isis, Set and Nephthys. They are also gods of the world, as per the prophecy. Osiris marries his sister Isis and Set marries his sister Nephthys. But Isis has learnt all sort of magical trickeries and other powerful ideologies through Khonshu. Isis has created a snake and creates a situation to bite Ra during his old

age. Ra in old age especially without clear eyesight, gets heavy pain by the unknown snake that is not created by him. He does not know what to do to overcome the pain. Isis uses this trickery for her to know the secret name of Ra and heals him from the poison of the snake. Isis and Osiris live a great life after the retirement of Ra from the position of Pharoah of Egypt. Osiris becomes the Pharoah and starts to change the world with good culture. He is the god of vegetation who teaches agriculture to the people of the world. He has instructed so many good things to live a pleasant life in the world to his people. He changes the mindset of evil-minded persons to get change over to the fine culture. But the evil thought in the mind of his brother Set is not known by Osiris. He is trapped by his brother Set and kept in a coffin for the first time. But Isis with her wisdom finds the coffin of Osiris. In order to save Horus their child from the evil-doing of Set, she starts to live in a secret place in underground. In the meantime, Set again finds the coffin of Osiris and cuts the coffin into fourteen pieces and throws them into different places. Finally Isis finds thirteen pieces and uses her magical power for the missing part of Osiris and completes the funeral duty for Osiris to enter the underworld. Later, Osiris becomes the god of underworld and starts to welcome all the dead beings to his place.

According to the *Etymonline* Dictionary, the word violence is a term from Latin *violentia* that means "physical force used to inflict injury or damage." Violence is not only a physical violence, it is segregated as sexual violence, emotional violence, psychological violence, spiritual violence, cultural violence and also as verbal violence, financial violence, and general neglecting or avoiding a person to do her/his fundamental duties.

The word *ecology* is coined in German language by a German Zoologist Ernst Haeckel as *Ökologie*, from the Greek term *oikos* that means house, dwelling place, habitation. An ecological violence is defined as the violence done by people to natural resources and the natural resources to the beings in the world and on some occasion, environmental policies that may be acted against people. At this research, ecological violence is studied from both the view of human beings' side and also from the natural resources side.

In the first story "Ra and His Children" Ra is the God of All gods, who has created the entire system. Ra is a Sun in the sky. Ra comes to know about the change of minds in human beings, so he wants to punish the entire human races that are all against his perception. He creates Sekhmet the lioness and asks her to kill the evil human spirits. Here, the lioness is used as a weapon to Ra to kill the entire evil spirits. Green describes the event done by Sekhmet as "As he spoke the name, Sekhmet leapt into being, in form as a mighty lioness of gigantic size. Away she sped into Upper Egypt, and slaughtered and devoured mankind until the Nile ran red with blood and the earth beside it became a great red marsh" (6). The duty of Sekhmet to kill evil spirited human beings but it is a mass murder done by Sekhmet to the entire human beings in the world of Ra. Ra is also felt sad for the happenings but the killing is unavoidable event as human beings minds are corrupted by the evil dragons. Though Sekhmet kills evil spirited human beings they are too belonging to the part of the nature. Their blood is spitted in the earth. Even the river Nile is filled with their blood. It is very horrible to imagine the situation of then period, but the horrible thing is happened to Nile. The mixing of blood with water of the river is also violence. It is against the usual progress of the nature. Though it is done by godly person it is also violence against the river. It is also one sort of pollution to the river Nile. At the same time, this earth is filled with a great red marsh. According to *Online Cambridge Dictionary*, the word marsh is meant for ground near a lake, a river, or the sea that often floods and is always wet. The acts of Sekhmet pollute the land of the area with blood. It seems to be Akeldema of Egypt as after the field of blood. In order to save the world from the action of Sekhmet, they have found a solution of using seven thousand jars of red ochres from Elephantine, the island. Red clayey soil in the island of Elephantine is seemed to be perfect match for the blood of all beings. That is the reason they have chosen this clayey soil for cheating and comforting Sekhmet from her high temper. Though this solution is given by Ra, seven thousands jars of red ochre symbolize the huge part of red ochre is taken for the welfare of the human beings. It may seem to be an important fact for decreasing

the angry of Sekhmet, it is one sort of polluting the land with unwanted soil that does not belong to the land itself. Likewise, this red ochre is not a food of Lion or Lioness. But Sekhmet has drunken the entire red ochre mixed water till her thirst of killing is faded out from her mind. It marks the violence of giving food to Sekhmet against its own food cycle. It is too violence that happened against the being in the story.

In the second story, "Isis and Osiris" starts with the prophecy of Thoth, as Nut, the Lady of the heavens bears child, that child is the future ruler of Egypt. As Ra has jealous over his kingdom, he curses Nut not to bear a child. The trickster Thoth, along with the help of Khonsu, the god of moon, creates five more days from the light of Moon, without his concern. These are the five days Nut bears Osiris, Harmachis, Set, Isis and Nephthys. Even Green too mentions that there are only three hundred and sixty days only before but after the creation of five more days, there are three hundred and sixty five days for a year. This event of creating five more days from the usual days is one sort of exploitation of the light. Though that is good for the birth of the royal persons, this event is also one sort of violence involved in the story. After Isis learns all sort of magic from Khonsu, she creates a snake named "Ureaus" out of all creation of Ra. Ra is unknown of these births. Then, Isis fashions clay that seems to be the hooded snake and sets a fiery poison of her midnight magic. As Ra becomes older on these days, he has eye sight problem due to his age, Isis uses it as a chance to cheat Ra. Her fashioned snake bites the heel of Ra and he comes to know that the creature is not made by him. He gets too much of pain from the poison and starts to scream in front of all gods. Isis makes this chance and starts to spell so many spells to make Ra to believe Isis and at last she creates a situation to him to tell about his other names and his secret name to Isis. This work of Isis is seemed to be the work of Police and Thief. Ra is treated to be a thief and Isis by giving pain through her magical poison makes Ra to tell his secret name. In order to know the secret name of Ra, Isis has used such trick and violence against Ra. At last Ra goes to Duat and rules the entire world from there. Especially when Ra explains his pain after the bite of unauthentic snake, he says,

> I was bitten by a serpent that I did not make- with a poison that I do not know. It is not fire, neither is it water: yet one moment I am colder than water, and the next moment I am hotter than fire. Now my body is sweating, and now it is shivering. My eyes are clouded and I cannot see; my head burns as with the fierce beams of midsummer. (14)

It once again remains the pain that Ra has suffered during the violent turn of Isis.

After Osiris becomes the Pharaoh of Egypt, he starts to teach the mankind how to sow and reap, how to live a prosperous life and he is the mentor of the entire world according to their myth. But the jealous of Set makes Osiris to be in the chest that is specially made for Osiris "with cedar wood from Lebanon and ebony from Ethiopia, inlaid with gold and silver, with ivory and lapis lazuli, and with precious stones" (18). Osiris is undergone a master trap of Set for the kingship. Set envy on kingdom rules him to kill and demolish Osiris from Egypt. He has killed Osiris when he is alive as a premature burial. It is a cruel situation for Osiris and Isis. This couple is on the way to their family life, but Set has destroyed their dreams and their life. Set throws the chest where Osiris body is in, to the river Nile. But Osiris the god of vegetation becomes a tamarisk tree in the city Byblos in Syria. The cruelty of set is showed from the action of throwing the body of Osiris in the river and he denies the funeral rites for Osiris. Isis gives birth to Horus and searches the body of Osiris in the shore of Byblos. Inundation is a natural disaster that makes Osiris chest to be in the shore of Byblos. But at the same time, one can understand, these people use cedar woods and ebony for manufacturing a chest or a coffin. When Isis finds the coffin of Osiris, she starts to own it but accidentally Set visits it and cuts his body into fourteen pieces and throws at different places. Killing a person is violence, scattering the body of the person after finding it long back is also very violent action done by Set. It shows the cruel mindset of Set as well as his attitude and ego towards Osiris. A funeral rite is a fundamental right but it is objected and denied for the new mother Isis. And Green explains the situation of Isis,

> As she rowed hither and thither on the Nile in her boar made of papyrus, the very crocodiles took pity on her and let her pass- and ever since anyone sailing on the Nile in a papyrus boat has been safe from the crocodiles, who think that it is still Isis searching for the last piece of the body of Osiris. (24)

According to the mythological story, Isis has found thirteen pieces of the body of Osiris, but one piece has fallen into the Nile, and it has been eaten by fishes and these fishes are accursed for the action of eating the body of Osiris. Eating a food in the water is the usual work of fish, cursing those fishes is violence. They have eaten the part of the body Phallus of Osiris unknowingly but they are cursed for their action. From the side of victims, the action done by these Medjeds might be wrong. But they have eaten something in the water naturally. This curse towards Medjeds is also one sort of violence to the particular variety of fish Midjeds.

Thus, anti-natural activities are happened in these two stories of Roger Lancelyn Green. From these two stories one can understand the close relationship of those period people with natural elements and all beings in the world. The translation of *Bhagavat Gita* 2.14 verses says that there are non-permanent thing that come and go like season, one day one person may be in power and in some other day someone will be in the power. It is clearly witnessed in the story of Ra, Osiris and Set. Though they are the power keepers they have the limitation that is proved in these stories. But these stories inform the readers that they are the witness of the past bloodshed stories of those people. Spoiling the nature becomes the habit of human beings from these stories. It signifies the activities of now-a-days men for polluting the nature in the beautiful world. These sorts of violence activities are to be gradually decreased for the sake of protecting nature for the future generation. Even the SDGs of 13, 14 and 15 of UNO "Climate Action", "Life Below Water" and "Life on Land" suggest the concepts of protecting the natural resources of the earth.

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Voices of Resistance: Dignity and Selfhood in Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's *Get Ready for Battle*

R. K. Krishnaveni and K. Maheshwari

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's fiction reflects a distinct feminine sensibility and a deep awareness of contemporary urban realities. With her keen powers of observation, she portrays the experiences of the educated middle class in post-independence Delhi. Much like Jane Austen, Jhabvala offers a close, often satirical study of a limited but socially significant class — the urban middle class struggling to reconcile traditional values with modern aspirations.

Her narratives frequently expose the emotional tensions and moral dilemmas within Indian families. She focuses particularly on marital discord, revealing how it often stems from rigid male behavior and patriarchal expectations. As M.A. Waheed observes, "Marital dissonance is definitely a reality, a painful disturbing fact of conjugal life, but its causes are rooted in the rigidity of male behaviour and consequently in seemingly abnormal relations of women." In her portrayal of women, Jhabvala expresses empathy for their suffering while simultaneously celebrating their resilience and quest for selfhood.

In *Get Ready for Battle*, Jhabvala's feminist concerns take center stage. The novel depicts women who not only conform to the traditional 'Sati-Savitri' ideal but also those who challenge restrictive conventions. The protagonist, Sarla Devi, wife of the wealthy businessman Gulzari Lal, represents a new woman—strong-willed, independent, and socially conscious. Conflict arises when she opposes her husband's unethical attempt to seize land in Bundi Busti for personal profit. Sarla Devi, a Gandhian by temperament and a dedicated social worker, refuses to tolerate her husband's immorality.

Living apart from him for over a decade, she dedicates her life to serving the poor. Her determination to help the underprivileged outweighs her concern for material comfort or social approval. When Gulzari Lal contemplates divorcing her to marry his mistress, Kusum, Sarla Devi responds calmly, without resentment, saying: "If you like," she said meekly, "I am ready to sign anything you want." Her reaction underscores her detachment from worldly attachments and her focus on moral duty rather than personal gain.

She expresses her sense of mission clearly to Mrs. Bhatnagar and Mrs. Das: "The people of Bundi Busti are my duty and responsibility, and I have never yet shirked my duty or responsibility." Even when others—like Mrs. Bhatnagar, a wealthy widow and socialite—support the eviction of slum dwellers, Sarla Devi defends the poor, arguing that displacing them for the sake of profit is inhuman. Interestingly, even Kusum, Gulzari Lal's mistress, voices sympathy for the oppressed, declaring: "There is nothing worse than making profit out of the suffering of poor people. How can a man's heart be so full of greed that he has no feelings for others?"

Sarla Devi's courage and moral conviction make her a striking figure. She endures criticism from her family—her brother Brij Mohan, her son Bishnu, and her daughter-in-law Mala—yet remains steadfast in her mission. Her brother, despite his anger at her unconventional choices, ultimately acknowledges her nobility, calling her "a saint" for her selfless service. Even Kusum, her supposed rival, admires her independent spirit, saying, "I have heard how independent she is—what a fine, free spirit! I admire her so much and often I think of her and love her also."

Through Sarla Devi's story, Jhabvala critiques the moral decay of the upper-middle class and exposes the hypocrisy of men like Gulzari Lal and Brij Mohan, who exploit women while maintaining a façade of respectability. Sarla Devi, in contrast, emerges as a beacon of conscience and compassion—a woman who sacrifices luxury for justice and personal peace for social purpose.

Jhabvala strongly condemns the exploitation of women in patriarchal society. Through the character of Brij Mohan, Sarla Devi's brother, she exposes the hypocrisy and moral corruption prevalent among affluent men. Brij Mohan leads a life of indulgence and immorality, taking advantage of his young maidservants to satisfy his desires. Sarla Devi openly confronts his behavior, refusing to remain silent despite their familial bond.

When Brij Mohan cruelly dismisses Tara, a young maid, and her elderly guardian under false accusations, Sarla Devi protests passionately. She implores him to let them stay, but he remains unmoved. Furious at his callousness, she denounces his exploitation of Tara in direct and unflinching words:

> "But what do you want from her? She is ready for all your pleasures. She sings for you, serves you, lies on her back for you... What more do you want?"

Through this powerful confrontation, Jhabvala exposes the vulnerability of working-class women and the moral emptiness of privileged men. The old woman accompanying Tara also accuses Brij Mohan of ruining Tara's innocence: "Such a beautiful girl, and see how he has taken her youth and innocence."

Brij Mohan himself later confesses to Kusum that he has been consorting with "low women" and feels no joy in such hollow pleasure. His admission underscores Jhabvala's central argument — that moral degradation, born of unchecked patriarchy, harms both the exploited and the exploiter.

Despite Sarla Devi's best efforts, her campaign to prevent the eviction of Bundi Busti fails. Wealthy elites like her husband Gulzari Lal bribe Ramchander, the community leader she trusted, to betray the slum dwellers. Disheartened but not defeated, Sarla Devi renews her commitment to the poor, drawing strength from her failures. Her courage embodies Jhabvala's vision of a woman who, though surrounded by corruption, refuses to compromise her principles.

Jhabvala also addresses the limited freedom of women through the character of Sumi, a young unmarried girl living with her sister, Mrs. Shankar, and her brother-in-law in New Delhi. Sumi longs for independence and defies the restrictive codes of traditional society. When accused of impropriety for her friendship with two men, Vishnu and Gautam, she protests:

> "I am not a child. What is wrong? We are not in purdah; we are free like Western women. I can go where I like with my friends."

Her sister Mala, however, represents conservative social norms. She rebukes Sumi for mingling freely with men, warning her that such behavior could ruin her chances of marriage:

> "Do you think it is right for a young unmarried girl to go into the bazaar and sit in a shop with two men? How do you expect to be married if you behave like this? What family will take you?"

Jhabvala uses this tension between Sumi and Mala to dramatize the clash between tradition and modernity. Sumi's innocent friendship with Vishnu becomes a scandal in the eyes of society, illustrating how patriarchal suspicion continues to police women's conduct. Vishnu himself feels humiliated by the accusations, reflecting sadly that "in our society, even pure affection between a man and a woman is mistrusted."

Furthermore, Jhabvala exposes the persistent evil of the dowry system. Sumi's parents, unable to afford dowry, struggle to arrange her marriage, revealing how women's worth is still tied to material wealth rather than personal merit. In this way, *Get Ready for Battle* portrays the multi-layered oppression women face — social, economic, and emotional — within a rigidly conservative framework.

In *Get Ready for Battle*, Jhabvala draws a sharp contrast between Sarla Devi's moral idealism and Kusum's modern materialism, presenting two distinct female responses to patriarchal society. Sarla Devi embodies spiritual and ethical strength, while Kusum represents a woman shaped by modern desires and social ambitions.

According to Indian social conventions, marriage is a sacred and socially recognized bond founded on emotional and moral integrity. However, the relationship between Kusum and Gulzari Lal exists outside this moral framework. Gulzari Lal, a successful businessman, maintains an extramarital relationship with Kusum, a widow of an army officer, Major Mehra. Their affair, despite their age and social status as grandparents, reflects the moral decline among the upper classes. In a strikingly ironic moment, Gulzari Lal teases Kusum:

> "'And I a grandfather,' he murmured into her ear. She began to giggle; 'Grandfather,' she giggled, and 'Grandmother,' he replied—and they laughed together."

This exchange exposes the superficiality of their relationship and Gulzari Lal's inability to perceive its ethical implications.

Jhabvala also explores the issue of widow remarriage, which, during the period, remained socially unacceptable. Kusum is aware of these taboos but aspires nonetheless to gain social legitimacy by marrying Gulzari Lal. Unlike Sarla Devi, whose strength lies in moral conviction and self-sacrifice, Kusum is pragmatic and opportunistic. She manipulates circumstances to achieve her goal, pleading with Gulzari Lal to divorce Sarla Devi so she can replace her.

For Gulzari Lal, however, divorce appears "too modern," while keeping a mistress remains a socially permissible indulgence among the elite. He hesitates not out of moral restraint but from fear of social scandal and damage to his business reputation. Jhabvala skillfully depicts this tension between old-world respectability and new-world self-interest. Kusum's persistence eventually forces Gulzari Lal to reconsider his views on divorce — not from conviction but from emotional dependence on her.

Ultimately, he decides to visit Sarla Devi, not out of affection but to initiate the legal process that would free him to marry Kusum. Yet Sarla Devi's reaction remains calm and detached. She neither resents her husband nor condemns Kusum. Her saint-like composure emphasizes her spiritual maturity and moral independence.

Even Brij Mohan, her brother, initially opposes the divorce out of familial loyalty, but Kusum cunningly wins him over through flattery and manipulation. Jhabvala thus reveals how moral weakness and self-interest shape male and female behavior alike in a society driven by appearances and greed.

Despite Kusum's schemes, Sarla Devi's focus never shifts from her social mission. While the others engage in emotional and moral compromises, she remains concerned with the plight of the poor at Bundi Busti. To her, personal suffering is insignificant compared to the larger human struggle for justice. Her detachment from worldly desires and her courage to act on her convictions mark her as one of Jhabvala's most powerful feminist creations.

Ruth Prawer Jhabvala's *Get Ready for Battle* presents a powerful exploration of women's dignity, moral strength, and self-determination in a patriarchal society. Through the character of Sarla Devi, Jhabvala celebrates a woman who transcends the limitations of her gender and social role. Sarla Devi sacrifices comfort, luxury, and familial relationships to remain faithful to her conscience and her commitment to social justice. Her courage and detachment elevate her to a moral and spiritual plane that sets her apart from the materialistic world around her.

In contrast, Kusum represents the emerging modern woman who seeks independence through social recognition rather than ethical conviction. Her ambition to become Gulzari Lal's lawful wife highlights the growing tension between traditional morality and the new social mobility of post-independence India. Yet, even as Jhabvala portrays Kusum's modernity, she exposes its hollowness when divorced from moral integrity.

Jhabvala's portrayal of Brij Mohan and Gulzari Lal further exposes the deep hypocrisy of patriarchal privilege. Both men exploit women—either for pleasure or for power—while maintaining an outward image of respectability. Against this background of moral decay, Sarla Devi stands as a beacon of conscience, compassion, and determination. Her voice becomes symbolic of women's resistance to exploitation and their fight for equality and self-respect.

The novel also reflects the broader social changes in post-independence India. Industrialization, Western education, and shifting gender roles disrupted traditional structures, compelling women to step beyond domestic boundaries and assert their individuality. As critic Prasunjay Kumar Sinha notes, Jhabvala's "quest for material reality is harmonized with her search for spiritual truth," a dual vision that gives her fiction both social relevance and moral depth.

In the end, Sarla Devi's quiet strength and unwavering sense of duty define Jhabvala's feminist vision — a vision grounded not in rebellion for its own sake, but in a profound belief in human dignity, compassion, and justice. Her journey embodies the struggle of every woman seeking freedom within the constraints of tradition. As A.K. Patel rightly observes, "In pursuit of ideal service to others, Sarla Devi destroys her own married life… yet she reveals no bitterness or resentment." Her detachment and perseverance reflect the triumph of moral conviction over material ambition.

Thus, *Get Ready for Battle* is not merely a story about domestic conflict; it is a profound meditation on women's identity, moral courage, and the timeless struggle for dignity and self-respect in a male-dominated world.

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The Universal Vice: Detha's Social Critique of Greed, Lust and Power across Caste and Class Hierarchies

Rajesh Kumar

Analysis of selective folktales of Vijayadan Detha

Vijayadan Detha is a regional writer. Despite being a regional writer his folk tales are voice of universality. The cosmopolitan aspect of his tales gives timeless relevance to Vijayadan Detha. Universal elements such as love, joy, sadness, anger, disgust, lust, greed, power, etc, are apparent in his tales. Vijayadan Detha as a keen observer of human nature without showing any prejudice and confines himself to a particular stratum of the society, portrays vivid demonstration of these elements in every caste and social hierarchy abundantly.

The present study demonstrates how judiciously Vijayadan Detha portrays vices in every class and social strata of the society whether they are marginalized classes such as peasants, laborers and prostitutes or feudal lords such as Thakurs, kings, merchants and moneylenders. Detha observes vices such as greed, lust and power, famously in each and every class and social strata.

Vijayadan Detha's narratives systematically expose the pervasive nature of vice that transcends social boundaries, demonstrating how greed, lust for power, and exploitation operate uniformly across all hierarchical levels of society. "His stories, combining Rajasthani folklore with a symbolic and imaginary world, create a mesmerizing environment. Many layers of deep meaning and sarcasm are hidden behind his simple stories. By portraying the socio-artistic terrain of the Rajasthani society, his stories make sarcastic and poignant comments on inequitable and hierarchical gender relations" (Bose 3). His fiction aligns with socialist

realism by depicting social structures with unflinching honesty, revealing how entrenched customs perpetuate exploitation through mechanisms like dowry, caste-based oppression, forced labor, and institutionalized hypocrisy—vices that afflict society comprehensively rather than being confined to particular classes (Balveer 757-61).

Michel Foucault sees power not just as something that stops people from doing things, but as a force that helps shape how people act. This idea helps us better understand how Vijayadan Detha shows bad behaviour like greed, lust and the desire for power across diffrent levels of society. Foucault explains that power works by creating a system of rules and representations that guide how people behave. When we look at Detha's stories through this lens, we see that these bad behaviours don't just happen naturally—they are created and supported by social systems like class and caste. Foucault says that for power to work effectively, it needs to link actions with clear consequences. This makes people follow certain behaviours not through force but through understanding and control. Detha's stories show how different social positions—like the power of Brahmins, the control of landlords, the roles of men and women, and the influence of money—create unfair advantages. These advantages allow some people to control others, turning personal desire into domination and needs into exploitation. Foucault also talks about how punishment should be fair based on the nature of the wrongdoing.

In Detha's stories, characters choose to act greedily or harm others because the social rules make these actions look normal or even reasonable. This shows how power flows through different parts of society, whether it's through official positions, family structures, or the way wealth is managed. This pattern of exploitation exists at every level of society, showing how power is constantly moving and shaping people's lives (Foucault 104-22).

"New Birth" by Vijaydan Detha demonstrates that vices such as greed, power-hunger, and exploitation runs uniformly across caste and class, boundaries, not confined to a specific social strata of society. The

narrative is about a lower caste kumbhar (Potter) family, which commits a crime by killing their own son in order to fulfil their greed, reinforcing the idea that vices are a universal phenomenon and not confined only to the privileged. The story focuses on the vice of greed across economic hierarchies. The wealthy seth is a prototype of institutionalised exploitation. For him, children of poor families are business assets, and he takes them with him by offering the allure of becoming wealthy businessmen.

According to him a dead Brahmin's son is primarily a lost profit potential. "Earlier, the seth had taken along a Brahmin's son with him to distant lands in the same way he had made profits worth thousands in his business, never made losses. But the boy died an untimely death from bone fever; otherwise, the seth would have been a crorepati by now" (Detha 11). This showcases how greed is legitimated through economic structure legally basically exploitative but approved by society. In the same manner, the greed of Kumbhar evolves from aspiration to systematic murder. Despite different social positions, both characters are blind to morality, where greed for wealth overcomes human values. "This is how devious maya deceives; if one could recognise her subtle trickery, would there be the need to weep? The most powerful kings do not stand a chance in the face of this deception. then what were the kumbhar and kumbhari who kneaded mud for a living? They could not but be blinded when dazzled by the glitter of gold (Detha 14).

"New Birth" proves that vices such as greed, power-hunger and exploitation are not confined to a particular caste or class but they are universal human vices manifesting across all social hierarchies. By introducing lower caste characters as protagonist whose moral corruption is equal to that of wealthy characters, Detha establishes vice as fundamentally human rather than socially determined, which asserts his comprehensive critique of how these vices corrupt all levels of society regardless of privilege or oppression.

'Aasmaan Jogi' by Vijayadan Detha is another story based on vices of greed, lust and power. The story is about a celestial being with the

name Aasman Jogi. We find elements of magic, philosophy and social critique in it, which weaves a narrative of resistance, tyranny and liberation. The story is about a seth, a wealthy merchant and his seven sons and one daughter.

On the occasion of the Teej festival of Sawan, by a mysterious enchantment, eight women disappeared. The women are encaptured by the Aasman Jogi—a powerful supernatural being who, using his magic tricks, turns them into stones.

vices—forces that corrupt both the ruler and the ruled. Detha's allegory exposes that these vices are not confined to class or caste but are innate human temptations and only compassion, equality, and moral resistance can overcome them. He justifies immortality under the guise of natural law. He asserts that even God is nothing before his power. Thus, Aasman Jogi represents the arrogance of unchecked authority, whether social, political or divine.

The Aasman Jogi seeks pleasure from the suffering of women, their tears magically turning into pearls. Aasman Jogi said "Why did you stop crying? cry as much as you want! she's twice the gain for me. The tears turn to pearls and I find the weeping faces of women all the more beautiful" (Detha 84). This emotional exploitation of women shows as a universal vice where desire of Aasman Jogi to see women in grief is shown as domination. It is symbolic of an exploitative power structure which feeds on the pains of others, transforming human grief into material profit. Aasman Jogi's nine-storeyed Badal Mahal, filled with pearls, jewels, and gold is representative of greed materialized—it is a place built from the fears of victims.

It is a testament of the illusion of wealth and comfort in elite societies that rest upon invisible oppression. Vijayadan Detha wants to say that greed not only includes wealth but also leads to a hunger for control and immortality. Aasman Jogi wishes to control the female body. He asserts, "And what greater pleasure is there than the pleasure derived from a woman's body?

Women possess beauty only for me to take pleasure in; their youth brims only for me to draw pleasure from" (Detha 85). The Aasman Jogi denies moral law by saying that nature obeys only power. Fidelity, marriage and love are hollow illusions according to Aasman Jogi. It shows power's universal corruption—its ability to justify immortality under the guise of natural laws.

He asserts that even God is nothing before his power. Thus, Aasman Jogi represents the arrogance of unchecked authority, whether social, political or divine.

The arrogance of Aasman Jogi comes to an end by the intelligence of lower-caste Potter woman rather than strength to uncover the Jogi's secret and liberate the victims. She symbolizes the moral power of the marginalized—dalit untainted by greed or lust for dominance.

Together these elements portray greed, lust and power as interlinked universal vices. The next story for analysis is 'Double Lives', which presents universal vices of greed, lust for power and exploitation inherent in patriarchal structure across class and caste hierarchies. The story revolves around Beeja, who is actually a girl by birth but raised by his father as son in order to hoard wealth, which showcases how vice such as greed blind a person and pervert his conscience. Detha critiques such oppressive system and how social status and power operate across economic classes, affecting rich and the poor simultaneously. The narrative starts with two rich seths whose greed manifests not only in hoarding wealth but also in acquiring social capital through male progeny. The seth in whose house a daughter is born does not accept this reality. He befools others for sixteen years.When his wife tries to convince her for not committing this sin by marrying a girl to another girl seth replies: "But I never did anything for which I should be nagged! We will get a huge amount in dowry! With much pomp I will ride in my son's jaan. A man's word can't be changed. Why should I have to compensate for nature's error? (Detha 250). It demonstrates how patriarchal honor and material allure make people greedy. This type of greed generally is not seen in lower classes, but it is visible in the wealthy merchant class,

expressing Vijayadan Detha's argument that vices transcend economic boundaries.Seth's selfish motives to sacrifice his daughter's future happiness and identity illustrate how greed corrupts moral judgment regardless of one's material circumstances. The neighbourhood knowingly closed its eyes. When they heard murmurs, they covered their ears- further demonstrates how collective greed foe maintaining social order enables individual exploitation. "Blind adherence to customs and regulations that have been established for centuries is nothing but a charade"(Sharma 358).The materialization of greed is symbolized through the elaborate wedding preparations: the groom's baraat arriving with grandeur, the groom on a camel, father on a chariot drawn by Nagauri bullocks, and the kanwar-kalewa welcome(Detha 256).These ostentatious displays reveal how wealth becomes instrumentalized not for genuine celebration but for demonstrating social dominance and extracting further material benefits through dowry. Detha exposes how lust for power operates through the control of female bodies and identities across social hierarchies. Seth's decision to raise Beeja as a boy- dressing her in a sixteen-hand-long turban, in dhoti,angarkhi, teaching her to ride horses and swear like a man- is symbolic of patriarchal power, the erasure of female identity itself.

When proposal for marriage was received by Seth, he accepted it with great joy, but for Sethani:

"It felt like a dagger had pierced it. And yet, she did not open her mouth; she did not even make a sound (Detha 252). She internalized oppression silently. She shows her anger as time goes. She asserts, "To hell with your gains! How will our daughter fulfil the needs of the bed after finding a father like you? (Detha 250). These lines expose the hollowness of patriarchal discourse which subjugates women regardless of their economic privilege. Thus 'Double Lives' argues that greed, lust for power and exploitation run uniformly across class and caste hierarchies. Seth's obsession with a male heir in order to fulfil his greed, objectification of daughters through dowry, deliberate numbness of society all reveal that these vices are not confined to a particular social strata but are endemic to the patriarchal structure itself. Detha's critique aligns with

Foucauldian analysis of power, which makes exploitation appear natural and reasonable. "The decision of Seth to provide and keep Beeja's identity as a man so that he can get her married to Teeja, his friend's daughter, expresses the normative structure of sexuality in the society that manages gender roles" (Bose 4). Thinkers like Judith Butler and Michel Foucault argue that gender is not biological construction but is shaped by society through norms and power relations. It serves as a metaphor for the ultimate futility of deception in the service of greed and power. The statement " A sixteen hand long turban cloth does not quite compensate for the instrument of man! (Detha 253) serves as a metaphor for the ultimate futility of deception in the service of greed and power.

Detha's "Lajwanti" exposes how desire and control operate uniformly across social hierarchies. The dove-keeper embodies possessive accumulation—capturing doves daily, monopolizing their sustenance, transforming a twenty-year longing into obsessive fixation. His relationship with doves mirrors feudal power structures: feeding them "from his own hands" establishes dependency disguised as affection, reflecting how elites exercise control through patronage.

Lajwanti's extreme veiling reveals patriarchal power transcending class boundaries. "The female chastity and loyalty is much desired social value in Indian families. The complete burden of maintaining family honour is on females and males are given the final authority of passing the judgments without owning any responsibilities. A minor slip may cost a female her life but for male it is nothing but an opportunity to begin his life anew" (Bharti 149). Village women's cruel gossip—speculating about deformities, questioning chastity—demonstrates internalized oppression where women police each other. Their shocked reaction to her beauty exposes competitive hierarchies, reducing female worth to sexual desirability.

The narrative's sharpest critique emerges through Lajwanti's marital transgression. Her fantasies during conjugal intimacy—"thinking of the dove-keeper and his beard"—subvert caste-based purity codes equating

female sexual control with family honour, suggesting respectability cannot suppress fundamental desires. The ambiguous ending—doves "fluttering away, never looking back"—offers only metaphorical escape, highlighting impossible liberation within rigid structures.

Detha reveals the universal vice: systems across all hierarchies transform natural longing into instruments of control, possession, and destruction of authentic connection, whether among dove-keepers, veiled wives, or gossiping village women.

Vijayadan Detha's narratives systematically expose the pervasive nature of vice that transcends social boundaries, demonstrating how greed, lust for power, and exploitation operate uniformly across all hierarchical levels of society. These vices constitute universal moral corruption and cannot be restricted to any specific social stratum, rather they are discernible among members of every caste and social hierarchy.

Detha's tales reveal patriarchy as a universal moral failing—an intertwined manifestation of greed, lust, and power that transcends caste and class boundaries. By centring women's voices, Detha exposes how these vices function across all levels: the greed of a Brahmin, the lust of a Thakur, and the dominance of a merchant. His stories offer powerful social critique—affirming that ethical failures are not bound by caste but are universal human weaknesses embedded in the very fabric of society. His comprehensive critique reveals how these vices corrupt all levels regardless of privilege or oppression.

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Folk Narratives as Social Commentary: Exploring Class Dynamics in Folk Stories of Vijaydan Detha

Reena Kumari

Introduction

Folklore establishes in countless forms across varied cultures, each component reflecting the unique essence of its origin. Myths, the cosmic stories entrenched in the fabric of human consciousness, capture archetypal struggles and divine beings, elucidating the mysteries of existence. Folk story is the most popular form of folk literature. These folk tales often grounded in historical events, weave a complex web that mixes the boundaries between reality and the supernatural. Expressions of a community's soul, resonate with the pulse of cultural identity, encapsulating the joys, sorrows, and traditions of a people are presented in the folk stories. However, the true heartbeat of folk stories throbs within oral traditions, where stories, myths, and wisdom are passed down through generations, evolving with each retelling.

Folk stories are traditional narratives passed down orally from generation to generation within a particular cultural community. They characteristically involve fantastical elements, such as magical creatures, supernatural events, and moral lessons. These stories originate from various cultures around the world and serve as a means of entertainment, education, and cultural conservation. The exact origins of folktales are difficult to pinpoint precisely, as they have likely existed for thousands of years, evolving alongside human societies.

Class structure in Detha's fictional world

Vijaydan Detha, a leading figure in the folk literature of Rajasthan, has

recreated a huge compendium of folk stories from Rajasthan in *Batan ri Phulwari* (A Garden of tales). Detha started his writing from folk life and made rural environment, people's struggle, their pain and sorrow, joy and entertainment and class structure his subject matter. Due to his talent, his creations always appear in a new form or a refined form. He was inspired to write the stories from his childhood by his father. Later he dedicatedly worked to recreate the cultural heritage of Rajasthani folk stories. He creates a platform for the ordinary people of rural Rajasthan, where the depiction of feudal society and the class structure of contemporary time can be clearly seen.

Naturally, all human beings are same, the roots of their origin are also the same, although they have physical variations, because of climatic conditions and natural surroundings. They are also different from each other when it comes to their class structure. In this class structure some are favored by the authority and some are oppressed because of their belongingness to a particular community in the society. Consequently, class struggle appears which is minutely observed by Karl marks as he remarks:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas. (61)

struggle is a conflict between different classes of the society coming from different social and economic positions and reflecting opposed interests. Vijaydan Detha does not tolerate anything which is inhuman and unethical, he chooses different characters to depict the actual image of the society. He stands up for the ordinary people, as we can say the downtrodden and unprivileged people in the feudal system. Through the

stories he provides knowledge of the wrights and duties of the kings, ministers, slave-maid and the other characters. His characters belong to a particular caste or class. His stories showcase simplicity and innocence of the poor. His fictional world appears to balance the different social classes. Detha releases even his own agony through the fictional characters and the events of these stories as his own father was killed by the village Thakur in a land dispute. Then he realized the power politics and decided to write against feudal dogma. Many of his stories have been intertwined around this theme.

The story, "A Straw Epic" depicts the class conflict between different communities of Rajasthan and narrates a series of trivial events which result into a holocaust. The story also explains the power dynamics and class structure of the time. The communities represented in the story are strong in their respective grounds: the *Rajputs*- politically powerful (the rulers), the *Banjaras*- a roaming tribe (physically robust), and, the *Baniya*- the businessmen (sharp minded). The plot of the story reveals how war hungry people kill each other without any particular purpose and how a very unimportant issue can create a massacre of many civic people. Vijaydan Detha calls "A Straw Epic" as "one of his political stories that offered meditations on violence in society." (*Chouboli* I 110-111) The story is related to a village of Rajasthan where a *Banjara* signs a small wisp straw stuck to jaggery, while taking it from a *Baniya*'s shop. He throws it up and flicks it against the wall which calls many flies, and flies attract a lizard which is confronted by the *Baniya*'s cat. The cat is attacked by the *Banjara*'s dog. This brings a fierce storm at the shop. The event also presents insights about human nature and the reactions to such a small incident. And the *Banjara* attacks the merchant fiercely on seeing his most trusted companion in severe pain. The small matter turns into a big one. The *Baniya* calls more *Baniya*s for help who approach tossing weights and stones from their shops on the *Banjara*. The *Banjara* cannot bring dishonour to his mother's milk. He reacts with double force. The horrifying scene portrays the unexpected consequences of a trivial matter. Meanwhile, the *Baniya*s summon the battle hungry *Rajput*s to the battle ground. Thus, this quarrel

turns into the war and later into a burial shroud. Everyone dies except some flies and a lizard patiently doing their work around the wisp which is still stuck to the wall. The story highlights the tragic result of ferocity, ego and power.

Another story, "The Crafty Thief" depicts another aspect of class structure where a successful thief is awarded with death in spite of being honest in his profession and in his real life. The story reveals the reality of the society where the poor are only puppets for the rich. In this story the thief meets a mahatma and takes four vows such as he would never be with a queen on her bed and others. The thief robs the royal treasure and takes away only five pearls from there. When he admits the truth, he was taken away to the king. In the royal court, the queen is astonished at his honesty and invites his for a secret meeting at night. She offers him many things at last her kinship to him but the thief refuses to the queen, because all are against his four vows. The queen offers him again but on his repeated refusal, she shouts loudly- "thief, thief, thief". Thus, the thief is slain and the sword of power celebrates victory.

Along with the class structure in the society, Detha also portrays the social life of the people in rural Rajasthan. It is well observed that literature can depict the society in a most authentic way. By doing so, Detha shows the true and real margins of the society as he portrays social life and collective consciousness honestly. Society is a collection of social relationships among many individuals that lead to social action. Society is formed by various communities and organizations. The category of social life includes various aspects related to the lifestyle of the communities. A glimpse of social life of a particular era can be seen through literature, because the personality of the author and his contemporary environment definitely dominate the work. Literature has always been a mirror of society. It reflects the rise and falls of a particular caste, its high and low sentiments, its religious ideas and reflection of social organisation, its historical events and political conditions can be found in literature only. Detha considers both tradition and social life in the folk stories as he connects the present to the past. He has portrayed

every aspect of social life in his fiction in a very natural way such as ethnic life, family life, condition of women and their struggle against patriarchy, caste system, religious beliefs, their occupation. Our cultural life is intertwined with society and people. Culture is nurtured in society in such a way that it never seems separate from us, but rather appears integral part of society. The traditions and customs of society are shaped by human behaviour and conduct. In "*Batan ri Phulwari*", social and cultural life of the people has been analysed minutely by the author.

Social life and its various aspects

Society is a collection of social relationships among many individuals. The caste system is portrayed by the author in his writing, somewhere he writes about the practices of exploitation of the poor by upper class and some time he presents the broad expression of social values. Social values are the ideals and goals prevalent in the society that are honoured the community. Detha's stories offer glimpses of the human understanding of family life and social life as he describes the social structure and status of women in detail.

He depicted joint families in many stories and somewhere single families are seen. In the story, "*Istukhan*", a family is mentioned with genuine sentiments where the father works day and night to support his family. He honestly cuts dry wood from the forest sells in the city. In another story, "The Dilemma" a miraculous transformation of a ghost is seen. Along with this theme, the family of a rich businessman is also depicted in this story who is deeply indulge in the habit of accumulating wealth.

In the story, "Kabeer" depicts the power politics and the hierarchical social set up where ruling class sometimes suppress the low-caste people. In this story Detha writes that how the ruling class becomes the cause of sufferings and sorrow of the poor people. The story opens with a description about the uselessness of the sacred scripture:

> These heavy, thick scriptures; Kabeera knows how useless they are. The ways of religion; mere corridors through piles of manure and dirt. These places of pilgrimages; Ram and Allah alone can

> save us from. The concept of higher and the lower, the poor and the rich; all lies, black as the night. (New Life 185)

In this story the low caste Kabeer is an extraordinary weaver and lives in a village where a king comes with his daughter. They visited Kabeer and watch his excellent embroidery. The princess pleases to see his skilful art and when the king asks to Kabeer to give them some piece of art, he denies by saying that his art is not for sell. This story depicts Kabeer as an uncommon man who is not daunted by power.

Vijaydan Detha as a social reformer, depicts the various sides of the society and bring them in for front. The portrayal of women is the chief characteristic of works. He wrote many women centric stories. He realistically depicts the status of women in feudal society in rural Rajasthan. He fights for them and highlights their right and their sensual desires. He glorifies the women by putting them into some social and moral dilemmas and present the victimized women as 'heroes' in the stories. Story "Chuoboli" is one of the most important folk stories which has the same characteristics. This story has three women characters princess chouboli, thakur's wife and thikhana manager's niece, the second wife of the thakur. Princes chouboli has an oath that she will speak only when some one is make her speak four times in a night. Many princes and kings have tried their fortune but they did not win the hand of princess chouboli. The story opens with other characters as a self-proclaimed thakur has a strange habit of shooting one hundred and eight arrows through the nose ring of her wife, thakurani. This habit shows the male ego and dominance over his abandoned wife. The wife requests him not to do such a nuisance but every time he gives same reply, "She had followed her lord around the wedding fire seven times. And now she would have to follow him every day for the rest of her life" (*Chouboli I* 32-33). Here thakur's wife is victim of man's desires but there is another character thakur's manager's niece, who challenges the patriarchal social set up. She challenges the thakur to win the hand of princess chouboli. When the thakur fails to do so, she goes in disguise to win chouboli. Thus, Detha paints such strong women characters.

Conclusion

The complex background of society created in various stories of Detha can be seen as combining into a world by itself with its unique social structure, political conditions, religious practices, cultural values etc. Thus, the paper throws light on folk culture which is the culture of simple, ordinary people who live closest to nature. His folk stories attract the readers towards specific features of Rajasthani society. The oral tradition of storytelling is the chief feature these folk stories. The paper is also an attempt to present the culture, religion, customs, traditions and beliefs of the society as these folk stories are the glimpses of the social life of a particular era specially, medieval period in Rajasthan.

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Struggles and Selfhood: Women in Margaret Laurence's Fictions

S. Kather Nooruni Rekha and K. Maheshwari

Introduction

As The Oxford Companion to Canadian Literature points out: "it is an exploration of the unconscious filled with symbols; a bird (the poet), Kings (the voices of the past), jewels and flowers {the allurements of the dead), water (dread), closed chambers (tombs), bones (death), and light (an awakening). Here the liberation is as much psychological as poetic" (342).

Canadian literature resembles a tree with two great roots: one rooted in French culture and the other in English traditions. The first part of Canadian literature is written in French, while the other is written in English. Although the two branches are separate, they are both connected to Canada. Authors and readers from each tradition are increasingly learning about the other's works, either in their original language or through translation. Robertson Davies poetically highlights this shared connection in his lecture titled "The Canada of Myth and Reality":

> Two stereotype figures have arisen from the pressures of our political situation; one is a wistful, large-eyed, pitiful girl in the peasant dress of the eighteenth century, and the other is a coarsegrained, large-footed, evil-visaged Scotch banker, to whom she is bound in a hateful marriage from which she seeks to escape. The mismated pair is, of course, Quebec, La Belle Province, and the other parts of Canada. (2)

Margaret Laurence's novels are the testimony of her own confessions, it has now become an established fact of the literary history of Canadian literature that Laurence's first hand encounter, in Somaliland and Ghana, at the physical and metaphorical levels, with strangers, colonialism,

imperialism, new myths and legends, contemporary situation of the status of women, nonfictional phenomenon of tradition and modernity, continuity and change, rootlessness, gender-discrimination, generation gap, rapidly coming changes at the social, moral and psychological levels, acted as a Catalyst and Crucible, for much of her later Canadian fictional and non-fictional writings.

Struggles and Selfhood: Women in Margaret Laurence's Fictions

Margaret Laurence's *The Fire-Dwellers* adopts a rather uncommon theme. The image of fire has been derived from the flames of illicit sex. Stacey Cameron had two daughters, Katie and Jen, who are fourteen and two and two sons, Lan or Honey and Duncan, who are ten and seven. Her husband, Mac Aindra, is a hardworking salesman. But he is wholly uncommunicative. Stacey aspires for a richer life. Her cage is too strong to be broken. When the story begins, we find Stacey repenting for her past youth. She is now a spent force. There was a time when she was nineteen and shook "the dust of Manawaka off" (7). In respect of education, she is much inferior to Mac. While Mac has a PhD, Stacey is only in grade eleven. Stacey's grievance against her husband bursts out: "Damn him, snoring always so unconcernedly, feel like giving him a sharp kick so he will wake up at least. We'll both be suffering" (27).

The traumatic indifference of Mac towards Stacey leads to estrangement. In *The Fire Dwellers* Stacey complains her will power as "Four kids have altered me" (186) "Four kids have ruined me" (91) Mac admits that Stacey has terrific willpower. She sits as it were on the crater of a volcano. A time comes when the situation becomes insufferable to her. She is not constrained to transgress the limit. In a mood of utter desperation. she said as "I could kill you, Mac. I could stab you, right this minute" (110) it shows Stacey's Selfhood ability and strangeness of her power no body under estimate of her deep and consciousness of free from all struggles of society.

It is a case not of loss of virtue but virtue gone sour Stacey's doubts Misgivings and apprehensions are the outcome of her having a negative

self-image. Her small town background and inadequate education are enough to make her feel inferior in a city like Vancouver. Burdened with the feeling of self-rejection, she is skeptical about her relationship with her husband. When he is late in returning home, she imagines him enjoying his dinner somewhere else in the company of a more pleasant-looking person that "Click, well, c'mon Stacey, it's getting late. Yes, so it is" (120).

Purged of all inner conflicts, Stacey understands herself better and comes to admire Mac as she had done before. Formerly, Stacey felt uneasy when she was wedded to Mac sixteen years ago,

> I wouldn't have minded about that except he doesn't talk any more, hardly at all, can you imagine what it's like to live in the same house with somebody who doesn't talk or who can't or else won't and I don't know which realm it could be. (181-82)

But after she traverses the thorny path of life, she learns what Life is, and then she is reconciled to her situation stated by Margaret Laurence in her novel *The Fire-Dwellers*:

> I won't be twenty-one again. I'll never have a really decent-looking pair of hips again as long as I live. I don't claim that's any tragedy. I don't even claim it's anything except ludicrous. The house is quiet. The kids are asleep. Downstairs in the ex-study, Matthew has been asleep for hours, or if not asleep meditating. Beside her, she can already hear the steady breathing that means Mac is asleep. Temporarily, they are all more or less okay. (280-81)

Margaret Laurence's *The Fire-Dwellers* ends on a note of poise and harmony. In the fictional world of Laurence finds earful and mentally sick protagonists striving hard for achieving harmony and fulfillment in their interaction with others. The male characters in her novels have been presented as perceived by women. While reading the fictional narratives of Margaret Laurence, one gets the impression that the joy of living is possible only for those who not only understand themselves but also have some knowledge of the human context.

My second woman character is Hagar Shipley from *The Stone Angel* is not really known by the people around her nor can Hagar really know them. When she realizes that she cannot convert Bram to her liking, she takes her younger son, John, along with her and goes out to live independently. For years together, she stubbornly refuses to communicate with her husband or with her elder son Marvin. She is convinced that she can afford to live all alone at the age of ninety also. Despite her advancing age, she is not mellowed. She is proud of being fastidious. Her assertion is no one like her in this world.

She cannot accept people as they are and finds it difficult to appreciate and accommodate doing something unconventional. Then wisdom dawns upon her. She realises that pride has led her to emotional wilderness. Sadly she muses that her principal aim in life was to enjoy it. But she lost the chance. It was her self-conceit that came in the way. After self-introspection she conveys a moment of intense and painful self-realization. The sudden awareness overwhelms the speaker, shattering emotional defenses and bringing deep bitterness. It marks a turning point where truth replaces illusion, showing that self-awareness often comes through suffering rather than comfort. Hagar Shipley gives up pretensions in order to enjoy life, and this is a great achievement on her part. In Hagar Shipley in *The Stone Angel* the novelist creates boldest and most memorable characters in Canadian fiction.

I select third woman from Margaret Laurence's Manawaka cycle reached its apex in her novel, *The Diviners*. The protagonist of novel is Morag Gunn, is a professional writer. She is a constant fighter. She is forced to test her power. She is a symbol of courage and endurance. She was married to Brooke Skelton eight years back when she was only twenty. She is not frightened of anything in this world. Margaret Laurence's makes a bold declaration on her protagonist as forests can't hurt her heroine because she has the power and the second sight and the good eye and strength of conviction.

Morag Gunn has no family. She was brought up by some friends and acquaintances of her parents. But she refuses to be looked after as an

object of pity. Her conviction is: "I cannot bear pity." (210) Circumstance has made her revolutionary. Her husband has affairs with other girls. This is why he does not charge Morag with infidelity. Other male characters like Piper, Colin Gunn and Thor Buckler have been viewed with the same jaundiced eye.

Margaret Laurence takes a partisan view of men, raising the pertinent question of whether an androgynous perspective is possible. Are there not frail, unscrupulous, and turbulent women in our society? She regards that the family as a psychic agency of society. Laurence is shocked by the bondage and servitude of women, which is why she advocates for their liberty and rejuvenation in her fiction. Through characters like Hagar, Stacey, and Morag, Laurence illustrates women trapped in existential predicaments. Their quests focus on survival, freedom, and self-actualisation. The secondary female characters serve as foils, reinforcing the central quest of the protagonists. In contrast, the male characters are often portrayed as shadowy figures, lacking traditional masculine qualities. For instance, Nick Kazlik, Mac Aindra, Bram Shipley, and Brooke-Skelton, the principal male characters in Manawaka fiction, play negative roles in their relationships with Stacey, Hagar, and Morag. Margaret Laurence attempts to reject and respond to the patriarchal, misogynistic social structure. However, this perspective can be one-sided. There is certainly no shortage of figures like Clytemnestra, Madame Defarge, and Lady Macbeth in our society. It would be dangerous to adopt a parochial view of either men or women. The male-female relationship can be more accurately assessed when viewed with scientific detachment.

Male characters frequently serve as foils, illuminating the limitations and challenges that women encounter. Through rich symbolism, nuanced characterization, and the depiction of internal conflicts, Laurence offers a critique of patriarchal structures while underscoring the importance of survival, freedom, and self-actualization as vital components of the female experience in Canadian society.

Conclusion

Margaret Laurence fictions explore the struggles, selfhood, and existential predicaments of women in a male dominated society. *The Fire-Dwellers*, *The Stone Angel*, and *The Diviners* female protagonists like Stacey Cameron, Hagar Shipley, and Morag Gunn navigate issues of division, self-doubt, and societal expectations. Laurence astutely highlights the psychological and emotional effects of male indifference, restrictive social norms, and personal insecurities, portraying women's journeys toward self-realization, resilience, and reconciliation.

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Faith and Guilt in Asif Currimbhoy's *Monsoon*

S. Sathish

Currimbhoy's *Monsoon* is a harrowing depiction of madness in the life of a man who associates his existence with sin and shame. The play is a retelling of a story told by one of Andrew's friends, Dr. Juan. There are layers of meaning inside the narration that finally assist the reader understand how religion, superstition, instinct, learning, logic, race and colonialism may violate a man's existence. In the play, Andrew is an example of someone who is well-versed in the Bible yet is destroyed by instinct at times. He is enslaved by the reality that he is sinful. Andrew is so consumed by his ludicrous guilt that he victimizes a tiny girl and separates her from the rest of the family. Andrew's action of the girl echoes with the behavior of Mary by God in the Bible.

Andrew utilises the body of Monsoon, the woman who has grown out of the child under his supervision, to have his own child, just as God used the Virgin Mary for the "immaculate conception" of God's child Jesus Christ. Andrew's wish for a child represents the human need to preserve his own lineage beyond his death. Andrew has a bizarre idea that by conceiving the girl, he would attain purgation, yet such a thought is contrary to human nature. He knows that it was sin, yet he subsequently says that sin is a necessity in the purification process. Andrew is dismissed after Dr. Juan examines the girl and discovers that she was raped by a syphilitic male.

Andrew is dismissed after Dr. Juan examines the girl and discovers that she was raped by a syphilitic male. The fact that the girl has lost her virginity annoys him since it has harmed his will to attain salvation. However, he could never shake his fascination with Monsoon and waited till she could reproduce. The grandmother has abandoned the girl with Andrew and departed when Andrew was sacked for allowing the girl

to be raped. Since then andrew has encased her within his home by erecting a massive, fortified wall in the shape of Noah's Ark. As a result, the child was cut off from the outside world and she only has the company of Andrew, and she has learnt only what Andrew taught her.

Andrew has first taught Monsoon words from the Bible concerning the Virgin Mary's immaculate conception. Andrew's sexual fixation with the tiny girl is only hinted at and is never made explicit until, after years of residing with the child andrew encounters an elderly woman who predicts the future through card reading. Andrew encounters the elderly lady by happenstance. After many years of solitude in his own home, he emerges one day and encounters Dr. Juan and Daisy the prostitute at the town's Ling's restaurant.

Daisy approaches the elderly lady at the restaurant and asks her for her fortune. The old woman also tells Andrew that he will make the girl pregnant and that the girl will give birth to a child whom he will love more than anything else in the world. However, his impact on his child has been constantly thwarted by the child's mother. And all of this eventually comes to pass. Andrew is subjected to implicit dominance. This is the White man's desire to instruct, preach and christen the natives. The girl is first removed from her grandmother because Andrew believes that she practices black magic and is a "heathen," as opposed to him, who is a "White man."

Andrew continually reminds the girl of the grandmother's impact on her, despite his deep loathing for the native's witchcraft or black magic, which has cast a spell on his life and for which he is suffering. He works hard to rescue the girl from the grandmother's spell, but he is never successful until the end of the play. As a result, his act of teaching the girl the Bible may also be interpreted as his wish to educate the native pagan and his fixation with having a child from her can also be interpreted as the desire of the white who have remained in the colonies to blend with the native and produce his own offspring. The distinction between native and white is implied from the start, when Dr. Juan and Andrew meet for the first time. They discuss why one stayed on the

tropical island and why the other returned from the land of the Whites. Finally, as Andrew beats and pulls Monsoon out of the home, he expresses his disdain for her and refers to her as the "cursed heathen." It's worth noting how Christianity figures into the plot.

Monsoon is an unabashed critic of how timid and powerless women are when they are tormented by obsession. This drama depicts Andrew in a position of power who abuses a human existence from its inception-Monsoon's rape as a child, her childhood seclusion. Andrew's fixation with the "purity and innocence of a virgin" drives him insane and he arranges for Monsoon's murder in life. Even though she is left with the key, Monsoon never goes over her limitations.

Monsoon's ability to sense Andrew's thoughts long before because she is a mature lady. Andrew's lessons are received by Monsoon. Andrew's deliberate repetition of the conception of Mother Mary through God is a deliberate move. Andrew does not want the consummation to be seen as a human effort, so he elevates it to the level of a divine act. He associates with God, while Monsoon identified with Mother Mary. He is a patriarchal icon for Monsoon, much as God is for Mary. Andrew begins with the body of Monsoon, whom he refers to as his "child," and then proceeds to the act of consummation, which is adultery. "Sometimes I see them flying . . . outside, free . . . and I get a sudden yearning, which all too soon passes away . . ." (135).

Monsoon is a religious production. It is committed to the Christian faith. This religion is diverse and is practiced by most of the the world's population. This religion's two fundamental pillars are purity of heart and devotion to God. If there is any wrongdoing in one's life, it must be repented from the bottom of one's heart before one may purify the inner side. Monsoon is a metaphorical drama. It has two meanings. Monsoon is the protagonist's name, and it also represents the downpour of hunger, romance and sex. Paul Baker observes: "Burry Fredrik has read Monsoon and agrees with me that it has great potential. We are seriously considering doing it for the next season".

The performance begins in the open-air theatre. The light of the sun is fading. An elderly guy sits in a chair. There is semi-darkness, and the man is dressed in western attire. There is also another individual named Juan who has been presented. He is a well-educated man. He is a contemplative individual. He pays attention to the audience yet deep in meditation within himself. He is in his forties and is concerned about his age. He is very careful of his personality since he does not want to be perceived as an elderly guy. He makes a comparison to his friend Andrew. He believes that he is a guy awakening to his superior appearance.

Juan assures him that he has a strong desire to study other languages as well. He has a strong drive to study. Latin is his first language, which he quickly learned in France. He was overjoyed to have mastered this language. Andrew describes the Monsoon season. It has both advantages and disadvantages. It is attractive and breathes new life into dead trees and other natural flora. Insects, birds, animals and humans welcome it because of the surrounding natural beauty, but it also has drawbacks. It is often brutal to the helpless. It does not provide them with any protection. The monsoon season has a significant influence on several civilizations. Monsoon has two explanations, according to Andrew. Some people find it lovely and elegant, while others find it harsh. Asif Currimbloy has created wonderful Monsoon sceneries in his drama. On one side, there is the 'Ocean' image, while on the other, there is the blackness of the land. The latter has a symbolic significance. It symbolizes the distance between the sea and the land. Currimbhoy has portrayed a synthesis of two civilizations with these two sceneries. These are Chinese and Indian civilizations. Both civilizations have distinct identities, as if existence had been distilled and viewed through a drop of rain.

When Andrew explains that life is distilled by a drop of rain, his words have immense meaning. The major topic of Andrew and Dr Juan's conversation is the monsoon. The latter praises it since it provides man with rich flora developing on one side and the rising ocean on the other. He has little interest in politics. He prefers to leave politics to politicians.

Andrew values his viewpoint, but he does not value his education in a distant nation. He is a terrific patriot who wants to live a happy life in his homeland. He queries Dr. Juan: "But tell me, Juan my friend, why did you leave the. . ." mother country"? With your taste for good living and the little fortune left by your good parents, I'd have thought you'd find Western life entertaing?" (87).

In this game, money is the most important component. Andrew assures Daisy that if she wins the game, she will receive money. Daisy wins the bet and collects the money at the end of the game. Currimbhoy proposes this game for two reasons. His first goal is to stage the love moment for which Andrew is seen here. Second, the dramatist wishes to depict the country's dire state. Daisy is from an extremely low-status household. Her family is not wealthy enough to meet basic demands. As a result, she must follow its legal path just to meet her own wants and provide some financial assistance to her family. For her, money is God.

Andrew comes to terms with the harsh realities of life. He values romance only one-tenth as much as Daisy values money above body. She has a golden heart, yet poverty forces her to cease working. Daisy is unimportant to Andrew. He refers to her as a 'bitch' since their only relationship is with money and sex, and both are the lowest levels of human interaction. He also insults her and tells her that she is just a man-hunter looking for money and sex and that he utilizes her 'eagle eye' for this reason. He has no genuine feelings for her or admiration for her virtues and skills.

Andrew is unconcerned about Daisy. In her place, she prioritises her pal Rosie-Posie because she is considerably superior to Daisy. Meanwhile, Rosie-Posie arrives. Rosie-Posie is a cheerful young lady and Andrew enjoys her company. He also makes negative remarks on the female world's character and behaviour. He informs his acquaintance, Dr. Juan, that some ladies believe they can do anything. And the more confident they get in themselves, the more shaky their judgement becomes. They grow overconfident. Instead of seducing the local boy into a certain wedding, they take their chances in a man-sized port-

world. They dress up in ill-fitting skirts and blouses, trying to snag a prize-tuan who is the first to make a whore out of her, until all they can get is a drunken sailor who ends up wondering whether he has got his money's worth.

Asif Currimbhoy has imbued her personality with a distinct meaning. She is a professional girl; thus she has a sophisticated and artistic way of making money in her life. Asif describes Daisy as being alone, her jaws clinched, tears streaming down her cheeks, while across the street, coolly When Dr. Juan advises Andrew to be kind to the impoverished and little lady. He answers that he has understood the psychology of the feminine world. The majority of the girls are hypocrites. His knowledge has outweighed her Daisy instinct. He assures Juan that he does not want to harm her feelings. He basically tricks her into thinking and she could obtain that man quite easily. Dr. Juan expresses his preference for Daisy once more, stating that she is clearly more feminine than Rosie-Posie. In a very funny way Andrew informs Dr. Juan that she certainly is more feminine because Rosie-Posie is a boy and not a female, but Rosie-Posie looks like a girl and some people mistake Rosie-Posie for a girl. Andrew also discusses his thoughts on homosexuality. He informs Rosie-Posie that he cares deeply about the victims of homosexuality.

Andrew sits alone in the second scene of the play Monsoon, deep in concentration. He ponders about Jesus Christ's birth and Mother Mary. He recounts the mystery of Jesus Christ's birth to a little girl sitting nearby Mary. Despite the fact that the child is the product of God's blessings, the mother of Lord Christ is nevertheless referred to be a virgin. She has never touched a guy, thus she is always a pure lady. She is an adopted child, but Grandma adores her. Andrew is a priest and performs the tasks of a priest; nonetheless, he is not a holy man on the inside. He teaches the girl about the religious message recorded in the Holy Bible, but it has little effect on the youngster since the holy words miss their message when spoken by a hypocrite. Grandma's lessons has an indelible impact on the girl. The girl is immensely grateful to her grandmother. Grandma is her guide, her rescuer, her inspirational force

and the genuine goddess. She discusses the purity of the 'Holy Ghost' with Andrew. She is skeptical. She believes that something is missing from the 'Holy Ghost's purity. As a result, she wants to know about the identity of it.

The innocent girl is oblivious to the truth of the ghost. The preceding conversations demonstrate that a man's pure spirit and intents may erase ghost concerns because the purity of heart can drive away all the bad ghosts from all the bad men. Her Grandma has put her trust in her and she follows her orders. Her interpretations of the Bible are spot on. Those who follow the Bible's message and have complete confidence in Jesus Christ never need to be concerned because they are always saved by the Merciful Blessings of the Lord. Grandma has also taught her that reading black magic books is not permitted since such readings mislead the people. Such a book is a significant impediment to the pursuit of truth and the Absolute. Money is also a significant impediment in the pursuit of the truth. Andrew likes the girl because he sees his soul in her. She is the embodiment of decency and purity. Here we can see Wordsworth's psychology, which plainly indicates in his poetry that the sparks of God exist in children. She has a direct and genuine relationship with God. When a youngster grows involved in earthly matters, he becomes a part of the materialistic world and the reality of God begins to vanish. The youngster speaks to Andrew in this scene in a really good and innocent manner.

The writer wishes to convey to his audience through Grandma's conversation with Andrew that she is the focus of love, morality and purity for the former. She bestows happiness and a long life to him. But this is not the case for Andrew. He believes that the female is an impediment in the search of reality and that her presence renders one as a slave.

GRANDMA: The girl gives me long life. It is a transfer from the young to the old It drives away the demons of old age.

ANDREW: Oh, but I thought all the black magic came from my book

GRANDMA: It does It does

ANDREW: You have taught the girl very well, I must say

GRANDMA: She listens

ANDREW: More to you than to me. You have her loyalty.

GRANDMA: I have her love

ANDREW: And yet you make her slave Buy her away from her parents so she can get you alms

GRANDMA: I protect her.

ANDREW: Expose her to every conceivable superstition and wretchedness of life

GRANDMA: I console her.

Andrew is not like Grandma. He understands how much she adores Monsoon. She also protects and soothes her when she is in need, but she also abuses her by keeping her uninformed and denying her God: hardly a parenting equation, he says. Andrew is furious with Grandma and urges her not to shape Monsoon's personality and nature according to her own whims and opinions. He also offers her money in exchange for her leaving the child alone, but Andrew is incorrect because money has no meaning in Grandma's life. It is little more than a means of subsistence for her. Her spiritual abilities are more important to her.

Andrew adds that the book of black magic has unique enchantment since it is made by summoning lightning to thunder across the sky, piercing the monsoon cloud and fusing the rabbit eye with the calf marrow. He also charges the grandmother for being a deceitful lady. She wishes to satisfy her desire to take the child away from him. She threatens him with blackmail, but he tells her that she will fail in her wicked plan since he has been living on this area for a long time learning all types of witchcraft.

Andrew threatens the grandmother not to carry on with her nefarious plans. She should refrain from influencing the youngster. The playwright has made a crucial point here about convincing people to alter their religion by using hypocritical means such as black magic. India has

been suffering from this sickness since the advent of Christians in India, while under the reign of Aurangazeb, a considerable number of Hindus are forced to convert their religion. They have converted to Islam at the point of a sword.

All these tactics irritate the dramatist. He has an open mind and believes in all religions since they all provide different paths to our loving God. Certain group of people hates Christians because they attempt to change the faith of India's poor and oppressed people. They inspire them by providing cash assistance and employment opportunities; therefore the dramatist addresses the topic in the play *Monsoon*.

Andrew enlists the assistance of The Biblical allusion of Noah's Ark. When there was widespread depravity, God desired to eliminate all people on the planet and save Noah's family, who were the most religious and righteous. God preserved this family in order to create the world. In a dream, God told Noah to build a large boat and to pack all of his goods, including his family members and animals, into the Ark (boat). Noah followed suit. Except for Noah's family members, all of the world's sinners perished. A new planet was created.

Asif Currimbhoy has created a lovely psychological portrait of the youngster. A youngster acknowledges her parents' or guardians' affection and sympathy. Monsoon has received love and attention from her grandmother, who is everything to her. She has obeyed her grandmother wholeheartedly. Her (Grandma's) love and devotion left an indelible mark on her. The Grandma is the goddess of Monsoon, but she does not enjoy being separated from her. She is terrified mentally. She dislikes her guardian father Andrew's company. She becomes unwell and develops a fever. When Andrew contacts Dr. Juan and seeks his medical assistance. Dr. Juan conducts a thorough examination but concludes that there is nothing wrong with the body. She suffers only from psychological disorder. She adores her grandma and utters for her even when she is sick. She believes wholeheartedly in her teachings, thus only her presence can heal her.

In *Monsoon*, Asif Currimbhoy exposes the tragic interplay of religion, guilt, and colonial power that destroys both the victim and the perpetrator. Andrew's obsessive need for spiritual purity becomes his path to moral corruption, transforming divine ideals into instruments of domination. Through his relationship with Monsoon, Currimbhoy portrays the colonial desire to control and "civilize" the native under the guise of faith and salvation. The play's Biblical allusions, psychological intensity, and symbolic imagery reveal how religion, when corrupted by obsession and ego, becomes a force of enslavement rather than enlightenment. Ultimately, *Monsoon* stands as a critique of patriarchal and colonial authority that reduces both women and natives to passive instruments of redemption. Currimbhoy's drama thus mirrors the deeper truth of postcolonial identity — that madness often emerges from the conflict between imposed belief and suppressed instinct.

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Redefining Femininity: Portrayal of Women in the Novels of Sudha Murty

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Introduction

Feminism is a multi-layered social and political movement that advocates women's rights and strives to establish gender equality across social, political, and economic realms. It addresses deeply ingrained structures of inequality that have historically suppressed women, with the aim of dismantling patriarchal norms that prolong gender discrimination and societal marginalization. By challenging gender stereotypes and deconstructing limiting social norms, feminism hopes to create a fair and inclusive society where every individual enjoys equality, autonomy and freedom of choice.

Sudha Murty is a distinguished contemporary Indian novelist, widely admired for her lucid narrative style that conveys profound social and cultural insights with clarity and compassion. Her novels thoughtfully reflect the ethical foundations and everyday realities of Indian society, providing a nuanced depiction of the tensions and intersections between enduring traditions and emerging modern values. Through relatable characters and socially grounded narratives, Murty lights the evolving cultural landscape with both clarity and empathy, offering insights into the complexities of contemporary life in India. At the heart of Sudha Murty's literary vision is her depiction of women as resilient, principled, and empowered individuals who confront personal and societal challenges with quiet determination, grace, and a transformative sense of agency.

Through her narratives, Sudha Murty presents a reimagined vision of femininity that goes beyond traditional stereotypes of women playing submissive, dependent, or confined to conventional roles. Her female

characters are depicted as autonomous and capable—intellectually engaged, morally strong, and socially aware—actively shaping their lives within complex familial and cultural settings. By highlighting everyday acts of courage, ethical decision-making, and emotional intelligence, Murty's fiction challenges patriarchal norms and offers a more inclusive portrayal of empowered womanhood in contemporary Indian literature.

Murty's female characters, whether as teachers, mothers, entrepreneurs, or professionals, illustrate how women's roles are evolving in modern Indian society. Sudha Murty's female characters reflect the complex challenge of balancing family responsibilities with personal growth and self-realization, navigating their identities within a patriarchal social framework. Her narratives highlight the quiet resilience needed to reconcile duty with ambition, and tradition with autonomy, often depicting women who assert their individuality while staying grounded in cultural and moral values. In contrast to radical feminist portrayals, Sudha Murty's vision of gender equality is grounded in empathy, moral integrity, and inner resilience. Her female characters rarely engage in overt rebellion; instead, they transform societal norms from within, drawing on compassion, wisdom, and quiet perseverance to assert their agency.

This study investigates how Sudha Murty's novels provide a literary platform to reinterpret femininity and examine the exercise of women's agency within the social and cultural contexts of modern India. By examining Sudha Murty's portrayal of women's experiences and aspirations, this research aims to uncover the subtle transformations in the literary representation of womanhood across her works. The study also explores how Murty's fiction contributes to contemporary discussions on gender dynamics, women's empowerment, and the evolving construction of social roles within modern Indian literature.

Eventually, Sudha Murty's narratives articulate a compassionate yet transformative vision of femininity—one that harmonizes the values of tradition with the aspirations of progress. Her portrayal of women emphasizes inner strength, ethical conviction, and social consciousness,

offering a model of empowerment that is both culturally rooted and forward-looking. Through subtle resistance and everyday resilience, her characters redefine womanhood not through confrontation, but through meaningful engagement with the social fabric around them.

Discussion

House of Cards

Sudha Murty's *House of Cards* provides an insightful analysis of women's experiences within traditional Indian society while highlighting their resilience, moral strength, and evolving agency. The novel focuses on the lives of ordinary women who face everyday challenges, yet show extraordinary courage and perseverance. Through her narrative, Murty highlights the inner strength and ethical resolve that women exhibit in negotiating familial, social, and personal responsibilities.

In *House of Cards*, the female characters navigate the complex tension between duty and self-realization. They balance household obligations and societal expectations with personal aspirations, demonstrating that women's identities are not confined to domestic spaces alone. Murty portrays her protagonists as morally grounded and socially conscious, often finding ways to assert their individuality without overtly challenging cultural norms. This subtle negotiation of tradition and autonomy reflects Murty's nuanced approach to feminism, which prioritizes empathy, ethical integrity, and inner resilience over radical rebellion. (repetition?)

The novel also addresses the broader socio-economic and cultural challenges faced by women, such as dependency, gender bias, and the pressures of conforming to patriarchal expectations. Murty's women confront these obstacles with quiet determination, often effecting change within their families and communities. Their courage lies not in dramatic defiance but in the consistency of their actions, the strength of their values, and the compassion with which they navigate social structures.

By focusing on everyday acts of perseverance, ethical decision-making, and emotional intelligence, *House of Cards* redefines femininity in a way that is both accessible and empowering. Murty's female characters

embody agency, demonstrating that strength can coexist with empathy, and personal growth can harmonize with social responsibility. Through this narrative, the novel contributes to a broader understanding of contemporary Indian womanhood, offering a vision of femininity that is dynamic, morally anchored, and socially engaged.

Dollar Bahu

Sudha Murty's *Dollar Bahu* examines the complexities of familial relationships and societal expectations, while offering a nuanced portrayal of women navigating cultural and personal challenges. The novel contrasts life in India with the experiences of Indians abroad, highlighting the influence of material aspirations, social pressures, and evolving cultural norms on women's roles. Through this lens, Murty presents her female characters as resilient, thoughtful, and morally grounded, reimagining femininity beyond traditional stereotypes.

In *Dollar Bahu*, the protagonist, Sumati, embodies the everyday struggles of women who attempt to balance family responsibilities with self-worth and personal identity. Her interactions with her daughter-in-law, the "dollar bahu," reveal the tension between material success and ethical values. While society often evaluates women based on wealth, status, or domestic prowess, Murty emphasizes intrinsic qualities such as empathy, wisdom, and emotional strength as markers of true empowerment. Sumati's journey reflects the assertion of agency within familial and social constraints, showing that women can exercise influence and inspire change through moral integrity rather than overt confrontation.

The novel also critiques societal pressures that define a woman's success through external markers, such as economic affluence or societal approval. Murty's female characters undergo these pressures with quiet determination, highlighting the courage it takes to uphold personal and familial values in the face of social expectations. This subtle resistance and moral steadfastness redefine femininity as a combination of resilience, intellect, and ethical clarity.

Through *Dollar Bahu*, Murty portrays women as dynamic agents capable of shaping their lives while remaining grounded in cultural and moral frameworks. The narrative underscores the importance of inner strength, emotional intelligence, and empathy, illustrating that empowerment is as much about personal growth and ethical action as it is about social mobility. By presenting women who harmonize duty, tradition, and self-realization, Murty contributes to a broader understanding of contemporary Indian womanhood, offering an inclusive and empowering vision of femininity.

Mahashweta

Sudha Murty's *Mahashweta* is a powerful exploration of identity, societal perceptions, and the resilience of women confronting personal and social challenges. Centering on Anupama, the novel employs leukoderma not merely as a medical condition but as a symbolic device to critique the intersection of bodily difference, social stigma, and patriarchal norms.Through Anupama's journey, Murty highlights the intersection of beauty, self-worth, and societal expectations, presenting a nuanced portrayal of femininity that transcends superficial norms.

In *Mahashweta*, Anupama embodies the struggle of asserting individuality within a patriarchal social framework. Her experiences reveal how women are often judged and marginalized based on appearance, marital status, and conformity to societal ideals. Yet, despite these pressures, Anupama's resilience, moral integrity, and quiet determination allow her to reclaim her sense of self. Murty portrays her female protagonist as an empowered individual whose strength lies not in rebellion but in her ability to confront social challenges with dignity and intelligence.

The novel also addresses the broader theme of agency, showing how women negotiate autonomy within constrained circumstances. Anupama's professional competence, ethical decision-making, and emotional maturity highlight that true empowerment encompasses both inner strength and practical action. Murty's narrative emphasizes that

women's identities are complex and multidimensional, shaped by personal experiences, social responsibilities, and cultural values rather than external validation or societal approval.

Through *Mahashweta*, Murty redefines femininity by illustrating how women can assert their individuality, maintain moral and ethical grounding, and exercise agency while remaining connected to their social and cultural milieu. The novel celebrates quiet courage, resilience, and intelligence, offering an inclusive and empowering vision of womanhood. By focusing on Anupama's journey, Murty challenges patriarchal standards, demonstrating that women's strength and identity are rooted in their integrity, choices, and capacity to overcome adversity, thereby contributing to a broader understanding of contemporary Indian womanhood. (Repetition).

Gently Falls the Bakula

Sudha Murty's *Gently Falls the Bakula* is a poignant exploration of gender roles, personal sacrifice, and the quiet resilience of women within the framework of marriage and ambition. At its core lies the story of Shrimati, a brilliant and sensitive woman whose life becomes a canvas for examining the cost of self-effacement in a patriarchal society.

Shrimati, an academically gifted woman with a deep passion for history, chooses to forgo her scholarly aspirations to support her husband Shrikant's corporate ambitions. Her decision, rooted in love and familial duty, reflects the traditional expectations placed upon women to prioritize domestic roles over personal growth. Murty's portrayal of Shrimati is neither overtly rebellious nor submissive; instead, it is marked by a quiet strength and introspective depth that challenges conventional notions of femininity.

As Shrikant ascends the corporate ladder, Shrimati's world narrows to the confines of domesticity and social obligations. Her intellectual hunger remains unfulfilled, and her identity becomes increasingly subsumed under the shadow of her husband's success. Murty uses this emotional and psychological erosion to critique the societal structures that equate

a woman's worth with her ability to serve others, often at the expense of her own dreams.

What makes *Gently Falls the Bakula* a powerful feminist narrative is its subtle yet firm assertion of female agency. Shrimati's eventual decision to reclaim her intellectual and personal space is not framed as an act of defiance but as a necessary step toward self-realization. Her departure from a stifling marriage is a quiet revolution—one that redefines empowerment as the courage to choose oneself without bitterness or blame.

Murty's narrative style—simple yet evocative—amplifies the emotional resonance of Shrimati's journey. Through her, Murty reimagines femininity as a blend of compassion, intellect, and moral clarity. *Gently Falls the Bakula* thus becomes a testament to the transformative power of self-awareness and the enduring strength of women who dare to step beyond the roles prescribed to them.

The Mother That I Never Knew

Sudha Murty's *The Mother I Never Knew* is a compelling twin novella that delves into themes of identity, familial bonds, and moral introspection, while subtly redefining femininity through the portrayal of maternal figures. Though the narratives center on two male protagonists—Venkatesh and Mukesh—the emotional core of both stories is shaped by the women who influence their journeys of self-discovery.

Murty presents motherhood not merely as a biological role but as a moral and emotional compass. The titular "mother" in each story—Venkatesh's biological mother and Mukesh's unknown son's mother—embodies strength, sacrifice, and quiet dignity. These women are not passive figures; they are agents of transformation whose choices and values challenge patriarchal norms and redefine what it means to be a woman in Indian society.

In Venkatesh's story, the revelation of his true parentage forces him to confront the pain of abandonment and the resilience of a mother who endured social stigma and personal loss. Her silence and suffering are

not signs of weakness but reflections of a deeply ingrained cultural expectation that women bear emotional burdens without complaint. Yet Murty gives voice to this silent strength, portraying it as a form of resistance and moral fortitude.

Mukesh's narrative, on the other hand, explores the consequences of male privilege and the invisibility of women's struggles. The mother of his illegitimate son is depicted as a woman of integrity, who raises her child alone, refusing to compromise her values despite societal judgment. Her story challenges the notion that a woman's worth is tied to her marital status or social acceptance, emphasizing instead her courage, independence, and ethical clarity.

Through these intertwined tales, Murty redefines femininity as a blend of emotional resilience, moral strength, and quiet agency. The maternal figures in *The Mother I Never Knew* are not idealized or victimized; they are complex, grounded, and transformative. Murty's portrayal invites readers to reconsider traditional gender roles and recognize the power of women who shape lives not through dominance, but through compassion, integrity, and unwavering resolve.

Conclusion

Sudha Murty's novels—*House of Cards*, *Dollar Bahu*, *Mahashweta*, *Gently Falls the Bakula*, and *The Mother I Never Knew*—collectively offer a compelling exploration of women's experiences, challenges, and evolving identities in contemporary Indian society. Across these works, Murty portrays women as resilient, morally grounded, and socially aware individuals who navigate complex familial, cultural, and personal landscapes. Her female characters are not confined to traditional stereotypes of submission or dependence; instead, they assert agency in ways that are ethical, empathetic, and socially constructive.

Murty's narratives consistently highlight the tension between duty and self-realization, tradition and autonomy, demonstrating that femininity can be redefined through quiet courage, inner strength, and emotional intelligence. Whether addressing societal biases, marital challenges,

professional aspirations, or personal identity, her protagonists embody a balance of compassion, wisdom, and moral integrity, reshaping conventional notions of womanhood.

Through these stories, Murty emphasizes that empowerment is not limited to overt rebellion or defiance but can emerge through thoughtful decision-making, resilience, and ethical action. Her novels thus provide a significant literary contribution to the discourse on gender, presenting an inclusive, nuanced, and inspiring vision of contemporary Indian women who redefine femininity on their own terms.

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Women, Power, and Identity in Bharati Mukherjee's The Tiger's Daughter and Wife

V. Vinotorchali, A. Santhanalakshmi and C. Alagan

Introduction

Bharati Mukherjee occupies a unique place in contemporary literature as a writer who blends feminist insight with postcolonial consciousness. Her fiction explores what it means to be a woman caught between worlds — India and America, tradition and modernity, belonging and exile. In The Tiger's Daughter and Wife, Mukherjee crafts two powerful yet deeply troubled female protagonists: Tara Banerjee, a young woman who returns to a rapidly changing India after years of education in the United States, and Dimple Dasgupta, an Indian housewife who migrates to America only to confront alienation and psychological collapse. Both women embody the complexities of identity formation for Indian women negotiating the pressures of patriarchy and displacement.

As Mukherjee herself writes, "My material is the immigrant experience — the loss of home, the search for identity, and the redefinition of self" (14). Through Tara and Dimple, she demonstrates that the journey of selfdiscovery is not only geographical but emotional and spiritual. The act of migration — whether physical, as in Wife, or internal, as in The Tiger's Daughter — becomes a metaphor for the woman's struggle to claim her own voice.From the opening pages of The Tiger's Daughter, Tara's disorientation reflects a broader cultural fracture. Mukherjee writes:

> Calcutta's heat and stench oppressed her; yet she longed to be recognized, to belong again among her own people" (The Tiger's Daughter 23).This longing for belonging and simultaneous estrangement sets the tone for her entire journey. Tara's return to

> India becomes a confrontation with both the colonial legacy that shapes her consciousness and the patriarchal expectations that confine her freedom. Her education abroad has given her a sense of independence, yet it also alienates her from her roots — a duality that defines Mukherjee's vision of the modern Indian woman.In contrast, Wife presents Dimple Dasgupta's story as a descent into psychological suffocation. She marries with dreams of romance and liberation, but marriage quickly becomes a cage. Mukherjee observes:
>
> "She had expected the excitement of television commercials, but marriage, instead, brought her the silence of a dark apartment" (Wife 46).

This passage captures the irony of Dimple's life — her fantasies of Western modernity are crushed under both domestic drudgery and the isolating immigrant experience. As R. S. Krishnan notes, "Mukherjee's heroines are victims of both patriarchal conditioning and postcolonial displacement; their rebellion is a cry against invisibility" (90). Mukherjee's exploration of women's identity is never simple or celebratory. Both Tara and Dimple confront not only external oppression but also internalized guilt and fear. Their crises reveal the costs of breaking away from cultural norms. In this way, Mukherjee dramatizes how female empowerment often emerges through pain and fragmentation rather than triumph.

Women and Cultural Displacement in The Tiger's Daughter

Bharati Mukherjee's The Tiger's Daughter explores the disorientation of a woman caught between the traditions of her homeland and the values of the Western world. Tara Banerjee, the protagonist, embodies the confusion and cultural alienation of India's postcolonial elite. Her education abroad gives her independence, but it also creates a gap between her and her Indian identity. When she returns to Calcutta, she feels both privileged and estranged — "a daughter of Bengal who no longer knew the smell of its earth" (The Tiger's Daughter 17).

Tara's struggle mirrors the larger crisis of India's educated women who inhabit a hybrid identity. She is not oppressed by poverty but by the expectations that her gender and class impose on her. Her marriage to an American, David Cartwright, further complicates her position. Her friends see her as Westernized and therefore deviant from traditional womanhood. Mukherjee writes, "They treated her as if her foreignness were contagious, as if her love for an American had stained her" (28). This small remark reveals the tension between belonging and exclusion that shapes Tara's life.

The city itself becomes a metaphor for Tara's fractured sense of self. The chaos and poverty of Calcutta overwhelm her; yet, she cannot detach herself from its pull. As Kavitha notes, "Tara's identity is a negotiation between nostalgia and revulsion — she loves the homeland that no longer feels like home" (267). Mukherjee's description of Calcutta's oppressive atmosphere symbolizes Tara's internal turmoil, where gender, class, and colonial history converge to silence her voice.

Despite her foreign education, Tara remains emotionally confined by patriarchal norms. She is polite, obedient, and fearful of confrontation. Her mother's advice — "A woman's happiness lies in patience" (Mukherjee 42) — echoes through her mind even as she senses its emptiness. Tara's silence becomes a survival strategy in a society that values female submission. Yet her silence also becomes a form of quiet rebellion; through restraint, she resists being entirely defined by others.

Tara's return to India does not resolve her crisis but deepens it. The India she once idealized appears fractured by class divisions, political unrest, and gender inequality. In one scene, Mukherjee shows Tara walking through a protest, feeling invisible: "She wanted to say, I am one of you — but her foreign dress and accent betrayed her" (63). This moment captures the paradox of the diasporic woman — present yet excluded, rooted yet displaced.

In the end, Tara's empowerment lies not in dramatic action but in awareness. She begins to recognize how deeply patriarchy and colonialism have shaped her consciousness. As Ambreen Kharbe

observes, “Mukherjee’s heroine does not conquer her world; she learns to see it, and in that seeing lies her strength” (5). Tara’s quiet endurance and introspection mark her as a prototype for Mukherjee’s later women — individuals who struggle for identity within the contradictions of modern womanhood.

Female Identity and Domestic Repression in Wife

In Wife (1975), Bharati Mukherjee shifts her focus from the elite, diasporic alienation of The Tiger’s Daughter to the suffocating domestic world of a middle-class Indian woman. The protagonist, Dimple Dasgupta, is raised to believe that marriage is the ultimate fulfillment of a woman’s life. Her fantasies of romantic love are drawn from advertisements and television, but these illusions quickly collapse. As Mukherjee writes, “She had expected life to be like a commercial, bright and exciting, but marriage was silence, boredom, and the smell of cooking gas” (Wife 46).

Dimple’s marriage to Amit Basu, an engineer, becomes a slow descent into psychological imprisonment. Her loss of individuality begins even before her migration to America. From the moment she marries, she is stripped of agency — “She had traded her name, her dreams, and her body for a husband’s approval” (Mukherjee 29). The language reflects a barter system of patriarchy, where a woman’s worth is measured by her obedience.

When Dimple migrates to the United States, she expects liberation, but her new world is lonelier and more alienating than India. The foreign environment amplifies her inner emptiness. As R. S. Krishnan notes, “The American setting in Wife becomes an external projection of Dimple’s disintegrating self” (92).

Mukherjee’s portrayal of New York apartments — sterile, cold, and airless — mirrors Dimple’s sense of entrapment. The dream of modernity becomes a nightmare of isolation.

Mukherjee uses domestic imagery to show how the home, supposedly a woman’s domain, turns into a prison. Dimple’s repetitive routines —

cooking, cleaning, waiting evoke the monotony of her existence. "The days passed like shadows; she waited for something to happen, but nothing ever did" (Wife 71). The repetition of "nothing" emphasizes the void within her, the slow erasure of selfhood under patriarchal control.

The violence in Wife is both psychological and symbolic. Dimple's fantasies grow darker as her frustration deepens. Her imagination, once filled with Bollywood dreams, begins to harbor thoughts of escape and self-destruction. Mukherjee shows this transformation with chilling precision: "She pressed the pillow against her husband's face — not in hatred, but in desperate search of silence" (183). This moment, though horrific, is the culmination of years of repression. Dimple's act is less a crime of passion than a twisted assertion of agency in a world that denies her voice.

Mukherjee does not glorify this violence. Instead, she uses it to expose the psychological cost of silencing women. Dimple's identity disintegrates because society has left her no space for self-expression. As P. Rajeswari and S. Rajarajan argue, "Dimple is not a madwoman by nature but by culture — a woman driven insane by patriarchal definitions of duty and virtue" (54). Through Dimple's breakdown, Mukherjee suggests that madness can be a distorted form of rebellion, a way of reclaiming autonomy through destruction.

Even in her tragedy, Dimple represents the suppressed power of the female psyche. She embodies the contradictions of women's liberation — the yearning for freedom clashing with the fear of isolation. Mukherjee's insight lies in revealing how internalized patriarchy turns the victim into both prisoner and executioner. As Kavitha observes, "Mukherjee's heroines revolt not through ideology but through emotion — their rebellion is instinctive, born of pain" (Journey of Transformation 268).

Thus, Wife becomes a study in the psychological consequences of repression. Dimple's fate warns of the dangers of measuring women's worth solely by domestic and marital roles. Her final act, though destructive, is also an assertion of a silenced identity.

Mukherjee's portrayal of Dimple underscores that empowerment for women cannot emerge within systems designed to erase their individuality; it must come from the painful recognition of their own humanity.

Comparative Reading: Power, Silence, and Resistance

When The Tiger's Daughter and Wife are read together, Bharati Mukherjee's vision of womanhood emerges as one defined by conflict, silence, and resilience. Both Tara Banerjee and Dimple Dasgupta are products of patriarchal and postcolonial structures that suppress women's individuality, yet both express subtle forms of resistance. Tara's quiet introspection and Dimple's psychological rebellion represent two extremes of the same struggle — the quest for a self beyond submission.

In The Tiger's Daughter, Tara's alienation is cultural and emotional. She struggles to fit into a society that expects her to embody traditional femininity. "She smiled because she had been taught to smile, even when she felt nothing" (The Tiger's Daughter 38). This small line encapsulates her internalized performance of gender. Tara's silence is her survival mechanism; she endures by hiding her discomfort beneath the mask of politeness. Her education and exposure to the West give her awareness but not agency. She sees injustice but cannot act against it.

In contrast, Dimple's rebellion in Wife is visceral and psychological. Where Tara represses her emotions, Dimple internalizes them until they erupt in violence. Mukherjee writes, "She felt the walls closing in, her breath shrinking — marriage had turned her into airless space" (Wife 59). Dimple's suffocation represents the literal and symbolic annihilation of a woman's identity within patriarchal domesticity. Her silence eventually transforms into madness, her only remaining form of self-expression.

For both women, silence is not weakness but a language of endurance. As Ambreen Kharbe observes, "Mukherjee's heroines speak through silence, their quiet defiance more radical than open revolt" (4). Tara's restraint allows her to survive in a collapsing social order, while Dimple's

breakdown exposes the brutality of that same order. Their contrasting fates show how women's power in patriarchal societies often manifests in invisible, internalized ways.

Mukherjee also explores how displacement intensifies the struggle for identity. Both Tara and Dimple inhabit "in-between" spaces — geographically, culturally, and emotionally. Tara's Western education makes her an outsider in India, while Dimple's migration to America leaves her caught between cultures. As Mukherjee notes, "Dislocation for women is not merely spatial but psychological; they lose a country and find a mirror" (28). That mirror reflects the fractured selves they must reconcile.

The tension between submission and resistance defines both novels. Tara's quiet endurance reflects an older generation's internalized patriarchal conditioning, while Dimple's violent outburst reflects a newer, more desperate form of protest. Yet neither achieves liberation. Their struggles end ambiguously, suggesting that freedom for women in postcolonial societies remains an ongoing process, not a resolution.

Critic Emmanuel Nelson summarizes this paradox well: "Mukherjee's women are not liberated in the Western sense; their power lies in awareness — the dawning consciousness of their own subjugation" (44). Awareness, for Mukherjee, is the first step toward transformation, even if it brings suffering. Both novels thus form a continuum: Tara represents endurance, Dimple represents rupture. Through them, Mukherjee articulates a feminist vision rooted in realism — one that recognizes the deep scars of patriarchy and colonialism while affirming the inner strength of women who survive within them.

Feminist Interpretation

Bharati Mukherjee's The Tiger's Daughter and Wife are essential texts in feminist and postcolonial discourse because they depict women negotiating multiple layers of oppression — cultural, domestic, and psychological. Through Tara and Dimple, Mukherjee exposes how patriarchal systems control women's desires, bodies, and identities, while

also showing how resistance can emerge from within those very confines.

From a feminist perspective, Mukherjee's work aligns with thinkers like Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Gayatri Spivak, who emphasize that postcolonial women face "double colonization" — by patriarchy and by imperial history. Tara's silence and Dimple's violence are both responses to the same power structures. As Mukherjee writes, "To be a woman was to learn the art of invisibility — to disappear so that others might feel whole" (The Tiger's Daughter 41). This quiet observation captures the essence of her feminist critique: women's social erasure is not natural but manufactured.

Tara's alienation reflects the subtle oppression of the upper-class, educated woman who is culturally silenced. Dimple's disintegration, on the other hand, dramatizes the physical and mental breakdown caused by internalized patriarchy. Both women embody different forms of what R. S. Krishnan calls "the female condition under cultural schizophrenia" (93). Mukherjee refuses to idealize either protagonist; instead, she presents their experiences as deeply human struggles within restrictive systems.

Silence becomes a crucial feminist symbol in both novels. For Tara, silence is selfpreservation — "Her words stayed behind her lips like birds that feared the sky" (The Tiger's Daughter 58). For Dimple, silence becomes suffocating — "She stopped speaking not because she had nothing to say, but because speech meant surrender" (Wife 124). Mukherjee's nuanced use of silence reveals that language itself can be a tool of patriarchy, denying women the power to define their reality.

In both novels, Mukherjee redefines empowerment. She rejects Western ideals of overt liberation and instead portrays self-awareness as the beginning of resistance. As Kavitha observes, "Mukherjee's feminism is not ideological but experiential; it grows from the lived pain of women who realize they must speak, even if no one listens" (270). Empowerment, in Mukherjee's fiction, does not always mean triumph — sometimes it means survival.Thematically, The Tiger's Daughter and Wife also

dismantle the myth of domestic bliss. Marriage, often idealized as a woman's destiny, becomes a structure of confinement. Dimple's marriage exposes the hypocrisy of cultural expectations that equate female virtue with obedience. "She wanted to breathe, but every breath was borrowed from someone else's will" (Wife 87). In this image, Mukherjee fuses physical and emotional suffocation, suggesting that patriarchy colonizes even the body.

From a postcolonial lens, Mukherjee connects personal displacement to cultural identity. Both novels critique how women's bodies become symbols of national purity and control. Tara's Western marriage is viewed as a betrayal of India's cultural essence, while Dimple's alienation in America reveals how migration transforms women into outsiders in both worlds. Emmanuel Nelson notes that "Mukherjee's fiction charts the geography of exile — where gender and nationality intersect to define, and often destroy, identity" (46).

Mukherjee's ultimate message is that empowerment is a process, not a conclusion. Tara and Dimple's stories, though tragic, awaken the reader to the realities of women's struggle for autonomy. Their journeys end in ambiguity because, for women within patriarchal societies, freedom itself remains uncertain. Yet in their moments of awareness — Tara's realization of her alienation and Dimple's fatal assertion of control — Mukherjee locates the seeds of transformation."Heroines like Tara and Dimple," writes P. Rajeswari, "are both victims and witnesses; through their suffering, they expose the limits of a civilization that denies women subjectivity" (61).

Conclusion

Bharati Mukherjee's The Tiger's Daughter and Wife portray women caught between tradition and transformation.Tara and Dimple struggle to define themselves within patriarchal and cultural boundaries.Their silence and rebellion reveal the deep psychological toll of gendered oppression.Mukherjee shows that power, for women, often lies in endurance rather than domination.Tara's quiet awareness and Dimple's tragic assertion both signify awakening.

Through their pain, Mukherjee critiques the social systems that confine women's identities.

Her feminism emerges not from ideology but from lived experience and emotional truth.

Both novels expose how marriage and migration shape female consciousness.

In their quest for selfhood, Tara and Dimple become symbols of resistance and survival.

Ultimately, Mukherjee envisions empowerment as the courage to confront and endure silence.

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Posthuman Interventions: Carnophallogocentrism, Thanatopolitics, and the Humanimal in *Elizabeth Costello*

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Introduction

J.M. Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello* (2003) is one of the most provocative fictional works of contemporary literature to interrogate the ethical, philosophical, and representational boundaries that structure human–animal relations. Framed through a series of fictional lectures delivered by its ageing protagonist Elizabeth Costello, the novel unsettles the assumptions of humanism, particularly the Enlightenment faith in reason, mastery, and human exceptionalism. In doing so, it opens a space for what can be described as posthuman interventions—challenges to anthropocentric worldviews and invitations to imagine new forms of relationality between humans, animals, and the environment. Posthumanism, as theorised by thinkers such as Cary Wolfe, Donna Haraway, Rosi Braidotti, and Jacques Derrida, calls into question the supremacy of "the human" as the measure of all value and knowledge, urging instead a decentring of human subjectivity in favour of interdependence, vulnerability, and multispecies ethics. Coetzee's text provides fertile ground for such a reading, particularly through its engagement with concepts such as carnophallogocentrism, thanatopolitics, and the humanimal.

Derrida's critique of *carnophallogocentrism*—the structuring of Western thought around meat-eating, patriarchy, and logocentrism—illuminates how cultural systems are built upon the disavowal of animal lives. In *Elizabeth Costello*, this manifests in the protagonist's impassioned vegetarian lectures and her unease with the cultural

normalisation of animal slaughter. The novel insists that the humanist edifice rests upon the invisible sacrifice of nonhuman lives, thereby exposing the ethical blind spots of modernity.

Similarly, Giorgio Agamben's notion of *thanatopolitics*—the politics of life and death that reduces certain beings to "bare life"—is central to Coetzee's exploration of animality. In factory farming and industrial slaughterhouses, animals are stripped of political value and reduced to killable commodities. Costello's infamous Holocaust analogy underscores this continuity of violence, provoking discomfort precisely because it reveals how biopolitical logics operate across species boundaries. By foregrounding the expendability of both human and animal lives, the novel situates itself within a discourse that refuses to confine ethical concern to the human alone.

Alongside these critiques, the concept of the *humanimal* provides a productive lens for understanding how Coetzee destabilises species binaries. Costello's insistence on the "sympathetic imagination"—the capacity to imagine oneself into the life of another being—opens a posthuman ethics that acknowledges shared vulnerability and interdependence. The boundaries between human and animal are not rigid but porous, and it is precisely within this liminality that new ethical possibilities emerge. Costello herself, as an ageing, fragile, and often marginalised figure, embodies this humanimal condition. Her vulnerability and her refusal to appeal to rationalist authority situate her outside traditional humanist paradigms, positioning her as a posthuman subject.This paper argues that *Elizabeth Costello* performs a critical dismantling of anthropocentric humanism by foregrounding carnophallogocentrism, exposing the thanatopolitical reduction of animals, and advancing the humanimal as a figure of relational ethics. In so doing, Coetzee's novel not only critiques the violence embedded in humanist discourse but also gestures towards a posthuman ethic of care, responsibility, and interspecies relationality. By situating *Elizabeth Costello* within posthumanist debates, this study demonstrates how literature can intervene in pressing philosophical and ethical questions surrounding human–nonhuman coexistence.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is rooted in posthumanist theory, which challenges the anthropocentric and humanist assumptions that have traditionally defined ethical, political, and philosophical thought. Posthumanism, as elaborated by thinkers such as Cary Wolfe, Rosi Braidotti, and Donna Haraway, decentralises the human, emphasising interspecies relationality, vulnerability, and the ethical significance of nonhuman life. Within this framework, the study draws on Derrida's concept of carnophallogocentrism, which critiques the intertwined logics of meat-eating, patriarchy, and rationalist humanism that sustain systemic animal exploitation. Agamben's thanatopolitics further underpins the analysis, providing a lens to understand how political systems reduce certain lives to "bare life," rendering them killable without ethical recognition. The study also employs the notion of the humanimal, which destabilises strict human–animal binaries and foregrounds shared vulnerability and relational subjectivity as central to ethical engagement. By integrating these frameworks, the research interrogates how Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello* critiques entrenched humanist discourses, exposes ethical blind spots in anthropocentric practices, and proposes an imaginative, relational, and posthuman ethics. The theoretical framework thus guides the analysis of literary representation, ethical philosophy, and interspecies relationality, allowing the novel to serve as a site for posthumanist intervention.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive research methodology, grounded in literary analysis and theoretical engagement. The primary text is J.M. Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello*, which serves as a case study for exploring posthumanist themes and ethical interventions. The methodology combines close textual analysis with theoretical application, reading the novel through the lenses of carnophallogocentrism, thanatopolitics, and the humanimal. Specific passages, such as Costello's lectures on animal lives, Kafka's ape, and her Holocaust analogy, are examined for how they critique anthropocentric humanism and

foreground interspecies ethics. Secondary sources include critical literature on posthumanism, animal studies, and literary theory, drawing on scholars such as Derrida, Haraway, Wolfe, Braidotti, and Agamben to situate the analysis within contemporary ethical and philosophical debates. The study also employs a conceptual thematic approach, organising findings under ethical, philosophical, and representational categories, enabling the identification of recurring motifs related to interspecies relationality, vulnerability, and imaginative ethics. By combining textual analysis with posthumanist theoretical frameworks, this methodology facilitates a nuanced understanding of how *Elizabeth Costello* enacts ethical critique and models alternative posthuman subjectivities, while situating the novel within broader discourses of human–animal relations, biopolitics, and ethical philosophy.

Future Scope of Research

The posthumanist reading of *Elizabeth Costello* opens multiple avenues for future research in literature, ethics, and interdisciplinary studies. First, comparative studies could examine Coetzee alongside other contemporary writers, such as Amitav Ghosh, Yann Martel, or Richard Powers, to explore recurring posthumanist and animal-ethical concerns across global literature. Such work could analyse narrative strategies, representation of nonhuman agency, and the ethical imagination in diverse cultural contexts. Second, there is scope for interdisciplinary research, linking literary studies with environmental humanities, eco-criticism, and animal studies, to explore how literary texts shape ecological and ethical consciousness. Third, scholars could extend the analysis of concepts like carnophallogocentrism, thanatopolitics, and the humanimal to broader socio-political issues, including climate crisis, industrial food systems, and global governance of life and death. Additionally, future research could examine pedagogical applications, investigating how posthumanist literary texts can cultivate empathy, ethical responsibility, and ecological awareness in educational contexts. Finally, emerging technologies, including AI-generated narratives and bioethics, offer opportunities to interrogate posthuman ethics in literature and culture. Overall, Coetzee's

work provides a foundation for ongoing critical inquiry into the intersections of literature, ethics, and posthuman thought, with potential to inform both academic scholarship and social praxis.

Unmasking Carnophallogocentrism: Animal Sacrifice and the Limits of Humanist Discourse

Jacques Derrida's notion of *carnophallogocentrism* names the cultural and philosophical nexus that sustains Western humanism: the privileging of the masculine (phallocentric), the privileging of rational, logocentric discourse, and the hidden centrality of meat-eating (carnivorousness) as a structuring practice. For Derrida, the act of eating flesh is not a mere dietary choice but a ritual through which the human secures its distinction from the animal. The sacrifice of the animal becomes an invisible foundation of human culture, a necessary disavowal that maintains the illusion of human exceptionalism. In J.M. Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello*, this carnophallogocentric structure is laid bare through the protagonist's uncompromising reflections on animal slaughter and her insistence on the moral blindness embedded in humanist traditions. Elizabeth Costello's vegetarian lecture, particularly in "The Lives of Animals," directly challenges the normalisation of meat consumption. She exposes how human culture naturalises violence against animals by cloaking it within rituals of denial, convenience, and rational justification. The very ease with which societies dismiss the suffering of animals reveals the entrenched grip of carnophallogocentrism: the cultural order depends upon the invisibility of slaughterhouses and the erasure of animal pain from moral consideration. Costello provokes discomfort precisely by drawing attention to what must remain unspoken in order for humanist discourse to preserve its coherence.

Carnophallogocentrism also intersects with the limits of humanist philosophy. Rationalist traditions, from Descartes to Kant, have often justified human superiority by defining the human in terms of reason, autonomy, and moral agency. Animals, framed as lacking logos, are consequently excluded from ethical consideration. Costello insists that

this exclusion is not a neutral categorisation but a violent disavowal that masks the ethical costs of human self-definition. By foregrounding sympathy and imaginative identification over reason, she destabilises the very basis of logocentric humanism. In doing so, she not only critiques the dietary and cultural practices of meat-eating but also the philosophical scaffolding that legitimises it.

The trope of sacrifice is central here. Derrida argues that the animal is continually sacrificed in order to affirm the human. In *Elizabeth Costello*, this sacrificial logic is revealed in Costello's Holocaust analogy, which juxtaposes industrial animal slaughter with human atrocities. Though controversial, this comparison underscores the ways in which carnophallogocentric culture renders certain lives expendable, stripped of dignity and rendered killable. By collapsing the distance between animal and human victims, Costello reveals how humanist discourse, far from safeguarding ethical responsibility, often functions as a mechanism of exclusion and violence.

Thus, to unmask carnophallogocentrism in Coetzee's novel is to recognise the limits of humanist discourse itself. Costello insists that ethical life cannot be founded on reason alone, for reason has historically been the very tool of exclusion. Instead, she advocates for an ethics grounded in imagination, sympathy, and vulnerability—qualities marginalised within logocentric traditions but essential to a posthuman ethics. By exposing the hidden violence at the core of humanist culture, Coetzee's text demands a radical reconfiguration of how humans understand themselves in relation to animals and the world.

Thanatopolitics and Bare Life: The Politics of Death in Human–Animal Relations

Giorgio Agamben's theorisation of *thanatopolitics*—the intertwining of politics with the power over life and death—offers a compelling framework for examining how J.M. Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello*

represents the precarious status of animals. For Agamben, modern political orders do not merely govern life (*biopolitics*); they also decide which lives are expendable, reducible to what he terms *bare life*—existence stripped of political and ethical value, vulnerable to death without recognition or mourning. In Coetzee's novel, Elizabeth Costello repeatedly invokes this logic to highlight the condition of nonhuman animals, whose lives are systematically reduced to killable commodities under industrial capitalism.

Factory farming and slaughterhouses are emblematic sites of thanatopolitical governance. Animals within these spaces are not merely killed but managed, processed, and transformed into consumable flesh in ways that erase their subjectivity. Costello draws on the analogy with the Holocaust, not to diminish the specificity of human atrocity but to emphasise the structural parallels: both rely on a bureaucratised, industrialised system that strips beings of individuality, dignity, and political standing. The discomfort her audience expresses at this analogy reveals the resistance of humanist discourse to acknowledging the continuity between human and animal suffering. Yet it is precisely this resistance that illuminates the depth of anthropocentric denial and the extent to which thanatopolitical logic underwrites everyday human practices.

Coetzee's narrative insists that the animal is not an abstract category but a living being rendered invisible by political economies of death. The reduction of animals to *bare life* mirrors Agamben's description of the *homo sacer*, the figure who may be killed but not sacrificed, excluded from both the political and the sacred. Similarly, animals in factory farms live outside the sphere of moral concern: their deaths sustain human consumption but are denied symbolic recognition. This denial is what allows their systematic extermination to continue largely unchallenged.

The novel also highlights how thanatopolitics is inseparable from human self-definition. By relegating animals to the status of killable life, humanity secures its own sovereignty and exceptionalism. Yet Coetzee complicates this by showing how this logic can turn inward, as in the Holocaust comparison: when humans themselves are stripped of political

value, they too are reduced to bare life. Costello thus demonstrates that the boundary between human and nonhuman vulnerability is far less secure than humanist discourse assumes. The politics of death is not limited to animals but extends across species, destabilising the very foundation of anthropocentrism. By invoking thanatopolitics, Coetzee's text reveals the ethical bankruptcy of a system that naturalises mass killing while maintaining the façade of civilisation. Costello's challenge is not simply to condemn these practices but to call for a reimagining of ethics beyond the limits of humanist frameworks. To recognise animals as more than bare life is to affirm their vulnerability, agency, and capacity to suffer—qualities that demand ethical consideration irrespective of species. In foregrounding the thanatopolitical reduction of animals, *Elizabeth Costello* forces readers to confront the hidden violence embedded in the politics of life and death, urging a posthuman rethinking of coexistence.

The Humanimal and Sympathetic Imagination: Towards a Posthuman Ethics

In *Elizabeth Costello,* J.M. Coetzee advances a vision of posthuman ethics through the intertwined concepts of the *humanimal* and the *sympathetic imagination*. The term "humanimal" captures the porous boundary between human and animal, highlighting the shared vulnerabilities and interdependencies that destabilise the traditional humanist hierarchy. By presenting Costello herself as a fragile, ageing, and often marginalised figure, the novel enacts this liminality, situating her as a figure whose subjectivity challenges the rational, autonomous, and self-contained human ideal. The humanimal embodies a posthuman subjectivity: one that is relational, ethically responsive, and attuned to the lives and suffering of nonhuman beings.

Costello's ethical intervention is mediated through what she repeatedly calls the *sympathetic imagination*. This imaginative capacity allows humans to apprehend the interiority of other beings without reducing them to human terms. Unlike reason-centered ethical frameworks, which have historically justified human superiority and excluded animals from

moral consideration, the sympathetic imagination relies on empathy, vulnerability, and imaginative engagement. In the novel, Costello insists that the ability to imagine oneself into the life of another, whether human or nonhuman, is the foundation of ethical responsibility. By privileging imagination over rational calculation, Coetzee dismantles anthropocentric notions of morality and opens the possibility for a more inclusive, posthumanist ethics.

The humanimal is also a critique of anthropocentric mastery. Whereas humanist discourse defines the human as the agent of reason and authority, the humanimal exposes how these qualities are neither exclusive nor absolute. Costello herself, through her bodily frailty, ethical attentiveness, and imaginative capacity, illustrates that humanity is inseparable from animality. This blurring of boundaries extends the ethical sphere to include animals as co-participants in moral consideration rather than passive objects or symbolic others. In this sense, the humanimal functions as both a conceptual and narrative device, foregrounding interspecies relationality as the locus of posthuman ethics. Furthermore, Coetzee's use of literature and storytelling reinforces the humanimal's ethical vision. Through fictional lectures, reflections on Kafka's ape, and engagement with historical atrocity, the novel demonstrates that narrative itself is a medium for cultivating the sympathetic imagination. By imagining the lives of beings whose experiences are silenced or marginalised, literature becomes a tool for ethical expansion, enabling readers to confront their own complicity in systems of exploitation and violence.

Ultimately, the humanimal and the sympathetic imagination together offer a framework for posthuman ethics in *Elizabeth Costello*. They challenge humanist assumptions, question species hierarchies, and foreground relational responsibility as central to ethical life. Coetzee's text thus does more than critique: it envisions a world in which humans and animals coexist in ethical interdependence, where vulnerability and empathy are the foundations of moral engagement, and where the ethical imagination is the medium through which the posthuman subject emerges.

Conclusion

J.M. Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello* offers a profound engagement with the ethical, philosophical, and literary challenges posed by contemporary posthumanist thought. Across the novel, the intertwined concepts of carnophallogocentrism, thanatopolitics, and the humanimal illuminate the ways in which humanist traditions have historically defined the human at the expense of animals and other nonhuman beings. By exposing the cultural, philosophical, and political mechanisms that normalise animal exploitation, Coetzee compels readers to confront the ethical implications of human exceptionalism and the pervasive denial embedded in anthropocentric discourse. Carnophallogocentrism, as elaborated in Derrida's work, frames the human as simultaneously rational, masculine, and privileged while situating the animal as both object and sacrificial figure. Costello's lectures disrupt this framework, revealing that humanist ethics cannot adequately account for interspecies vulnerability or moral responsibility. Through the lens of thanatopolitics, Coetzee extends this critique to the systemic reduction of animals to bare life. Industrialised killing practices, including factory farming and slaughterhouses, exemplify the ways in which certain lives are rendered expendable, stripped of moral or political value. The Holocaust analogy employed by Costello, while controversial, underscores the structural continuity of this logic across species and compels a reevaluation of the ethical limits of humanism. By foregrounding the precariousness of life and the governance of death, the novel aligns with posthumanist critiques of sovereignty, hierarchisation, and the instrumentalisation of other beings.

The concept of the humanimal, coupled with the sympathetic imagination, offers an alternative vision of posthuman ethics. Coetzee's text emphasises relationality, vulnerability, and imaginative engagement as central to moral responsibility. By blurring the boundaries between human and animal, the humanimal challenges anthropocentric hierarchies and models a form of ethical subjectivity attentive to the experiences and suffering of nonhumans. Costello herself, as a figure marked by corporeal fragility and moral sensitivity, embodies the posthuman subject: one whose authority arises not from mastery or rational calculation but from ethical

attentiveness and imaginative responsiveness. Literature, in this context, functions as a medium for cultivating empathy, expanding ethical horizons, and fostering recognition of interspecies interdependence.

In conclusion, *Elizabeth Costello* operates as a critical intervention in posthumanist discourse, demonstrating that literature can disrupt entrenched anthropocentric norms while articulating an ethical framework that transcends species boundaries. By unmasking the hidden violence of carnophallogocentrism, illuminating the precariousness of bare life through thanatopolitics, and advancing the humanimal as a model of relational ethics, Coetzee's novel offers both critique and imaginative possibility. The ethical imperative emerging from the text calls for attentiveness, imagination, and responsibility—qualities essential for navigating a world in which humans and nonhumans coexist in complex, interdependent networks. In foregrounding these concerns, Coetzee not only critiques the limits of humanism but also envisions a posthuman ethics capable of addressing contemporary challenges of interspecies coexistence, ecological fragility, and ethical accountability.

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Literature Reshapes Society: Studying George Orwell's *NineteenEighty-Four*

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Introduction

Literature has always maintained a complex relationship with society. Writers draw upon the political, economic, cultural, and moral conditions of their historical moment, but literary works can also influence how later generations understand those conditions. A novel may originate in a particular political crisis and yet acquire meanings far beyond its original context. Literature can preserve experiences that official histories attempt to suppress, question social conventions that appear permanent, and enable readers to imagine alternative forms of social existence.

George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four, published in 1949, provides an exceptional example of this process. The novel presents the fictional state of Oceania, where the Party exercises almost total control over its population. Winston Smith, the protagonist, works at the Ministry of Truth, rewriting historical documents so that the past continuously corresponds with the Party's current political position. He gradually becomes conscious of the relationship between political authority and control over language, memory, and truth.

The continuing cultural influence of the novel supports the argument that literature can reshape society. The Orwell Foundation notes that the novel introduced concepts including "Big Brother," "thought police," "Room 101," "doublethink," and "Newspeak" into the English language. In The Orwell Foundation These expressions have moved from fiction into everyday political vocabulary. Thus, Orwell did not simply describe political oppression; he created a language through which later societies could discuss it.

The central thesis of this paper is that Nineteen Eighty-Four reshapes society by converting political ideas into literary symbols and by making readers conscious of the relationship between power and representation. The novel demonstrates that political domination becomes most powerful when it controls not only external behaviour but also the language through which people understand reality.

Literature and the Social Function of Art. The argument that literature possesses a social function has a long history in English literary criticism. Matthew Arnold, for instance, regarded criticism as an important cultural activity because it helps society encounter and circulate significant ideas. He famously describes criticism as an effort "to see the object as in itself it really is" (Arnold). Cambridge University Press,1. Arnold's concept is useful for reading Orwell because Nineteen Eighty-Four repeatedly asks whether human beings are capable of seeing reality independently of political authority. The Party does not merely prohibit certain opinions. It attempts to determine what counts as reality.

The importance of literature therefore lies partly in its ability to create distance between the reader and the society represented in a text. A reader living under ordinary social conditions can enter Oceania and recognize the dangers of surveillance, propaganda, political conformity, and manipulation of history. The dystopian form makes familiar political mechanisms strange and therefore more criticism.

T. S. Eliot provides another useful theoretical perspective. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent," Eliot argues that new literary works enter into a larger historical literary order and modify that order. Poetry Foundation, 1

Orwell's novel has done precisely this. It has entered the cultural tradition so successfully that its fictional terminology has become part of political and journalistic discourse. The literary work therefore survives its historical moment. Nineteen Eighty-Four was written in response to the political anxieties of the twentieth century, but readers continue to employ its concepts to interpret new forms of authoritarianism, surveillance, propaganda, and political manipulation.

Orwell's Theory of Political Writing : The relationship between literature and political consciousness becomes particularly clear when Nineteen Eighty-Four is read alongside Orwell's essay "Why I Write." Orwell states that one of his central motives is "political purpose," which he defines as the desire to influence ideas about the society toward which the world should move. The Orwell Foundation

More importantly, Orwell rejects the notion that art can exist entirely outside politics. He argues that the belief that art should have nothing to do with politics is itself political. The Orwell Foundation

This statement provides an important theoretical foundation for1Nineteen Eighty-Four.The novel is clearly artistic, but it is also political. Orwell does not present political theory in the form of a treatise. Instead, he creates characters, institutions, slogans, symbols, and situations that allow readers to experience political domination imaginatively.

Orwell's political writing therefore fulfils two functions: it exposes political lies and transforms political criticism into art. The Orwell Foundation summarizes his objective as making "political writing into an art. "The Orwell Foundation" This fusion of political purpose and aesthetic form explains much of the novel's enduring influence.

The Political Control of Language

One of the most important arguments of Nineteen Eighty-Four is that language is not politically neutral. The Party understands that controlling language can limit the possibilities of thought. Orwell had already developed this argument in his essay "Politics and the English Language," where he describes language as an instrument that human beings shape for particular purposes. (The Orwell Foundation)

The fictional language of Newspeak represents the extreme version of this argument. The Party seeks to reduce the vocabulary available to citizens so that politically dangerous ideas become increasingly difficult to formulate.The novel repeatedly employs linguistic concepts that demonstrate this process:

1. "Newspeak" (Orwell, ch. 5)

2. “thoughtcrime”(ch. 1)

3. “doublethink” (ch. 9)

4. “unperson”(ch. 4)

5. “crimestop”(ch. 5)

These terms are not merely invented vocabulary. They represent different mechanisms through which political power enters consciousness.

“Thoughtcrime” makes thought itself punishable. “Unperson” removes the individual from historical memory.

“Doublethink” describes the psychological capacity to accept contradictory propositions when political authority demands it. “Crimestop” represents the ability to stop a dangerous thought before it becomes conscious.

Language consequently becomes an arena of political struggle. The significance of this idea is enormous. If language determines the concepts available to human beings, then political power can operate before an individual has even formed a conscious political opinion.

“Big Brother” and the Culture of Surveillance: The most recognizable symbol in Nineteen Eighty-Four is Big Brother. The phrase appears alongside the warning:

“Big Brother is Watching You” (Orwell, ch. 1).

This brief phrase establishes the psychological atmosphere of Oceania. Surveillance is not merely an occasional governmental activity. It becomes an internalized condition of existence.

The telescreen represents the technological dimension of surveillance: “telescreen” (ch. 1).

Citizens can never be certain when they are being observed. Consequently, surveillance changes behaviour even when direct observation may not be occurring.

This distinction is important. The Party does not need to punish every citizen continuously because citizens begin to regulate themselves.

The novel thus anticipates a central concern of modern societies: the relationship between technological communication and surveillance. Although Orwell could not predict every later technological development, his literary imagination provides a conceptual framework for thinking about societies in which observation and communication overlap.

The phrase "Thought Police" (ch. 1) makes the ultimate objective of surveillance explicit. The state is interested not merely in criminal actions but in mental independence.

Literature reshapes society here by transforming surveillance into an unforgettable cultural symbol.

History, Memory, and Political Power

Perhaps Orwell's most profound argument is concerned about historical memory. Winston works at the Ministry of Truth, where documents are altered to reflect the Party's present position. The Ministry itself becomes an ironic symbol because it produces political falsehoods under the name of truth.

Winston recognizes the fundamental political principle: " Who controls the past controls the future" (Orwell,ch. 3).

The statement is completed by the idea that control of the present permits control of the past.The political implication is clear: whoever controls historical memory can influence political legitimacy.

The Party therefore continuously destroys evidence of its previous mistakes. Individuals who disappear become: ""unpersons" (ch. 4).

Their existence is removed from official history.

Orwell's warning is particularly significant because societies depend upon collective memory. If citizens cannot establish what happened yesterday, they become dependent upon whoever controls today's information.

Winston's desire to preserve memoryas it is consequently an act of resistance.His diary represents a private archive against the state's official archive. The importance of this theme can be connected with Arnold's conception of criticism as a cultural activity that attempts to see things clearly. Orwell's novel suggests that critical consciousness becomes impossible when the historical record itself has been politically manipulated.

Doublethink and the Destruction of Rationality

Another major mechanism of political domination is doublethink.

The term "doublethink" (ch. 9) refers to the ability to hold contradictory ideas simultaneously while accepting both as true when required by the Party.

The slogans of the Party illustrate this principle:- "War is peace"** (ch.. 1)

- "Freedom is slavery"(ch. 1)

-"Ignorance is strength"(ch. 1)

These contradictions are not accidental. They demonstrate how political language can reverse ordinary meanings.

The slogan "War is peace" transforms violence into a condition of stability. "Freedom is slavery" makes independence appear dangerous. "Ignorance is strength" converts intellectual limitation into a political virtue. The importance of these slogans lies in their simplicity. They are short enough to be memorized and repeated. Their repetition replaces argument.

This demonstrates the relationship between propaganda and literary form. Orwell himself uses slogans as literary devices, but he simultaneously exposes their political function.

Propaganda and the Ministry of Truth

The Ministry of Truth provides one of the novel's most powerful examples of political irony.

Winston's occupation involves rewriting newspaper articles and historical documents. The Party does not simply suppress information; it continuously produces new versions of the past.The novel's bureaucratic vocabulary includes:" memory hole"(ch. 4),a device through which unwanted documents are destroyed.

The term is deceptively ordinary. Its significance emerges only when readers understand what it represents: institutionalized historical erasure. Orwell thereby demonstrates the literary power of naming. A complicated political process becomes memorable because it is transformed into a concrete image.

The Ministry of Truth also illustrates how bureaucratic institutions can conceal violence behind neutral terminology. Orwell's satire exposes the gap between institutional names and institutional functions.

This concern is directly related to "Politics and the English Language," in which Orwell argues against vague and misleading political language. The Orwell Foundation

The Individual and the State

The conflict between Winston and the Party is ultimately a conflict between individual consciousness and political authority. Winston's first act of resistance is writing: "DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER"(Orwell, ch. 1).

The significance of this sentence is disproportionate to its physical form. It is merely writing in a diary, but in Oceania private writing is politically dangerous.

Writing preserves individuality.- Winston later asks: "If there is hope"(ch. 7), and he associates that hope with the proles. The proles constitute the majority of the population, yet they remain outside the Party's central ideological machinery.

Winston believes: "If there is hope, it lies in the proles"(ch. 7). The statement reveals his belief that ordinary human life might survive beneath the political structure.

His political consciousness is therefore initially based upon memory, individual thought, and the possibility of collective resistance.

Class and the Social Structure of Oceania:- Orwell's dystopia is also a study of class. The society is divided among Party leaders, Party members, and the proles. Winston's observation that the proles form the majority raises an important political question: why does a minority maintain power over the majority?

The answer involves surveillance, propaganda, fear, and the fragmentation of consciousness.

The proles are controlled partly through distraction. The Party produces entertainment, lottery systems, popular songs, and sensational material while restricting access to serious political knowledge.

The expression: "proles"(ch. 7) therefore represents much more than a social category. It represents the relationship between class, political awareness, and power.

Orwell's analysis remains significant because it suggests that political domination does not always require continuous direct coercion. A population can also be controlled through distraction and the management of information.

Love as Political Resistance:- Winston's relationship with Julia is also politically significant. In Oceania, sexuality is regulated because independent emotional relationships threaten the Party's control. Winston's attraction to Julia therefore becomes a form of rebellion. Julia's character demonstrates another dimension of political consciousness. Unlike Winston, who is interested in historical truth and political theory, Julia initially resists the Party through personal behaviour. Their relationship creates a private space beyond Party authority. The phrase:

*"I love you" (ch. 1), becomes politically meaningful because genuine intimacy challenges the state's attempt to organize every aspect of human existence.

The Party ultimately recognizes this threat. O'Brien's explanation of power is brutally concise: "The object of power is power" (ch. 3). This statement reveals the difference between Orwell's political system and a government that claims to rule for public welfare. The Party does not ultimately seek power as a means toward another objective. Power itself is the objective.

Room 101 and the Destruction of the Self:- The culmination of Winston's resistance occurs in Room 101.The expression: "Room 101" (ch. 5) has become one of the novel's most recognizable symbols. It represents the final stage of political domination i. e. psychological destruction.

The Party does not merely want Winston to obey. It wants him to surrender his independent conception of reality. The climax occurs when Winston betrays Julia under extreme psychological pressure.His transformation demonstrates the Party's ultimate achievement: it has entered the private consciousness of the individual. The final statement:

"He loved Big Brother"(ch. 6) is deliberately devastating.

The novel begins with Winston's attempt to resist Big Brother and concludes with his emotional submission to him.

The circular structure demonstrates the power of totalitarian ideology to reshape identity itself.

Orwell and T. S. Eliot: Literature and Cultural Continuity

T. S. Eliot's theory of literary tradition helps explain the continuing cultural life of Nineteen Eighty-Four. Eliot argues that a new work enters an existing literary order and alters that order.

Orwell's novel has unquestionably done so. The vocabulary created by the novel has become part of the language of political criticism. "Orwellian," "Big Brother," "doublethink," "Newspeak," and "thoughtcrime" are no longer restricted to literary discussion. This demonstrates a central way in which literature reshapes society: it gives society new metaphors. Once a literary metaphor becomes culturally established, it can influence how people interpret political events.

The literary imagination thus becomes part of social consciousness.

Orwell and Matthew Arnold - Literature as Critical Consciousness

Arnold's emphasis on criticism as a means of circulating significant ideas also illuminates Orwell's achievement. A dystopian novel does not simply tell readers that authoritarianism is dangerous. It allows them to experience its consequences imaginatively.

Orwell's fiction therefore performs a critical function. The reader becomes a witness to the manipulation of history, language, and identity. The novel teaches readers to ask questions: Who controls information? Who decides what counts as truth?

Who controls historical memory? What happens when language becomes political propaganda?

Can individuals preserve independent consciousness under surveillance? These questions extend beyond the novel itself. They become part of the reader's intellectual equipment.

Orwell and F. R. Leavis: Literature and Moral Seriousness :- F. R. Leavis's approach to literature emphasizes the importance of moral seriousness, cultural judgment, and the relationship between literature and lived experience. From this perspective, Nineteen Eighty-Four_possesses significance because its political arguments are inseparable from human experience.

Orwell does not present abstract discussions of dictatorship. He presents fear, loneliness, desire, memory, physical pain, betrayal, and psychological destruction.

Political theory becomes personal experience.:- This is one reason the novel remains powerful. Its ideas are embodied in a human narrative.

The reader does not simply understand that authoritarianism is oppressive; the reader experiences Winston's increasing loss of freedom.

Literature as Social Warning

The greatest achievement of Nineteen Eighty-Four may therefore be its ability to function as a warning.

Orwell's purpose was not simply prediction. The novel is better understood as a warning about tendencies that may emerge when political institutions gain excessive control over information, language, history, and private life. The Orwell Foundation describes the novel as a satire on totalitarianism and emphasizes its continuing significance in relation to modern political systems. (The Orwell Foundation) Its enduring relevance demonstrates that literature can outlive the immediate circumstances that produced it. The novel was written in 1949, but its central questions remain available to later generations also. This is the point at which literature becomes socially transformative. A reader who encounters Nineteen Eighty-Four learns not merely about fictional Oceania, but about the fragility of truth, memory, and individual autonomy.

Literature Reshapes Society

The title of this study—"Literature Reshapes Society"—therefore describes a reciprocal relationship.

Society shapes literature, but literature subsequently reshapes the way society interprets itself. Orwell transformed political fears into literary symbols. "Big Brother" transformed surveillance into an unforgettable cultural image.

"Newspeak" transformed linguistic manipulation into a recognizable political concept. "Doublethink" gave society a word for the acceptance of contradictory beliefs. "Thoughtcrime" provided a vocabulary for the political policing of consciousness. "Room 101" became a symbol of ultimate psychological punishment.

These concepts demonstrate that literature can enter public consciousness in ways that political theory alone may not achieve.

The novel's social power therefore lies not merely in its plot but in its vocabulary.

Conclusion

George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four demonstrates that literature possesses the ability to reshape social and political consciousness. The

novel converts complex political problems into characters, symbols, slogans, institutions, and memorable concepts. Through Winston Smith's experience, readers encounter the dangers of surveillance, propaganda, historical revision, linguistic manipulation, political conformity, and psychological domination.

Orwell's own essays provide an important theoretical foundation for understanding this achievement. In "Why I Write," he explicitly identifies political purpose as one of the major forces behind serious writing and argues that writers inevitably engage with the political world. The Orwell Foundation In "Politics and the English Language," he emphasizes the relationship between language and political thought. The Orwell Foundation Nineteen Eighty-Four_ transforms these theoretical concerns into fiction.

The novel's relationship with Matthew Arnold, T. S. Eliot, and F. R. Leavis further demonstrates that literature can operate as criticism, cultural memory, and moral inquiry. Arnold's idea of criticism as a means of seeing reality clearly is particularly relevant to Orwell's struggle against political distortion. Eliot's conception of literary tradition helps explain how Orwell's vocabulary has entered subsequent cultural discourse. Leavis's emphasis on moral seriousness helps explain why Orwell's political ideas remain powerful because they are embodied in individual human experience.

Thus, Nineteen Eighty-Four demonstrates that the power of literature does not depend upon providing direct political instructions. Its power lies in changing the reader's imaginative relationship with reality.

The reader who has encountered Big Brother may recognize surveillance differently. The reader who understands Newspeak may become more suspicious of political euphemism. The reader who understands doublethink may recognize the danger of accepting contradictory claims without questioning them. The reader who understands the destruction of Winston's memory may become more conscious of the importance of historical truth. Literature therefore reshapes society by reshaping the minds of its readers. Orwell's novel remains important precisely

because its warning has become part of the cultural vocabulary through which later generations interpret political power. The continuing use of its concepts demonstrates that a literary work can escape the boundaries of its historical moment and become part of society's collective consciousness.Nineteen Eighty-Four therefore asks readers to defend the conditions that make independent thought possible: language, memory, truth, love, historical consciousness, and the freedom to recognize reality. In this sense, literature does not merely represent society." It teaches society how to look at itself."

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George Orwell himself explicitly describes his political purpose as an attempt to alter people's ideas about the society they should strive for, which makes him unusually valuable as both the primary novelist and a theorist of his own political writing.

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