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Articles on

Identity crisis of Sylheti Hindus, the impact of Dalit literature in Indian Cinema, significance of the wounded child, the fault lines of the postcolonial nation-state statecraft, *Legend of the Snow Queen*, *Flights*, *The Folded Earth*, Israeli and Palestinian Cinema, digital resistance literature, *Wanderings of a Pilgrim in Search of the Picturesque*, a reading of select works of Jhumpa Lahiri, 'Bio-Icon', *Wonder Woman*, *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, Eugene Ionesco, *Umrao Jan Ada*, *Death of a Salesman*, Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter, *Lights Out*, depiction of cast in the contemporary retelling of the *Mahabharata*

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'Displaced' and 'Excluded': Examining Identity Crisis of Sylheti Hindus through Select Fiction in English from Shillong

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Abstract

The paper seeks to examine the identity crisis Sylheti Hindu Bengalis have faced owing to displacement from their homeland and the 'outsider' status given by the local population of Shillong, where many of them migrated. The 1979 communal riot against the Bengalis, the use of terms like *dkhar* (foreigners) and Bangladeshis, and several laws laid down by the Meghalaya government have led towards further migration of the community to other parts of the country. The paper looks into the liminal sense of identity and home among Sylheti Hindu Bengali migrants as portrayed in Siddhartha Deb's *The Point of Return* (2002) and Nilanjan P. Choudhury's *Shillong Times: A Story of Friendship and Fear* (2018). The paper attempts to address the dilemma of the community through a study of migrant characters in select novels.

Keywords: Sylheti Hindu; identity crisis; Shillong; home; migrants

Introduction

Understanding a person's identity and what it entails is very complex. Researchers and social scientists have taken this term and given meaning to it through different contexts. A diverse set of discourses revolve around identity, which also takes shape from them. 'Identification' is a process that does not make sense 'outside relationships' (Jenkins 5). Bucholtz and Hall write:

> Although identity work frequently involves obscuring differences among those with a common identity, it may also serve to manufacture or underscore differences between in-group members and those outside the group. The perception of shared identity often requires as its foil a sense of alterity, of an *Other* who can be positioned against those socially constituted as the *same* (Mary Bucholtz and Kira Hall 371).

Two things are crucial in terms of identity, first, the self-identity or how one identifies oneself; and second, identity as imposed by others. Indian economist Amartya Sen states, "However, even when we are clear about how we want to see ourselves, we may still have difficulty in being able to persuade others to see us in just that way…Our freedom to assert our personal identities can sometimes be extraordinarily limited in the eyes of others, no matter how we see ourselves" (6). This clash of identity is pertinent, moreover in the North-

East because the various tribal groups were also in the "search of identity, for the sense of belonging and for self-determination in a new social order" (Sarin 77). V I K Sarin points out that this "need of group belongingness and group anchorage which cemented these tribals…into a socio-psychological unity or 'we-group' with strong sentiments of ethnocentrism and exalted codes while viewing 'other groups' and their ways with suspicion, hostility and sometimes contempt" (77). The paper deals with the identity crisis of the displaced Sylheti Hindus through two novels from Shillong – Siddhartha Deb's *The Point of Return* (2002) and Nilanjan P. Choudhury's *Shillong Times: A Story of Friendship and Fear* (2018). Deb's work is set between the 1970s and 80s, and Choudhury's work is in the 1980s.

The partition of India has played a significant role in displacing people across created borders. While major literature on the partition focusses on the shift in the Western part of India with works like *A Train to Pakistan* and *Ice Candy Man*, the Eastern region of India is less discussed. The nation's division that went along the lines of religion gave rise to many issues. The migration of Sylheti Hindus, or as one may call 'forced migration,' led to an identity crisis at different levels. Severed from their home, they lost their language, culture, and above everything, their sense of belonging. Vipasha Bhardwaj, in her article "Mapping the discourse of home and identity," writes, "The Sylheti population in India continues to negotiate their identity in and outside Assam. Due to the absence of any territorial affinity with Bengal and a troubled political location in the Northeast, their identity, although distinct in character, had to grapple with the homogenizing motive of the Assamese and the indifference shown by larger Bengali nation" (Bhardwaj).

Historical Background of Sylhet

In 1826 the British annexed Assam and made it a part of the Bengal province, along with other regions of present-day Bihar and Orissa. The first partition of Bengal and Assam came in 1874. Moushumi Dutta Pathak writes in her book, "The colonial authorities, for maximum utilisation of resources for the fulfilment of their economic interest, decided to incorporate the Bengali speaking district of Sylhet, an integral part of Bengal historically, linguistically, geographically and ethnically, into the new province of Assam." Agitations followed because of the inclusion of the Bengali-speaking Sylhet into the Assamese-dominated province. Fear and insecurity gripped their minds as the Bengalis started seeking employment in government services. In 1905, more Bengali-speaking districts were merged into Assam, creating the province of Eastern Bengal and Assam. In 1947, Sylhet got its final blow when following the Sylhet Referendum; it was severed from the nation India itself. The Referendum gave people of the Sylhet district within the Assam province of British India a choice to stay with Assam and thus remain a part of India or join the newly formed nation of Pakistan. Sylhet, a Muslim-majority area, opted for Pakistan and thus got incorporated within East Pakistan or present-day Bangladesh. Fear of termination led the Sylheti-speaking Hindu community to leave their homeland Sylhet and migrate to West Bengal and the nearby state of undivided Assam. Lamenting the fate of this group of Hindus, Anindita Dasgupta and Neeta Singh

writes, "Unlike the creation of 'two' Punjabs and 'two' Bengals—which were also dramatically partitioned at the same time—no 'second' Sylhet was created on the Indian side of the border."

Historical Background of Shillong

Shillong, one of the populous towns in the Northeast, was "no more than a cluster of villages in the pre-colonial era" (Hasan 83). It was with the advent of the British that it began growing as a place of settlement. The East Khasi hills where Shillong is located reminded the British of the cool climate of Scotland. Apart from that, like other hilly landscapes, this served the British as a place for the "pursuit of private interests, a site where the British could re-create some semblance of a bourgeois civic life" (Kennedy 88). It became the headquarters for Khasi and Jaintia Hills in 1864, and in 1874, when Bengal and Assam were separated into two provinces, Shillong was made the administrative headquarters of Assam. This was followed by a massive influx of people from the rest of India to Shillong to work in government departments for trade and manual labour, among others. Kennedy mentions that half of the population consisted of the indigenous Khasis, and the other half were "Bengali government clerks. Bihari dhobis and small traders, Marwari merchants, Assamese servants, and Nepali porters and graziers" (190). In one of his essays, "Shillong: The Making and Unmaking of a Cosmopolity," Binayak Dutta rightly says, "the seeds of Shillong's cosmopolitanism were embedded in its colonial character" (Dutta).

However, this cosmopolitan nature started giving way to the rise of an ethnocentric attitude with the coming of print culture among the Khasi. The Christian missionaries gave a script to the Khasis and encouraged learning. This promoted in them a sense of identity. The different families and clans began identifying themselves as a single Khasi community. This identification based on ethnicity made them hostile towards people from the plains. Schlesinger points out, "identity is as much about exclusion as it is about inclusion, and the critical factor for defining the social *boundary* which defines the group with respect to other groups…not the cultural reality within these borders" (qtd. in Hasan 101). This group consciousness among the tribal population peaked when they began to feel excluded because of the dominant Assamese politics and sentiment after Independence. Following their demands, in 1972, the Khasi-Garo and Jaintia hills were carved out of Assam to form a separate state of Meghalaya. Shillong, the capital of former Assam, now became the capital town of Meghalaya. In the subsequent years, the people saw a rise in ethnocentrism, and the first communal riot against outsiders occurred in 1979 (*The Shillong Times*). Subir Bhaumik writes, "...the new tribal states were much more intolerant in dealing with minority issues than had been the case in Assam" (253).

"Imagined communities" or Identity and Citizenship

The nineteenth and twentieth century saw the rise of nations and nationalism across the globe. Anderson defines a nation as "an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign." Different factors play their part in carrying among the

nation's people the "image of their communion" (6). He explains the word 'limited' in his definition; he says that the nation has "finite boundaries beyond which lie other boundaries" (7). Bringing this into the context of India's partition and subsequent migration of the Sylheti Hindus, one can say that the people residing within this created boundary gave them the identity of Indians. Citizenship was, and still is, the most important marker of one's identity. This legal identity in the broadest category, that is, as an Indian, allows one to move and conduct one's business within the country freely. Problems arise when restrictions are placed by the states and sub-groups within the nation. These make it difficult for someone who does not form part of these small 'in-groups' to carry on with their everyday lives.

The case with the displaced Sylhetis is a similar one. They occupied a peripheral or a marginal position within the statehood of undivided Assam and later within the state of Meghalaya. The North-Eastern region, after the Independence, was a major site for growing hostility and violence. Comprised of diverse linguistic and ethnic groups, it saw one group fighting against the other for the assertion of their rights and autonomy. Each group wanted its state, and some even wished for a different nation. The concept of 'ethnonationalism' is very appropriate here; like any politically and geographically defined nation, the ethnic groups of the northeast aspired for sovereignty and social boundaries outside which everyone was a 'foreigner.' The Bengalis were most affected by this kind of attitude, for instance, *Bongal Kheda* ('drive out the Bengalis') movement in Assam during the 1960s and *Beh Dkhar* ('chase the Dkhars away') in Meghalaya during the 1970s. This is true even at current times; only recently, in 2020, there were banners put up with statements like "All Meghalaya Bengalis are Bangladeshis" and "Khasiland for Khasis; Foreigners Go Away" (Ranhotra).

Apart from the movements, the several policies of the Meghalaya government also proved hurdles in the migrants' way of claiming their identity. The Meghalaya Land Transfer Act of 1971 prohibits non-tribals from buying land. The state government jobs are also mostly reserved for the Khasi-Garo and Jaintia. As the identity of a group also rests on the rights that he gets, this migrant community is a forever refugee in Shillong. They are deprived of enjoying the full rights of a citizen. Sanjib Baruah, talking about the migrants in the Northeast, uses the term 'denizens' because of the limited rights they exercise. He writes, "…the citizenship discourse is qualitatively different from the homeland discourse of northeast India that makes denizens and perpetual foreigners out of ethnically defined outsiders and their descendants" (63). Patricia Mukhim, a prominent journalist and editor of the newspaper *The Shillong Times* titles one of her articles, "Non tribals in Meghalaya – non citizens or half citizens?" The terms 'denizens,' 'non citizens,' and 'half citizens' denote the position of this migrant community within the legal purview. According to Mukhim, the nationalism that prevails among the Khasis is "parochial because it excludes the others" ("Turbulence"). Rakhee Bhattacharya points out, "The Indian Constitution does not have any provision to discriminate against its citizens as 'racial others' or 'foreigners' in their homeland, and Shillong cannot be an exception to such fundamental citizenship norms" (*The Statesman*).

From Sylhet to Shillong: The Shifting Place and Identity

The place of residence is a significant factor in deciding an individual's identity. Theorists have come up with concepts like 'place identity' (Proshansky), and 'topophilia' (Tuan), thereby placing geography as a crucial element in shaping the behaviour, emotions and identity of individuals and a community. E.C. Relph's work *Place and Placelessness* is crucial for understanding the relationship between place and people. He brings in two fundamental concepts, that is, of 'insideness' and 'outsideness.' Commenting on this, David Seamon & Jacob Sowers write:

> If places are to be more thoroughly understood, one needs a language whereby we can identify particular place experiences in terms of the intensity of meaning and intention that a person and place hold for each other. For Relph, the crux of this lived intensity is identity with place, which he defines through the concept of insideness—the degree of attachment, involvement, and concern that a person or group has for a particular place… On the other hand, a person can be separate or alienated from place, and this mode of place experience is what Relph calls *outsideness*. (45)

This sense of identity is disrupted on account of migration and displacement. The identity of the displaced individual and the community is constantly shaped by what goes "in between leaving and living" (1), a term taken from Sadan and Pushpendra's work *Home, Belonging and Memory in Migration*. The two novels explore this instability of identity regarding the displaced Sylhetis.

Shillong Times: A Story of Friendship and Fear

Shillong was a lucrative centre for all types of jobs because of being the administrative capital of Assam province. Mr Dutta's father had come to Shillong searching for a job, and he managed to open a medicine shop. Narrating the story of his father to his son Debu, he says that life was going on quite right in Shillong, but then partition happened. The family that had moved for economic reasons could no longer return to Sylhet. Before this sudden division, Mr Dutta, with his siblings, would always spend a month at the ancestral place. Mr Dutta says,

> Like millions of people, my father now had to make a choice – India or Pakistan? The peaceful pine-covered hills of Shillong or the majestic rivers of Sylhet? He loved both equally. He thought he belonged equally to both places. But now he had to choose one country over the other, one home over another. (Choudhury 24)

He also remarks, "Overnight my father became an outsider in Bangladesh, the land of his birth," and Shillong became his father's "permanent home, and his exile" (25). The use of these words, ' home' and 'exile,' together brings a very conflicting sense of one's identity and where one belongs. For the migrant, his identity would remain in a position of liminality, where he might be forced to 'un-belong' from his place of origin and not allowed to belong to the place of destination too.

Mr Dutta, who considers Shillong his home and place of belonging, is reluctant to leave the place even after the entire community faces grave threats. His self-determined identity conflicts with the one propagated by the local Khasi population. They see the Bengalis and the other non-tribal communities as outsiders and are determined to drive them away. Mr Dutta, who used to claim his place in Shillong with determining voice, "Let me make something absolutely clear to you once and for all today – this is my home. I was born here. I have been living here for fifty years. I will fight if I have to but I will not go anywhere", now he has no other choice but to leave the town of dreamy pleasure (135).

The book begins with the sentence, "Debu was fourteen when he first heard the word '*dkhar*'" (Choudhury 6). The incident takes place when Debu is returning from school. Three local boys make him their target and shout things like "Go back to your own country and eat your rotten fish…" and call him "Bangladeshi" (7). The term '*dkhar*' had gained a notorious meaning or association in course of Shillong's history, certainly after 1972. Used by the Khasis to refer to people from the plains, it gradually became an abusive name for the non-tribals. Mr Dutta explains to him that *dkhar* means foreigner, which Debu mistakes for "those people in English movies." Mr Dutta responds, "They called you a foreigner because you don't look like them" (16). The words '*Dkhar*,' 'foreigner', and 'Bangladeshi' are used interchangeably for the Sylheti migrants. For a young person born and brought up in Shillong, who has no memory of other place, it takes him a while to ultimately come to terms with it. As Bengt G. Karlsson mentions in his article, "…not all are welcome or allowed to belong to the city. Some forever remain *dkhars*, outsiders, despite being born and raised in Shillong" (32).

The Point of Return

The other novel, *The Point of Return*, traces the journey of Dr Dam. A doctor working with the Assam Veterinary Department, Dam has to move from Sylhet to Silchar with his family at partition. Later, he gets transferred to Shillong in 1969, while his parents and brothers stayed in Silchar. Dr Dam's wish to build and live in his own house comes true very late in his life. He builds a one-room house in Gauhati in the 1960s, only to be demolished by the government. By the time he learns about this, "it was [is] too late to buy and or house in Shillong as new laws prohibited 'outsiders' from acquiring land there" (Borah 223). At last, building a house in Silchar becomes "a last-ditch attempt to find a resting place" (Deb 43). The narrator writes, "That was where we would live after he had retired, he said firmly; no more government quarters, no more rented houses with strangely shaped rooms, but finally a house of our own" (37). However, ironically, the ties with his relatives are so fragile that Dr Dam's wife and their son Babu cannot connect with this larger family.

Dr Dam spends most of his life in Shillong but fails to accept it as his home. Babu, the narrator, says that his father "had not shaken off the stigma of the refugee" (43). As a post-partition and post-colonial refugee, Dam's effort to establish his identity lies in having his own home. The meaning of the term 'refugee' is fluid and appears to be derogatory in many

contexts, for it is used to denote those who do not belong. (Murshid 7). The frequently drawn ethnic lines and "fresh cartographic boundaries" (Deb 39) ensured that the identity of people like him always remained in flux.

The novel is a retrospective journey of Babu to his childhood days and an attempt to figure out his father's fears, anxieties, and reclusive nature. Examining the novel through the themes of 'return' and 'memory,' Jayashree Borah writes, "In the absence of narratives, stories and personal diaries, the son has to examine the various actions, words and silences of his father to derive meaning and to draw connections" (222). Like his father, who left Sylhet, he leaves his birthplace Shillong, yet, Babu is able to claim it for himself after letting it go. He says, "Having lived there once, that piece of earth is never released by our clutching hands, unless it be when we die…I truly become the place. I am my own hometown" (207-8). The identity of a place is thus carried on as etched in one's mind. He associates himself with Shillong, but that does not mean he still yearns for it; in contrary, he has "truly let go" (227).

As portrayed in these two novels, the displacement made the Sylheti Hindus outsiders both at their place of origin and destination. Rianka Sarkar writes in her article, "Thus, home for them [partition migrants] is lost in the past, and their identity is hybrid and hyphenated" (1522).

Language, Culture, and Identity

Another important marker of identity is language. According to John E. Joseph, "language and identity are ultimately inseparable" (13). People are often categorised based on the language they speak. In the context of the displaced Sylheti, identity, place, and language intertwine. Those settled in Shillong among the Khasis found no commonality with them. They could not speak the Khasi language, and their culture and appearance are altogether different. This distinction never allowed them to be a part of the dominant community. They may somehow become an integral part of the landscape, but the minority status got permanently attached to them.

An additional crisis arises because of linguistic differences with the Bengalis from Calcutta. Though people from both Sylhet or East Bengal and Calcutta speak the Bengali language, there are variations in the use of certain words, pronunciation, and tone. West Bengal Hindus ridiculed their dialect and customs and the refugees were seen as a liability to the state (Bandyopadhyay 64). There is still this debate between these two forms of speech. While some consider Sylheti a different language, others consider it a Bengali dialect but somewhat inferior. There is also evidence of a different script called Sylheti Nagri, "which is believed to have developed to cater to the needs of the dialect" (Bhattacharjee 119). After partition and loss of homeland, the first-generation Sylheti migrants felt the need to at least hold on to their mother tongue for verbal communication as the script was already lost. This gradually changed with later generations as their self-identity began taking shape in two significant ways. Considering it, one group began to identify with the larger Bengali community, leaving behind their Sylheti culture and identity. This change is more feasible with migration to places

resided by Bengalis. The other group lost connection with the larger community itself; there remained little essence of "Bengaliness." These young people cannot even write or speak the language. However, it is also notable that despite adopting the ways of the host community, they are still the 'other' (Dev 83).

Shillong Times

The narrator of *Shillong Times* states that the two languages

> were as different as chalk from cheese… To begin with, there was the minefield of language. Like most Shillong Bengalis, Mr Dutta spoke Sylheti, a dialect of Bengali that was almost incomprehensible to his Calcuttan relatives… For example, the sentence 'He is very dirty' would be spoken in Calcatian as, 'O na, bheeshon nongra'; while in Sylheti, it would become far more evocative: 'Hota akta phyarot.' (103).

The dilemma over one's place within this linguistic community and the fear of their speech being mocked would always be there among the Sylheti speakers. It was not easy for people like Mr Dutta to have a relaxed thoughts about moving to Calcutta. He would hear voices whispering into his ears:

> *Sylheti is not Bengali. In fact, it isn't even a proper language.*
> *It's just pidgin…*
> *The Calcuttans make fun of you. And why shouldn't they?*
> *You Sylhetis are so funny!* (104-5)

The narrator further goes on, "The voices convinced them that as a language, Sylheti was inferior to Calcatian. From this they internalized the notion that Sylhetis were inferior to Calcuttans—they would never be as clever or as cultured as them." (105)

The Point of Return

Deb voices similar concern in his novel; he writes that the immigrants settled in Silchar "were not really Bengali, because they spoke a dialect that aroused only amusement and derision in the real center of Bengali culture and identity, in Calcutta" (Deb 107). Nonetheless, they "clung to their language fiercely" (107) because it was possibly the only thing that kept their memories of home alive. According to Boccagni, "the influence of kinship and co-ethnic groups [is noteworthy]; the more widespread and cohesive the latter, the greater the chance for homeland languages and traditions to 'survive' and be shared across generations" (76). With the majority of Silchar population being Bengali, it was not a very difficult thing to do. However, Dr Dam's further migration to Shillong posed a problem; it led to his son's estrangement from the Sylheti speech. Such alienation from one's language and culture is true of diaspora and migration. It is often seen that second or third-generation migrants speak more in the tongue of their host community or sometimes, in lingua-franca. Apart from the Khasi language, English is commonly spoken in Shillong. The novel mentions that Babu and Dr Dam communicates in Bengali only in the presence of the former's mother. Thus, Babu finds it "difficult even to conceive of a conversation with my [his] grandparents, their speech

slushed over with the earthly village dialect that clung to them forty years after Partition" (105).

So, as we see, this language crisis is at several fronts for the migrants and their children. For some, it becomes a matter of difficulty in speaking in their ancestral speech; for others, their speech cultivates a sense of inferiority in their minds.

Fragmented Self-Identity

The sense of identity comes foremost from one's knowledge of oneself and the world around. According to James E. Marcia:

> "The experience of having an identity is that one has a core, a center
> that is oneself, to which experience and action can be referred. One can
> trace one's history in a meaningful way to one's present situation and can
> extend that line into probable futures" (Marcia et al. 7).

John Locke's distinction between 'man' and 'person' is important to understand this aspect of identity. Anna Whitehead in her work *Memory: The New Critical Idiom* explains the role of memory in identity process as proposed by the famous philosopher Locke. The distinction between 'same man' and 'same person' is important, for Locke, in understanding the disruption of self-consciousness. A man leading a normal life can go through a lot of changes in his behaviour and personality because of some undesirable event or incident. Thus, the 'person' does not the same, though he is the same 'man' (56-7).

Dr Dam on going through the trauma of displacement and alienation, becomes a person who cannot properly distinguish the past from the present, reality from dreams. His memories are sometime inadequate or even faulty. The crisis of identity arises at the level of his psychological self. Additionally, Dam is humiliated and verbally abused by his seniors and colleagues at office, and attacked by the mob for being a non-tribal. All these incidents shatter his self-image. Dr Dam goes through hallucinations, has traumatic dreams and he cannot even voice out his fears aloud. He is unable to cope up with the changing world and his self-identity remains stagnant. Dam still believes in working with honesty as a government servant and does not realize that Bengalis like him are not much favoured by the natives. His friend Chakraborty, on the other hand, seems to be aware of his place in the society and he moulds himself accordingly. While some get a grasp of the shift, yet there are many partition victims like Dam who live in a state of limbo. The connection with the past is so strong that it affects every phase of their lives thereafter.

Conclusion

The meaning of identity has gone through a lot of changes from being pre-determined and absolute to being a construct that is often hegemonic in nature. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu stresses on how the identities arbitrarily formed around 'regional' and 'ethnic' markers, once established, appear very real and natural (221). The discourses of postmodernism and postcolonialism have contributed in opening up to new possibilities for looking into the

complexity of identity. Such outlook can broaden the mind of the people to take a turn from homogenous inclusion or formation of community towards a heterogenous one where differences are both respected and included. Amartya Sen remarks on the need to adopt and promote a pluralistic concept of identity, where an individual can be seen as belonging to separate groups simultaneously (Prologue). The question is of prioritizing one over the other given the situation he/she is in. As human beings, one should be thoughtful enough to value an identity that gives a sense of inclusion into the larger public sphere. The host community should make the environment favourable for these migrants so the migrant sees his/her identity not in a state of crisis but rather as something more encompassing.

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Caste Unveiled: The Impact of Dalit Literature and Indian Cinema in Exposing Dalit Realities in India

KOMAL BHATT & DIVYABHA VASHISTH

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Abstract

A potent literary movement and cinematic representation of Dalits, historically oppressed and underprivileged populations, have captured their real experiences, aspirations, and difficulties inside the Indian caste system. This article examines the vital contribution of Indian cinema and Dalit literature in illuminating the complex realities and difficulties experienced by Dalits in India. The first section of the essay examines Dalit literature, which first became a potent literary force in the middle of the 20th century and later developed into a thriving genre, through their novels, poems, short tales, and autobiographies, Dalit writers offer a profound insight into the caste-based prejudice, social justice issues, and poverty that Dalits face. This literature bridges the divide between cultures, encouraging empathy and understanding while also empowering Dalits. The second section of the essay focuses on Indian cinema's contribution to the prominence of Dalit issues. The sufferings and tenacity of Dalit communities have been vividly portrayed in films, which have been crucial in spreading awareness of caste-based injustices and the need for social transformation. Movies have been successful at challenging preconceptions, fostering discourse, and highlighting caste-related concerns by accurately depicting the complexities of caste dynamics.

Keywords:- Dalits, social injustice, identity, cultural representation

Introduction

To emphasize the experiences, traumas, and aspirations of Dalits in India, Dalit literature and Indian cinema are crucial. In the Indian caste system, Dalits, also known as Scheduled castes or earlier "untouchables" are historically underprivileged and persecuted communities. To challenge caste-based discrimination and increase awareness of the social and economic problems Dalits experience, both forms of art and expression have made significant contributions. In India, caste-based prejudice has persisted as a chronic social problem, maintaining long-standing inequalities, and marginalizing some groups, particularly the Dalits. Dalits, formerly referred to as "Untouchables" have experienced systemic persecution and exclusion from mainstream society, placing them at a significant disadvantage on the social, economic, and cultural levels. Despite these difficulties, Dalit literature and Indian cinema have become effective resources for illuminating the underreported struggles of the Dalit people. The goal of the essay is to examine the significant contributions of Indian cinema and

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Dalit literature in exposing the realities of Dalit life in modern India. When Dalit authors attempted to use their writing to establish their identity, dignity, and aspirations in the middle of the 20th century, the literary movement gathered steam as a fundamental facet of the literature of India. Dalit literature gives authors a platform to discuss their personal viewpoints, feelings, and experiences with caste-based prejudice and social injustice (Prasad 78).

In addition, Indian cinema has been essential in highlighting Dalit stories. Filmmakers have addressed a wide range of viewers through the visual media, igniting debates about the complexities of caste dynamics and the difficulties faced by Dalit people (Chatterjee 112). The strength of cinema resides in its capacity to arouse feelings and encourage empathy, which has fostered a greater awareness of the struggles encountered by Dalits in a firmly entrenched caste-based society (Kumar 235). This paper intends to highlight the transforming influence both artistic mediums have had on societal perspectives and the struggle for social reforms by analyzing major works in both Dalit literature and Indian cinema. It will also stress how important these portrayals are for fostering awareness, conversation, and empathy about the persistent problem of caste-based discrimination. This study aims to add to the continuing discussion on Dalit empowerment, cultural representation, and the urgent need for social change through a thorough analysis of a few literary masterpieces. We can promote a more inclusive and just society that recognizes the past injustices experienced by the Dalit community and strives toward a future free from the chains of caste discrimination by stressing the value of Dalit voices in the spheres of literature and film.

Dalit Literature: Empowering Voices Resistance and Identity.

Dalit writing goes beyond the limitations of traditional literary expression and focuses on the real voices of the underclass. To express the experiences and ambitions of the Dalit people, a compelling and transformative literary movement known as Dalit Literature has developed in India. Dalits, who have historically been persecuted and disenfranchised within the caste system, have discovered a potent platform via literature to proclaim their identity and fight societal injustices. The literary movement serves as a vehicle for social change and not just drawing attention to the problems experienced by Dalits.

The well-known social reformer and excellent author Dr. B.R. Ambedkar is one of the key figures in Dalit literature. In the world of Dalit literature and movements, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, a legendary figure in India's social and political history, occupies a prominent position. Ambedkar was a visionary social reformer, lawyer, and politician in addition to being a prolific writer who used his writing skills to fight for the rights and dignity of the Dalit population, which was under oppression. His key text *Annihilation of Caste* is one of his best-known writings, challenging the caste system's core foundation and advocating its destruction. Ambedkar calls for the total abolition of the caste system in his landmark book which dissects its oppressive structure. This important essay underlines the need for social

transformation and refutes the prevalent ideas of caste-based inequality (Ambedkar 67–89). The dominant ideas of superiority and inferiority based on caste are sharply criticized. Ambedkar vehemently disagrees with the idea of a benign caste structure and maintains that true democracy can only exist when every person is treated equally and has access to the same chances and rights.

Omprakash Valmiki's autobiographical account *Jonathan: A Dalit's Life* is another essential piece of Dalit literature. When it comes to caste-based atrocities and the resilience of the Dalit spirit, Valmiki's book offers a genuine and honest account of what it was like to grow up as a Dalit in rural India. He highlights the persistent discrimination that manifests in every aspect of their life, from access to school and healthcare to fundamental human dignity, by eloquently describing the suffering and indignities faced by his family and community. Readers are greatly moved by the author's frank and unvarnished account of his life events, which forges an emotional bond and inspires empathy. The complexities of Valmiki's experiences are captured in his evocative and compelling language, which also challenges the readers to face the harsh realities of caste-based prejudice. Additionally, Dalit women writers have contributed significantly to the movement by providing distinctive viewpoints on intersectionality and gender-based injustice. Mahasweta Devi has made significant literary contributions, and her book *Breasts Stories*, exposes the misery of Dalit women while highlighting the significance of gender equality within the greater fight against caste prejudice (Devi 112-130).

Dalit literature has reached beyond geographical boundaries and resonated with readers in many Indian languages and literary traditions. The broad and multifaceted nature of the movement is shown in the works *Kusumabale* (Kannada) by Devanoor Mahadeva, *Karukku* by Bama, and *Korku* song by Daya Pawar, which reflect the collective voice of Dalits from many locations. Daya Pawar's English poem "Korku Song," which represents the Dalit voice from Maharashtra, is a moving and powerful poem. The Korku tribe, an Adivasi Dalit population in the area, faces challenges and has aspirations that are highlighted by Pawar, a well-known Marathi Dalit author. The poem captures the rich cultural history and struggles indigenous groups endure in their pursuit of justice and acknowledgment.

Indian Cinema's Representation of Dalits.

In addressing caste-based prejudices and bringing Dalit issues to the fore, Indian cinema has been instrumental. Filmmakers have used the cinematic medium to depict the difficulties, discrimination, and tenacity of Dalit communities. Movies have been crucial in raising awareness of caste-based inequality and the need for social transformation because of their wide audience. Many movies have especially tackled Dalit themes and caste relations in their depictions. These films frequently focus on the difficulties Dalit people confront, their goals for social advancement, and the effects of caste discrimination on their lives. For example, Shyam Benegal's *Ankur* (1974), Nagraj Manjule's *Sairat* (2016), Anubhav Sinha's *Article 15* (2019), and Dr. Biju Kumar's *Perariyathavar* (Names Unknown, 2014) are famous Indian movies

with an emphasis on Dalit themes or characters. These movies have won praise from critics and helped to shape the way that people talk about Dalit concerns in general. Although caste-based prejudice and social injustice still pose obstacles, Dalit literature, and Indian cinema have both played vital roles in drawing attention to Dalit struggles and ambitions. To promote empathy and understanding and work toward a more inclusive and just society, these artistic forms continue to be crucial.

The highly respected Marathi film *Sairat* by Nagraj Manjule has received praise on both the domestic and international stages. The film's major plot revolves around the inter-caste romance between the lead characters, which highlights the prevalent caste dynamics and the challenges the Dalit protagonist must overcome. Dalit storylines are becoming increasingly common in Indian cinema because of the film's popularity with both audiences and critics. The intense Hindi film *Article 15* by Anubhav Sinha is based on real-life incidents. In the movie, a police officer from an upper caste investigates the case of two Dalit girls who vanished in a far-off village. Through its gripping narrative, *Article 15* highlights the entrenched prejudices and injustices present in Indian society, particularly the hardships of the Dalit people. The responsibility of depicting Dalit narratives and tackling caste-based oppression has also been taken up by Indian cinema. Filmmakers have used the movie as a potent tool to spread knowledge, dispel myths, and bring attention to the actual situation of Dalits. The relationship between Dalit literature and Indian cinema is evidence of how effective narrative can be in bringing about social transformation. Both forms of media help to reshape attitudes, create empathy, motivate group action against caste-based prejudice, and promote a more equitable and fair society.

The main concern of Vasant Moon's autobiography is the pervasive social injustice and caste-based prejudice that Dalits in India must deal with. As Moon effectively demonstrates, Dalits are placed on the lowest rung of society's hierarchical hierarchy and are thus susceptible to mistreatment and humiliation. As shown in the book, which exposes the degrading untouchability practices, Dalits are forbidden from entering temples, wells, and other public spaces, further marginalizing them.

Article 15 deals with the issue of caste-based discrimination and violence, which is widespread in rural India. The investigation demonstrates the terrible consequences of caste stereotypes by exposing the horrifying reality of the violence Dalits, especially Dalit women, confront. The film exposes the heinous crimes committed against them and the culprits' impunity.

The Dalit community's persistence and will in the face of difficulty are also highlighted in the book. Adaptability and the Battle for Dignity. Moon's narrative emphasizes their struggle for respect and equality as they navigate the challenges of an oppressive culture. The author's commitment to education and ultimate professional achievement as a writer serves as an illustration of the Dalit spirit's tenacity in the face of discrimination.

Another crucial concern in *Article 15* is the institutional apathy and corruption that sustain caste inequalities. The movie demonstrates how frequently the wealthy are helped by the police, the court system, and other institutions to maintain the status quo while failing to protect Dalits. It highlights the compelling need for structural adjustments to be made to address these injustices.

"Growing Up Untouchable in India" extensively examines the effects of caste-based discrimination on Moon's family and the greater Dalit community. The book provides an illustration of how discrimination affects social relationships, employment opportunities, and educational opportunities. It portrays Dalit group conflicts as they band together to defend their rights and self-respect.

The role of upper-caste police officer Ayan Ranjan in the film tackles the idea of privilege. Ayan learns the value of utilizing his position to seek justice and combat caste-based abuses as he investigates the case and faces his own privilege and biases. The movie puts a lot of emphasis on wealthy people's social duties to overthrow or reform an unequal society.

The autobiography *Growing Up Untouchable in India*, written by Vasant Moon, delves thoroughly into the problems of societal inequity and prejudice based on caste. In the book, he provides intimate personal stories of what it was like for him to grow up as a Dalit in rural Maharashtra. The humiliations that Moon's family and community experienced because of their caste identification paint a clear picture of the harsh reality of untouchability. He calls attention to the systemic injustice that denies Dalits access to fundamental rights like education and employment. The plot also explores the complex relationships between power, poverty, and caste dynamics, demonstrating just how pervasive the caste system is in Indian culture. Like the book, the movie *Article 15* has themes that revolve on caste-based prejudice, socioeconomic disparity, and the fight for justice. Ayan Ranjan, an upper caste police officer tasked with probing into the kidnapping of two Dalit girls, is the movie's primary character. As he investigates the case, Ayan is forced to confront the grim reality of caste-based violence and systemic corruption. The film emphasizes the widespread discrimination and oppression faced by Dalits, emphasizing the urgent need for social reform and systemic change.

Caste-based prejudice and its terrible effects on Dalits' lives are subjects that are heavily emphasized in both "Growing Up Untouchable in India" and *Article 15*. The movie employs a fictional story to represent the more general socioeconomic difficulties, whereas the autobiography offers a personal and intimate analysis of the concepts. Both works emphasize the Dalit population's tenacity and struggle for dignity. The problems raised by *Article 15* are further expanded to include institutional corruption and the role privilege plays in upholding prejudice. The film highlights the importance of admitting privilege and taking the initiative to overcome caste-based inequalities. In conclusion, the themes that repeat in both "Growing up Untouchable in India" and *Article 15* include prejudice based on caste, social injustice, and the persistence of the Dalit population. A more just and inclusive society that upholds the

rights and dignity of every person, regardless of caste or socioeconomic standing, is called for in these works, which serve as forceful criticisms of the urgent need for social change.

Growing Up Untouchable in India, an autobiography by Vasant Moon, adopts a very introspective and unique approach. As a Dalit, Moon shares his personal life story, giving an honest and unvarnished account of his experiences. Focusing on the psychological and emotional impacts of caste-based prejudice on Moon and his family, the story develops in a raw and passionate manner. *Article 15* portrays social injustice and discrimination based on caste in a more cinematic manner. The movie uses fictional people and events to tell a wider story that was informed by actual occurrences. The plan effectively makes its point through suspense, drama, and social satire.

Vasant Moon's autobiography, "Growing Up Untouchable in India," takes a very introspective and distinctive tack. Moon discusses his own life story as a Dalit, providing an open and unreserved portrayal of his experiences. The plot unfolds in a direct and passionate way, focusing on the psychological and emotional effects of caste-based prejudice on Moon and his family.

Article 15 is a film production that uses visual storytelling techniques to tell its story. To thoroughly immerse spectators in the mood of the film, the technique makes use of powerful visuals, emotive language, and evocative sequences. The emotional effect of the story is enhanced by the film's photography and direction.

Through his story, Moon reveals the difficulties that Dalits in India face daily. By detailing the prejudice encountered in education, the workplace, and interpersonal interactions, he creates a vivid picture of the complex web of social hierarchy. The approach successfully captures the particulars of daily life as well as the enduring effects of caste-based discrimination on many aspects of daily life.

The approach involves employing made-up characters like Ayan Ranjan (played by Ayushmann Khurrana) and a made-up Hamlet setting to explore the wider problems of caste-based prejudice. By utilizing fictitious elements, the film can explore a variety of character arcs and narratives, allowing for a more detailed depiction of the underlying causes of caste prejudice.

The plan is founded on Moon's perceptions of his self-identification as a Dalit and the wider impacts that the caste system has on the lives of millions of people. He muses on what it means to be an untouchable and how it affects one's sense of self and community. The narrative encourages readers to consider their own identities and privileges in order to build a deeper understanding of caste relations. *Article 15* makes good use of dramatic aspects to convey its social message. Viewers are forced to confront the terrible realities Dalits in India must deal with by the film's striking depictions of injustice and caste-based violence.

The approach adopted in "Growing up Untouchable in India" and *Article 15* contributes to the uniqueness of each work. In Moon's autobiography, the Dalit experience is explored

in-depth and emotionally, and the film's powerful social message is delivered through cinematic narrative.

Authenticity vs Observer – Moon relates the tale from his own perspective to provide it credibility. His firsthand story, which is based on his own memories, observations, and interactions, provides readers with a realistic depiction of Dalit life in rural Maharashtra. The book effectively depicts the nuanced and complex nature of his experiences while also illuminating the reality of caste-based prejudice and societal injustice thanks to the narrative perspective.

The narrative point of view in Ayan's story serves as an observer of the injustices Dalits face. As he reveals the case's real cause, the audience is exposed to the horrifying reality of caste-based violence, despotism, and institutional apathy. Through Ayan's perspective, viewers can emphasize how difficult a reality Dalits must deal with is and how urgently society has to change. In terms of the narrative perspective, "Growing Up Untouchable in India" and *Article 15* have various character perspectives and viewer relationships to the stories. Moon's autobiography, which offers a first-person narrative of the author's experiences as a Dalit, forges an emotional connection between the reader and the narrator. Alternatively, *Article 15* recounts a fictional tale from the perspective of an outsider, Ayan, enabling the audience to observe the injustices Dalits encounter via his evolving perspective.

Social Commentary – Vasant Moon's autobiography, "Growing Up Untouchable in India," is a powerful social critique of the widespread caste-based prejudice and social injustice Dalits encounter in India. The intricate workings of the caste system are examined, along with how it impacts Dalits' lives, in this book, which offers crucial insights into the need for social reform and the struggle for equality and dignity. The social commentary offered by *Article 15* on the widespread caste-based discrimination, social inequality, and structural problems with the Indian legal system is scathing. The movie employs a made-up story based on true events to show the difficult conditions Dalits must live in and the urgent need for societal reform.

Exposing Horrors of Caste-Based Discrimination – The autobiography is candid in its description of the atrocities Dalits faced in rural Maharashtra due to caste-based prejudice. Moon gives a comprehensive account of untouchability, the denial of fundamental human rights, and Dalit social isolation. From his personal experiences and those of his family, friends, and community, Moon provides a direct account of the horrific violence Dalits undergo.

The horrifying brutality Dalits, particularly Dalit women, endure in rural areas is brought to light in the movie. It demonstrates sexual assault, violence motivated by caste, and Dalit exploitation and oppression. The grim realities of caste-based atrocities, which are typically disregarded or underreported, are laid bare to *Article 15*'s readership.

Challenging Social Norms and Justice System – The societal norms that sustain caste-based prejudice are criticized in the book "Growing Up Untouchable in India". The book challenges the deeply rooted prejudices and hierarchies that continue to disadvantage Dalits in society. In reaction to Moon's narrative, which discusses the apathy and indifference of the wealthy towards the plight of Dalits, readers are advised to challenge and question the established quo to challenge the status quo.

Through Ayan Ranjan's inquiry, *Article 15* critiques the court system's inefficiency and disregard for crimes against Dalits. The movie places a lot of emphasis on how institutional biases and corruption hamper the administration of justice, sustaining caste-based violence perpetrators' impunity.

Social Reform vs Systematic Reforms – The autobiography urges social transformation and places a strong emphasis on the need to abolish the caste system. Dalits must be informed, aware of their circumstances, and unified in their battle for their rights and dignity. The book's social commentary encourages collective action against caste-based prejudice and makes the case for a more equitable and just society.

To overcome socioeconomic disparity and caste-based prejudice, *Article 15* advocates for structural improvements. The film raises awareness of the pressing need to protect the principles of social justice outlined in Article 15 of the Indian Constitution. It underlines how important it is to implement laws and policies that protect the rights and dignity of Dalits.

Both *Growing Up Untouchable in India* and *Article 15* offer incisive social commentary on caste-based discrimination and social injustice in India. To promote compassion and solidarity, the book explores the psychological and emotional impacts of discrimination on individuals and communities. On the other hand, *Article 15*, which examines systemic defects and deficiencies in the system, discusses the significance of systemic reforms to stop caste-based violence and discrimination. The social critique that *Growing Up Untouchable in India* and the flim offer enriches and elevates both works. Both advance social reform and offer crucial insights into the problematic societal norms that Dalits must contend with. The intense social criticism in these works increases empathy, awareness, and the need for collective action to eradicate caste-based prejudice and create a more equitable and just society for all.

Growing up Untouchable in India by Vasant Moon and the movie *Article 15* both add vital fresh perspectives to the subject of Dalit narratives by highlighting the pressing issue of caste-based oppression in India. The fundamental themes of both works are caste-based persecution, social inequality, and the perseverance of the Dalit minority. While Moon's autobiography provides a profoundly personal and intimate understanding of these topics, *Article 15* employs a cinematic form to portray a fictional narrative that mirrors the bigger societal concerns. "Growing up Untouchable in India" offers an honest and deeply felt account of Moon's upbringing as a Dalit person from a very introspective perspective. In contrast, *Article 15* illustrates how caste-based prejudice is institutionalized and its impacts through the dramatic and visually stunning medium of film.

The empowerment of Dalit narratives, the eradication of caste-based prejudice, and the advancement of social reform in India have all been positively helped by the Indian film industry and Dalit literature. Two notable instances of this are the influential book *Growing up Untouchable in India* by Vasant Moon and the movie *Article 15*. *Growing Up Untouchable in India,* Vasant Moon's autobiography, provides a highly intimate and introspective analysis of the struggles faced by Dalits in rural Maharashtra. By reflecting on the Dalit community's perseverance and struggle for dignity, Moon uses his personal experience to highlight the horrors of caste-based discrimination. The work functions as an illuminating social commentary, challenging conventional wisdom, advocating reform, and emphasizing the urgent need to end the caste system. But *Article 15* employs a cinematic tone to tell its tale of caste-based injustice. Through the figure of Ayan Ranjan, the movie depicts the harsh reality that Dalits must face while critiquing the flaws in the legal system and pushing for structural forms. *Article 15* is a powerful social commentary that highlights the institutional biases that encourage caste-based discrimination and violence. The fundamental themes of both works are caste-based persecution, social inequality, and the perseverance of the Dalit minority. While *Article 15* uses drama and visual storytelling to effectively convey its point, Moon's autobiography portrays a more intimate and intense encounter. By providing viewers and readers with first-hand accounts of Dalit realities, the narrative points of view in both works enhance the reality of the plot. The unifying power of Indian cinema and Dalit literature upends social norms and elevates the voices of the oppressed. These media reduce prejudice, humanize the Dalit experience, and promote empathy and collective action to eradicate caste-based injustice. By highlighting the struggles and triumphs of the Dalit people, they foster greater understanding and camaraderie and contribute to the development of a more inclusive and equal society. As Dalit literature and Indian cinema continue to converge, this artistic expression could result in a fundamental shift in society. The stories and narratives developed on these platforms foster the idea of a more egalitarian and just India while also illuminating the difficulties faced by the Dalit community. Dalit literature and Indian cinema are crucial for empowering Dalit narratives and advancing social reforms.

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Significance of the Wounded Child: A Futuristic Representation of Climate Change in *The Swan Book* by Alexis Wright

AKILANDESHWARI SRINIVASAN

Abstract

The current discourse in literary studies increasingly emphasizes the profound interconnection between human existence and the natural environment. The exploitation of nature for human advancement, coupled with the authoritative disregard for non-human entities' inherent rights to a shared planet, has precipitated an emergent threat of ecological catastrophe. The anthropocentric conquest of natural spaces, facilitated by modern science and technology, has led to widespread and irreversible dissatisfaction. This hegemonic centrism has also resulted in the violent appropriation of Indigenous landscapes, cultures, natural resources, and traditional knowledge systems, all subsumed under ill-conceived developmental paradigms, contributing significantly to climate change. Alexis Wright's novel *The Swan Book* poignantly examines the struggles of Indigenous peoples as they endeavor to restore ecological balance in Australia and reclaim their ancestral lands. Through the protagonist Oblivia, who survives amid the remnants of both present and future devastation, Wright explores the multifaceted impacts of environmental degradation. This paper investigates how Oblivia's wounded and muted existence symbolizes the global challenges of climate change, raising critical questions about the sustainability of the future in a world facing unprecedented ecological and political upheaval.

Keywords: climate change, ecological imperialism, environmental racism, bio-colonialism, muteness, resistance

Recent developments in literary studies have increasingly highlighted the profound connection between human life and ecology, emphasizing the shared responsibility humans have towards the environment. The planet, as a collective home for both human and non-human beings, faces unprecedented ecological threats due to human exploitation of natural resources for development. Such exploitation not only jeopardizes the delicate balance necessary for life on Earth but also exacerbates the complex interplay between nature, culture, and society. The relentless pursuit of progress, driven by modern science and technology, has led to the disenchantment of the world and deepened these intersecting threats. This hegemonic centrism, manifesting in environmental racism, ecological imperialism, and bio-colonialism, forcefully integrates technological developments into the sacred heritage of natural spaces, leading to the violent appropriation of Indigenous lands. This process, marked by the introduction of non-native species and European agricultural practices, as well as the commodification of

Indigenous knowledge and resources, has profound consequences, including global warming, species extinction, and the emergence of unidentifiable diseases. Moreover, these developments contribute to the displacement of communities, creating climate refugees who are forced to migrate in search of safety.

Modern advancements, often complicit with powerful socio-political forces, further exacerbate environmental destruction and climate change, encapsulated by the term "Anthropocene." This concept challenges the myth of human exceptionalism by highlighting the intertwined nature of human and non-human agency and the far-reaching impacts of human actions on the biosphere. The Anthropocene underscores a paradox where human activities, while dominating the planet, also pose existential threats that extend beyond individual lifespans and historical epochs. As a result, climate change not only leads to physical displacement, illness, and death but also inflicts psychological wounds, rendering climate refugees mute in their trauma. To mitigate the slow violence of climate change, there is an urgent need for a corrective response that reconsiders human interaction with the biosphere, emphasizing the importance of sustainable practices for the future of life on Earth.

In recent decades, there has been a notable correlation between the growing awareness of climate change and an increase in fiction that imagines drastically altered environments. Indigenous Australian literature, flourishing over the last thirty years, has been particularly attuned to the disruption and destruction of Aboriginal lands and communities, often brought about by genocidal policies. This body of literature has created a powerful intellectual space for Indigenous recovery and resistance, with fiction serving as both a means of vindication and a platform for expressing the Aboriginal life experience in experimental ways. Alexis Wright's novel *The Swan Book* (2013) stands as a poignant example of eco-dystopian fiction, depicting the struggle of Indigenous Australians to restore environmental balance and reclaim their lands, which have been objectified and exploited by colonial forces. The novel envisions a bleak future in which all life forms, including humans, are under threat due to Western colonization's exploitative practices. Wright's narrative aligns with Rob Nixon's concept of "slow violence," particularly as it affects disenfranchised minorities globally, and is reflected in the silence of both Oblivia, the protagonist, and the swans, symbolizing the pervasive and enduring impacts of climate change.

Environmental scholars have approached *The Swan Book* from various angles, with Ursula K. Heise, Adam Trexler, and Adeline Johns-Putra examining the ecopolitical implications of environmental literature and the challenges faced by authors of climate fiction. Timothy Clark, in his work *Ecocriticism on the Edge: The Anthropocene as a Threshold Concept* (2015), argues that the roots of the climate crisis lie in a failure of imagination, suggesting that literary texts play a crucial role in understanding these issues. Adam Trexler's study of climate change novels highlights the intersection between domestic and planetary concerns, while Chiara Xausa's article "Climate Fiction and the Crisis of Imagination: Alexis Wright's Carpentaria and *The Swan Book*" (2021) explores the representation of environmental and climate crises in Wright's works. Joanne Faulkner's essay, "Settler-Colonial Violence and the 'Wounded

Aboriginal Child': Reading Alexis Wright with Irene Watson (and Giorgio Agamben)" (2020), examines the figure of Oblivia as a site of contestation between First Nations sovereignty and settler sovereignty.

This research paper investigates how the life of Oblivia, the wounded Aboriginal child, symbolizes both environmental and political climate change. It explores how bio-colonialism, environmental racism, and ecological imperialism are employed as tools to stabilize and validate the research statement. The novel's portrayal of silence and muteness in the lives of Oblivia and the swans serves as a powerful metaphor for resistance against climate change. Alexis Wright's *The Swan Book* engages with themes of climate change, environmental conflict, and migration, presenting an environmentalist discourse intertwined with concepts from Aboriginal epistemology and ontology. Wright's postcolonial counter-discourse of resistance, framed within the context of climate change and the Anthropocene, suggests that the present and the presence of others are simultaneously displaced, lost, and forgotten. The novel imagines a climate-changed future, emphasizing the urgency of addressing these critical issues.

In *The Swan Book*, Waanyi writer Alexis Wright navigates the intricate intersections of the Anthropocene, colonialism, and climate change by envisioning a future where these forces have profoundly altered both the environment and the lives of Indigenous Australians. The protagonist, Oblivia, embodies the enduring scars of both the present and the future, emerging as a wounded child who must survive among the ruins of these intertwined temporalities. The worlds depicted in the novel, particularly the representations of the disenfranchisement of Indigenous inhabitants in the far north of the Australian continent, serve as a critique of the intersections of capitalist and colonial projects that have defined modernity and, in turn, have exacerbated global climate change. Set in a speculative future, *The Swan Book* traverses various landscapes, from remote northern regions of Australia to a bustling urban southern city, and finally through the long, arduous journey between these places. Severe environmental degradation has displaced both human and non-human inhabitants, with the black swans, who share the narrative's center with Oblivia, symbolizing the shared plight of these dislocated beings.

Climate change, as portrayed in *The Swan Book*, emerges as a product of the same Western culture that spawned imperialism and capitalism—a restless, invasive, and acquisitive force, bent on the trespass of Indigenous lands for material excess and self-aggrandizement. Such cultural impositions have historically led to chaos, particularly in the lands of the Aboriginal people. Anthropogenic climate change, according to Kyle Powys Whyte, is familiar to Indigenous peoples from the past and persists in the present: "People's relationships with plants, animals, and ecosystems are altering at a 'wrongfully rapid pace' in the Anthropocene, but this is rather 'another kind of anthropogenic environmental change: climate destabilization' that follows from the anthropogenic environmental change enacted in (settler) colonialism" (Whyte 208). Wright's novel underscores how these historical and ongoing disruptions have drastically altered Indigenous life, rendering "'Mother Nature'…'Mother Catastrophe of flood, fire, drought and blizzard'" (Wright 6). This devastation has led to the closure of towns, the

abandonment of communities, and the collapse of governments, forcing people into homelessness and statelessness, and driving them to migrate as climate refugees in search of sustainable living conditions.

Oblivia, as the most wounded child of Australia, symbolizes the profound dysfunction of the environment under the pressures of a technologically advanced society. Her gang rape, subsequent entrapment in the bowel of a eucalyptus tree, and eventual rescue by Bella Donna of the Champions are intricately tied to the natural phenomenon of drought, suggesting a parallel between her personal trauma and the environmental suffering induced by climate change. As the narrative speculates, "Some say that there was an accident before the drought. A little girl was lost" (Wright 6). Oblivia's confinement and her writings in the ancient language of her people while trapped under the eucalyptus tree signify the Western invasion of Indigenous lands, disrupting their ecology, culture, and embodied knowledge. Her forgotten life by her own community mirrors the larger amnesia of a harmonious existence with nature, which has been overshadowed by the imposition of technologically driven development.

The novel also explores the significant relationships that claim Oblivia's wounded life—first by Bella Donna of the Champions, a European climate refugee who rescues her, then by the swans, and finally by Warren Finch, who claims her as his promised wife. Bella Donna, living in a rusted hull in the middle of a polluted swamp that serves as an Aboriginal detention camp, shares stories of swans with Oblivia, blending her own experiences as a climate refugee with Indigenous narratives. The swamp, where Oblivia belongs, symbolizes the future landscape ravaged by wars, industrial exploitation, and environmental devastation, much like other places around the world. This traditional landscape reflects the broader issues of ecological imperialism and environmental racism perpetuated by white settlers. The swamp, renamed Swan Lake, signifies the vulnerability of Indigenous landscapes to climate change, mirroring the lives of its displaced inhabitants. Oblivia's connection to the swamp, and her interactions with the swans, highlight the ongoing resistance against the slow violence of climate change and the forced disconnection from ancestral lands. As the narrative notes, "The swamp now renamed Swan Lake was nothing special. It was the same as dozens of fenced and locked Aboriginal detention centres" (Wright 43).

Bella Donna's storytelling, centered on swans that led her people away from the climate wars of their homeland, becomes a source of hope and restoration for Oblivia. The story of the white swans contrasts with Oblivia's familiarity with the black swans of the swamp, emphasizing her estrangement and muteness throughout the novel. The arrival of black swans in the swamp symbolizes both the displacement caused by global warming and the militarized control exerted by the Australian government over Indigenous people. Oblivia, the swans, and the Australian Indigenous community become "the inheritors of oppression and dispossession," losing sovereignty over their land and culture, which reflects the "eternal reality of a legacy in brokenness that was the problem to them" (Wright 75).

Oblivia becomes acquainted with the granted stories of the white swans through her European foster mother, Bella Donna. However, the embodied stories of the black swans, which exist beyond human recounting within European narratives, compel Oblivia to accept the black swans as her kin. As Oblivia feeds her kin and runs "through the water with the fledging cygnets," she begins to believe that by helping them survive in the polluted swamp, she might learn how to escape as freely as they have been able to take flight (Wright 60). The relationships between the swans and the swamp are complex, mirroring the intricate dynamics between the swans and Oblivia. Her communal kinship with the swans suggests that she prioritizes the swans over human connections in her world, indicating that the swamp is not a stable environment for any entity.

The swans' struggle for survival is closely intertwined with Oblivia's wounded life and the devastated existence of the Australian Indigenous people. Ben Holgate argues that "the black swans are not just a 'metaphor for Australia's original inhabitants,' but they are to be read literally as 'ancestors' who once travelled the continent, sharing their Law Stories" (Holgate 63). Like the black swans, Oblivia has no stories rooted in any part of the country, and she is unable to find any narrative regarding her own existence or that of the swamp. This becomes evident when the swamp people declare that Oblivia's story is nothing but a lie. In her dream, they say: "Your tree did not exist. Screamed: TELL HER. No strong tree like that ever existed here. The girl panicked, would wake up in fright from not remembering anymore about how she came to be asleep in the tree. She started to believe what other people believed: She was telling lies" (Wright 42). After thorough exploration, she finds no eucalyptus tree trunk with strange writing in the dust, no swamp lined with people guarded by the Army. She cannot comprehend why this history does not exist in the world of creation—it is incomplete, flawed. There is no miniature black girl like herself in any depictions of humanity, no swamp world of people quarreling over food (Wright 198).

The significance of Oblivia's wounded and forgotten life, her kinship with the swans, and the story of her non-existence in the swamp symbolize the slow violence of futuristic climate change. This slow violence, coupled with ecological imperialism and environmental racism, disrupts not only Oblivia's life and that of the swamp people but also the entire world. The claims of Bella Donna through her swan stories and the claims of the swans through their kinship with Oblivia are inextricably connected to human atrocities toward nature, including invasion, colonization, mass extinction, depletion of natural resources, and global warming. Bella Donna's death marks a turning point in the lives of Oblivia and the swans in the swamp, raising questions about the future, particularly for Oblivia and the swans. All the swans in the swamp search for Bella Donna and mourn her death, causing a change in their behavior that disturbs the swamp people. Oblivia, like the swans, is left alone in the swamp to mourn Bella Donna for the first time in her life. Despite this, Oblivia tries to take Bella Donna's place by digging holes around the swamp in search of the old eucalyptus tree and the stories Bella Donna told her. However, the swans give up; when attacked by the swamp people's dogs, they refuse to save themselves and die, "still sitting on the ground, heads

tucked under their wings" (Wright 79). The swamp people expect Oblivia to give herself up after the death of all the swans, yet nothing stops her from burying her head beneath her wing and refusing to acknowledge the dangers surrounding her.

The future of Oblivia and the swamp is further complicated by a television documentary about the Aboriginal hero and President of Australia, Warren Finch. Finch is a post-authoritative figure who aspires to be "good black people, not seen as troublemakers, radicals, or people who made Australians feel uneasy, thinking Aboriginal people were useless, wasting Australian government money" (Wright 85). He is well-educated, fluent in many languages, and charismatic. Raised by his elders as a savior of the Aboriginal people, Finch belongs to the Aboriginal community of the Brolga Nation, neighboring the Swan Lake where Oblivia resides. The Brolga Nation has "grown prosperous with flukes of luck here and there called mining, and saying yes, yes, yes to anything on offer—a bit of assimilation, a bit of integration, a bit of giving up your own sovereignty, a bit of closing the gap—and was always paraded as Australia's international showcase of human rights" (Wright 101). Finch claims Oblivia, just as her forgotten life was previously claimed by Bella Donna and the swans. According to the traditional law of the Brolga Nation, Warren's elders have already arranged his marriage with Oblivia. However, much like the sudden changes in the climate-changing world, the elders of both countries attempt to prevent the marriage after learning of the newspaper story about Oblivia's gang rape by some petrol-sniffing youth.

Warren Finch's arrival at the swamp leads the people to believe that their prayers will be answered. They view him as an archangel sent to save them and help them in the future. However, Warren deceives them with his indifferent attitude. He sees no difference between himself and the people living in the swamp, even though he speaks the same language as them. Nevertheless, Aboriginal children are always encouraged to become like Warren Finch in the future, particularly in education and politics. The swamp people comment on his politicized environmental ideology: "the world's foremost environmentalist was visiting—but if anyone needed to know, they had some of the world's true environmentalists living at Swan Lake. They could bet a million dollars to think that they were not using much of the world's resources" (Wright 116).

During a discussion with the Swan Lake Aboriginal Government about bringing development, Warren mentions his search for his promised wife at Swan Lake. The swamp people know that no one among them could be a suitable wife for someone as important as Warren Finch, especially in this isolated community under military control. Eventually, Warren declares that Oblivia, the girl forgotten by her community, is his promised wife. Oblivia's muteness persists, even when Warren meets her in the hull in the middle of the swamp to convey that she is his promised wife. When Warren prepares to take Oblivia with him to marry her, she has no choice but to follow him. Warren's claim of Oblivia as his promised wife symbolizes the forceful invasion of authoritative and colonial powers on Aboriginal and Indigenous landscapes in the name of sustainable development. The swamp people's understanding that none of them could be Warren's promised wife reflects nature's disapproval

of development that would spoil the landscape. Furthermore, Oblivia's muteness when Warren declares her as his wife, and her lack of choice in the matter, represents the human violation of nature and the environment by imposing technological developments without the consent of the people.

Warren's assassination causes a disturbance between the swamp people and the government. His death, along with his violent individualist agency, is replaced by the realized and futuristic interconnection between Oblivia, the swans, and the swamp, along with their shared ethics of care. After Warren's final procession, Oblivia, as a climate refugee, starts moving ahead with the swans flying above her. The novel reveals the resilience of the wounded child and the climate refugees at the end, as everyone is forced to head north to escape ruined cities and polluted areas. Oblivia does not join the mass migration of people fleeing the cities, despite the possibility of receiving support with food. Instead, she joins those traveling incognito on unofficial and illegal crossings through the swamps:

> There were so many people moving through the country, she was never alone…Some were former street people. Others were the homeless people who had slept on the footpaths with cardboard blankets, or in empty buildings. Now in hordes and all travelling north, they crowded the swampy lanes on pitch-black nights and nestled close to one another for safety (Wright 274).

Oblivia is likely saved by her care for the cygnet that refuses to fly. As everyone else becomes increasingly disoriented and hallucinatory during the forced migration, Oblivia grows stronger in her resolve to escape from the claim of another colonial authoritative power. To remain undiscovered, she begins to evade everyone's sight, hiding herself as she walks beneath the cloud of swans. This multispecies connection saves both Oblivia and the swans, allowing them to gain agency and write their own story, expressed through their muteness until the novel's end.

Oblivia's wounded life exists on multiple levels. Her name, Oblivion Ethyl(ene), suggests that she represents oblivion, encompassing both forgetting and being forgotten. She is the 'Ignis Fatuus' or 'Foolish Fire,' 'the dust,' and 'the drought.' She is the swan princess, a vessel into which Bella Donna introduces her alien swan stories. Her memory is filled with whatever Bella Donna chose to tell her about the swans. Additionally, she is Ethylene, a hydrocarbon found in crude oil used to produce, among other things, the ubiquitous plastic shopping bag and a hormone that ripens fruit. As such, she has become a legend, seen by the people of the swamp who visit Swan Country after its destruction by Warren Finch. They say she remains a teenage girl, screaming, "kayi, kayi kala-wurru nganyi, your country is calling out for you" (Wright 301), as the voice of the broken swamp.

The Swan Book serves as a profound meditation on the intersection of environmental degradation, colonial violence, and Indigenous resilience. Through Oblivia's journey, Wright weaves a narrative that transcends the immediate trauma of environmental destruction and cultural loss, suggesting that even in the face of profound adversity, there is potential for

renewal and reimagining. Oblivia's relationship with the swans and the swamp illustrates the possibility of forging new kinships and understanding within a landscape that bears the scars of historical and ecological wounds. This novel challenges readers to confront the ongoing legacies of colonialism and environmental exploitation, while also imagining a future where Indigenous knowledge and ecological care are central to survival and regeneration. Wright's work ultimately offers a vision of apocalypse as both an end and a beginning, urging us to consider the ways in which the future can be shaped by a deep, relational understanding of the world that honors both human and non-human lives, and the landscapes they inhabit. In doing so, *The Swan Book* not only critiques the present but also holds space for hope, asserting that other, more equitable worlds are not only possible but necessary.

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The Fault lines of the Postcolonial Nation-State Statecraft, Exception and Wasted Lives

BINAYAK ROY

Abstract

Sovereignty constitutes the state and statist politics by deciding who is to be incorporated into it. The state is authoritarian command and imposes vulnerability as a condition of participation in public or political life. Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* articulates the failures of Burmese nationalism after the assassination of Aung San. A series of insurrections on ethnic grounds have belied the aspirations of the postcolonial nation state. The old imperial British government finds its legacy in the regressive Burmese military regime which uses the past to justify the present. The literature of the Indian North-East embodies a similar subnational discourse, an isotope of minority discourse, homogenizing its ethnic folk imagination and setting itself up in binary opposition to the hegemonic nation-state. The paper seeks to explore how literature exposes the strategies of exclusion of the ones in power thereby making citizens' lives vulnerable and delineates an attitude that is inherently and implacably resistant resulting in alienation from the modern nation-state.

Keywords: exception, nation-state, transnation, xenophobia, subnationalism

> After all, in the thousands of years of Indian history, there never was such a creature as a united India. Nobody ever managed to rule the whole place, not the Mughals, not the British. And then, that midnight, the thing that had never existed was suddenly 'free'. But what on earth was it? On what common ground (if any) did it, does it, stand?

Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*.

> Nationalism, either in its linguistic versions or in its volk versions, or as a combination of both, consists of the attempt to create general categories mostly on grounds of naturalized differences, and this obviously includes the categories of 'nationals' and 'aliens'.

Tabish Khair, *The New Xenophobia*

Exceptionalist policies in a postcolonial nation state

Giorgio Agamben, in his influential book on political philosophy *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, argues that what distinguishes the biopolitical regime of power which operates in modernity is the fact that the "state of exception comes more and more to the foreground as the fundamental political structure and ultimately begins to become the rule"

(*Homo Sacer* 20). The state of exception has become "the dominant paradigm of government in contemporary politics" (*State of Exception* 2). The suspension of the law is pivotal because it directly affects people's lives, not as subjects of politics or citizens, but as human beings as such. Agamben defines sovereignty primarily in terms of exclusion or exception. Sovereignty constitutes the state and statist politics by deciding who is to be incorporated into it. This decision is grounded on a fundamental exclusion of what is to remain outside. It is the sovereign who decides where and whether law applies. Politics is instead grounded on rendering people vulnerable and abject, on subjection to a power so total that it can command life and death. The state is authoritarian command and imposes vulnerability as a condition of participation in public or political life.

The rise of exceptionalist policies explains the practices of dehumanization of the other that are currently being employed in postcolonial countries, both by the West and by local governments. R.B.J. Walker affirms, "exceptions may be enacted as a claim about inhumanity" (76), that is, all individuals not belonging or conforming to such a paradigm are considered as not being human beings, but rather as pre-human or inhuman persons, to which the legal juridical order that sustains the international, i.e. the regime of human rights, does not apply. Such "wasted lives", as Bauman has labeled them, are then excluded by the community of humans and treated as human waste, disposable lives that are superfluous, not necessary to the current order but at the same time part of it: they are "the waste of order-building combined into the main preoccupation and metafunction of the state, as well as providing the foundation for its claim to authority" (33). The production of "human waste" – wasted lives, the "superfluous" populations of migrants, refugees and other outcasts – is an inevitable outcome of modernization. It is an unavoidable side-effect of economic progress and the quest for order which is characteristic of modernity. Bauman argues that the waste of globalized production is not only material but also human. Inside the "developed" world this "human waste" takes the form of "redundant" people – those who are easily disposable in an economic model which is no longer based on "jobs for life". "To be declared redundant means to have been disposed of because of being disposable – just like the empty non-refundable plastic bottle or the once used syringe" (12). The world today is full (there is nowhere unexplored, or uninhabited which is habitable) and so there is nowhere to transport this excessive, redundant population – as there would have been in colonial times (5). Outside the "developed" world there are millions of people who are on the move in the liquid world – put into movement for economic or political reasons. Bauman focuses on the experience of the refugee – someone whose experience is the epitome of loss (of land, house, family, work) but who is given no "useful function in the land of arrival or assimilation". In effect, from their present place – the dumping site – "there is no return and no road forward" (77).

The state almost always portrays its use of force as an attempt to maintain "law and order". It thus projects itself as the instrument of desirable order in conflict with a naturally unruly, unpredictable, potentially or actually violent populace. In the current political situation

Butler argues that the law becomes an instrument of power to be deployed by the state. Law is no longer that which creates the state, nor that which constrains it; rather, it is one more tool for the state to use. The fact that "managerial officials decide who will be detained indefinitely" and who will be "reviewed for the possibility of a trial with questionable legitimacy", implies that "a parallel exercise of "illegitimate decision is exercised within the field of governmentality" (54). The law could have a meaningful and important role in negotiating what it is to be human, and therefore to have a liveable and grieveable life. When norms and the law are collapsed together then trials and legal interventions are an important site for securing precarious lives: "[t]he law […] is now expressly understood as an instrument, an instrumentality of power, one that can be applied and suspended at will" (82-83).

The Glass Palace and contemporary Myanmar

Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* represents how colonial discourses (primarily the military discourse) have moulded native identity and resulted in severe vulnerability and existential crisis.[1] It interrogates both the grounds and the production of historical knowledge by reading between the lines of the imperial archives and emerging as alternative discourses for expressing the subaltern past. The liberation struggle of the Indian National Army serves as an instrument of cultural resistance for these automata against a racist colonial discourse. Popular or insurgent nationalism thus reclaims or imagines forms of community and challenges colonial rule giving shape to a collective political identity. The narrative also traces the failures of Burmese nationalism after a series of insurrections on ethnic grounds belied the aspirations of the post-colonial nation state.

Dinu's discourse articulates the failures of Burmese nationalism after the assassination of Aung San. A series of insurrections on ethnic grounds have belied the aspirations of the post-colonial nation state. Before long, the old imperial British government finds its legacy in the regressive post-colonial order of the Burmese military regime which "'use the past to justify the present. And they themselves are much worse than the colonialists'" (*GP* 537). Despite its show of military power and extreme control over both the public and the personal sectors, the regime does not have the ideological and epistemological depth and power of the British colonial machinery. A new censorship was enforced which restricted the freedom of writers as a result of which Dinu's Burmese wife Ma Thin Thin Aye finds herself languishing in prison. Occupying a very narrow discursive-ideological space, the representatives of the government discourse are not interested in finding out things that are beyond them. Queen Supayalat's prophecy about the destitute condition of Burma comes true as Dinu reveals "'you know how poor we are in our Myanmar'" (*GP* 507). The Burmese junta decides to shut Burma off exclusively from the world outside: "It was because of the imperialists that Burma had to be shut off from the world; the country had to be defended against neo-colonialism and foreign aggression" (*GP* 537).

In his collection of prose pieces *Dancing in Cambodia; At Large in Burma*, Ghosh dismantles the exclusivist ideology of the nation-state "In a region as heterogeneous as South-

East Asia, any boundary is sure to be arbitrary. On balance, Burma's best hopes for peace lie in maintaining intact the larger and more inclusive entity that history, albeit absent-mindedly, bequeathed to its population almost half a century ago"(100). It is this notion of compositeness and inclusiveness that Dinu thrusts on his writer wife: "'We are a universe on our own […]. Look at all our people […] Karen, Kayah, Kachin, Shan, Rakhine, Wa, Pa-O, Chin, Mon […]. Wouldn't it be wonderful if your stories could contain each language, each dialect?'" (*GP* 533). It is this concept of syncretism, of a national reconciliation of all opposing ethnic insurrections that is the liberating idea in a crumbling nation. This ideal is expressed both by Dinu and by the democratic voice of Aung San Suu Kyi who realizes that although "politics has invaded everything, spared nothing […] religion, art, family", "it cannot be allowed to cannibalize all of life, all of existence" (*GP* 542). It is this voice of repose that symbolizes the democratic aspirations of the Burmese people against the oppressing menace of the military junta.

Community is neither a productive project of becoming nor is it a social contract produced by citizens. It is a sharing of singularities who are together unbecoming and unbinding in their sharing and social binding. This unworking is the refusal of unity. It is resistance to totalizing communion. Nancy suggests that fascism annihilates community by destroying difference but that there is always a resistance to this destruction. "[T]he fascist masses," Nancy writes, "tend to annihilate community in the delirium of an incarnated communion... [C]ommunity never ceases to resist this will. Community is, in a sense, resistance itself: namely, resistance to immanence"(35). In *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* Ghosh laments the equation of the novel in the Western tradition with what John Updike terms the "individual moral adventure" at the expense of the collective. The celebration of the collective, the "men in the aggregate" (106) has been a recurrent trope in Ghosh's oeuvre initiated in his debut novel *The Circle of Reason* itself. The community of the disillusioned soldiers of the British Indian army presented in *The Glass Palace* is one that challenges, provokes, threatens, but also enlivens, is a community of disagreement, dissonance, and resistance. The narrative explores the heterogeneity of exploitative labor conditions, their situatedness as well as their "lived experiences" documenting the variegated landscape of neo-slavery for vulnerable migrant workers. The perspective of precarity provides the potential to link actions to tackle forced labour with the broader struggle for (migrant) workers' rights. The recognition and inclusion of migrants as transnational actors and activists must be central to this work. The fact that Amitav Ghosh was able to explore these issues decades ago speaks about his farsightedness as well as the relevance of *The Glass Palace* in contemporary academic engagement. Ghosh genuinely attempts to revisit and reframe the colonial past by questioning the ideological, epistemological, and ontological assumptions of the imperial powers, the masks of conquest. Resistance in itself has always been an integral component of literature. Protest is simultaneously a dialogue, a deconstruction and an assertion. Literary resistance in *The Glass Palace* that interweaves historical-political events with individual stories thus explicates Benita Parry's critique of postcolonial discourse for its unwillingness to "articulate a more oppositional politics" (138).

The idea of the autonomous nation-state enclosed within non-permeable borders has generated universalist notions of ethnic homogeneity, linguistic uniformity, moral absolutism, and cultural consonance, as the markers of nationhood. When this totalizing norm was filtered through En-lightenment ideals, it powerfully inflected Eurocentric ideas of the self, and simultaneously con-structed the non-European Other. The nation is an "unprecedented" institution, contends Sudipta Kaviraj, which attempts to replace premodern communities, marked by "fuzzy" boundaries and intense emotional ties with an "enumerated" and modern national community. The latter is ter-ritorially specific, has clear boundaries and must "enumerate" what belongs to it. Hence, "the end-less counting of citizens, territories, resources, majorities, minorities, institutions, activities, im-port, export, incomes, projects, births, deaths, diseases" (Kaviraj 30-31). Benedict Anderson defines the nation as "an imagined political community and imagined as both inherently lim-ited and sovereign" (15). It is imagined by its people and ideologues, imaginings fraught with incongruities. One of these is that nation-states, although historically "new" entities, "always loom out of an immemorial past" (19) as the same entity of a united people sharing the same heri-tage. Modern India needs to be judged from this perspective. The Indian nation is "not an object of discovery but of invention" (Kaviraj 1).

Postcolonial studies, as postmodernist thinking, has an insistently anti-nationalist and anti-statist leaning. Postmodernists, as Stuart Hall puts it, tend to reject all the "great collective social identities of class, of race, of nation, of gender, and of the West" ("Old and new identities", 44). They view them as hegemonic identity narratives that suppress marginality, heterogeneity and difference. "Cartographic anxiety is said to be the defining feature of the territorially circumscribed postcolony" believes Baruah, "and in the case of India—the child of Partition—it is 'inscribed into its very genetic code'" (186). Nation-building, quite predictably, became a conflict-prone exercise; it turned to demonizing en-emies both within and without, "especially in situations where a majoritarian view began to assert "ownership" of a pol-ity in the name of a "core" ethnoculturally defined "nation" and then tried to redefine the state as one that belonged exclusively to that "core" group" (187). What emerges clearly from Northeast India's troubled postcolonial history is that the era of nation-building has not been conducive to the growth and flourishing of non-nation-state political forms. India may be heading toward becoming an exemplary "civilization state" accommodating its foundational diversity rather than a conventional nation-state aspiring to the impossible goal of achieving internal homogeneity.

What Amitav Ghosh and Easterine Kire exhibit in their novels is that the 'nation' is not synonymous with the state and how the grand narrative of the nation acts as repressive as well as regressive machinery. Literary narrative provides a new perspective of looking at the historical past, often questioning the credibility of the historical representation. By way of questioning what Hayden White calls history's tropic prefiguration, the prominence given to key historical figures, the erasure of subal-tern individuals or communities, literature foregrounds the role of narrative in constructing one's understanding of the world and meaning

and truth. A postcolonial writer, in his/her critical re-interpretation of the historical archive, creates a hybrid text that combines historical evidences and imaginative reconstructions, historical as well as invented characters. With this interplay, history is stripped of its objective quality. That literary texts have been widely recognized as essential materials for historical study is evident in Spivak's endorsement of Foucault's suggestion that "to make visible the unseen can also mean a change of level, addressing oneself to a layer of material which hitherto had no pertinence for history and which had not been recognized as having any moral, aesthetic or historical value" (Spivak 27-28). Evidently what Ghosh and Kire try to reconcile are the "analytical" histories utilizing the rational categories of modern historical thought and the "affective" histories which account for the plural ways of being-in-the-world. After all, as E.L. Doc-torow observes, the modes of historical and fictional narratives mediate "the world for the purpose of introducing meaning" (cited in Hutcheon 112).

Notes

1. For a detailed discussion of how colonial discourse moulds native identity see my article "The Intimate Enemy": Schizoids in Amitav Ghosh's *The Glass Palace* in *Asiatic*, Volume 9, Number 2, December 2015.

2. For an explication of the political context of the novel see Muthukumar Manickam & Vinod Balakrishnan (2019): "Being Bios in Zoe and Zoe in Bios: Easterine Kire's *Bitter Wormwood* as a Critique of Agamben's Model of Biopolitics", *South Asian Review*, DOI: 10.1080/02759527.2019.1656040.

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Psychogeography as a Determinative Force: Re-examining the Impact of Place on the Perception of Individuals in *Legend of the Snow Queen* by Manjiri Prabhu

NEHA NAIR & PREMALATHA S.

Neha Nair

Abstract

A thoughtfully chosen location not only provides context to the action in a crime fiction, but also becomes memorable because of the specifications of the space. The landscape often provinces as a character in its own right, as it lingers as a constant atmosphere at the backdrop of all the characters.

The present study highlights how the writer braid's location into the fabric of the text and as a result of which, the characters perceive specific situations a certain way. The aim of the study is to accentuate that location can portray the multitude of social mechanisms of price where a crime is committed. Manjiri Prabhu paints an illustrative picture of how characters respond to locations and spaces in a peculiar manner, depicting the relevance of demographical implications on an individual, thereby pushing him to react and respond in discrete methods.

Keywords: location, place, perception, space, behavior

Introduction

> To make an artistic unity it is, I feel, essential that the plot should derive from the setting, and that both should form part of the theme.
>
> Dorothy L. Sayers, "Gaudy Night"

Place connects individuals and acts as a catalyst that helps in building connection and relatability. Destination thrillers specifically allows to armchair travel to a particular place via vivid depictions. Tim Cresswell in *Place: A Short Introduction* (1994), defines place as a notion that is hidden in common sense and is something that is both plain and complex. He grapples that place is not a trivial element in the world, rather it is a means of comprehending the world. As a component, place has a crucial role to play in the development of a crime narrative, especially a destination thriller, as it invigorates a sense of comprehending the setting of the text. Furthermore, it ends up playing a role of co-protagonist in the text as readers gain a perception of the atmosphere of the novel.

In the Golden Age Detective novels of Gladys Mitchell, Dorothy L. Sayers and Agatha Christie, Place has been a point of critical obligation. These writers have reassessed the

Premalatha S.

element of place in their works due to which readers get narrative hints that are not typically detective in nature, rather they broke the apparent uniformity that existed in the Golden Age. The scene of the crime defines the physical setting for the crime and also the evidence is generated from the crime scene. Even then, it is hardly the most portentous aspect in a detective thriller. Christie formulated a place-taxonomy that solidified her work significantly: the village, the house, London and the holiday transmit vivid meanings from very early in her career. Meanwhile, Mitchell explored the falsification that exists between character and place and used this relationship to incorporate psychological interrogation in her works. Sayers perceives place to be an element that unifies the rest of the elements in a crime genre. In her works, place gradually became a central point through which she inquests prevailing values and identities.

In the contemporary crime fiction, location plays a pivotal role. Kort's *Place and Space in Modern Fiction* (2004) is an attempt to decode the concept of place from a socio-geographical stance. As a *2007 New Yorker* essay mentions, "The crime fiction in the prevailing times, the prime concern is not 'what happens' but 'where' does it happen". David James' *Contemporary British Fiction and the Artistry of Space* (2008) questions, "to what extent do places in crime fiction intervene with our responses and do they exist as mere background or in the form of exuberant figures?" "Re too paused to appreciate the room's grandeur. The period furniture, colourful paintings with gilded frames that seemed like tapestries with scenes from the Rococco era, a musical instrument that resembled the piano and a harmonium….and then the Peacock (Prabhu 210)".

With the passage of time, geographers have claimed that "space" and "place" are not corresponding in nature, but also act as tools using which individuals construe their identity. Yi-Fu Tuan, who is considered as one of the pioneer figures in the field of Psychogeography, defines it as a combined study of geography and humanism. Therefore, humanist geographers have contributed to the detailed interpretations of place. "Such a beautiful lake. Has always inspired me…A smaller version of the seas of my travel. "But the seas and the lakes and mountains gave me more peace than the people. Which is why I always sought solace in nature, in my travels (Prabhu 48)".

Multiple titles from the genre act as a testimony to the abiding importunity of location specifications such as *Scene of the Crime: The Importance of Place in Crime and Mystery Fiction* (2008) or *Crimes of the Scene: A Mystery Novel Guide for the International Traveler* (1997). In her essay, "Place in Fiction", Eudora Welty highlights that place is often perceived as one of the "lesser angels" that remain trivial, while plot, symbol and characters perform the massive role. Inversely, Leonard Lutwack, the writer of the first extensive study of the subject, *The Role of Place in Literature*, claimed that the most radical direction of a reader to a narrative text is through its elicitation of places. Geoffrey Hartman advocates that solving a crime case in a detective thriller means to accord it a specific location; to distinguish not only the culprit and his motive, but also the clever or callous occurrences. Thomas Hardy in

his Wessex novels and William Faulkner in his Yoknapatawpha books exhibit how setting plays an integral role not only for the aesthetic vision of the writer but also for the readers' experience.

David Geherin (2008) points that in detective stories, there is a devoted association between crime and its milieu Authors like Daniel Defoe in *Robinson Crusoe* and Franz Kafka in *The Castle,* yield a powerful sense of place but without chartering a specific geographical location. Others like Joseph Conrad in *Nostromo* and Gabriel Garcia Marquez in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, furnish exhausting details of imaginary countries. James Joyce in his depiction of Dublin in *Ulysses* is so meticulously enumerated that readers can perseverate the steps that the characters take in the novel. In *From Space to Place and Back Again*, geographer David Harvey emphasizes that depiction of perceptible repercussions is emoted in actual behavior.

Place matters: Perceptions of Place

The significance of literary description is so intense that *representation* of place often adds to the overall *perception* of the place. Thomas Hardy's depiction of Egdon Heath from the opening chapter of *The Return of the Native* reiterates that personification of landscape is vital to capture the human emotions as well as circumstantial responses. Gillian Tindall in *Countries of the Mind* points that for various writers their stories are not just 'set' in a particular place, but they have 'grown' there. In Ernest Hemmingway's *Big Two-Hearted River,* the depictions of the town of Seney are so lucid and eloquent that readers may feel that there exists a parallel between Nick Adams and the place.

Manjiri Prabhu brings out the relevance of the association that exists between the characters and their spatial settings. "Possenhofen Castle was Elisabeth's favourite home. She learned to fish, ride, limb and swim and to connect and be with nature. I believe her love for nature originated here and that lasted her a lifetime (Prabhu 81)".

Prabhu highlights how the ambience of a particular kind of place that is perceived a certain way because of the royalty associated with it, can affect an individual's way of thinking and reacting to specific situations. The protagonist, a detective, takes into consideration different aspects of a crime scene before analysis and place analysis becomes one of the most prominent one to deduce results.

> As he had moved from room to room, he had sensed immense pride in his country. It was no wonder that millions of tourists flocked to visit this castle year after year. It was inimitable. The Throne Room, the Tower Garret, the Dining Room, the Bedroom-each an example of ostentatious marble and gold-gilded expression of beauty. Dominating the walls and the tapestry were elaborate scenes of amazing detail from medieval German folktales, legends and scenes from Richard Wagner's stage compositions, most prominently Wagner's Lohengrin (Prabhu 10).

Perception is not a perimetric or inessential element that is to be assessed only in academic terms; rather it is extremely pragmatic in nature. George J. Demko professes that the place

plays a central role in deciphering the 'why's' of a crime scenario alongside other important aspects like individuals, motive, space and setting. "Re-felt as if he had stepped straight into an abandoned film set as he glanced around him. He had been the sole person to alight from the Munich train and the station looked deserted at six in the morning (Prabhu 19)".

Julian Earwaker and Kathleen Becker's *Scenes of Crime: A Guide to the Landscapes of British Detective Fiction* (2002) consists of interviews with writers that covers 500 crime fiction locations in Britain. The same signifies the expansive horizon of the role that place has in the genre.

Crime fiction deals with such grotesque and grisly events that it needs to be rooted in a place that is concrete enough for the readers to absorb and follow. "Re knew that this room had specially been given to the Treaty members as their work space and right then, the atmosphere was charged with an uneasy silence (Prabhu 35)". The most discernible character in a destination thriller whose perception reaches the reader, in order to understand the place of the crime, is the investigator. Manjiri Prabhu paints detective Re Parkar as an individual who imbibes the essence of a place to decipher the hidden meaning behind it. The strategy helps him in not only disentangling but also in reaching an eventual thought. "In the distance, Rose Island appeared like a clump of haze-washed trees, seemed to emerge from the lake like a solitary presence. He had heard so much about this island which was the fairy-tale king's abode of solitude. And he knew that he wanted to visit it soon (Prabhu 45)".

Mitchell in *The Rising of the Moon* (1945) uses the physical landscape of the place in order to convey symbolic interpretations of circumstances, using mountains, valleys and gardens. "Re stepped out into the shopping street which was a delightful array of twinkling lights, streamers of bulbs, a large Christmas tree that filled one half of the square, adding that touch of Christmas cheer (Prabhu 15)". This technique engages the reader as deriving the connotation becomes significant to the reader as well.

> Re glanced around the hall, the chattering youngsters were leaving and a group of elderly men took some sofas. Waiters dressed in a white uniform hovered around patiently, serving the guests. The Christmas tree shone bright and merry. The snow outside glinted against the window panes and the light reflected on to the stained-glass images in the hall. The atmosphere of lazy holidays was rampant and yet Re knew that all was not as it seemed (Prabhu 67)". In such a way, the landscape becomes an appendage of the narrator itself, and the narrator's view caters to the psychological analysis of the text. "What a lovely place to grow up in." Re remarked. "She must have had a happy childhood (Prabhu 81).

The associations that the investigator decipher of a place has a lot to do with future anticipation of occurrences and happenings. "Re's attention was instantly reverted to a dark grey statue of Elisabeth just outside the station. It was a full figure of the Empress, standing tall and graceful and her head held high, looking straight at Re (Prabhu 71)".

> Henceforth, the detective's vision has a pivotal role to play. "So far, his visions had only been about the places he had visited and it was then that he actually revisited the place in an

effort to find a solution or protect it or even prevent disaster from happening. Like he had visited the Schloss Leopold Kron in Salzberg or Lund University in Sweden. But this vision was different. Was it a warning or a reminder? A premonition or an awakening (Prabhu 102).

Viability of the Place: Essence and Esprit

In order to create a recognizable world for the readers, writers employ certain instrumental aspects into the descriptions of place, such as; flora, fauna, speech patterns, local customs, infrastructure etc. "The slushy ice melted with the rain, as Parisians and tourists alike huddled under umbrellas, thick jackets turned up till the neck and beanies comfortably on. It was a particularly nasty winter afternoon and hardly felt Christmassy to Re (Prabhu 16)".

The physical experience of place cannot be underestimated in a destination thriller as enjoyment of the reader is not the sole purpose. The prime intention is to co-create the sense of location and place.

> He stood outside, his gaze cruising the gardens of the Hotel Die Kaiserin. Shin-deep snow was layered with a fresh coat during the right and the hotel twinkled bright inside out. The usual winter bleakness was dispelled by the cheerful, soft music that emanated from the hotel. Through the large square windows, the Christmas tree beamed a cosy invitation. A merry atmosphere surrounded the old hotel and Stefan sighed satisfied (Prabhu 12).

On the contrary, Gerald Kennedy advocates that all the notions of place are assuredly subjective in nature as writers will seemingly describe it as per their understanding and visualization; which again is pristinely subjective. "Those deep blue, tall turrets rising majestically above the limestone walls of the five-storied fairy-tale castle were straight out of a magical Disney film. Perched royally on the Swan Rock, above the Alpsee Lake and near the deafening waters of the 5-metre high Pollat Gorge. Some labelled it 'a fantasy realised in stone' (Prabhu 9)".

Various writers like Nicholas Freeling and Simenon urge that evoking a sense of atmosphere also helps in putting a context to place details. Narratives like *Pickpocket*, *Headless* and *Madwoman* have intense narrations of weather; thereby creating a conundrum of atmospheric details. "Snow-flakes drifted to the ground, merging with the dense white carpet on the station platform. It was freezing and Re could feel the snow slide down the neck of his coat (Prabhu 19)". Just like a typical investigator, Re Parkar focuses on attention to minute details and Prabhu leaves no stone unturned in bringing this into limelight. "Re stood outside for a few seconds observing the hotel Facing the road, it was three-storeyed and the green windows and the brown wooden balconies contrasted perfectly against the cream structure. He knew that on the other side was a long terrace, with steps leading down to a beautiful grand park, now under thick snow (Prabhu 39)".

In Prabhu's world, the impressions and descriptions of the city are so vivid and uncanny that one can smell the very geography of that place. The art, culture and beliefs of that very place convey the ambience of the city in the most realistic manner possible. "Surrounded by

a huge garden and lawns, the house carried an air of quaint dignity. The shuttered green windows, the pointed, sloping brown roof, the cream walls gave it a striking look (Prabhu 207)".

Conclusion

Manjiri Prabhu is one of the contemporary crime fiction writers who make a deliberate effort to make place an essential ingredient in her destination thrillers, as this added angle can leave inerasable impact in the minds of the readers. Alongside the narration of the plot and the lingering mystery associated with the crime, she paints a vivid imagery of the very place in which the crime is committed. The readers get a glimpse of Starnberg and in a way, the place exists as a side character, that is developing on its own as the plot progresses and shapes its own identity by the climax of the story. The depiction of the hotel Die Kaiserin, the physical landscape of the Christmassy winter in Austria and the minute details of the frozen lake, adds up to a memorable experience.

Decoding the impact of place on the perception of individuals is crucial as it takes into account the socio-geographical implications of the same. In a Destination thriller, it becomes all the more momentous as the readers associate their understanding of a crime scene based on the particulars given of that demographical area.

The present study advocates that place matters in the domain of crime fiction and impacts the perception of the investigator, who is basically the 'eye' of readers in a destination thriller. The researcher proposes a transdisciplinary study pertaining to the sociological and psychological ramification of place on the personality of an individual that can be fruitful in garnering a better understanding of the spatial psyche.

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Mapping the Journey: Cartographic Imaginaries in Olga Tokarczuk's *Flights*

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Abstract

Maps are not neutral representations, but rather subjective constructions that reflect the perspectives, values, and interests of those who create them. The paper by analyzing the maps and cartographic metaphors in Olga Tokarczuk *Flights* (2007), examines the power dynamics involved in their creation, including the ways in which dominant cartographic traditions and power structures shape the representation of space and geography. The paper also tries to look at pertinent questions related to the politics of mapping, the role of uncertainty and ambiguity in cartographic language, the relationship between identity and movement, shifting sense of identity and belonging and the limitations of language and representation in conveying lived experiences. The paper also attempts to understand how movement and travel affect characters' understanding of themselves and their place in the world.

Keywords: cartographic metaphors, geography, identity, language, maps, mobility, space

Maps can help to establish the setting of a novel, providing readers with a visual representation of the story's location, to feel more engaged with the story and its characters providing readers with a sense of the history, culture, and politics of the setting and help to create a sense of immersion for readers, making them feel more deeply connected to the world of the novel. Maps can also be a powerful tool for exploring themes related to borders, identity, and mobility in literature. By depicting the physical boundaries between different regions or nations, maps can highlight the arbitrary nature of borders and the ways in which they can limit or shape individual identities and experiences. Furthermore, maps can also be used to explore the concept of mobility, including the movement of people and ideas across borders and the ways in which this movement can challenge or reinforce existing power structures.

The act of mapping carries significant political and social implications, as maps are not neutral representations but rather subjective constructions that reflect the perspectives, values, and interests of those who create them. As Franco Moretti observes: "Not that the map is itself an explanation, of course: but at least, it offers a model of the narrative universe, which rearranges its components in a non-trivial way and may bring some hidden patterns to the surface" (53-54). The narrator in Olga Tokarczuk's novel *Flights* (2007) says that "When I embark on a journey, I disappear from maps. Nobody knows where I am. At the point of departure or at the point to which I travel? Is there something "in between" in between?(1).

Barbara Piatte on analysing fictional spaces observes that "fictional spaces don't have to, but can feature references towards the geospace (first space, actual space). Moreover, it's a fact, that both writers and readers are tempted by the option of anchoring texts somehow in the(ir) real world. On the other hand, authors also indulge in creating entirely new worlds with totally imaginary settings." Referring to the 'inbetween' space she remarks that "these options – both faint and strong correspondences between geospace and textual space, as well as various connections that can be discovered to exist somewhere inbetween – have to be taken into account" (Piatte etal 182).

In the context of Olga Tokarczuk's novel *Flights*, the use of maps can be analyzed from various perspectives, including the politics of mapping, the power dynamics involved in creating maps, and the ways in which maps can be used to subvert or challenge dominant cartographic traditions and power structures. The paper tries to look at how the characters' perceptions of space and geography are shaped by the maps they encounter, and how these perceptions are influenced by factors such as history, culture, and ideology. The paper also examines how Tokarczuk uses cartographic metaphors and other literary techniques to challenge and subvert traditional representations of space and geography, and to explore alternative ways of understanding the world.

Flights is structured as a collection of interconnected stories and essays that touch upon various subjects, including travel, anatomy, and the history of medicine, among others. Maps and navigation are used as a metaphor to explore themes of movement, dislocation, and the search for identity in a constantly changing world.

> There are many maps loaded into Flights' narrative: old and contemporary, true and legendary, representing continents, islands and cities. By observing them attentively and recreating them in their heads, readers notice abstract patterns, undeveloped stains and geometric lines, which start to resemble the human nervous system. With good reason – Tokarczuk tries to grasp the essence of travel not in its physical but in its psychological sense. Thus, the geographical maps are accompanied by maps of human bodies, thoughts and emotions. They all transform and grow, becoming in a way interactive, unfinished. (culture.pl)

Flights is a non-linear and fragmented novel, in which maps appear in various forms throughout the novel, including hand-drawn sketches, historical maps, and modern-day GPS systems. The protagonist, who is also the narrator, frequently refers to maps and cartography in her musings and reflections on travel and movement. Commenting on the twelve maps scattered in the novel, Jonathan Wlodarski remarks:

> These diagrams include no explanation, no caption or connection to the fragments they interrupt. Some maps are in Russian, Japanese, or Latin; others are unlabeled (though a list at the back of the book gives the name of each). Without context, these images are disorienting, working against the very purpose which humans create maps for: to orient themselves in the world. Ultimately, it feels like a continuation of the book's disdain for human efforts to exercise control over the ever-changing world; during her diatribe about travel writing, our narrator says 'no book ages quite so quickly as a guidebook,' and the

same can be said for maps, especially as our understanding of the world changes (one map, included near the end, is drawn to show Odysseus's travels in the world as the Ancient Greeks understood it) or as we change the world, exerting our willpower to redirect rivers and dynamite tunnels through mountains.(www.musicandliterature.org)

The theme of mapping and its various implications are recurring motifs throughout the novel, and is explored in various ways across the different sections and fragments of the novel.The novel's non-linear narrative structure, which emphasizes the fragmentary and interconnected nature of human experience can be seen as a critique of the modernist notion of space as fixed and stable. The novel emphasizes the fluidity and transience of human experience, depicting characters who are constantly on the move and who resist the idea of rootedness and stability.

Flights explores the experiences of travellers from different cultures and regions, highlighting the diversity and complexity of human experiences of space. It also critiques Western colonialism and imperialism, portraying the ways in which the imposition of Western spatial categories and hierarchies has marginalized and oppressed non-Western peoples. In terms of the ways in which it depicts the production and contestation of space, the novel portrays various spatial practices and strategies, including mapping, tourism, migration, and pilgrimage, and explores how these practices are shaped by power relations and social structures. It also highlights the potential for resistance and subversion, depicting characters who challenge dominant spatial narratives and create their own alternative spaces and geographies.

In *Flights*, the connection between the physical body and the spaces it inhabits is explored through the characters' experiences of travel and movement. The novel highlights how the body is affected by the spaces it occupies and the ways in which movement and travel impact bodily experiences such as illness or aging. For instance, the vignette titled "Phenomenon" features a woman who is diagnosed with a rare condition that causes her to feel intense pain when she is in a stationary position for too long. She copes with her condition by travelling and constantly moving. This demonstrates how the body's relationship to space can have a profound impact on bodily experiences. In the vignette titled "Cortes Island," the narrator describes a group of people who retreat to a remote island to escape from the pressures of modern society. One of the characters, an elderly woman, experiences a renewed sense of vitality and energy through her connection with nature and the physical activities she engages in on the island. This suggests that movement and physical engagement can have positive effects on the body, even in old age. Moreover, the novel explores how bodily experiences can be linked to specific spaces and environments. In the vignette titled "Baggage," the narrator describes the experiences of a woman who works at an airport and becomes acutely aware of the smells and sounds of different countries and cultures. This highlights how the body can be attuned to the sensory qualities of specific spaces and environments.

Flights uses cartographic metaphors to describe journeys of both the body and the mind, rejecting the Cartesian division. In the vignette, "Koan," in *Flights* the narrator describes how a traveller's physical movements can influence their psychological state. She writes,

"The body moves through space, and as it does, the mind follows. The mind and the body are connected, and our experiences of the world are shaped by this connection"(67). Maps and cartographic language operate as metaphors for movement, travel, and exploration in the novel, both of the world around us and of the inner landscape of the mind. Throughout the novel, maps are frequently used as a metaphor for journeys. For instance, the narrator states: "The map is not the territory, but the territory can be contained in the map" (67). This suggests that our understanding of the world is limited by our maps, and that there is always more to explore beyond what we know. Another cartographic metaphor used in the novel is the aerial view. The narrator often describes experiences from a bird's eye view, as if looking down on the world from above. This perspective highlights the interconnectedness of different places and events, and suggests that our experiences are shaped by the larger patterns and forces that govern the world. The act of navigating is also used as a metaphor for the journey of the mind. The narrator talks about how we navigate through different ideas, thoughts, and experiences, trying to make sense of them and find our way forward. This metaphor suggests that the mind is like a traveller, trying to find its way through an unfamiliar landscape. Finally, the idea of routes is another cartographic metaphor used in the novel. The narrator talks about how people often follow certain routes in their lives, repeating the same patterns and habits. She suggests that breaking free of these routes and exploring new paths is essential for personal growth and discovery.

The novel suggests that maps not only reflect but also shape the way we see the world. *Flights* blurs the line between physical and mental journeys, suggesting that they are interconnected and perhaps equally important as the two are related and shape our sense of self. Maps have often been used as tools of colonization and control. *Flights* illustrates how maps are used to exercise control over both individuals and societies, and can perpetuate power dynamics. The novel also suggests that despite their often, oppressive nature, maps can also be used to empower individuals and subvert dominant narratives and have the potential to be a tool for liberation and empowerment.

One way in which the maps and cartographic metaphors reflect the interconnectedness of physical and psychological landscapes providing insights into the characters' interior lives and their relationship to place, is through the use of imagery. The narrator describes how maps can be used to navigate both physical and emotional landscapes. She states, "Maps are magical. They can change the world, the way we see it. They can help us find our way, and they can also trap us" (45).This statement highlights how maps can be both helpful and limiting, just like our perceptions of the world around us. To emphasize how our physical experiences can shape our psychological landscapes, the narrator describes how a traveller's physical movements can influence their psychological state.

The insights gained into the characters' interior lives through their relationship to place are numerous. For instance, in the vignette titled "Swimming Lessons," the narrator describes how a woman's memories of swimming are tied to her relationship with her mother. She writes, "The water was a medium in which she could feel close to her mother, who was

always distant, unreachable" (53). Similarly, in the vignette titled "Turin," the narrator describes how a man's experience of a city is tied to his sense of self. She writes, "The man felt as if he were the city itself, as if the city were a reflection of his own inner landscape" (123). Thus, the maps and cartographic metaphors in the novel provide insights into the characters' interior lives and their relationship to place, highlighting how our physical experiences can shape our emotional and psychological landscapes.

The act of mapping has significant power dynamics involved in it, as maps are not just representations of physical landscapes, but also reflect cultural, political, and social ideologies of the mapmakers. Jeremy W Crampton in his article on maps as social constructions asserts that "the map is not objectively 'above' or 'beyond' that which is represented; nor can one track back from the representation to some ultimate object, knowledge or mind." He continues to say that "one of the important implications of this is that, according to Harley, maps are rhetorical devices which dismantle the 'arbitrary dualism' of propaganda versus true maps, or scientific versus artistic maps" which echoes Foucault's 'dividing practices' that "are the result of a discourse of power-knowledge" (240).

In *Flights*, Olga Tokarczuk explores the significance of mapping and how the maps in the novel reflect or subvert dominant cartographic traditions and power structures. In traditional cartographic practices, maps are often used to reinforce colonial power structures and to legitimize the expansion of empires. The act of mapping was used to claim ownership of territories and resources, to mark borders and boundaries, and to erase the histories and cultures of indigenous peoples. Barbara Piatti et al. points out the potential power of fiction:

> Fiction is sometimes hard to localise, whereby settings are located 'somewhere', with no precise correspondences to a given section of the geospace. This forms a problem for cartographers – where to locate settings when there are no geographic 'hooks' on which to 'hang' these elements of literature. Cartographers will need to hunt for clues about location, follow inferred routes and demarcate boundaries which refuseto accord to 'traditional' cartographic rules. (182)

In *Flights,* Tokarczuk subverts these dominant cartographic traditions by presenting maps that are not fixed, but fluid and constantly changing. In the vignette titled "The Encyclopedic Palace," the narrator describes a map that is constantly updated by a group of travellers. The map is not a fixed representation of physical geography, but rather a dynamic expression of the travellers' experiences and perceptions of the places they visit. This subverts the dominant cartographic tradition of fixed and static maps, and highlights the importance of subjective experiences in creating maps. "Every time a traveller recounted his or her experiences in a new place, a map of sorts was created, but it was a map that was alive, a map that grew and changed with each new tale added to it, a map that was not a representation of the physical landscape but instead a representation of the travellers' perceptions and experiences of it"(*Flights* 61).

In *Flights*, the maps and cartographic metaphors also suggest the limitations of language and representation in conveying lived experiences. The linguistic devices used in the novel highlight the uncertainty and ambiguity of the characters' experiences and the difficulty of capturing the full complexity of human experience through language. In the vignette titled "The Tongue," the narrator describes the difficulties of translating words from one language to another. She writes, "Words that are full of meaning in one language can be almost empty in another" (31).This highlights the limitations of language in conveying the full meaning and complexity of lived experiences.

Similarly, the maps often reflect the ambiguity and uncertainty of the characters' experiences. In the vignette titled "Baggage," the narrator describes a map of an airport that is full of empty spaces and uncertainties. She writes, "The airport was a place of transition, it was where you ended up when you were between two places, two lives. It was a map full of holes, with many places that were unknown and undefined. You were in a state of suspension there, as if the world had come to a stop and you were simply waiting for it to start up again" (80. This emphasizes the ambiguity and uncertainty of the characters' experiences as they travel through airports and encounter new places and cultures.

Moreover, the cartographic metaphors used in the novel suggest the limitations of representation in conveying lived experiences. In the vignette titled "The Broken Road," the narrator describes a road that is broken and fragmented, much like the characters' experiences. She writes, "The road was broken, and so was their journey. There were gaps and fragments, places that they had to fill in themselves"(203). This metaphor highlights the difficulty of representing complex experiences through language and suggests that the characters must fill in the gaps themselves. "The characters were suspended in time, between their past and their future, trying to find a way to connect the two. They were searching for a narrative to make sense of their experiences, but the road was fragmented, and the narrative was elusive" (203). The novel highlights the importance of subjective experiences and the limitations of objective representation in understanding the full complexity of human experience.

In *Flights*, the maps and cartographic language are used to reflect the characters' shifting senses of identity and belonging, and to explore how movement and travel affect their understanding of themselves and their place in the world. The novel portrays travel as a means of self-discovery and a way to explore different facets of one's identity and belonging.The maps in the novel often depict a fluid and changing geography, mirroring the characters' sense of movement and change. In addition, the novel features characters who are constantly on the move, traveling through different countries and cultures. In the vignette titled " Flights," the narrator describes a group of travellers who are constantly moving from one airport to another. These travellers are in search of adventure and new experiences, and their movement reflects their desire to explore different aspects of their identities. In the vignette titled "Swedish Heaven," the narrator describes a woman who travels to Sweden to meet her long-lost sister. Through her travels, the woman gains a sense of connection and belonging to her sister and her Swedish heritage. Her movement also allows her to discover

new aspects of her identity that she may not have explored otherwise. Her movement itself was the goal, her arrival merely an incidental by-product of the journey. Through her travels, she had come closer to her sister and to her Swedish heritage. The movement had allowed her to discover new aspects of her identity that she may not have explored otherwise (247). Furthermore, the maps and cartographic language in *Flights* contribute to the novel's broader themes and aesthetic dimensions by emphasizing the subjective nature of experience and the limitations of representation. The novel highlights the importance of subjective experiences and the difficulties of representing complex experiences through language and other forms of representation. Throughout the novel, characters are shown using maps to navigate physical and emotional journeys, to explore new territories and to chart their own paths through life.

However, the novel also explores the ways in which maps can be used as tools of power and domination, particularly in the context of colonialism and imperialism. The novel examines how maps have been used to shape and control territory, to impose borders and boundaries on the world, and to assert authority over people and places. The novel's exploration of these themes is closely tied to its engagement with history and the legacy of colonialism. The novel contains a number of historical episodes that highlight the ways in which maps have been used to shape the world, from the early days of exploration and colonization to the present day. These episodes demonstrate the ways in which the power of maps has been used to assert control over people and territory, often at the expense of indigenous cultures and ways of life. The novel shows how maps have been used as tools of colonialism and imperialism, allowing colonizers to claim and divide territories and resources for their own benefit. The characters' understanding and interaction with these maps are shaped by this history of exploitation and domination, and they are often presented with maps that reinforce these power dynamics. Anders Engberg-Pedersen makes a reference in this regard to J. B. Harley's insightful article "Deconstructing the Map," and comments that "adopting theoretical claims from Derrida and Foucault to challenge the seductive transparency and alleged scientific objectivity of the map, he instead recast it as a complex of rhetorical structures, power, and hidden ideologies" ("Introduction" 5).

The novel challenges the notion that language and mapping are objective and universal tools that can be used to represent the world in a neutral and unbiased way. Instead, the novel suggests that these tools are shaped by cultural and historical contexts, and are often used to impose particular ways of understanding and categorizing the world. The novel also explores the limitations of language in representing identity, particularly in the context of gender and sexuality. The novel's narrator suggests that traditional gender categories are inadequate for capturing the full range of human experience, and that language often fails to fully represent the complexities of gender and sexuality.

In addition to language, the novel also interrogates the limitations of mapping in representing the world. The novel suggests that maps often flatten and simplify the world, reducing it to a series of lines and boundaries that fail to capture the full complexity of human experience. In the vignette "Lines, Planes and Bodies" of *Flights*, the narrator says, " maps of the world, of

this internal and that external world, had already been drawn up, and that order, once glimpsed, irradiated the mind, etching into it, the primary—the fundamentals—lines and planes"(188).*Flights* interrogates the limitations of mapping and language in representing the complexities of human experience and identity, suggesting that traditional forms of representation often fail to capture the full richness and diversity of the world. The novel's exploration of these themes provides a thought-provoking and insightful perspective on the challenges of representing the world through language and mapping.

One of the key themes of the novel is movement and displacement, and the novel explores the ways in which power dynamics shape individuals' ability to move and travel freely. The novel's characters come from a range of backgrounds and experience different levels of freedom and constraint when it comes to mobility and movement. For instance, the character Kunicki is a wealthy businessman who is able to travel freely around the world and exert his power and influence wherever he goes. In contrast, the character Annushka is a migrant worker who faces numerous obstacles and barriers in her efforts to move and find work. The novel also explores the ways in which power dynamics are tied to the ability to control movement and mobility. The novel suggests that those who hold power are often able to control the movement of others, whether through physical force, legal restrictions or economic exploitation. At the same time, the novel also explores the ways in which individuals and communities can resist these power dynamics and assert their own agency and autonomy. The novel's characters are shown taking various actions to challenge the constraints placed on their movement, whether through acts of rebellion, creativity or solidarity. The novel suggests that the ability to move freely is a key aspect of personal freedom and autonomy, and that power dynamics often shape individuals' ability to exercise this freedom.

The novel also shows how maps can be used to erase or marginalize certain communities and cultures. The characters encounter maps that depict the world in ways that exclude or minimize their own experiences and perspectives, and they must negotiate their own identity and agency within these limited representations. "Tokarczuk has said Poland's own history of disappearing and reappearing on the map of Europe lends its literature a preference for the fragmentary and the uncertain" (Nota Bene).

At times, the protagonist is critical of the way maps can be used to reinforce colonial and imperialist power dynamics, and how they can erase or marginalize certain cultures and perspectives. At the same time, the novel suggests that individuals and communities can challenge and subvert these power dynamics by creating their own maps and representations of the world. The characters in the novel engage in creative and imaginative acts of map-making, using their own experiences and perspectives to challenge the dominant representations of the world. For instance, the character Kunicki is a wealthy businessman who is able to travel freely around the world and exert his power and influence wherever he goes. In contrast, the character Annushka is a migrant worker who faces numerous obstacles and barriers in her efforts to move and find work. At the same time, the novel also explores the ways in which individuals and communities can resist these power dynamics and assert their

own agency and autonomy. The novel's characters are shown taking various actions to challenge the constraints placed on their movement, whether through acts of rebellion, creativity or solidarity. The narrator says in the vignette "Purging the Map", "If something hurts me, I erase it from my mental map. Places where I stumbled, fell, where I was struck down, cut to the quick, where things were painful, —such places are simply not there any longer." She continues, "Whenever I have had to visit one of those non-existent places(I try not to bear grudges), I've become an eye that moves like a spectre in a ghost town…I've played by the rules as established by the people." She avers that "I've tried not to betray to them the phantom nature of these places where they're still stuck, poor things, all erased… I wouldn't want to confuse them with the knowledge that they don't exist" (103).

In Olga Tokarczuk's *Flights*, the line between physical and mental journeys is often blurred, as the novel explores the complex relationship between movement, imagination, and memory. The novel is structured as a series of interconnected fragments, each exploring a different theme or idea related to travel and movement. These fragments are presented as a mosaic of different voices and perspectives, weaving together stories of travel and displacement from different times and places.

Throughout the novel, the characters' physical journeys are often intertwined with their mental and emotional experiences. The characters frequently find themselves drifting in and out of memories, dreams, and imaginative flights of fancy, blurring the line between the physical and the mental. The character Kunicki becomes fixated on a series of maps that he believes will lead him to a lost city, and he becomes increasingly detached from his physical surroundings as he becomes more and more obsessed with his mental quest. Similarly, the character Annushka becomes immersed in a series of imaginative flights of fancy as she travels across Europe, using her imagination to escape the limitations of her physical reality. At the same time, the novel suggests that the physical and the mental are deeply interconnected, and that movement and travel can be powerful catalysts for personal growth and self-discovery. The characters' physical journeys often lead to important insights and revelations about themselves and their place in the world. However, the protagonist is also fascinated by the creative possibilities of mapping and the ways in which maps can help us understand and navigate the world around us. She is intrigued by the idea of creating her own maps, and she imagines new ways of representing the world that could challenge the dominant narratives and power dynamics embedded in traditional cartography. Laura Kurgen in her work *Close Up at a Distance: Mapping, Technology, and Politics* says, "Often unknowingly we also generate maps and even become maps, as the data of our travels, our purchases, our work habits is conglomerated, processed, and visualized with the aid of GIS on the very maps that are then presented for us to read or, precisely, are hidden from view behind secure firewalls" (34).

The map has become a part of the everyday lives, "in Marshall McLuhan's terms, an extension of ourselves, but instead as a completely integrated part of our lives. In an unprecedented way, we live the map" (Engberg-Pedersen, "Introduction" 3). The novel's

main character, the "traveller," is constantly moving between different places and cultures, and maps serve as a way of orienting herself within these spaces. However, as the novel progresses, it becomes clear that the traveller's identity is not fixed or stable but is instead shaped by the places she visits and the people she encounters. Through her exploration of this theme, the protagonist invites readers to consider their own relationship to maps and how they shape our perceptions of the world around us. As Engberg-Pedersen states:

> Cartography matters to literature in ways that far exceed the simple task of orienting the reader in the fictional world. As they also show, however, the precise valences and meanings of literary cartography become clear only when texts and maps have been framed in such a way as to make each other sufficiently strange for their complementarities, disjunctions, and tensions to appear. (Introduction 13)

Maps and cartography used in *Flights* explore broader theoretical concepts related to globalization and the movement of people and ideas across borders. The novel contains references to historical maps, including those used by explorers and cartographers during the age of exploration, as well as contemporary maps used by travellers and migrants. Through its use of maps, the novel emphasizes the importance of spatiality and geography in shaping personal and collective identity, and invites readers to consider the broader social and cultural contexts in which these identities are formed. The novel illustrates how characters use and interact with maps in the novel, to reflect the ways in which maps are both influenced by and contribute to power dynamics and cultural narratives. They enhance the reader's understanding and engagement with the story, and provide a visual and interactive element to the reading experience.

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Anthropocentrism and Inequity between Human and Non-Human Worlds: A Study of Animal Imagery in Anuradha Roy's *The Folded Earth*

ARUNYA S. & V. VINOD KUMAR

Arunya S.

Abstract

Anuradha Roy, the contemporary Indian novelist, contributes award-winning novels to the realm of Indian writing in English. Her novels highlight the deteriorating relationship between human beings and nature, paving way for a range of environmental problems. Environmentalists presume that ecological degradation is an inevitable side effect of anthropocentrism which regards humans as the primary holders of moral standards and valuing all other beings based on their ability to serve human needs. This paper reiterates the human chauvinistic attitude of establishing dominance over the non-human world resulting in the cruel and degrading treatment of animals with an effective use of Animal Imagery as portrayed by Roy in her novel *The Folded Earth*. These ideas are elucidated through relevant instances from the novels.

Keywords: ecological degradation, anthropocentrism, environmental problems, animal imagery, and human chauvinism

A study of "literature and environment" always raises the question of whether it is a sub-discipline of literary studies or an extension of literary studies to environmental sciences. It is a practice that is largely imbibed within the paradigms of the humanities and social sciences. The texts that appear in this field are either conceptual or experiential. It focuses on the literary and the artistic experiences of humans in a world that is shaped by both nature and culture hoping for a harmonious existence. The basic definition of ecocriticism, as put forth by Cheryll Glotfelty in *The Ecocritical Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, is "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (xviii).

Ecocriticism emerged as a field in response to environmental problems. It evaluates texts and ideas in terms of responses to environmental crises. It is one of the emerging disciplines that began during the 1990s. Ecocriticism derives its insights from philosophy, feminism, Marxism, sociology, environmental studies, and other disciplines working at the level of discourse and application. It takes an earth-centred approach that examines the treatment of nature in literature. "Ecological criticism shares the idea that human culture is connected to the physical world, which is affecting it and being affected by it…as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman" (xix).

Environmentalists presume that ecological degradation is an inevitable side effect of anthropocentrism. The term "Anthropocentrism" is derived from ancient Greek, where *anthropos* means "human being" and *kentron* means "center," hence human-centered, which believes that only human beings possess intrinsic values, all other beings are valued only based on their utility to serve human needs. According to the Merriam-Webster

V. Vinod Kumar Dictionary, the definition of Anthropocentric is "considering human beings as the most significant entity of the universe; interpreting or regarding the world in terms of human values and experiences" (Anthropocentric)

In this article, the non-human world is limited to animals, as animals play a significant role in the lives of every individual being. The study of relations between animals and humans in the humanities is split between the analysis of the representation of animals in history and culture (or animal studies), and the philosophical consideration of animal rights. Animals function as an important trope in literary texts. The aim of this paper is to bring out the anthropocentric attitude resulting in the inequity between human and non-human worlds through the use of animal imagery in Anuradha Roy's *The Folded Earth (FE)*.

Researchers have conducted various studies on the animal imagery used by writers. Ahmed and Rafique (2014), in their article "Use of the Animal Imagery in Adiga's *The White Tiger*" analysed and interpreted the use of animal imagery ranging from tigers to black crows in Adiga's novel in the context of postmodernism. Sushil Ghimire (2021) in the article titled "Animal Imagery in George Orwell's novel *Animal Farm*" explored the effective use of animal imagery in order to bring out the political issue of power struggle in the allegorical novel. Thus, in most of the literature reviews the human-animal relationship is presented with animals as an integral part of nature. The present study aims to bring out the use of animal references in Roy's *The Folded Earth* that play a significant role in determining the human relationship with nature and addresses the issues of the anthropocentric attitude of man towards the non-human world.

Anuradha Roy is an Indian novelist, editor, and journalist. Initially, she worked at the Oxford University Press in New Delhi as an editor, and later she and her husband, Rukun Advani, founded their own publishing company, "Permanent Black." Her second novel, *The Folded Earth,* is about a young woman, Maya, making a new life at Ranikhet, a tiny village in the foothills of the Himalayas after the death of her husband, Michael. She moves to the town where people lived in co-existence with nature, in order to escape her tragic past and to live in harmony with nature. The village life of Maya is with Ama, a wise elderly village woman who takes care of her son's family; Charu, the granddaughter of Ama, who initially seemed to be timid, later grows up to be courageous; Puran, Charu's half-witted uncle; Diwan Sahib, an aging aristocrat; and Veer, the mountaineering guide. Maya is caught between the past life and her new life in the new place.

This study explores the wide use of animal imagery in *The Folded Earth*. A multi-faceted description of animals is carried out meticulously by Anuradha Roy in order to bring out the anthropocentric perspective present in her novel. Animal references, including horses, dogs, cows, goats, etc. are taken for analysis. The vivid description of animals in the texts provides various characteristics of anthropocentrism through the use of animal images. The use of animal imagery dates back to classical literature. Although the use of animals in literary works may be interpreted in different ways, the writers use them in order to strengthen their ideas and concerns. Animal imagery is used from children's fables to contemporary literature in a motive to impart wisdom and knowledge to the readers, irrespective of their age. Earl J. Wilcox defines imagery as the impression or impressions, we receive when one or more of our senses are stimulated by language (186). Anuradha Roy has used a wide range of animal imageries in her novels. Animal imagery has been taken for study in order to unveil the relationship between humans and nature, as the physical world collectively includes plants, animals, and landscapes.

Tim Hayward in his "Anthropocentrism: A Misunderstood Problem" claims that human beings may be accused of speciesism where their preference towards the interests of members of their own species over the interests of members of other species is motivated by morally arbitrary reasons. Hayward considers "if it is wrong in the human case to inflict avoidable physical suffering because humans are sentient beings, then it would be morally arbitrary to allow the inflicting of suffering on other sentient beings. That is why cruel and degrading treatment of animals can be condemned as speciesist" (52-53). This is where the idea of the instrumental value of anthropocentrism comes into play, since non-humans are recognized in terms of their instrumental value to human needs. These non-human beings are accorded only instrumental value and not intrinsic value. Some consider speciesism to be an aspect of anthropocentrism, whereas in other cases it is used interchangeably with anthropocentrism. Paul Francis Waldau, an American ethicist, defines "Speciesism is the inclusion of all human animals within, and the exclusion of all other animals from the moral circle" (38).

Human Chauvinism implies that humans must take precedence over the interests of the non-human world, establishing the superiority or dominance of one's own group, considering them to be strong, virtuous, and worthy; on the other hand, the non-human others are weak, inferior, and unworthy. "While the human chauvinist may officially claim that there are criteria which provide reasons for preferring humans – such as the language, rationality, sociality etc" (Hayward 56-57). Richard Routley and Val Routley in their essay "Against the Inevitability of Human Chauvinism," state "We will be concerned primarily with strong forms of human chauvinism, which see value and morality as ultimately concerned entirely with humans, and nonhuman items as having value or creating constraints on human action only in so far as these items serve human interests or purposes" (36).

In the anthropocentric worldview, humans are considered the subjects, and nonhumans are identified as objects. It is a conception that takes the human as its centre or norm. The natural world is seen as something that is entirely in relation to humans to serve their needs.

Traditionally, horses are seen as the symbol of nobility, pride, and chivalry. In *FE*, there is a reference to Arab horses, which happen to be one of the oldest and the most popular breeds of horses. They are also considered to be the first domesticated breed. Diwan Sahib was telling about the Nawab and his beautiful Arab horses, which he was passionate about. He spent most of his time with the horses and went on horseback to the jungles. The very first duty of the Nawab in the morning was to go to the horses; he had five favourites exalting them with names of Mughal kings and queens. During the partition, when the Nawab had to leave India, his worry was towards the horses. He did not want to leave them under anybody's care. This reflected in his brutal action of shooting them one after the other with his own hunting rifle, although he disapproved of hunting. As Pearce notes, "self-loving people do not necessarily care more about others – humans or animals" (qtd. in H. Kopnina et al. 119), which appeals to the Nawab because of his self-centered nature, he did not care about the lives of the horses. This action of the Nawab elicits a narcissistic attitude in mankind:

> The Nawab had kept beautiful Arab horses, Diwan Sahib was saying. They were his passion. He spent more time with them than on his royal duties… He had five favorites, whom he had named after Mughal kings and queens: Noor, Jahangir, Babar, Humayun, and Mumtaz. The day before his departure, he went to them, watered them, whispered to them, and then shot them with his hunting rifle, one after the other. (Roy 23-24)

Cruelty towards animals also expresses the anthropocentric attitude of human beings in extremity. There is yet another incident where self-centered egoism is portrayed by Roy through the character, Mr. Chauhan, a recently appointed administrator of Ranikhet. Charu's uncle Puran was often called Sanki Puran because of his eccentric behaviour with humans as well as animals. The mention of Puran in the novel is always accompanied by animals or issues related to animals. Understanding between human and nature is sometimes beyond human assumptions, as in the connection between Puran and the deer, Rani. Puran's relationship with the fawn began when he brought home the animal from the forest. The fawn did not allow anybody to touch it except Puran. He took much care of the fawn by making a soft cushioned bed for it with piled pine needles and dry grass. He has named it Rani, as she was queenly in her attitude and a deer from Ranikhet.

Rani was separated from Puran and taken to the Nainital Zoo. Puran was arrested for keeping a wild animal at home as a revenge initiated by Mr.Chauhan. Although it was wrong on the part of Puran trying to tame a wild animal, Mr.Chauhan's attitude was more brutal. His attitude reflects the human-animal difference, considering animals as the other when compared to humans, and also mirrors the power hungry and ego-centric attitude of humans towards nature:

> Mr. Chauhan's permission was sought. He slammed the telephone down, fuming. "Here I am, the ad-min-is-trator of this city," he said, emphasizing every syllable with a rap of his pen on the desk. "And they want me to give all my time to these foolish matters!" It would be the ultimate humiliation for him to have to send Puran to Nainital. He would not hear of it. (172)

The news from a friend reached that Rani refuses to take food and water in the zoo. There is no improvement in spite of continued efforts made by the veterinary of the zoo. After a week, the vet advised them to bring Puran, which is the only hope for the deer's survival. Mr. Chauhan was informed about the issue, but he had no consideration towards the life of Rani and said that he had no time for such trivial things. This resulted in the death of Rani in the zoo: "On the thirteenth day, the deer died of malnutrition, dehydration, and grief. It became a small news item in the local paper, and a journalist came to interview Puran for a "human interest" feature" (172). Mr. Chauhan had the authority to send Puran to the zoo, which would have saved the life of poor Rani but he had no concern for the life of deer. This illustrates the anthropocentric thought that human beings can comprehend the world only to a certain level pertaining to human perspective, excluding animals from the moral circle. It is implied that the ego-consciousness of man caused the life of an animal. A simple action of man towards nature would have a great impact, but the self-centered attitude spoils everything.

Roy's portrayal of animals with human beings throws light on the question of domesticity. Domestication of animals in a way is purely for the benefit of human needs. Although they understand their importance in their everyday lives, they view animals as commodities. This is evident through Roy's use of the motifs of goats, dogs, and cows. Ama sold Pinki, Charu's favourite goat, to the butcher, reasoning that she had to arrange feasts for the prospective grooms who came to see Charu and to pay the Ohjha, a person who is believed to treat sick people through prayer or supernatural power (witch doctor). She also made it clear that goats were not meant to be pets; they were ordained to be slaughtered when they reached the right size. It is not much difficult for humans to part with their animals when compared to animals that trusted humans. This is apparent in Pinki's case. Though Charu found it painful every time to part with the dear animals she brought up, it was not as agonising as the animals undergo. The butcher tried various ways to move Pinki, but every attempt failed, so Ama sent Puran to help him move her. After Puran's arrival, Pinki obediently moved in the same direction as if being taken to its regular graze every day. In this sense, Ama may be considered a speciesist because of her preference for the interests of members of her own species over those of members of other species. This manifests that animals trust their masters more than anybody else, but it turns out to be disastrous towards the end. This also reflects the slave-owner relationship between animals and humans:

> It was not an easy time for her. That same month, Ama sold Pinki to the butcher. "I wouldn't have to sell your precious goat, if you didn't cost me so much," she had said when Charu pleaded with her. Ama had to finance the feasts for the prospective grooms, and there was the money she had to pay the Ohjha. "The goats are not pets," she reasoned. "Why do you think I keep them?" All their goats were destined for the slaughter house, and were sold to a butcher in the market when they reached the right size . . . . He tried oak leaves as enticement and when that failed, he hit her rump with a stick. Pinki dug in her heels and pitted all her strength against his. He could not budge her. When all his attempts failed, Ama sent Puran to help the butcher. (191-92)

Callicott's view of anthropocentrism is that "only humans are worthy of ethical considerations" and "other things are mere means to human ends" (qtd. in H. Kopnina et al. 115). Here, when Ama's cow, Gouri Joshi was missing, Charu went in search of it everywhere wherever she usually grazed her in the slopes. Only the next day, "Charu found Gouri at dawn the next day, in a deep gully. The cow had fallen in awkwardly. Two of its legs jutted at such an odd angle they were certainly broken, and it had a deep wound near its neck. It was alive, but it lay with a still, glazed look, not making a sound" (Roy 98). As the cow was wounded seriously, Maya suggested to call the veterinarian to treat Gouri but Ama preferred Ohjha, a witch doctor, over the vet and the word was spread to inform Ohjha about the incident to come at once. Not only Ama but most of the villagers including the clerk also believed that something could be done by Ohjha to Gouri. Charu stayed with Gouri all night. Next day afternoon Ohjha arrived and began his rituals towards Gouri – chanted mantras, waved his peacock feathers, and out of everybody's expectation finally made a verdict that when time comes nobody can stand between death and life:

> "We should call the vet," I said. "I'll go." "That animal doctor will be no good now; it's too late," the clerk said…"Yes, only the Ohjha can do something," the clerk nodded in sombre agreement… Then he went still and quiet. After an interval when everyone waited, respectful and expectant, he gave his verdict: "When the time comes to return to the world of ghosts and spirits, nobody can stand between death and life." (98-99)

With this statement, Ohjha gained the charms of the local people, took three meals from Ama's house and pocketed twenty rupees as his charge, and left the place without worrying about Gouri and its life as his expectation is satisfied. Finally, Charu watches "…the pain-filled eyes of Gouri Joshi, which on the fourth day clouded over and closed" (100). Thus, Human exceptionalism is based on its own values and ethical considerations, and the lives of other non-human world are mere means to human needs. Preference to Ohjha over vet was based on human ethical considerations even though the vet might have saved the life of Gouri. Gouri's life was taken for granted as it was considered based on its mere utility to human needs.

Thus, Roy in the novel projects the inequity between the human and the non-human worlds through the use of animal imagery, which depicts human interaction with the environment through animals that are part of their everyday lives. The concern over man's harmonious relationship with nature is an issue that remains vital in the current era, maintaining respect for nature and being in harmony with the environment are vital for a worthy life. Some of Roy's characters live a life of constant interaction with animals, where the animals become a usual part of their everyday existence, but their innate belief of anthropocentric attitude never subsides, though it may vary in proportion from one individual to the other. Roy is successful in portraying the problems of the others (animals) such as the degrading treatment of animals and considering them to be mere resources or commodities which are valued based on their utilitarian purpose for human benefits. Roy also throws light on the domestication of animals and existing cruelty towards animals. Such attitude of human beings, in a way, inflicts damage to their own species resulting in apocalypse. Animals are so ingrained

in the lives of certain characters of Roy. With an elegant and poised narration, Roy portrays a realistic picture of the animal world. The harmonious state of living is considered an alternative to, and even a remedy, for humans' anthropocentric attitude and alienation from nature. The complexity of the natural world remains beyond the understanding and command of the human community. Therefore, it is necessary to foster human-animal harmony in real life.

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Wounds of the Land: Landscape and Memory in Israeli and Palestinian Cinema

Sarath S.

> "Of the Visible, to the dialectic of the visible and the invisible, so as far as Palestinians are concerned." Edward W. Said

Abstract

The article critically examines how "Liberal Israeli-Palestinian Wave Movies" and Palestinian movies constituted and re-mediated Palestine through their cinematic discourse effectuated through the complex parameters of verbal and non-verbal narrative structures. It explores how storytelling in these films influences perceptions and impacts the understanding of the nation of Palestine. Liberal Israeli Palestinian Wave emerged as a novel trend in the Israeli cinema, receiving accolades both at home and over global platforms for its innovative emphasis on Arab and Palestinian characters, a development unprecedented in Israeli cinematic history.

Keywords: Liberal Israeli-Palestinian Movies, Zionism, Geopolitics, Textual Homeland, Nakbas, Intifada

The entire history of the Palestinian struggle is intimately connected with the aspiration to achieve visibility. It is a widely acknowledged fact that the relationship of Palestinians to the visible and the visual has been fraught with difficulty. Early Zionist rhetoric aimed at mobilising Jewish communities deployed the slogan "We are a people without a land going to a land without people" (Dabashi 2), which played a significant role in narrating the purported non-existence of a people. This article critically examines how "liberal Israeli-Palestinian wave" movies and Palestinian movies constituted and re-mediated Palestine through their cinematic discourse effectuated through the complex parameters of verbal and non-verbal narrative structures. It elaborates how the story telling in the select movies shapes fact or perception and impact the understanding of the nation - Palestine. The article studies select Liberal Israeli Palestinian Wave Movies like Eran Riklis' *Lemon Tree* (2008), *The Syrian Bride* (2004) and *Zaytoun* (2012) , Amos Gitai's *Free Zone* (2005), Guy Nattir and Erez Tadmor's *Strangers* (2007), and Scandar Copti and Yaron Shani's *Ajami* (2009) and indigenous Palestinian movies like Elia Suleiman's *Divine Intervention* (2003) and *The Time That Remains* (2009) , Annemarie Jacir's *Salt of This Sea*(2008), Hany Abu-Assad's *Paradise Now* (2005) and *Rana's Wedding* (2002), and Rashid Mashrawi's *Ticket to Jerusalem* (2002).

The Liberal Israeli-Palestinian Wave films center Arabs and Palestinians as protagonists or central characters, explicitly depicting their struggles, survival, and critical life junctures. These films often offer a fictionalized revisiting of the enduring Arab-Jewish or Israel-Palestine conflict, marking a significant shift in cinematic narrative. These films are referred to as "Liberal Israeli-Palestinian Wave" because they adopt a liberal perspective and, for the first time in the history of Israeli cinema, provide visual representation of Palestinians and their struggles on the Israeli screen. It is evident that films entered Israel early on and were utilised to reflect and influence Israeli political and cultural agendas. Conversely, Palestinian cinema emerged later due to complex socio-political and religious conditions, while Egypt became the central hub for Arab filmmaking. As Dabashi observes, "The central trauma of Palestine is Nakba, which is the defining moment of Palestinian cinema" (11). This study examines how storytelling in selected films influences perceptions of the Israel-Palestine conflict, the geopolitics of the region, and the politics of narrating the nation of Palestine. Movies have the potential to influence perspectives, when it is woven within the garbs of history, myth and memory. Narratives are the most persuasive form of communication, being fluid and a paralanguage, it is thus pivotal in catering politics.

Since their inception and development, Israeli and Palestinian cinema have intertwined with the geopolitics of Nile to Oxus region. Films foreground the nationalistic encounter between Israel and Arab nations, with their respective nationalistic ideologies shaping distinct patterns of self-representation within their cinematic narratives. During the early silent film era in Palestine, the cinematic landscape was predominantly shaped by newsreels, travelogues, and documentaries, all of which were exclusively filmed by foreign filmmakers (Shohat 15). *First Film of Palestine* (1911), the first native film of Palestine was not produced by Arabs but by Jewish Ashkenazi immigrants. The movie was directed by Moshe Resenberg and was screened in the Zionist congress in Basel. Until 1960s these movies of Palestinian land were synonymous with Zionist propaganda, portraying the Holy Land as a barren desert transformed by Jewish settlers, reinforcing the narrative of "a land without people for a people without land" (Dabashi 2). Arab Palestinians were represented as uncivilized nomads and troublemakers, reinforcing a binary between secular nationalism and fundamentalist Islam. The formation of Israel, in1948, by UN as a nation created Pan-Arab solidarity and it is the beginning of Palestinian nationalism and national conscience.

Film makers Yacov Ben Dov, Nathan Axeldrov and Baruch Agadati filmically represented Jewish progress in Palestine from a Zionist perspective. Zionist organisations were the major financial source for each production; agencies such as Jewish National fund, Jewish Agency, United Jewish Appeal were some of them, which obliged financial dependency to Zionist institutions. Abu el Hassan's *The life of the Jews in Eretz Israel* ignored the Arabs of the region, majority of the population, it helped to give a narration and impression that the country was solely Jewish. Ella Shohat argues that following the establishment of Israel in 1948, film production became more organized and played a significant role in both promoting Zionism internationally and integrating new immigrants domestically. Until the late sixties,

Israeli films focused on virtually mythic Israeli heroes (*The Heroes Wife, What a Gang, Give Me Ten Despirate Men* were some instances.). Those films widely used archeological sites to narrate nation, Holy Land as envisioned in the Bible. The death of the protagonist as in many Israeli nationalist movies is allegorically compensated by the rebirth of the country. This narrative framework in Israeli context is linked to the concept of self-sacrifice for the home land, which is articulated in phrases like "in their death they granted life for us" (Shohat 55).

Another characteristic of Israeli movies was the anonymity of enemy; it is necessary to construct abstract evil characters hence Arab soldiers are repeatedly narrated as agents of violence. *Oded the Wanderer* (1933), directed by Chaim Halachmi is the first feature-length narrative film of the Yishuv, the native Jews of Palestine before the formation of the State of Israel in 1948. It was projected in 1933 at Eden Cinema, Tel Aviv. The story of the cinema is that of a native born Jew or Sabra, Oded, whose small journey from his school, that is a trip through the Palestinian land which he records in his diary later but he loses his way during the journey. The narrative focuses Israeli landscape; prime objective was to showcase Eretz Israel/the Promised holy land of the Bible, and its people. The analysis of Israel's first film reveals its intent to construct a national identity through cinema. *Oded the Wanderer* intertwines myth with geography, as a teacher in the film recounts the desolate state of the Jezreel Valley and its subsequent revitalization by Jewish forefathers. *Oded the Wanderer* becomes a pretext to display Promised Land's landscape and turns literal what was before, in George Steiner's phrase "Textual Homeland".

An analysis of the region's geopolitics reveals that Palestinian nationalism, like Zionist nationalism, is a constructed identity. Zahir Muhsein, a PLO member, stated that "the creation of the Palestinian state is only a means for continuing our struggle against the state of Israel for our Arab unity" (Berger). The demand for a distinct Palestinian nation emerged as a product of Arab nationalism, as the concept of Palestinian nationalism did not exist before Israel's establishment. Palestinian cinema, often called the cinema of the Palestinian revolution, reflects this, as demonstrated by Palestine's statement at the 1973 Afro-Asian film conference in Tashkent, asserting that "the people's war is what granted the revolutionary Palestinian cinema its characteristics and its mode of operation… the light 16mm camera is the most appropriate weapon for the cinema of the people.""(Gertz 32).

In cinema, settings are crucial as they establish the narrative's temporal, spatial, and socio-cultural context, influencing the portrayal of characters and their actions. These settings often serve as cinematic tools to reflect or amplify characters' psychological and physical states. Liberal Israeli-Palestinian films frequently employ third or liminal spaces for their settings, exemplified by films like Zaytoun (Lebanon), Strangers (Germany and France), The Syrian Bride (Golan Heights), Free Zone (Jordan), and Lemon Tree (border between Israel and the West Bank), with the notable exception of Ajami, set in Jaffa. This choice of neutral settings allows Israel to sidestep direct representation of Palestinian landscapes, historical sites, and the impacts of conflict, thus marginalizing Palestinian narratives. Conversely,

Palestinian films are set within Palestinian territories, such as Nazareth, Ramallah, the West Bank, Jerusalem, and Kalandia, directly addressing the local landscape and its challenges. These films highlight ruined homes, demolished infrastructure, and Israeli checkpoints, thus asserting a visible Palestinian presence and identity. Elements such as the Dome of the Rock, the Israeli Separation Wall, and traditional Palestinian architecture frequently appear, alongside personal artifacts like Soraya's orange from Jaffa, Emad's bottle of sea sounds, and Jabir's projector. These props and settings serve to evoke a sense of nostalgia, address themes of identity and displacement, and critique Israeli imperialism.According to Christian Metz "The study of cinema is an art. The study of cinematographic expressiveness can therefore be conducted according to methods derived from linguistics…through its procedures of denotation; the cinema is (thus) a specific language" (Metz 182). Cinematography is the (visual) language of the cinema; camera angles and mise en scene are aids to convey information covertly. The recurrent shot that the select Palestinian movies have utilized is the extreme long shot showing the entire region of Palestine. While using the extreme long shot the camera adopts the wide angle lens which covertly conveys the message that the characters are distanced from their landscape and surrounding. Soraya and Emad in *Salt of this Sea* look out from a hill enumerating the various places in 'Palestine'- Jaffa, Ramallah and Tel-Aviv. A similar shot is repeated in *Paradise Now*, as Said and Khaled look out and see the landscapes, the buildings and the separation walls that are in front of them as obstacles to their freedom and movement. In *Divine Intervention* and *Time That Remains*, the Palestinian characters are presented within framed images symbolic of their present predicament under Israeli captivity. The characters are framed within doorways or windows and are placed under claustrophobic spaces of Israeli 'home', inside cars or hospitals.

The cinematography of *Rana's Wedding* frames Rana in a moment of desperation as she witnesses the demolition of Palestinian homes by a JCB. Tracking shots follow Palestinian characters in movies of ES, *Salt of the Sea, Rana's Wedding* and *Ticket to Jerusalem,* designate that the Palestinians are always on the run. Shaky point of view shots are used in *Ticket to Jerusalem* to articulate the restriction of movement. While in Israeli Liberal Movies, they use medium shots and close-ups, which are recurrently adopted to hide the Palestinian landscape, by focusing solely on the characters and their emotions. POV shots are used to indicate the Israeli point of view and their perspective on Palestinian landscape. The two POV shots in *Zaytoun* juxtapose the experiences of children in Arab and Israeli territories, highlighting Palestinian children receiving military training in a Lebanese playground, while Israeli boys play football in theirs, subtly weaves the politics of the narrative.

Divine Intervention and *The Time that Remains* present Palestinian characters with a positive body language, even in the face of taxing conditions. ES has a deadpan face and stoic endurance to the inhuman treatment of Palestinians in Israel. His girlfriend however wears a modern outfit and does a ramp walk across the Israeli watch tower making it crumble down to the ground in a magical realist style. She is powerful and controls the Israeli army with her gaze. The army gets stunned and they allow her to walk past them. She fights the

Israeli army in the attire of a ninja warrior. In the *Salt of the Sea*, Soraya is appalled by her treatment at Tel Aviv airport as she returns to her home for the first time from Brooklyn, but she stays strong at their lengthy interrogations. She is optimistic in both her attitude and attire. Her strong will and exuberance change the attitudes of Emad and other Palestinians in Ramallah who nurtured only pessimism in their lives. Said and Khaled in *Paradise Now* are presented as two angry men. From Said's visage the audience can read that he is hiding a grave wound, to stay in Palestine as the son of a collaborator. They are unfazed by death as suicide bombers as they have nothing to give to Palestine except their bodies, which they happily give. Rana is an independent woman who is bent on marrying her boyfriend, she dances merrily at her wedding at Al-Dahiya roadblock. *Ticket to Jerusalem* presents a couple Jabir and Sana following their passions of screening cinema and medical service respectively. Both are determined individuals as expressed through their body language.

The stories that movies convey have the power to sway the minds of the masses through the production and dissemination of identity and narration of landscape, trauma and memory. The themes of the select liberal Israeli Palestinian wave movies, revolve around the Israeli-Palestinian binary interactions- an Israel/Palestine friendship as espoused in *Zaytoun* (Fahad and Yoni, the pilot), an Israel-Palestinian romance in *Strangers* (Eyal and Rana), or an Israel-Palestinian female camaraderie as in *Lemon Tree* and *Free Zone* (Hanna and Leila). The themes of the select Palestinian movies are the Palestinian stoicism under Israeli occupation, their quest for identity and their acts of resistance. In Elia Suleiman's *Time That Remains* and *Divine Intervention*, the director's resistance to Israeli occupation is through silence and dark humour, while ES's girlfriend assumes superhuman powers to fight back the Israeli soldiers. In *Salt of the Sea* Soraya identifies her roots in Palestinian soil and throws away her diaspora garb of the Brooklyn born Palestinian. Soraya's way of resistance comes from flouting the Israeli authorities: she robs the British- Palestine bank and 'illegally' crosses the borders before getting arrested by the Israeli police. *Paradise Now* gives a grim picture of the lives of Palestinians living in Nablus, West Bank, through the eyes of two young men, Said and Khaled. Said wants to throw away the stigma attached to his name as the son of a collaborator and his only way of resistance to the Israeli authority is to blow himself up as a suicide-bomb. Khaled and Said are led by the dogmas of death and atonement instilled in them by the clandestine groups. However Suha emerges as the spokesperson of Palestine, where she brushes aside their beliefs, making them understand how violence will breed further violence. *Ticket to Jerusalem* presents Jabir's attempt at showcasing movies at various parts of Palestine including Jerusalem. The impediments he has faced in the form of checkpoints that thwarted his mobility, the land annexation, and the repeated riots on streets suggest how the Palestinian spaces are threatened, narrowed or reduced. However, Jabir's resistance comes in the form of crossing the borders to Jerusalem and screening the movie before the audience which ironically includes Israelis.

Themes of the Liberal Movies consciously mask the major Palestinian question of freedom, trauma, identity crisis and homelessness. In *Zaytoun* Fahad is happy to return to his refugee camp in Lebanon after visiting his home in Israel with Yoni. His home is now a dilapidated

building with walls and a door intact just enough for Fahed to open the doors with his key. He plants an olive in his courtyard, sleeps there happily but is unhappy over losing his Israeli friend. *Free Zone* presents the possibility of coexistence through the Leila and Hanna, in *Strangers* Eyal decides not to go to war for Rana, in *Ajami* the Palestinian drug dealers are caught and killed and the Palestinian hero Omar is running for his life. These movies further harp on the shared suffering at both camps during war- Yoni, the Israeli pilot narrates the death of his father in war; in *Lemon Tree* the Israeli Minister's wife is unhappy over her husband's decision and sympathizes with Salma; in *Free Zone* Hanna the Israeli, narrates the hardships of living in Israel during Intifadas and Naksas. *Strangers* talks about Eyal's confrontation with Israeli army, suggesting the sufferings of civilians in Israel during war time; in *Ajami* the murder of an old Jew by Palestinians, then kidnapping and the murder of the Israeli police officer's younger brother by a group of Palestinians suggest that no one is innocent in war.

The Israel/Palestine binary forms one of the dominant motifs in liberal wave movies. Zayatoun presents Fahed, a Palestinian boy and Yoni, an Israeli pilot and their comradeship. Israel is cultured, educated, professional and sincere while the Palestinian is uncouth, rude, arrogant, and deceitful. Fahed gets training to become a 'terrorist' while Yoni is a 'soldier' pilot. Fahed apes the cultured West when he robs Yoni's sunglass, gums and his cigarettes besides aping his ways and manners. Finally, Fahed returns home as a cultured, refined boy under the guidance of yoni. In *Free Zone*, Hanna and Leila serve as foils, subverting stereotypes by depicting Hanna, an Israeli, as indebted to Leila, a Palestinian. Hanna is portrayed as strong and independent, working on a cattle farm, while Leila is depicted as meek, facing family disapproval over her second marriage and ongoing financial conflicts. *Strangers* contrasts the powerful Israeli Eyal with Rana, an undocumented migrant in France who is devoted to him. *Ajami* presents a Jaffa beset by violence and crime, with Palestinian youths engaged in illegal activities and the Israeli police, under Officer Dando, maintaining control. The film contrasts the chaotic, tribal justice of the Palestinians with the orderly legal system of Israel, highlighting the disparity between the two communities.

Contemporary Palestinian movies narrate the state of nowhereness and the conflict of present-absentee status. Sulaiman gives the subtitle of "*Chronicle of a Present Absentee*" to his film *The Time that Remains*. He is conscious of his presence in his homeland but politically insignificant, that is absent. In *Salt of the Sea*, Soraya goes to collect money from the British-Palestine bank only to discover that her grandfather's bank account in Jaffa was frozen after the 1948 war. The bank does not consider her case now as Jaffa is now under Israeli governance. Palestine does not exist for them although Palestinians still exist as exiles, refugees or immigrants. Another recurrent motif is the quest for identity and home. The movie *Time That Remains* presents an Israeli cab driver who banters about belongingness to a home, while Elia mutely understands the plight of his home, Nazareth. Soraya (*Salt of the Sea)* crosses illegally to Jaffa to see the land of her ancestors where her roots are fixed. Israeli occupation is another motif which runs through all the select movies. The acculturation faced

by the Palestinian children under the Israeli governance in schools is epitomized in ES in *Time That Remains.* The physical and psychological harassment to Palestinians at check posts and road blocks appear in *Divine Intervention, Time That Remains, Salt of the Sea, Rana's Wedding and Ticket to Jerusalem.* The Palestinians are always under the Israeli surveillance – the Point of view (POV) Shots in Palestine movies narrate the Surveillance. In *Rana's Wedding* as the bride and groom sat near a statue in Jerusalem, the CCTV closely watches the couple and Khalil makes faces at the camera. The culture shock and survival threat faced by Palestinians amid Israeli occupation, house abduction and land annexation are narrated in *Time That Remains, Divine Intervention, Salt of This Sea, Rana's Wedding and Ticket to Jerusalem.* The lengthy interrogative sessions at airports, road blocks and borders which deteriorate to the extent of body-checks (Soraya, Emad, Jabir, ES) and the unending trails of questions about nationality and origins suggest how these have become customary in the lives of Palestinians. Palestinian films often emphasize the narration of memory and trauma, in contrast to their Israeli counterparts. *The Time That Remains* draws on the private diary of ES's father, Faud Suleiman, who recounts the traumatic experiences of his father after the 1948 war, including his home being ransacked by the Israeli army, his imprisonment, torture, and near death. ES also depicts his own trauma as a Palestinian child in an Israeli school, where he was forced to sing the Israeli anthem and reprimanded for labeling America as "imperialist." Similarly, *Salt of This Sea* features Soraya, who lives with the memories of her ancestors, particularly the stories from her grandfather about Jaffa oranges, the sea, and the bustling streets of their homeland.

Re-narrating the Palestinian history is another conspicuous aspect of the Palestinian movies which was consciously ignored by the liberal wave. ES's *Time That Remains* presents the entire history of Palestine through the lens of Fuad Suleiman and Elia Suleiman. The war of 1948, the surrender of Nazareth, the various Naksas and Nakbas are also presented although with an air of dark humour and deliberate affectation. *Rana's Wedding* and *Ticket to Jerusalem* critique the land annexation by Israel which is still being executed in the occupied territories. *Ticket to Jerusalem* presents how the Israeli soldiers annexed Rabab's house leaving her a single room. They try to drive away all the Palestinians from their homes so that they can take in Israeli settlers. The occupation and destruction of Jaffa, an old Palestinian territory in the 1948 war is narrated at the beginning of the movie *Salt of This Sea*.

Liberal films depict Israel as a state under siege, surrounded by both the literal sea and a metaphorical sea of Arabs, subtly valorizing its vulnerable position among Arab states and reinforcing its "no-choice" topographical situation. In contrast, Palestinian films frequently depict public spaces as sites of social tension and political struggle, while Israeli cinema often focuses on interior spaces, portraying Palestinians as trapped by community obligations and customs. Palestinian cinema, through non-linear narratives and fragmented visuals, explores themes of dispossession and despair, expressing a hope rooted in hopelessness, humor masking anger, and a serious yet ironic portrayal of the Palestinian experience under occupation, countering the narrative that labels them as violent or terrorist.

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Digital Resistance Literature and Queerbaiting

PRAVEENA THOMPSON

Abstract

With the advent of the digital age, fans, once relegated to relatively lonely existences at the margins of society, have now moved to inhabit thriving communities or fandoms, in more hospitable online spaces where they can freely express their ardent devotion as well as air grievances regarding the canonical storyline. Literary and media fans continue to actively engage with the works that stir their imagination in various innovative ways, rather than passively consume them. The transformative works or fanfiction they create based on their favourite characters, are digitally archived and shared in the fandoms. These works serve a greater purpose beyond wish fulfilment; they also act as astute and sharp commentary on the original work. Queerbaiting is a term used to refer to some of the strategies employed by authors or creators to ensure the interest and following of the queer community. Typically, this is executed by hinting at a non-heteronormative relationship between characters, successfully getting fans invested in the possibility of a relationship between them, but ultimately shying away from making it a reality. For fear of alienating conservative audiences, the creators eventually force a standard heteronormative relationship, even when it is not as meaningful or logical. These instances are sources of unrest for fans who delve into the dynamics of character interaction, and their alternate reading is expressed through their creative work. This paper argues that the slash and femslash fanfic in the fandoms of the TV shows *Game of Thrones*, *Sherlock Holmes*, and *Supernatural*, on the website archiveofourown.org, examined with the help of story tags, forms a body of resistance literature against the hegemonical practices of mainstream media.

Keywords: fandom; fanfic; queerbaiting; slash; femslash; resistance literature

With the advent of the digital era, literature has undergone many transformations, evolving into new genres and adopting new media to reach aficionados. The parameters of production and consumption of literary artifacts have also shifted to afford a more active role to readers who are no longer content to be passive consumers. Assuming the mantle of prosumers, being producers and consumers concurrently, fans mine the material from the work that they are emotionally engaged with to create transformative works of their own. Even though copyright laws prevent these works from being published for profit, they circulate freely in the virtual spaces called fandoms, where fans aggregate to discuss and celebrate their favourite work as well as the derivative versions of it emanating from their own ranks. The transformative fan works stem from certain dissatisfactions and disagreements which linger in the fans'

mind as well as from a desire to be continuously engaged with it in various ways. The digital age has also prompted the academic world to adopt new methods and tread new landscapes to keep up with the changing trends in humanities. The internet and social media and hashtags have become indispensable if we are to keep pace with the changing face of literary creation and dissemination.

Fanfiction is inspired by literary works, movies, television series, sports teams, music bands, and celebrities. Media fandoms are among the largest and most prolific of fandoms. Fans often disagree with how characters are portrayed in certain episodes, how the storyline develops, and most commonly about how the series ends. The fan-created storylines, or fanon, gains such wide acceptance at times that even show producers are forced to take note and tweak the original storyline to satisfy the fans. Sometimes it is on ideological areas that fans take issue with their favourite shows. The type of representation—often stereotypical or nominal—or complete lack of representation of marginalized characters poses a widespread problem which is critiqued creatively by fans.

The representation of LGBTQIA+ characters in mainstream media has always been fraught with complications. Even after the iron-fisted control of the Hays code, which explicitly prohibited the depiction of queer characters, was lifted, the perceived permissiveness of the western media did not always extend to include queer characters as much as to be representative of society, however closeted it was. One justification offered for this is that nonconformist representations of gender and relationships would not be accepted or enjoyed by the vast majority of viewers and fans who preferred heteronormative portrayals.

Queerbaiting is the practice of insinuating homosexual undertones between characters to retain the interest of the queer community, and later on refrain from pursuing it any further and assigning them to heterosexual relationships. This incites harsh protest from the fan community who react with fanfiction which subverts the heteronormative identities imposed on the characters. Resistance literature is a subset of literary output that is a socio-political activity involved in a struggle against dominant ideologies. Barbara Harlow explains that the fight against cultural supremacy can be won only through literary elements. This paper argues that one of the main stimuli for the production of slash and femslash fiction is the queerbaiting strategies employed by the creators of the show, and that this fiction forms a body of resistance literature online against the attempt to erase the natural presence of homosexuality. In order to substantiate this the slash and femslash fanfic of the fandoms of the television series *Game of Thrones, Supernatural,* BBC's *Sherlock* and *Merlin* from archiveofourown.org are explored and analysed with the help of the story tags.

Queerbaiting is closely related to queer coding, which was another deleterious practice adopted by production houses. It entailed the superimposition of stereotypical gay traits and behaviour on a character who was never explicitly shown to be gay. Moreover, such characters were invariably villains or used for comic effect. This was done supposedly with the intention of creating a negative association with homosexuality in young impressionable minds and

keep them from turning to such ways. When show makers and studios realised the necessity of harnessing the viewership of the LGBTQIA+ demographic as well in order to improve ratings, they started baiting them and gaining their fan following, with the possibility of meaningful representation which ultimately remains unfulfilled. The exercise proves successful time and time again—queer audiences, starved of any form of representation in mainstream media, flock to shows which offer the barest hint of it, even though the promises are empty and they are left unsatisfied. Fans, gaining agency through their activity in online fandoms, bring out fanfic exploring exactly the terrain which the original creators were squeamish to enter for fear of alienating the heterosexual fans. Slash fiction deals with male homoerotic pairings while femslash portrays lesbian relationships.

Game of Thrones is a television adaptation of George R.R. Martin's novel series *A Song of Ice and Fire*. It ran for eight seasons from 2011 to 2019. Set in a fantasy feudal universe, it portrays the struggles of several noble families trying to wrest control of Westeros and the Iron throne, all the while warding off a larger, supernatural threat in the form of The Night King and his army of the undead. Given the show's cultural importance with a massive fan following across several continents, critics feel that it missed an opportunity with queer storylines even though the writer has commented, "I wanted to include the full range of humanity, including the full range of sexual preferences …" There are many homosexual and bisexual characters in the show, but all of them are killed or imprisoned, and none are granted an enduring romantic relationship. Added to this is the fact that the dynamics between several characters heavily hint at a romantic attachment but never gets a proper treatment.

The beautiful young Sansa Stark is mistreated and terrorised by King Joffrey Baratheon and his mother, Cersei Lannister, at King's Landing. After Sansa's father is executed as a traitor, she is no longer considered important enough to be Joffrey's wife. Margaery Tyrell is brought into the picture as the next prospective bride. An unlikely friendship and attachment develops between the two girls, which is given a romantic colouring. Margaery presents Sansa with a rose in true romantic fashion, walks arm in arm with her, holds her hands, looks deep into her eyes and even mentions that some women like girls; the relationship however does not evolve any further. The site archiveofourown.org yields thousands of Margaery/ Sansa femslash fanfic. Fanlore.org attests that 'Sansaery', as their pairing is otherwise known, has consistently been the most popular femslash pairing on Archive of Our Own.

The Wolf and the Rose by Archive user Kendrene reimagines the fate of Sansa and Margaery as reigning together as Queens in the North after Sansa proposes to and marries Margaery. As the long winter slowly melts, the future seems hopeful for them.

Daenerys Targaryen and Yara Greyjoy is another fan-favourite femslash pairing. Daenerys is a strong claimant for the Iron Throne, having shed her powerlessness and mothered dragons. She builds up a reputation as a liberator of slaves as she conquers lands on her way to Westeros. Her strength and ability are acknowledged by those who used to dismiss her as just a little girl. Yara is as strong as any man and commands the respect of the men she sails with. She wants to break with convention and rule her land, the Iron islands, an ambition

rivalling Daenerys's own in intensity. They both had cruel fathers who were killed by usurpers, but managed to emerge as strong and respected women in the midst of rigid patriarchy. There is an evident attraction and flirtatious repartee between them when Yara arrives to offer her allegiance to Daenerys. Almost two hundred works turn up with this pairing in Archive of Our Own. Even the actress Emma Whelan, who played Yara, is reported to have said that her character might be in love with Daenerys. Yara is even shown to engage in a brief sexual exploit with a slave woman on the show, and Daenerys in the books does the same with one of her handmaidens. These interludes with social inferiors are tacitly meaningless encounters with no possibility of a lasting emotional bond. They also serve as small bits of representation intended to satisfy queer audiences, without having to commit to a real queer relationship integral to the framework of the show. The producers of the show, after giving out such strong signals of mutual attraction, chose to steer Daenerys into another heterosexual relationship.

I never demand by Phare takes off from the scene of the meeting and handshake of alliance between Daenerys and Yara that sparked numerous speculations of a lesbian love between them. The story sees their relationship consummated and Yara staying on with her through her many battles and victories.

The BBC adaptation of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* detective stories, which incidentally spawned one of the earliest fandoms, was aired from 2010 to 2017 and is set in the present day. The emotional intensity and undeniable sexual tension of this modern-day version of the famed literary pairing had fans expecting their relationship to be made canon. Contrary to these expectations, Watson is married off by the producers of the show. There are several instances in the show where other characters assume that they are a couple and homoerotic subtext abounds. 'Johnlock', as their pairing is known, is considered by some to be the father of all gay ships, amassing more than sixty-thousand stories on the Archive.

One Chance

has John Watson heading for a new job outside his partnership with the highly intelligent detective. He receives a text from Sherlock which starts a conversation between them about their relationship and finally brings them together in a relationship for which they have both been pining.

Supernatural is a dark fantasy series which has been enjoying one of the longest runs in television history, with fourteen seasons from 2005 to 2020. The brothers Dean and Sam Winchester following in their father's footsteps to become hunters of all manner of supernatural evil including monsters, demons, Gods, and Satan himself. Castiel is an angel in a human vessel who was originally supposed to appear only for six episodes. However, due to massive fan support for the character, he became a regular in the show. The pairing of Dean and Castiel, commonly dubbed 'Destiel', originated among fans on the very day that Castiel made his first appearance in Season four. In 2012, the gay entertainment site AfterElton ran

a poll to determine the most popular gay ship, and Destiel came in a close second to the *Teen Wolf* fandom's 'Sterek', with 245376 votes. Several moments in the show are cited as proof of their romantic feelings for each other; when they called each other family, when Dean told Castiel never to change, when Castiel admitted their "profound bond", to name just a few, and often share long, lingering glances. The hyper-masculinity that Dean projects is also seen as a cover or denial of latent homosexuality. Fans have also picked up on various references to well-known gay meeting places being mentioned at random throughout the show, mainly by Dean. All this has been fodder for more than eighty-three thousand Destiel stories on the Archive. Another favourite slash pairing favourite of *Supernatural* fans is Sam Winchester and the archangel Gabriel, contributing more than thirteen-thousand stories to the Archive. Their similar story arcs and the special affinity that Gabriel and Sam display towards each other give credence to their romantic alliance. *Destiel ships Sabriel* by teller_of_tales_and_hero_of_songs depicts Dean and Castiel in an established relationship, noticing the attraction between Gabriel and Sam, helping to bring them together. *Destiel Winter Kisses* by Ionlaisbored has Dean and Sam admitting their love for one another to Sam and Gabriel.

Merlin, a retelling of the old Arthurian Legend from the point of view of the eponymous young warlock, reveals a unique intimacy between him and Arthur Pendragon. Merlin poses as his manservant while, unbeknownst to Arthur, trying to help him achieve his destiny of ruling Camelot. He cares for him and tends to him and sacrifices his own interests for him time and again, frequently having near-death experiences in order to do so. Fans have picked up homosexual cues from their banter and interaction. Arthur is often accused of exhibiting sexual belligerence in his dealings with Merlin and a singular lack of chemistry in his romance with Guinevere. Arthur's dying scene, where Merlin cradles him in his arms, is held up as irrefutable proof of their homosexual love. Fanfic tries to rectify this distorted portrayal and give primacy to the relationship which the show tries to keep under wraps, and 'Merthur' fanfic makes up more than twenty-three thousand stories on the Archive. *Silver Skin* by cosmicfuss has Merlin revealing his secret of having magic with Arthur who has already guessed it and the two openly acknowledging their feelings for one another.

Queerbaiting concedes queer fans just enough representation to keep them interested, but not enough to afford them the satisfaction of true representation. It gives the suggestion that queer people have a vital role in these stories, that they might even be defining figures; the suggestion not the reality. They are forced to play the waiting game, but almost never reap the reward for it. The online fandoms and the fanfiction provide them the gratification of seeing their favourite characters united without judgement or hatred. The sheer number of such fanfiction is astounding and gives an inkling to the widespread objection to this hypocritical practice. It is a resistance against the denial of their proper place in society and cultural representation to queer people. As the digital populace enlarges with more and more digital immigrants pouring in to put a safe distance between themselves and the threatening social contacts in the outside world, it is not unreasonable to expect these concerns, which are

given creative expressions to online, should be acknowledged and addressed by mainstream society.

In this post-COVID world where we all talk about a new norm being established, we can hope that the resistance put up in the digital world- a world we have all taken refuge in to distance ourselves from the threat of the virus –will overcome the discriminatory practices that diminish the identity and experiences of the queer community. The old heteronormativity that bound society should be replaced with a new norm of acceptance and adequate representation without fear of consequences.

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Framing The Indian Picturesque in Women's Travel Writing in Colonial India: A Study of Fanny Parkes' *Wanderings of a Pilgrim in Search of the Picturesque*

NURJAHAN BEGUM

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine the picturesque aesthetics in the context of women's travel writing in colonial India. Women's engagement with the discourse of the picturesque is always controversial as it has been considered the prerogative of the male writers till the nineteenth century. For many writers who write in the backdrop of imperialism and colonialism, the picturesque is a crucial literary device. Travel writers' opinions of India in the nineteenth century were greatly shaped by the picturesque aesthetics. Specifically in India, Western women writers often draw on the picturesque in order to represent landscape. This paper is an attempt to look into the strategy of landscape depiction adopted by Fanny Parkes in *Wanderings of a Pilgrim in Search of the Picturesque* (1850), where she claims to be an objective narrator, i.e., in her own words, "a poor hajji in search of the picturesque." The paper argues that the discourse of the aesthetics, especially the picturesque offered women travel writers the authority to gain control over the Indian landscape. In preparing the Indian landscape for the 'roving eyes' of the colonisers, the picturesque thus performed an essential rhetorical function.

Keywords: discourse, aesthetics, picturesque, Women's Travel Writing, colonial India

I

No country can furnish more or so many picturesque scenes as India...How much I enjoy the quietude of floating down the river, and admiring the picturesque ghats and temples on its banks! This is the country of the picturesque.... (Parkes 1: 147)

Introduction

Travel writing entails descriptions of other places visited and thus gratifies the curiosity of the readers about different and foreign places. The writer reflects on his own impressions of various cultures while also providing first-hand accounts of his cross-cultural contacts. The notion of distinction between the writer's own culture and other cultures is reaffirmed in all of these accounts. Along with expressing his or her own subjectivity, the writer also expresses personal beliefs, prejudices, and values while recounting all these experiences. Women acquired access to the isolated lives of women, to which they have easy access in comparison to males, and the growth of women's travel writing, especially with the expansion of the British

Empire, gave great pleasure by providing details of life in the colonies. Many women travel writers provided important information on the landscape of India in their writings in the nineteenth century. The paper argues that the discourse of the aesthetics allowed women travel writers to conceal unsightly/unwanted elements under the rubric of the picturesque. The women travel writers' engagement with the picturesque during the colonial period is comparatively much less studied and offers important sites for understanding colonial ideologies. The paper intends to explore the traits of the picturesque aesthetics by undertaking a close reading of Fanny Parkes' *Wandering of a Pilgrim in search of the Picturesque* (1850). The paper makes the claim that in travel writing, the strategy of the picturesque can be seen in terms of a politics of innocence where the travellers' objectivity remains sceptical. The picturesque aesthetics had political import as well. Fanny Parkes was the wife of a member of the Bengal Civil Service, Charles Crawford Parkes, who worked as a Collector of Customs at Calcutta and overseer of the ice-pits at Allahabad. Fanny Parkes lived in India for twenty-four years between 1822 and 1845.

The travel books/writings provided important insights into the construction of mental images about the 'other'. Mary Louise Pratt points out in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (1992): "Travel books were very popular. They created a sense of curiosity, excitement, adventure and even moral fervour about European expansionism. They were one of the key instruments that made people "at home" in Europe feel part of a planetary project; a key instrument, in other words, in creating the "domestic subject" of empire (Pratt 3). From around the eighteenth century travel writers inscribed the foreign landscapes in aesthetic terms. The history of the aesthetic discourse dates back to Richard Paine Knight and Uvedale Price. The discourse of aesthetics was always the privilege of male writers and hence adopting the picturesque style was quite challenging for women travel writers. Women travel writers had to negotiate various social conventions in adopting things that were considered 'feminine' and texts that violated those conventions were either banned or republished with omissions. Women writers trying their hands in landscape appreciation or the picturesque were often labelled as 'amateurs'. Throughout her writing, Fanny Parkes also describes herself as an amateur artist, i.e. in her own words, "a poor hajji in search of the picturesque" (Parkes 240). It is worth noticing how this kind of projection of amateurism is nonetheless a politics of representation. In the colonial period the picturesque served as a means of controlling landscape and people in the colonies. It would be pertinent to examine how in adopting the male travel writer's position as explorer, women travel writers like Fanny Parkes negotiate the gender parameters. It is interesting to examine what aspects of landscape women travel writers prioritize. To examine how women travel writers appropriated the Indian landscape during the colonial period is equally important.

Definition of the Aesthetics and Picturesque

Aesthetics in common parlance refers to the appreciation of beauty. Mary-Ann-Constantine explains the term "aesthetics" in *Keywords for Travel Writing Studies*:

The word aesthetics encompassed both the conception of perception through the senses and 'the art of beautiful thought'...aesthetic is highly relevant to travel writing, and in particular to texts which encourages the reader to appreciate a landscape or a scene—it speaks to the painterly aspects of the genre, and overlaps with the territories of the picturesque and the sublime...A truly aesthetic vision requires a distancing from the particular, the gross and the utilitarian (Constantine 7-8).

Similarly Elizabeth A. Bohls describes aesthetics in her book, *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics, 1716-1818* (1995) as "a discourse or a closely related set of discourses…aesthetic discourse deals with the categories and concepts of art, beauty, sublimity, taste and judgment, and more broadly with the pleasure experienced from sensuous surfaces or spectacles" (Bohls 5).

She also points out another significant aspect of the picturesque, "Women's aesthetic writing, as it tampers with the gender of the perceiver, tends to expose the interests that inform supposedly disinterested acts of aesthetic appreciation" (Bohls 9).

The Encyclopaedia Britannica defines the 'picturesque' as an

Artistic concept and style of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries characterised by a preoccupation with the pictorial values of architecture and landscape in combination with each other. In Britain, the 'picturesque' was defined as an aesthetic quality marked by pleasing variety, irregularity, asymmetry and interesting textures; medieval ruins in a landscape were thought to be picturesque.

Pramod K. Nayar argues in *English Writing and India* (2008), "Aesthetics furnishes a descriptive vocabulary that enables the English traveller to cast India in ways that call for particular kinds of colonial or imperial responses...aesthetic modes and their narrative structures act as contexts for and narrative methods of colonial 'action', often suggesting a rhetorical-textual control over India" (Nayar 1). The picturesque mode of viewing grants the travel writer the authority to observe an alien landscape. The picturesque serves as an important strategy for many writers writing within the imperial and colonial context. The aesthetic of the picturesque plays a crucial role in moulding nineteenth century travellers' perceptions of India. Specifically, Western women travel writers have frequently used the aesthetic of the picturesque in their writings. The picturesque landscape is one that looks good in a picture. By depicting the landscape in picturesque vocabulary, the observer reduces the threatening elements of the land. This is political in the sense that the picturesque observer erases the 'actual' reality of the land in order to make it picture perfect. So, in a picturesque description of landscape, only the beautiful aspects of the land are presented to the viewer. The land, in other words, is appreciated only for its material benefits.

Development of the Picturesque and its Use in Travel Writing

The aesthetic movement known as the 'picturesque' began to emerge around the mid-eighteenth century and evolved from Edmund Burke's discussion of the sublime and the beautiful. The mode of description, which is employed to "capture" the landscape, can be

termed "picturesque discourse." In widespread cultural usage since the middle of the eighteenth century, the adjective "picturesque" has meant anything that would appear pleasing in a picture. By the turn of the century, the definition of the term had become more clearly defined to refer to the characteristics of a harsh landscape. All people consider rocky hilltops, flowing cascades and wind-damaged trees to be picturesque.

However, it was William Gilpin, a 17th century theorist who theorised the term 'picturesque' and linked it to uncultivated landscapes. The phrase first appeared in the middle of the 18th century and was used to describe a way of painting landscapes. Over time, it expanded to include a broad range of activities including art, literature, landscape architecture and travel.

Indira Ghose takes note of the growth of the picturesque and finds out that it has gone through a number of stages:

> Several stages may be traced within the development of the picturesque. The first consisted in arranging a landscape, manipulating a view so as to render it more suitable for a painting. The first theorist of the picturesque, William Gilpin, stressed the fact that nature was not inherently picturesque. While beautiful objects in nature were characterised by smoothness, the picturesque called for the introduction of a rugged element into the scene, rendering it more fit for pictorial representation... A later theorist, Uvedale Price, developed Gilpin's notions by defining the picturesque as a distinct and third category to be set against Burke's sublime and the beautiful. He produced a list of items suitable for the picturesque—they included ruins, cottages, dilapidated mills, hovels, shaggy goats, the worn-out-cart-horse, but also gypsies, beggars, in fact the entire gamut of rural poor (39).

Travel writing has absorbed the picturesque as a rhetorical strategy that provided particular purposes for the traveller. It is pertinent to cite what Indira Ghose remarks in this context, "the search for the Indian picturesque was a part of the project of Orientalism. Just as the picturesque movement in Britain preserved the English countryside in an eternal Arcadian age, Orientalism constructed the Orient as timeless and immutable….the social reality of India is effaced in order to freeze the scene depicted in an aesthetic tableau" (40-41). For example, Fanny Parkes describes an Indian environment in the following words:

> The river is very picturesque; high cliffs, well covered with wood, rising abruptly from the water: here and there a Hindoo temple, with a great peepul-tree spreading its fine branches around it: a ruined native fort: clusters of native huts: beautiful stone ghats jutting into the river: the effect greatly increased by the native women, in their picturesque drapery, carrying their vessels for water up and down the cliffs, poised on their heads.… but the most picturesque of all are the different sorts of native vessels; I am quite charmed with the boats. Oh that I were a painter, who could do justice to the scenery! (1: 333)

As Ghose observes, in the above passage "all the ingredients of the Indian picturesque are to be found: an Arcadian landscape, Hindu temples and ruins, and statuesque Oriental women. The literary mode corresponding to the picturesque is the mode of sensibility" (41). Ghose sees in this kind of a passage the presentation of "the Orient as a commodity" (42). In similar

terms Parkes remarks: "To a griffin, as a new comer is called for the first year, India is a most interesting country; everything appears on so vast a scale, and the novelty is so great" (1: 23). For Parkes, India is a veritable treasure trove of the picturesque; everything there is picturesque. India thus appears to be a vast treasure ground of curiosities to the foreigner; everything appears to be quaint, exotic and hence needs closer scrutiny. Parkes finds everything novel and curious in India worthy to be converted into a picture. Her adoption of the picturesque stance allows her to subvert her fears of the alien landscape, i.e., India. Sara Suleri in *The Rhetoric of English India* (2005) writes,

> One of the few socially responsible positions available to women was the role of female as amateur ethnographer...women could however sketch. Her function was to produce both visual and verbal representations of India that could alleviate the more shattering aspects of its difference, romanticizing its difficulty into the greater tolerability of mystery, and further regarding Indian cultures and communities with a keen eye for the picturesque (Suleri 75).

The picturesque mode of viewing thus enables the women travel writers to gain control over the Indian landscape. They also highlight a 'rhetoric of difference' in all aspects of Indian culture. In case of Fanny Parkes, whatever appeals to her senses as quaint or curious becomes a picturesque image.

II

The Picturesque in Fanny Parkes' *Wanderings of a Pilgrim in Search of the Picturesque*
India is an endless repository of the picturesque for travellers and travel writers seeking out the picturesque. Fanny Parkes described her travels as '*Wanderings of a Pilgrim in search of the Picturesque*' declaring that "No country can furnish more or so many picturesque scenes as India" (Parkes 1: 147). Parkes and other colonial travellers like her imagined India to be a timeless presence, where they could go to satisfy their demands for the visual and the picturesque.

Travel writing also contributes to the perpetuation of colonialism by disseminating colonial stereotypes and generating knowledge about the 'orient'. Fanny Parkes in a similar vein complains: "Woe is me that I sojourn in this land of pestilence that, I dwell afar from the home of my fathers!" (Parkes 1: 303). Women travel writers like Parkes represent the position of British women in Empire by portraying themselves as occupied with gathering picturesque landscapes or curios. As Parkes herself notes, she is in the best company as part of the colonial appropriation project. She boasts of having a hefty collection of idols and artefacts, and after returning home, she writes:

> Visited the British Museum; the new rooms that have been added are handsome and well filled with Egyptian curiosities; mummies in crowds, and very fine ones. The Elgin marbles, in a handsome hall, are also shown to great advantage. My collection of Hindoo idols is far superior to any in the museum; and as for Ganesh, they never beheld such an one as mine, even in a dream! (2: 334)

Parkes here showcases her mastery in collecting exotic artefacts. Such images in a way present India as a land of commodity for consumption by the Western traveller. Travellers do, in fact, have preconceived notions about the people they meet and the places they visit when they travel to a new place; and accordingly they evaluate others as a result of their preconceived notions. These perceptions are sometimes inaccurate and often negative. In the case of Fanny Parkes, it appears that at first she was very delighted to see everything Indian as very charming and picturesque, including the climate. On arriving in Calcutta, her first impression was very delightful and she writes to her mother, "On arriving in Calcutta, I was charmed with the climate; the weather was delicious, and nothing could exceed the kindness we received from our friends. I thought India a most delightful country, and could I have gathered around me the dear ones I had left in England, my happiness would have been complete" (Parkes 1: 21). Here, Parkes imagines an India peopled by Englishmen and women, in a way erasing Indians from the backstage as well.

Again she remarks: "In December, the climate was so delightful, it rendered the country preferable to any place under the sun; could it always have continued the same, I would have advised all people to flee unto the East" (Parkes 1:23). But gradually she becomes critical of the same and complains: "I have now been four months in India, and my idea of the climate has altered considerably, the hot winds are blowing; it is very oppressive; if you go out during the day, I can compare it to nothing but the hot blast you would receive in your face, were you suddenly to open the door of an oven" (Parkes 1:25). Again she adds: "I knew not before the oppressive power of the hot winds, and find myself as listless as any Indian lady is universally considered to be; I can now excuse what I before condemned as indolence and want of energy—so much for experience...." (1:26). On arriving at Allahabad, she further complains: "The weather is more oppressive than we have ever found it; the heat intolerable...Allahabad may boast of being the oven of India" (1: 83). Parkes here apologises for her mistake in associating Indian women with sluggishness and acknowledges that the hot weather is actually to blame for the indolence of Indians. Her statement makes it clear that she arrived to India with preconceived beliefs about Indians as lethargic. Travellers inevitably bring with them to India their generation's expectations, perceptions and standard observational and recording techniques. Accordingly, the travellers see the Land with a coloured lens.

Moreover, it is seen that feeling oppressed by the climate of India, Parkes longs for home: "Oh! How I long for the liberty and freshness of a country life in England—what would I not give for a fine bracing air, and a walk by the sea-side, to enable me to shake off this Indian languor, and be myself again!" She even finds the moon similar to that of the sun: "The moon is so hot to-night, I cannot sit on the terrace; she makes my head ache. A chatr (umbrella) is as necessary a defence against the rays of the moon at the full, as against the sun" (1: 146). It seems that women travel writers use the picturesque vocabulary to portray India in a new light and to emphasize its distinction from Britain and to paint a different picture of the country. By doing this, they explain the landscape's timeless quality and justifies the need for colonial intervention to enhance the Indian landscape's aesthetic or productive

potential, as the case may be. Parkes' narrative thus oscillates between fact and idealisation; and her ambivalence also serves a rhetorical function in masking the atrocities of the empire on the colonised. By subsuming the 'other' to a picture, the traveller is able to assert control in what might well be in a situation of cultural misunderstanding and tension (Ghose & Mills, 2001).

<h2>III</h2>

Conclusion

It can be argued that the search for objectivity in travel writing is more political than real and innocence is also a politics. Accordingly, the India Parkes depicts is frozen in time and the colonial rule is justified as the best thing that happened to India. In the process of providing picturesque images of India, Parkes effaces the colonial reality. In fact, people or aspects of the landscape that appear unpleasant are either relegated to the margin or erased from the scene. This distancing device also allows her to detach herself from the natives and to mask the hideousness of the 'other'. What makes her text interesting is that she was able to provide minutia of life in India in the guise of an innocent pilgrim and thus satiates the curiosity of the readers back at home by producing and circulating images of the 'other' and thus fashioning a definition of the self. She thus amasses information in the form of "a pilgrim in search of the picturesque" (Parkes 240) and places herself on an important position as information gatherer on the Orient. This, in a way, constitutes a significant component of the larger colonial knowledge structure and a vital component of the overall colonisation process. Women's travel writing that deals with the picturesque thus calls attention to the colonial project of commodification of India. Critics like Bernard S. Cohn have already talked about the methods and reasons behind the formation and articulation of colonial knowledge in India. Every aspect of India such as ruins, ancient texts, people, houses, festivals, religious practices etc. were subject to closer scrutiny in order to have a greater understanding of India and its history. Women travel writers like Fanny Parkes thus immensely helped in the accumulation of knowledge about India in the form of "a poor haji in search of the picturesque." Thus the portrayal of India in women's travel writing is distinctly colonial and the writer uses the picturesque to turn the native presence into aesthetically attractive, colourful vistas. In addition, aestheticization of landscape in reality results in a conceptual separation of people from the landscape and places the observer in a position of mastery or dominance over the landscape. In fact, aesthetic discourse makes it possible to materialize the scenic appeal of landscape.

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Displacement and Search for Identity: A Reading of Select Works of Jhumpa Lahiri

STANCILAUS S.

Abstract

Diasporic writers often deal with themes of Identity, cultural differences, assimilation, acculturation well , displacement, nostalgia,.memory and liminal existence. Jhumpa Lahiri, a prominent Indian American diasporic writer, has depicted the ambivalence in attitude towards the native land as well as the settled land in her works. Though the first generation settlers cling on to the nostalgic memories of their homeland, even in the evening of their lives, the young generation characters find it relatively easy to strip their connections and forge hybrid identities in the foreign soil. " Most of Lahiri's characters are of Indian origin, and lead a simultaneous existence in two cultures. Lahiri deals with the experiences of a migrant life in a diasporic community in *Interpreter of Maladies*, *The Namesake*, *The Lowland* and *Unaccustomed Earth*. Her characters struggle with identity issues, torn between two cultures. She dwells on what it feels like to be an immigrant with the accompanying sense of displacement and search to forge new identities in the new territory. Lahiri brings in the interesting concept of home which is more or less a mental construct created from memory. The migrant occupies a displaced position and the home becomes more and more rooted in his imagination.

Keywords: Hybridity, displacement, diaspora, alienation rootlessness, culture, identity, filiation and affiliation, memory and nostalgia

Homi K. Bhabha challenges the idea of a fixed identity through the notion of 'hybridity'. His critical writings attempt to question notions of identity, nation and culture as stable, coherent and unified entities. Hybridity refers to a position of "inbetweenness" where an individual is positioned between two cultures. Colonialism may be viewed as an encounter between different cultures, people, systems of thought and languages where the power balance is always tilted to the side of the Western imperialists. Colonial incursions and settlements in various parts of Asia and Africa succeeded in introducing Western culture, language, religion and way of life to the Orient. This resulted in the creation of the hybrid colonised native as theorised by Bhabha and other postcolonial thinkers.

V.S. Naipaul succinctly captures the hybridised natives of Caribbean lands thus:

A peasant-minded, money-minded community spiritually cut off from its roots, its religion reduced to rites without philosophy set in a materialistic colonial society: a combination

of historical accidents and national temperament has turned the Trinidad Indian into a complete colonial, even more Philistine than the White. (Naipaul 89)

Naipaul depicts the erasure of the Caribbean identity and the sprouting of hybrid identities as a result of the colonial encounter. What Naipaul says about the Caribbean is applicable to other territories also and is faithfully depicted in Diasporic literature. Diasporic literature written by authors residing outside their homelands often deal with themes of identity, cultural differences, assimilation, displacement, nostalgia, memory and liminal existence. Indian diasporic writers offer rich insights into the questions of identity and cross-cultural experiences of Indians stationed abroad. These writings depict the lives of families struggling to negotiate the pressure of dual identities. Diasporic narratives often highlight themes of displacement, identity and cultural hybridity through tales of migrant communities faced with the dilemma of balancing their traditional native culture and the modern ways of life in the Western environments. Indian diasporic narratives also address issues of racism, filiation, and affiliation and social and economic issues faced by the immigrant population. In their struggle to accustom themselves to the realities of the Western culture, they frequently wander down memory lane and yearn nostalgically for their homelands. This sense of in-betweenness or liminal existence is a recurring element in the emotional lives of at least the first-generation immigrants.

The diasporic, hybridised conditions of migrant communities have been faithfully mirrored by authors, who were themselves transplanted away from their native lands like Buchi Emecheta, Bharati Mukherjee, Hanif Kureishi and Jhumpa Lahiri, to name a few.

Lahiri is a prominent Indian American author who settled in New York city. The author's life was punctuated by a series of uprooting and migrations. Born on 11 July 1967, as Nilanjana Sudeshna Lahiri in London, the story teller of the Indian diaspora was brought up in South Kingstown, Rhode Island. Her parents had migrated from West Bengal initially and her family shifted to the United States when Lahiri was just two years old. Though stationed in the United States, her mother was particular that her children should grow up retaining their ties to the Bengali heritage. Visits to their relatives in Calcutta was an integral part of their family vacations.

As a writer from the Indian diaspora, she has also made substantial contributions to European literature through her forays into Italian language. *In Other Words* (2016) her memoir in Italian, *Dove mi trovo* (2018) her maiden Italian novel and *Racconti Romani* a short story collection shows her prowess in the Italian language. A discerning reader cannot fail to notice the parallels and similarities between the author's life situations and the lives of the characters essayed by her in works like *Interpreter of Maladies*, *The Namesake*, *Unaccustomed Earth*, and *The Lowland*. A probe into the stories in *Interpreter of Maladies,* reveals the ambivalence inherent in the attitudes to India, between the first-generation migrants and the second and the third generation born of Indian parents in foreign soil. Though the first-generation settlers cling on to the nostalgic memories of their homeland, even late in their lives, the new generation characters mostly ignore such nostalgic pulls and easily forge their hybrid identities in the foreign soil.

Most of the characters penned by Lahiri in her novels and short stories are of Indian origin, stationed in America, who lead a simultaneous existence in two cultures. As a second-generation Indian American writer, Lahiri speaks of her personal experience of negotiating two cultures thus:

> When I was growing up in Rhode Island in the 1970s, I felt neither Indian nor American. Like many immigrant offsprings, I felt intense pressure to be two things, "loyal to the old world and fluent in the new, approved of on either side of the hyphen. Looking back, I see that this was generally the case. But my perception as a young girl was that I fell short at both ends, shuttling between two dimensions that had nothing to do with another. (Wikipedia.org)

Lahiri often speaks of the diaspora, hybridised state of migrant communities. Diaspora or the displacement of a community or culture into a different geographical and cultural region has been the thematic concern of many writers. Chroniclers of diaspora, like Lahiri, have depicted how such diasporic movements developed their own distinctive cultures in the settled land, by retaining, preserving, extending or developing their original cultures.

Lahiri's works may be seen as a representation of the diasporic predicament of Indians stationed abroad. Robin Cohen has defined the term 'diaspora' tentatively "… as communities of people living together in one country, who acknowledge that 'the old country' – a notion often buried deep in language, religion, custom or folklore – always has some claim on their loyalty and emotions." (Cohen ix) McLeod comments that the emphasis on collectivity and community here is very important, as is the sense of living in one country but looking across time and space to another (McLeod 207)

Cohen adds that an individual's loyalty and bonding with the diasporic community is revealed by his acknowledgement of "an inescapable link with their past migration history and sense of coethnicity with others of a similar background". (Cohen ix)

Though many people belonging to the diaspora are migrants, it is naive to think that all share the label of migrants. Generational differences need to be considered before naively assuming that diasporic communities are largely migrants. Children or grandchildren of migrants would automatically qualify for the passport of the nation they have settled in by virtue of their being born there. Their identity would however carry traces of shared experiences, acquired from living in a diasporic community. It would be prudent to talk about 'diaspora identities' rather than 'migrant identities'. As a matter of fact, not all who live in a diaspora, or even all who share emotional bonds with 'their parent country' have experienced migration.

The experiences of migrancy and the realities of life in a diasporic community have been the staple theme of much recent postcolonial literature, theory and criticism. The new possibilities and problems generated by the experience of migrancy and diaspora life have been explored by various diaspora writers, critics and academics alike.

In the title story, 'Interpreter of Maladies' from her debut collection of short stories *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) Lahiri presents the couple, Mr and Mrs Das, whose idea of

India is largely gathered from cheap paperback tour books. To the Das family, India is nothing short of a show, a spectacle which is to be devoured by the Indian American gaze. Not only the Konark temple, but "… the shirtless men worked at the tea stall" (46), the monkeys, a bullock cart – almost everything comes under the Indian American gaze as a show. The representations of India, however, do not turn out to be inauthentic or misrepresentations.

Ashima in *The Namesake*, is a diasporic character to the core, who is torn between identities. The struggles she goes through to come to terms with the American reality as she reaches the United States after her marriage with Ashoke is well documented by Lahiri. Lahiri has always delved into the processes which shape the evolution of the characters in her works. The myriad forces that shape the nature, perspectives and consciousness of a character. Often it is the surroundings they live in that mould their perspectives and identity. Lahiri as a diaspora writer can speak from her personal experiences with conviction. She says: the question of identity, is always a difficult one, but especially so for those who are culturally displaced, as immigrants are, or those who grow up in two worlds simultaneously, as is the case for their children. The older I get, the more I am aware that I have somehow inherited a sense of exile from my parents, even though in many ways I am so much more American than they are. In fact, it is still very hard to think of myself as an American. I think that for immigrants, the challenges of exile, the loneliness, the constant sense of alienation, the knowledge of and longing for a lost world, are more explicit and distressing than for their children. ("An interview with Jhumpa Lahiri", BookBrowse)

The immigrant Indian families are seen observing all the Bengali rituals and ceremonies even in the foreign soil. It is with intense yearning and nostalgic feelings that the first-generation immigrants observe the Bengali rituals and ceremonies. The hold of the rituals and celebrations of the motherland seem to exercise less control over the next generation of immigrants. The younger generation celebrate festivals like Christmas with more enthusiasm than 'Pujo'. Even in the case of the first-generation immigrants, a considerable change in attitude towards the host country is perceptible, as they remain there over the years. They tend to forge stronger ties to the new place with the passage of time. Towards the beginning of the first chapter, we see Ashima pondering over the difference in the ways childbirth is in America and in India. In America, the mother is necessarily rushed to a hospital, whereas in India, "… women go home to their parents to give birth, away from husbands and in-laws and household cares, retreating briefly to childhood when the baby arrives". (4)

The native home is a distant but vivid memory to those in a diasporic existence. The home, they left can only be reached through memory, nostalgia and imagination. McLeod succinctly remarks that:

> This disjunction between the past and present, between here and there, makes 'home' seem far removed in time and space, available for return only through an act of imagination. Speaking of Indian migrants, Rushdie writes that "our physical alienation from India", almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost;

that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands. (McLeod 211)

Home here becomes a mental construct, created from memory that intrudes from the past. The migrant occupies a displaced position and the home becomes more and more rooted in his imagination. McLeod poses a pertinent question, "If imagining home brings fragmentation, discontinuity and displacement for the migrant, can new homes be secured in the host country? In migrating from one country to another, migrants inevitably become involved in the process of setting up home in a new land" (McLeod 211). It is interesting to note that, towards the end of the novel *The Namesake*, Ashima undergoes a radical change in her outlook to America, her new home land:

For thirty years she missed her life in India. Now she will miss her job at the library, the women with whom she's worked. She will miss throwing parties. She will miss the country in which she had grown to know and love her husband. Though his ashes have been scattered into the Ganges, it is here in this house and in this town, that he will continue to dwell in her mind. (279)

The sentimental longing expressed by Ashima at this stage is starkly different from her earlier stance towards the then strange territory of America when she first reached there after her marriage. Lahiri quite realistically projects the apprehensions and uncertainties in the minds of an immigrant thus:

But nothing feels normal to Ashima. For the past eighteen months, ever since she's arrived in Cambridge nothing has felt normal at all. It's not so much the pain, which she knows, somehow, she will survive. It's the consequence: motherhood in a foreign land… that it was happening so far from home, unmonitored and unobserved by those she valued, had made it miraculous still. But she is terrified to raise a child in a country where she is related to no one, where she knows so little and where life seems so tentative and spare… (5, 6)

Ashima's son Gogol, is a typical new generation kid who is caught between two worlds. He has to navigate the differences in culture and social setup. At home, he is stuck in Bengali traditions, language and customs, while outside he is surrounded by American culture. His plans to vibe with his American friends face resistance from his parents who make every possible attempt to uphold Bengali customs and traditions. This results in a sense of alienation and estrangement, "In so many ways, his family's life feels like a string of accidents, unforeseen, unintended, one incident begetting another"(264). This internal conflict prompts him to distance himself from anything that might reveal his 'otherness'. The discomfort he feels with his cultural heritage can be read as a defence mechanism against the estrangement he feels in both American and Indian contexts. Gokul attempts to carve out a new identity, changing even his name, and distancing himself from his Indian heritage. The new name does not help him escape his cultural background or the demands of his family. He ends up by living a double life, heightening his feeling of disconnection. It is after his father's death that Gokul comes to terms with the duality of his identity, accepting his American upbringing as well as his Indian heritage, leading to a deeper sense of self awareness, acceptance and

contentment. The issues faced by the second-generation migrants are different from their parents. They see themselves as belonging to minority communities and seldom consider "… themselves exiles like the early immigrants" (Ramraj 221)

Lahiri's characters belong to different stages of acculturation. New immigrants like Mrs Sen, the titular character in 'Mrs Sen's' clings on to her native culture even after reaching the foreign land while Shoba and Shukumar in 'A Temporary Matter' or the Das family in 'Interpreter of Maladies' are Americanised and have assimilated the hybrid culture.

Subhash Mitra in *The Lowland* migrates to the United States for academic and professional reasons. His migration signals his need to escape from the stifling shadow of his brother Udayan, a Naxal rebel. He saw the United States as a refuge where his talents and aspirations could be fulfilled. However, he is made to feel like an outsider. Subhash strives hard to navigate the new cultural landscape, despite feeling isolated and disconnected. He had to face a whole new set of problems, unlike in his homeland, where he was surrounded by his family, friends and a close-knit community.

> Subhash was the only foreigner. No students from other parts of Asia were there. It was nothing like the demonstrations that erupted now in Calcutta. Disorganised mobs representing rival communist parties, running helter-skelter through the streets. Chanting, unrelenting. There were demonstrations that almost always turned violent (42).

Subhash's isolation was further heightened by cultural and linguistic barriers. Gauri, on the other hand, assimilates to the American life style with ease, treating it as an opportunity to escape from her drab life.

Lahiri's works explore identity and displacement as major themes. She reveals what it is to be an immigrant with the accompanying sense of displacement and search for identity. Her characters struggle with identity issues, torn between two worlds.

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Juxtaposing Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* in an Exploration of Psychological Strategies to Deal with Loss of Job

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Abstract

Willy Loman succumbs to the psychological turmoil caused by involuntary job loss in *Death of a Salesman* (1949). His tragedy resonates with the angst of a large proportion of the workforce who may be laid off due to economic constraints and other macro issues. An individual's job serves not just as a means of livelihood but also plays a crucial role in defining the self and identity. It also provides a sense of direction, significance and status in life. Achieving deadlines, receiving rewards for completed tasks, and gaining recognition are critical factors that drive motivation beyond just receiving the monthly paycheck. This paper undertakes an interdisciplinary approach to explore the implications of job loss in the context of Arthur Miller's play and leans on psychological theories to throw light on the concepts of self-perception and identity formation. It also aims to establish that equating one's self-worth with one's job may take a toll on mental health and lead to tragic consequences. It is concluded that sound mental health, emotional well-being, and having meaningful relationships with family and friends can act as buffers to cope with professional challenges.

Keywords: Job loss, mental health, self-perception, identity holistic well-being

Introduction

Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* (1949) is a modern tragedy showcasing the psychological turmoil Willy Loman faced due to the loss of his job. "Modern Western culture has a disturbing tendency to idolize the young and reject the elderly, and a number of modern dramas have turned their attention to the issue of ageing, both positively and negatively" (Abbotson 17). "Willy Loman, the desperate protagonist of Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, knew what it was like to be entrenched in a career. Miller wrote his play in 1949, but Loman's grim and futile situation is all too familiar in the contemporary situation. What happens when workers are entrapped and disillusioned? Willy Loman sought to free himself through suicide" (Carson and Carson 62). Goldsmith et al. observe that the two principal adverse effects of job loss are on the economy and on the mental health of the employee and the family members (333). I aim to study the psychological impact of job loss and how this can be mitigated through resilience, social relations, and family support.

Arthur Miller (1915-2005), a leading American playwright of the twentieth century, won the Pulitzer Prize in 1949 for his play *Death of a Salesman* which is a tragic representation of

a dysfunctional family and the failure of the great American Dream. Miller's play delves into the generational conflict resulting from Willy Loman's expectations from his sons Happy and Biff. Willy wants them to be engaged in lucrative jobs because he believes one's income and employment determine success. Abbotson identifies 'work' as one of the major themes of modern drama, which treats work not merely as a means for survival but also explores how competitive market and capitalist goals lead to the mechanical existence of the workforce. How people are judged by the work they do rather than by who they are and how people allow their work to take over their lives is one of the themes that Miller's play explores. (Abbotson 267).

This paper argues that Willy Loman's tragedy is caused by his excessive dependence on his profession as the chief barometer of happiness, success, and sense of purpose in life. He relied too heavily on extraneous factors to give himself a sense of meaning, and on being rejected from his position, he is psychologically buffeted by past guilt, life choices and missed opportunities. He seeks an escape through suicide and makes a last attempt to secure his family financially. The play comments on misplaced values and the brutality of the capitalist economy that victimises gullible people with false notions of an ideal world that could be attained through hard work sans ethics and values.

The American Dream and Willy Loman

"*Death of a Salesman* is not about one or two individuals; rather, it is about a family system, a unit of interlocking relationships, which shapes individual members' behaviors and attitudes" (Chavkin and Chavkin 27). The dysfunctionality of their family is a glaring contrast to the picture of a family that is projected through commercials, which merely propagate consumerism and are operated by the ruling market principles governed by capitalistic ideals. Biff and Willy are often in conflict arising from the father's unrealistic expectations of his sons and his guilt about his illegitimate relationship with a coworker. Happy, the elder son is a rolling stone, incapable of pursuing a job or a relationship seriously; he "has turned into a self-deceiving womaniser who believes in nothing but his own pleasure, getting nowhere but, seemingly like his father, contenting himself with illusions"(Bigsby 101) Linda, the wife is the only character who tries to keep the family together, she is perhaps the most resilient character in the play who stands by her husband and bridges the gap between him and the two sons. "Linda Loman, the ever protective, ever forgiving, ever solicitous wife to Willy, is an enabler. Her sometimes charming, other times wayward husband is seldom held fully accountable for his actions" (Walton 58). All his life, Willy Loman pursued the elusive and misleading American Dream. He cared more for the material acquisition of the refrigerator, the car, and the house and struggled to make the payments. Willy borrowed money from Charley to maintain the pretence of being in a job. His wife, Linda, sadly states in the requiem that the final payment on the house was made the same day that Willy Loman was buried (Walton 57).

Christopher Bigsby notes that Willy had internalised the materialistic values of society. As a salesman, he depended on "social performance" (101). "Willy Loman is a man who wishes

his reality to come into line with his hopes, a man desperate to leave his mark on the world through his own endeavours and through those of his children. Though he seems to seek death, what he fears above all is that he will go before he has justified himself in his own eyes" (Bigsby 101). His delusion led him to believe that his death could grant him and his family what he could not deliver as a living man. Willy fails to recognize the love of his wife or the need to inculcate moral principles in his children. He produces another generation that becomes a victim of unsound and unreal values that Biff calls "phony" (Miller 103). Biff, is more in touch with reality, he tells his father, "Pop! I'm a dime a dozen, and so are you!" (Miller105)

Willy complains of being "tired to the death" (Miller 2) and of having "strange thoughts" (4) as he drives back home from work in the opening scene of the play. He is not needed in New York anymore. However, he remains deluded and firmly believes he is "vital to New England" (4). Apart from his work, he is also troubled by the presence of Biff, who is not suitably employed. Willy is ambivalent in his assessment of Biff; he cannot accept that the young man lacks commitment to work. "Biff Loman is lost. In the greatest country in the world a young man with such—personal attractiveness, gets lost. And such a hard worker. There's one thing about Biff—he's not lazy" (4). Biff, on the other hand, has more self-awareness. He says, "I've had twenty or thirty different kinds of job since I left home before the war, and it always turns out the same… Texas is cool now, and it's spring. And whenever spring comes to where I am, I suddenly get the feeling, my God, I'm not gettin' anywhere! What the hell am I doing, playing around with horses, twenty-eight dollars a week! I'm thirty-four years old, I oughta be makin' my future" (11). The younger Biff haunts Willy's mind as a spirited boy with promising potential and capabilities. Willy misjudges Happy's and Biff's abilities; he brings them up with a faulty value system, programming their impressionable minds with improbable and superficial notions. "That's why I thank Almighty God you're both built like Adonises. Because the man who makes an appearance in the business world, the man who creates personal interest, is the man who gets ahead. Be liked, and you will never want" (21).

Willy reminisces about how he encouraged Biff and Happy to steal lumber from the neighbour's construction site and get a soccer ball from the sports locker at school. Willy misled them to not bother about the Maths exam because they had immense attractiveness, which would make them more successful. Willy's infidelity in his youth had broken the loving bond between Biff and Willy in the past. We get a picture of his guilt through his reveries, but Biff never mentions it, though he says his father is a "fake". Willy believes in appearances; he borrows money from Charley and hides from Linda that he has not been getting his wages. The conversation between the two friends reveals Willy's unwillingness to accept that he has lost his job. His delusive pride deters him from taking the job that Charley offers; he insists on being given the same work profile by Howard. Like Singleton, the salesman he admired, his desire to be remembered after his death reveals his false notions of accomplishment.

Linda and Willy raised a family and paid for the house, the car, and the refrigerator. No one lived in the house when all the mortgages had been paid. The empty nest syndrome and the economic crisis faced by the loss of his job are coupled with Willy's illusions about wealth and material objects. The shocking vacuity of his life compels him to take the drastic step to commit suicide. Bigsby sums it up aptly:

> Where he remains illusioned is in his conviction that his death can win what his life cannot. His life insurance will gift his sons the success that has eluded them and him. Meanwhile, by his side is a woman who offers a redemption he is too blind to see. Raised in a world in which appearance mattered more than substance, the world of a salesman in which clothes must be spotless and a smile always on the lips, he fails to recognise something as intangible as her love. (101)

In his book *Arthur Miller*, Bigsby cites multiple interpretations of the play. It can be read as the paradox of living in a technological era leading to alienation, impersonal human relations, or violence within a dysfunctional family. It is a tragedy about how society completely overwhelms an individual who succumbs spiritually by adhering to its materialistic principles at the cost of any spiritual, holistic pursuit of well-being (101).

In addition to the above-mentioned interpretations, I see the play as one that highlights the psychological impact of job loss. Loss of a job affects an "individual's perception of personal efficacy, locus of control, and hence psychological well-being" (Goldsmith et al. 333). It can also lead to drastic eventualities such as suicide and depression. Job loss, downsizing and layoffs due to the economic recession and the COVID-19 pandemic have become a global phenomenon. According to Ashoka University's Centre for Economic Data and Analysis (CEDA), 14 million jobs were lost in India between January 2020 and October 2022 (Mohanty). I want to draw attention to the adverse effect of job loss on mental health and how such an adverse impact can be avoided through holistic self-care.

Psychological Impact of Job Loss on Willy Loman

Willy Loman equates his job and professional success with his self-worth. His job loss leads to a significant identity crisis, which is not uncommon, as revealed by psychological studies. Conroy and O'Leary-Kelly (2014) noted, "Transitions in work memberships, relationships, and roles can result in work-related identity loss". (67) The emotional experiences that people undergo determine whether individuals would encounter adaptive or maladaptive identity-related outcomes. A work-related identity (WRI) loss can trigger an interruption in existing identity, causing one to locate a new defining sense of self-hood. Not being able to traverse this transitional phase leads to "*identity instability*" (68); people become "cognitively and emotionally consumed by the loss, stagnating in their inability to let go of the old self and/or to embrace the new and changed work self" (ibid.). An alternative and more desirable scenario emerges when the employee emerges from a WRI loss with a stronger and more resilient sense of personal identity. (Dutton et.al.) Willi Loman clearly did not belong to the latter segment of the population; he chose to take his life as his coping strategies had been

compromised because of adverse life situations and his personally flawed sense of value system that relied more on external sources for self-fulfilment and purpose of life.

Willy Loman's inability to achieve his dreams leads to feelings of failure and disillusionment. The liminal period refers to the period of transition when an employee has not been able to let go of the job; he/she has lost or has found a new engagement. It entails a dynamic fluctuation between job loss and restoration. This liminal interval is punctuated with feelings of dejection, low self-esteem and self-worth. Conroy and O'Leary-Kelly (2014) devised a model to explain the evolutional trajectory of emotions that range from Loss orientation syndrome (LOS) to identity stabilization and adaptive identity development. "LOS is the most maladaptive identity status and involves the inability to exit the liminal interval. Because the employee gets stuck in thoughts and emotions about loss, there is limited opportunity to explore the new self. LOS is most probable when the WRI loss event triggers a large negative identity discrepancy and when social conditions are conducive to rumination" (80). The first stage is marked by diminished well-being and difficulty adapting to organizational change. However, with the gradual passage of time, the stage of identity stabilization is marked by adaptation to change. The last stage of adaptative identity development is denoted by the individual's realization of the benefit one has gained despite the loss. This is through identity authenticity, described by the researchers through the Greek word, 'Eudaimonia', which means to flourish and thrive.

Willy was never able to attain the state of eudaimonia, as he was stuck in the loss of his job, which triggered negative, unregulated emotions. "Intense negative emotions coupled with identity ambiguity prevent attachment to new roles or memberships, making it difficult to adapt to the changes that are common in organizational life" (ibid.,81). His inability to accept the changed demands of the job, his growing age, his forgetfulness and his inability to cope with the competitive market conditions that a salesman is exposed to lead to his deteriorating mental health. His wife, sons, friend Charlie and employer are aware of his disoriented mental state. However, his refusal to come to terms with his disintegration is further exacerbated by the loss of his job. His coping mechanism is marked by denial, idealization and escapism. He refuses to accept his declining career and the changing business environment. Willy glorifies his past and his brother Ben's success, and finally, he seeks escapism by retreating into memories and fantasies to avoid confronting reality.

Hitlin (2003) has drawn links between the two dominant theories of Identity, the Theory of Identity and the Social Theory of Identity, by pointing out that both theories do not adequately explicate the concept of personal identity. Hitlin argued that "values are a cohesive force within personal identity. Conceptualizing values as the core of one's personal identity leads toward understanding the cohesion experienced among one's various social identities" (118). He adds that Personal identity and the self are not solely shaped by the responsibilities of roles or by comparing oneself to others who are seen as relevant. Instead, personal identity is developed through a commitment to certain values. Values are fundamental cores of the' self'. Arthur Miller's delineation of Willy Loman showcases a modern man of the

post-war era who pursued material ends at the cost of familial ties and values. He failed to realize that being "liked" through one's charm cannot be a sustainable answer to one's search for growth nor, having all the material symbols of success, such as a house, the refrigerator and a car. He is also a victim of the belying values of the American Dream, which prioritize superficial markers of success. I contend that his lack of moral fabric led to a shallow sense of identity formation, which has a detrimental effect on an individual's mental and emotional well-being.

Implications of Involuntary Job Loss

Job loss can be caused by multiple reasons, such as downsizing, a slump in market conditions, recession due to economic factors, or situations encountered during COVID-19. Retirement/superannuation is another reason why people give up professional pursuits. It marks the onset of a time when one stops working altogether. Loss of a job due to any of the above-mentioned factors can be emotionally wrecking and can lead people to take drastic steps or be subjected to mental illness. Job loss has become commonplace in the present competitive market conditions. However, this paper argues that Willy Loman's tragic situation can be avoided through the right attitude and emotional preparedness for the eventuality.

Goldsmith et al. (1996) note that job loss entails a twofold impact; the economic factor implies the output forgone due to laying off the worker. The second adverse effect is the psychological damage suffered by affected individuals. Joblessness leads to a definite deterioration in mental health. Mancoske et al. (2018) conducted a study to establish how job loss impacts mental health; it was found that the "threat of job loss increases worry and fear"(166). The writers maintained that social class is determined by income and earnings, ideology, historicity, and economic dynamics shape health and mental health outcomes. Involuntary job loss creates downward social mobility, leading to devaluation and fear, thereby affecting the mental health of individuals, families, and communities. Unemployment is defined by the above writers as "Unemployment can be viewed on the continuum of fully employed, underemployed, threatened with job loss, unemployed, to having given up on seeking employment" (167). Their study concluded that multi-level social support is crucial in helping the individual and the family members to cope with the situation and deal with behavioural and mental health issues that are directly impacted due to job loss, which in turn affects their social status and can lead to downward social mobility (186).

Witte (2016) observed the scarring impact of job insecurity on people's psyche. Involuntary job loss is one of the critical psychological risks in the working environment. Kinicki et al. (2000) identified problem-focused and emotion-focused coping as the two significant coping strategies for job loss. They remark, "Two important internal coping resources are self-esteem and life satisfaction. Empirical research reveals that high levels of self-esteem are positively associated with increased use of problem-focused coping… Individuals with high self-esteem also relied more on the problem than emotion-focused coping"(91). The researchers asserted that social support is an essential external coping resource that enables

one to exercise problem-solving mechanisms. It was concluded that coping with job loss is dynamic and not static (98); one's coping ability is influenced by economic and social support, unemployment duration, and reemployment quality.

Solove et al. (2015) identified three coping resources- self-esteem, social support, and financial security- that directly impact one's ability to cope with job loss. The researchers concluded that individuals with higher self-esteem and social support levels were likelier to engage in problem-focused coping and be reemployed much faster. In her 1982 study, Susan Folkman succinctly explains that both processes include cognitive and behavioural strategies," "problem-focused coping, for example, includes strategies directed at analysing the situation and strategies involving action. Similarly, emotion-focused coping includes cognitive strategies such as looking on the bright side of things and behavioural strategies such as seeking emotional support or having a drink" (99).

Job Loss due to Retirement

Like involuntary job loss, retirement too hurts the psychological well-being of an individual. Atchley (1982) asserts that the process of retirement is determined by:

(i) Attitude towards retirement

(ii) Retirement policies

(iii) Factors that lead to retirement

He further writes, "The retirement transition has varying effects, depending on how the individual arrives at retirement. Those who retire voluntarily have little or no difficulty adjusting. Those forced out by mandatory retirement policies tend to be dissatisfied initially, but eventually, they adjust. And those who retire because of poor health are understandably the most dissatisfied" (120). There may be a negative impact on one's mental and physical health after retirement, which is primarily caused by a lack of physical activity and engagement. Having a secure income or retirement corpus, good health, and satisfactory relationships with close ones can be psychological buffers that act like armour to transition from an active lifestyle to one without the earlier routine.

"Retirement is complex and has several forms; it usually is accompanied by noticeable reductions in income (especially wage income), in working hours, and in psychological attachment to work" (Beehr 1093). Beehr has identified four models/theories which have an impact on decisions pertaining to retirement. These are:

(i) The Economic Model refers to financial constraints that compel people to continue working.

(ii) Identity Theory focuses on psychological perceptions and feelings about oneself, which are influenced by one's self-image and group membership. It gives answers to the basic question of "Who am I?"

(iii) Continuity Theory argues that "people only change slowly and moderately as they age, in terms of their psychological characteristics…continuity theory would argue for the stability of one's identity over the times before, during, and after retirement"

(iv) Role Theory outlines the urge in people to retain the roles they play in their job profiles to feel acknowledged and productive. "Role theory suggests that certain socially prescribed and personally relevant roles are critical in self-identity" (Carter and Cook 67)

Beehr observes that health and wealth have been adequately studied as factors influencing retirement, but enough study has not been done on the psychological markers for the same (1097). In their study on career entrenchment, Carson and Carson analyse why people do not want to change or quit jobs. Apart from the economic constraints, as time passes in the same job, "face-saving or self-presentation motives may become dominant. If social cues suggest that continuation is appropriate, the individual's need for psychological preservation makes entrenchment even more likely" (62). Dissatisfaction with the existing jobs becomes visible when the employee feels underpaid, and the rewards do not match the efforts put into the profession. The writers illustrate the above point through the example of Willy Loman. They observe that:

> When an individual experiences career dissatisfaction, distress reactions such as anxiety, anger, and depression may surface. Career entrenchment creates anguish because of the boredom and tedium associated with overlearning tasks. The resulting melancholy, with accompanying hopelessness and rumination, can induce negative consequences (70).

It leads to psychological withdrawal. Linda says in her interaction with Biff:

> Linda: I don't say he's a great man. Willy Loman never made a lot of money. His name was never in the paper. He's not the finest character that ever lived. But he's a human being, and a terrible thing is happening to him. So, attention must be paid. He's not to be allowed to fall into his grave like an old dog. Attention, attention must be finally paid to such a person. (40)

Willy served the company for thirty-six years, entrenched in his job as a salesman, opened "unheard-of territories" (40), building the company, never trying to quit or change his job because he so wholly sought his psychological sense of well-being from the job. In his old age, he is "exhausted" (40) and has "lost his balance" (41), and in his utter helplessness, he commits suicide as he fails to reconcile with reality.

Building Social Resources Through Positive Work-Related Identity and Self-Perception

Work is a significant aspect of life and a prominent basis of significance and identity for most people (Stryker and Serpe; Ashforth and Mael). Work-based situations determine the construction of social identity in individuals (Prat. et.al.). Karl Marx says, "It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness" ("Economic Manuscripts: Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy"), and this "social being" is determined by the work he/she

does. Work-related identities impact how individuals construe themselves in their work domain. It encompasses a "variety of activities, tasks, roles, groups, and memberships that individuals can use to compose a work-related self" (Dutton et.al.,266). Identities are individuals' subjective interpretations of who they are based on their sociodemographic characteristics, roles, personal attributes, and group memberships (Ashforth & Mael). Much of an adult's life is spent at work with colleagues, meeting targets and deadlines. It is, therefore, pertinent that one should have a positive self–perception about one's place and utility in a professional environment, or else it can be detrimental to mental health.

The Social Identity Theory, introduced by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s, suggests that a part of an individual's self-concept comes from belonging to certain social groups, and these were important sources of pride, self-esteem, and self-perception. Ashforth and Mael (1989) argued that "organizational identification is a specific form of social identification" (22). Such social identity enables individuals to derive an existential sense of meaning, connectedness and empowerment. As a social category, an organization is thought to exemplify traits that are considered typical of its members, which enhances their self-esteem. Dutton et.al. (2010) explored the factors that could impart positive self-identity to the workers. They drew from contemporary literature on identity within organizational research and various fields to formulate four unique theoretical viewpoints. These viewpoints highlight the beneficial elements of work-related identities and the processes involved in identity construction. They formulated four theoretical perspectives on positive work-related identity, namely,

a) The Virtue Perspective- A positive work-related identity is formed when it encompasses virtuous attributes or strengths of character that align with the traits recognized as those of commendable people, which are inherently considered virtuous. "When individuals construct work-related identities that have the strengths, characteristics, or qualities that are instantiations of these master virtues, those particular identities are considered positive" (Dutton et. al,268).

b) The Evaluative Perspective asserts that identity is positive when it is regarded favourably. "People often make positive evaluations of their personal identity at work—that is, the work-relevant traits, characteristics, and competencies that differentiate them as an individual… The evaluative lens captures how the sense of worth or regard applied to one's self-definition (by the self or others) can imbue an identity with positivity" (ibid.270-271).

c) The Developmental Perspective emphasizes the evolution of an individual's sense of self or identity over time. This viewpoint inherently assumes that identity is dynamic and can improve and adapt.

d) The Structural Perspective- Individuals can construct a positive identity through the structure of an individual's identity content or self-concept. It is more positive when "multiple

facets of the identity are in a balanced and/or complementary relationship with one another" (ibid.273).

The researchers deduced that because of positive identity formation at the workplace, the employees display a better capacity to endure stress and hardship and increase their capacity to take on new demands and challenges. Consequently, it builds social resources, which include diversity and the quality of relationships employees have at work. Social resources are the valuable assets that influence the structure, content, and quality of individuals' interactions with each other at their place of work. Building better social resources has a direct and favourable impact on their physical and psychological health.

Holistic Well-Being

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), 'decent work is good for mental health'; it also states that a poor work environment, which includes factors such as discrimination, job insecurity, and excessive workload, poses a risk to mental health. "Mental Health at Work", (2022) reported that 15% of working adults were reported to have mental disorders in 2019.WHO website states that "Globally, an estimated 12 billion working days are lost every year to depression and anxiety at a cost of US$ 1 trillion per year in lost productivity" (ibid.). Apart from livelihood, decent work conditions also impart confidence and give a sense of purpose and achievement, along with an opportunity for fruitful relationships and inclusion in society. It also offers a platform for having a structured routine. Employers can address mental health issues through organizational interventions such as flexible working hours and implementations of frameworks that deal with violence and harassment in the workplace.

Given the tragedy of Willy Loman in *The Death of a Salesman* and the unnamed population of workers affected by mental health issues, adequate attention must be given to holistic well-being. The approach to holistic health is multi-dimensional and includes the physical, mental, emotional, social, intellectual, and spiritual aspects of one being ("What Is Holistic Health? – Institute for Holistic Health Studies"). Stoewen (2017) notes that "Wellness encompasses 8 mutually interdependent dimensions: physical, intellectual, emotional, social, spiritual, vocational, financial, and environmental", and all these dimensions must be catered to achieve "personal harmony" and to ensure overall well-being. A balanced approach to the above-named elements requires one to be aware of not giving precedence to the vocational and the financial factors more than the rest. If one's profession drains out a person, holistic health is bound to suffer. Though work is central to most people's identities, it should not be allowed to consume a person so thoroughly that the social, emotional, and spiritual aspects should be ignored. Family, social relations, hobbies, and passions must be nurtured to enable a person to seek and attain self-actualization.

Conclusion

Social roles are integral to a person's identity, which can be broadly classified as the ones that a person has with family members and friends, in social groups, and in group leisure

activities. Having a close-knit family is an enabler in any adverse situation, and friends, family, and membership in social groups outside the circuit of the workforce also reinforce better adaptability. Similarly, hobbies and leisure pursuits make the transition less difficult. Contrarily, if a person has only invested in professional roles and relationships for socializing, the burden of loneliness is aggravated after retirement. "The presence of satisfying relationships with friends and family and affiliations in voluntary groups and leisure activities decrease the chance that retirement adjustment will be difficult." (Carter and Cook 71). Job loss is less tough for those who do not establish their identity through work alone; work for them is a means of livelihood, not *life* itself. If being productive is essential, one can pick up a bridge job and not be attached to the "role" one enjoyed in a specific job to derive a sense of purpose in life.

Willy Loman is entirely unhinged, lacking the necessary coping resources. He neither has health nor financial means; even his relationships are coloured by his guilty past. He does not want to leave the job as his work defined his existence for thirty-six years. It is often noticed that most people do not find it easy to transition from one job to another. It becomes especially difficult if a person has not invested time with oneself and with one's family and friends. Willy Loman is an example of the angst encountered by an "exhausted" man who loses touch with reality; he lacks the resilience to accept the change and seeks refuge in suicide to salvage his family from a financial crisis with his insurance money. It is a tragic end, which can be avoided by prioritising family over work and quality of life over monetary gains and through holistic and spiritual development rather than professional growth alone. It is essential to realize that livelihood is not synonymous with life.

Additionally, it may be asserted that the detrimental impact of job loss on mental health can also be mitigated through certain policies and measures on the part of the organizations. Employee assistance programs can be launched to help employees make the transition, which could include a severance package to enable them to deal with financial strain. Skill development and retraining programs could be initiated for all age groups so that people can be re-employed. Employees will also be better prepared if they are given advance notice before being laid off. The organisation's human resources department can also take necessary measures to handle delicate situations sensitively and communicate the message empathetically. Having an integrated approach both by the employees and the organizations can help encounter job-related trauma and psychological distress to the individual and the family members. Developing psychological resilience and strong human relationships coupled with wellness training and adequate policy measures by employers and the government can lead to the creation of social resources with positive work-related identity (WRI) and self-perception.

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Idolizing Legacies: Decoding Sociopolitical Dynamics of Commemoration and Heroic Adoration Via Select 'Bio-Icon'

MEHAK ISLAM

Abstract

Commemoration, as a dynamic socio-cultural phenomenon, embodies the expression of collective memory, cultural identity, and symbolic representation, thereby becoming an essential tool in shaping narratives of historical events and individuals. The present study delves into the intricate tapestry of sociopolitical significance attributed to the act of commemoration, meticulously scrutinizing its multifaceted impact on society through an in-depth analysis of the select bio-icon. Through a judiciously curated selection of bio-icon – eminent figures whose lives have indelibly imprinted upon the collective consciousness, this research endeavours to unravel the intricate interplay between commemorations and the sociopolitical landscape. Drawing upon an eclectic array of interdisciplinary methodologies, including cultural studies, and historical analysis, the study excavates the manifold layers of meaning enmeshed within these commemorative practices. This investigation transcends the conventional paradigm of commemoration as a mere observance of history, positioning it instead as a potent instrument of sociopolitical agency.

Keywords: Commemoration, Sociopolitical significance, Bio-icon, Collective consciousness, Cultural Studies

> "Worship of a Hero is transcendent admiration of a Great Man."
> - Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, & the Heroic in History*

Commemoration, as a practice of honouring and remembering historical events and figures, plays a pivotal role in shaping collective memory, constructing identities, and influencing power dynamics in society. The term 'Commemoration,' in its colloquial sense, denotes an act of remembrance. It signifies the observance of noteworthy individuals or events through ceremonies, social gatherings, and various accolades. Iconisation or the creation of icons serves as a method by which societies immortalize remarkable personalities and occurrences marked by heroism. Commemorative structures, for instance, cenotaphs, (war) memorials, historical monuments, monoliths, mastabas and statues designed to embody a nation's historical virtues, echo the antiquities of its legacy. Primarily, these commemorative instances evoke the sacrifices and ideals of great historical figures/heroes, followed by manifold cultural and collective rituals.

The terms 'Commemoration' and 'Hero-worship' are inherently intertwined, as the former draws upon the latter for its inception. The focal point of any act of remembrance lies in

heroes, hero worship, and the fervent admiration they command. In India, hero worship stands as an ancient tradition of exalting and paying tribute to courageous men for their acts of valour and leadership. Heroes, particularly notable figures, form an integral part of every society's culture and historical narrative, transcending temporal boundaries. Numerous scholars have assimilated the concept of a 'hero' with a 'great man' to "describe a host of significant historical persons, from Alexander the Great to William Shakespeare. Although the idea that Great men act as prime movers in history has surfaced in a broad range of literature since the 19th century, one treatise has been particularly important in popularizing it" (Frisk 90). In the present paper, the phenomena of 'commemoration' and 'hero-worship' are being scrutinized in the context of the highly-publicized statues of the bio-icon of Punjab, Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The paper delves into the complex tapestry of sociopolitical significance attributed to the acts of commemoration, and heroic adoration through the statues erected in honour of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the Punjab region. It explores how these statues serve as potent symbols of historical memory, identity construction, and political narratives within the contemporary social landscape. The intricate interplay of socio-political dynamics and rhetorical strategies in commemorating a specific heroic persona, particularly within a designated societal locus, takes centre stage. Prior to delving deeply into the intricate constructs of heroism in Punjab, a comprehensive exploration of commemorative practices is conducted to establish a foundational framework for this overarching investigation.

The act of creating heroes within society is a significant phenomenon, influenced by various factors and deeply ingrained in our cultural and social practices. This tradition involves venerating individuals who hold iconic status, ranging from political leaders, renowned personalities, great rulers, divine figures, and military personnel, to more recent additions like healthcare workers. Heroes are elevated to an almost untouchable pedestal, and this tradition is deeply interwoven with our societal customs and beliefs. It thrives within the realms of social, cultural, and political ideologies, becoming an integral part of our daily lives. Hero worshipis particularly prevalent in India, where heroic figures often take on a god-like stature in the hearts of ordinary people. Much of our public discourse and personal anecdotes are marked by a sense of reverence for these figures. The younger generation, in particular, tends to emulate these heroes, leading to passionate mass gatherings and emotional expressions as a reflection of the adoration and celebration surrounding these iconic figures. Heroic adoration in Indian society is deeply rooted in its rich historical and cultural heritage, with a long tradition of venerating individuals who have made significant contributions to the nation. This practice is closely intertwined with India's complex sociopolitical dynamics and diverse cultural tapestry. It transcends political and regional boundaries, shaping public consciousness, and serving as a unifying force in a nation characterized by its remarkable diversity.

Thomas Carlyle's The Great Man Theory

The expansive realm of heroism within the sociological discourse has been meticulously explored by an array of theorists across epochs. Central to this discussion is the prominent

archetype of heroism as a 'pro-social phenomenon.' The heroic persona is intrinsically characterized by a prosocial disposition, wherein an altruistic demeanour becomes the hallmark, eliciting reverence and widespread recognition within society. One notable figure among these theorists is Thomas Carlyle, a preeminent historian of the early Victorian era. His seminal work, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* engages in an exhaustive examination of the hero and the way these Great Men have indelibly shaped the historical landscape. Carlyle's discourse passionately advocates for the imperative of heroic leadership. His assertion revolves around the idea that exceptional individuals should guide, while others revere them. The paper embarks on a comprehensive analysis of Carlyle's 'The Great Man Theory of Leadership,' enriched by complementary secondary sources that corroborate its central tenets.

According to Carlyle, people look up to Great Men who are the embodiment of light "which enlightens, which has enlightened the darkness of the world; and this not as a kindled lamp only, but rather as a natural luminary shining by the gift of Heaven; a flowing light-fountain,…of manhood and heroic nobleness; - in whose radiance all souls feel that it is well with them" (2). Within Carlyle's framework, heroic figures function as torchbearers, sustaining societal life processes akin to living organisms. They serve as prototypes, guiding emulation, and more profoundly, as catalysts propelling history forward. The annals of history, he posits, are fundamentally guided by the transformative influence of great men and heroes. These exemplary beings are propelled by an innate compulsion to uplift their fellow beings, embodying a divine essence expressly designed for the elevation of human existence. 'Universal History,' Carlyle noted:

The central focus of my research paper resides in the exploration of the cultural and iconographic nuances linked to heroism and hero-worship, channelled through the prism of a prominent 'bio-icon' (or Great Man/Hero in Carlyle terms) of Punjab, Maharaja Ranjit Singh. Recognized as the iconic "Sher-e-Punjab," he emerges as a revered symbol synonymous with courage and a magnetic aura, earning acclaim for his role in unifying Punjab and expansively reshaping the frontiers of the Sikh empire. This research framework seamlessly aligns with Carlyle's conviction regarding the critical import of heroic leadership, an aspect vividly embodied by Punjab's celebrated icon.

Within this study, the concept of 'bio-icon' encapsulates heroic personas, notably warriors like Maharaja Ranjit Singh, who are hailed and magnified in the public sphere. Their glorification serves as a commemorative testament to their sacrifice, thus etching their legacies indelibly into the grand tapestry of the nation's history. The Maharaja, hailed as Punjab's quintessential 'bio-icon,' finds symbolic representation through statues and historical renditions. These symbolic effigies epitomise the revered figures who command widespread adulation. Their memory lingers, entrenched within individuals who possess firsthand experiences or who passively absorb accounts of pivotal events, encompassing global and regional conflicts, or instances of territorial accession, meticulously captured through architectural narratives.

The very essence of 'bio-icons' is intertwined with memorability, resonating resoundingly within the public psyche as 'collective memory.' These icons serve as conduits for preserving collective memory, consequently contributing to the construction of a unified 'collective identity.' Their images, including photographs and portraits, permeate mass media platforms – newspapers, advertisements, and cultural showcases – casting them as embodiments of valour and patriotism.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh as a bio-icon in the present research is the heroic personage whose "biography operates as the point of contact between a given situated viewer and that which lies beyond, or behind, the icon: potentialities, desires and actions which may emerge" (de Rezende 156). In the cultural landscape of Punjab, particularly within the Sikh community, an entrenched historical pride resonates in the multifaceted legacy of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, encompassing his military prowess, political acumen, and secular contributions. His self-proclamation as the inaugural king of Punjab post his conquest of Lahore in 1801 remains a pivotal historical juncture. Despite his physical limitations, such as a left blind eye and a visage marred by smallpox scars, these very attributes were transmuted into formidable strengths. Despite his diminutive stature, he emerged as a visionary leader.

Max Weber, another luminary historian, expounds upon a parallel trajectory by introducing the concept of "charismatic authority." This notion revisits the societal hagiography, transcending the realms of politics, religion, military affairs, and celebrity spheres. Weber interweaves leadership and authority, forging a symbiotic link between a leader and their followers. Charismatic authority, characterized by individuals of 'Charisma' possessing extraordinary, even supernatural, qualities, elicits devotion and obedience, prompting the audience's transformation into ardent adherents.

Origination of A 'Hero'

The primal concept of a 'hero' springs to life within our imaginative faculties when contemplating the narrative of Beowulf. In this, Beowulf exemplifies the quintessential traits of a classical hero: one who risks all for the common good and champions the nation against malevolence. Parallelly, the revered Greek hero Achilles relinquished his life in defence of Troy and its inhabitants, with the intensity of his veneration amongst the Greeks attaining extraordinary proportions. Throughout chivalric literature, the journey of the hero's evolution stands as a cornerstone in many narratives. The transformation of Sir Gawain in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* exemplifies this process, as he navigates trials and tribulations, emerging evolved within the tale. Joseph Campbell's "Hero's Journey" theory encapsulates this developmental odyssey of heroism within a societal framework.

Fundamentally, heroism is characterized by enduring traits evident across diverse literary works. A cardinal principle underpinning hero-worship is that heroes undertake noble deeds, contemplate the welfare of their compatriots, and remain ever prepared for sacrifice. These figures serve as intermediaries between mankind and the divine.

The Great Theory of Leadership illustrates the creation of heroes as an inherent natural phenomenon. Great men are born with the essential attributes necessary to guide the world towards a better future. However, the assertion that heroes are a product of society has been argued by various theorists, as Spencer exemplifies, implying that heroes are fashioned rather than innately born. This interplay between individual potential and societal influence underscores the integral connection between heroes and leaders, where leadership is a cornerstone of heroism. This association is also evident in Carlyle's 'Great Man Theory.' The evolution of heroism spans epochs, yielding diverse perspectives and interpretations; ultimately weaving a complex narrative that maintains its relevance across time.

The Punjab region boasts a significant array of historical statues, notably erected as tokens of heroism, commemorating the resolute and fearless feats of Sikh warriors or 'bio-icons,' particularly in the struggles for independence and accession. The warrior ethos of the Sikhs, firmly interwoven with their mainstream identity and narrative, finds enduring expression in the formidable Sikh regiment of the Indian Army. Within Sikh identity, the pivotal roles of martyrs and warriors are accentuated, forming an integral part of their cultural and religious heritage. This martial spirit, inseparable from the broader fabric of Sikh tradition, coexists alongside their spiritual devotion. The enduring legacy of Sikh warriors remains embodied in the formidable Sikh regiment of the Indian Army, perpetuating the ideals of strength and valour.

Maharaja Ranjit Singh occupies an esteemed pedestal in the hearts of the masses across Punjab. The topographical landscape of Punjab bears the indelible imprints of this phenomenal leader through strategically allocated spaces, resplendent with statues and monuments erected in his honour. Bestowed with the epithet of the 'Lion of Punjab,' Maharaja Ranjit Singh is eulogized for his remarkable achievement in forging a unified secular political state, underpinned by his unwavering commitment to secularism. His legacy transcends regional boundaries, and he remains a cherished icon not only in the annals of Indian history but also in the broader narratives of the Orient.

The Maharaja's reign is emblematic of the pride of Sikhs and Punjabis alike, a time when the region reached the pinnacle of excellence in fields as diverse as culture, philosophy, and warfare. His ascension to power at the tender age of twelve underscores his innate heroism, a beacon of resilience and leadership reminiscent of the qualities espoused by Thomas Carlyle in his seminal work on hero-worship. The people of his era revered him as a deity incarnate, faithfully treading in the footsteps of this heroic figure, as expounded upon by Carlyle. In the Sikh cosmos, the Gurus and Maharajas held positions of paramount significance, serving as guiding lights, steering the populace towards the righteous path. Societies often showcase a grand tapestry of commemorative landmarks that are erected within physical environments steeped in reminders of the past. In Punjab's urban landscape, these historical markers have proliferated, blending seamlessly with essential urban elements such as institutions, highways, rural roads, and other roadside symbols. These commemorated historical markers are a

frequent sight, strategically positioned amidst densely populated areas and important national landmarks.

Punjabis hold Maharaja Ranjit Singh in high esteem, as his leadership qualities and persona continue to inspire people worldwide. He played a pivotal role in Indian history, uniting various local confederacies known as "misls" and regional kingdoms to form the Sikh Empire. Maharaja Ranjit Singh's visionary leadership style serves as a classic example taught in business schools and military academies. He dedicated himself to the welfare of Punjab for four decades, guided by the teachings of Sikh Gurus and a deep commitment to his people. Maharaja Ranjit Singh undoubtedly fits the definition of "Great men" as put forth by Carlyle. These great men serve as leaders and inspirations, guiding their nations.

However, it's essential to acknowledge that the commemoration of such monuments has political dimensions, often driven by government-sponsored programs aimed at aesthetically enhancing surroundings. "The bio-iconic visuals are not mere signs of some 'innocent' cultural commemorating activities, but are rooted in a complex dynamics of power" (Chaturvedi et al. 133). There exist two distinct approaches in the realm of art with political implications: "Political art" and "Politics in art." In the former, artworks explicitly convey political subjects or messages, using visual imagery as a means to effect political change. These works openly critique the prevailing state of affairs. Conversely, in the latter approach, art is created with underlying political motives. The objectives of such art often revolve around wielding influence, power, or authority over others through political means. The realm of art has increasingly faced mounting political pressures, impacting not only the creation, presentation, and reception of artistic works but also their preservation within diverse cultural contexts. A recent addition to this dynamic is the phenomenon of dismantling and renaming structures, driven by politically mediated directives. The reconfiguration of historical monuments has gained heightened significance. Some artworks are considered objectionable by certain groups and are consequently being destroyed. Chinki Sinha, associate editor at India Today in her article "Here's How Artists in India are Making Political Statements through their Work" writes that - "While artists have always stayed away from the tag "political art", the artworks themselves are a commentary of the state of affairs and as art comes into its own as visible "political discourse.""

The equestrian statue of Maharaja Ranjit Singh, prominently displayed atop a seven-layered pedestal in the bustling Old Fawara Chowk in Amritsar, exemplifies this reverence. It shares space with other culturally and politically significant landmarks, such as the Golden Temple, Akal Takht, Jallianwala Bagh, Partition Museum, and Gobindgarh Fort. This strategic placement within a sacred space underscores the process of hero-making and icon-formation while intertwining with political dynamics. Commemorating Maharaja Ranjit Singh in the heart of this hallowed city signifies both a socio-cultural representation and an inevitable connection to political affairs.

The statue in the Ram Bagh Gardens, unveiled in 1985 by Shri Arjun Singh, Governor of Punjab, is a monumental bronze equestrian sculpture, paying homage to the first Maharaja of the Sikh Empire. The statue portrays him confidently astride a horse, adorned in cavalryman's armour, gripping a spear in his right hand while guiding the reins with his left. Positioned proudly upon an elevated pedestal, this grand sculpture serves as the centrepiece of the sprawling Ram Bagh Gardens. It is not just a visual tribute; it signifies the role of this iconic figure in Punjab's history, his influence on military modernization, and his political significance.

The third statue under examination stands proudly at the Maharaja Ranjit Singh War Museum in Ludhiana, the largest city in Punjab and a major industrial hub in northern India. This bronze statue, erected in 1991 during the tenure of General O.P. Malhotra, Governor of Punjab, stands nine feet tall. It depicts Maharaja seated regally on a throne, flanked by majestic royal palm trees. The museum, strategically located on the Grand Trunk Road, serves as a solemn tribute to the brave soldiers who sacrificed their lives in numerous battles and wars. Beyond honouring their memory, the museum also serves as an educational platform, enlightening citizens about defence and its role in the nation. The museum offers insights into historic battles, featuring collections of weapons, armour, and uniforms. Interestingly, the statue deviates from the opulence often associated with rulers; Maharaja Ranjit Singh is portrayed in plain clothing, seated in a simple armchair, reflective of his reputation for simplicity despite his significant stature. This choice reflects his identity as a shrewd warrior.

Hence, the statues and monuments dedicated to Maharaja Ranjit Singh studied as a bio-icon of Punjab, serve as eternal sources of inspiration for present and future generations. They are more than artistic tributes; they are carefully preserved cultural relics and significant tourist destinations, bearing testimony to Punjab's rich heritage. These statues stand as powerful reminders of the iconic 'Sher-e-Punjab,' eternally celebrated for his leadership, vision, wisdom, and statesmanship. It is undeniably clear that statues erected in bustling public spaces are symbolic of the intricate processes of hero deification and hero worship. These monuments dedicated to Maharaja Ranjit Singh in Punjab are no exception and are shaped by the same socio-political dynamics discussed earlier.

These bio-iconic statues can be seen as visual texts that bear the distinct characteristics of a particular era. They breathe life into history and make historical events more tangible and accessible. However, it's important to recognize that they are not devoid of political propaganda inherent in the act of hero worship and the construction of monuments and memorials in tribute to iconic figures. Highlighting the politics entwined with hero worship, B. R. Ambedkar cautioned against the excessive devotion and hero worship prevalent in Indian politics. He argued that while admiring leaders as heroes is not inherently wrong, it can lead to entrusting these individuals with vast unchecked powers, undermining accountability.

The collective emotional response from observers contributes to the cultivation of hero figures within a community "wherein such icons are displayed as the 'norm' against the

bigger population." These historical monuments serve as tangible remnants of the past that are subject to interpretation and appropriation. The selection of which statues to erect in prominent public spaces is not a straightforward process but rather involves subtle power dynamics. Public spaces serve as the canvas for a nuanced portrayal of the great ruler's history and the evolution of state historical markers. What may appear as innocuous reminders of the past can become a battleground for complex cultural politics. Other practical considerations, such as meticulous planning, adequate space allocation, and substantial budgets, come into play. However, the essential question of what should be commemorated and what deserves public recognition has become a pivotal topic in the realm of hero worship and commemoration.

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Re-evaluating Wonder Woman's Feminist Legacy and Complexities Amidst Women's Liberation Movement

SADIYA NASIRA AL FARUQUE

Abstract

This study provides a critical analysis of the feminist legacy of Wonder Woman and the intricate nuances surrounding her character in context with the ongoing women's liberation movement. Considering the dynamic nature of feminist discourse and the shifting societal landscape, it is crucial to undertake a evaluation of the representation of Wonder Woman and the resulting implications. The paper aims to examine the origins of Wonder Woman, as envisioned by William Moulton Marston in the 1940s, and to scrutinise the character's original feminist principles, as well as their subsequent evaluations throughout the years. The present study aims to investigate the discordance between the feminist principles that Wonder Woman initially upheld and how she has been depicted in comic books by subsequent writers and editors. It will examine her representation as both a symbol of feminist empowerment and a perpetuator of patriarchal stereotypes. Through an examination of both the positive and negative aspects of her feminist contributions, this study aims to gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which media depictions of female superheroes can influence and challenge societal conceptions of gender roles and equality.

Keywords – Wonder Woman, feminist icon, women's liberation, gender roles, stereotypes

1. Introduction

In the 1940s, Marston, an American psychologist, author, and the inventor of the lie detector, came up with the idea of a female superhero for the very first time, at a period when the then-recently established genre of superhero comic books was reaching its peak popularity, with Superman and Batman being the most popular superheroes at the time. He created Wonder Woman, one of the earliest and most influential female superheroes. When Marston was developing the character, he had the distinct intention of communicating a particular message about the superiority of women. He was of the opinion that women were considerably superior to males and that they had the potential to bring about greater justice and peace to society, even in the midst of World War II. Marston posited that women's inherent aptitude for affection, caregiving, and altruism would render them superior leaders in comparison to men (Finn 7). While men generally espouse traditional ideals of power and dominance, Marston argued that women's more compassionate approach to leadership would prove to be far more effective.

In a letter addressed to Coulton Waugh, a prominent historian of comic books, the author said that Wonder Woman serves as a form of psychological propaganda for a novel archetype of women who possess the potential to govern the world. He states - "Frankly, Wonder Woman is psychological propaganda for the new type of woman who should, I believe, rule the world" (qtd. in Finn). During the period when it was believed that feminist concepts were being assimilated and weakened by mainstream culture, Marston utilised the character of Wonder Woman as a means to advocate for women's autonomy in politics, finance, and societal influence (Finn 7).

Marston's creation of Wonder Woman was driven by a particular objective, with the aspiration that his character would serve as a catalyst for a lasting transformation in the societal and sexual hierarchy. Finn states – "Deliberate in his goal, Marston hoped that Wonder Woman would inspire a real and permanent change in the social-sexual order" (8). Marston's motivation for creating Wonder Woman also stemmed from a desire to deviate from the prevailing culture of toxic masculinity and gut-wrenching violence that was pervasive in comic books. Hence, the first page of the *All-Star Comics* issue #8, published in October 1941, reads – "At last, in a world torn by the hatreds and wars of men, appears a woman to whom the problems and feats of men are mere child's play!" (Moulton 1). Marston gives a detailed account of his motivation for the character in an article in the journal *The American Scholar* titled "Why 100,000,000 Americans Read Comics", published in 1943. He says,

> It seemed to me, from a psychological angle, that the comics' worst offense was their blood-curdling masculinity. A male hero, at best, lacks the qualities of love and tenderness which are as essential to a normal child as the breath of life. It's smart to be strong. It's big to be generous. But it's sissified, according to exclusively masculine rules, to be tender, loving, affectionate, and alluring. "Aw, that's girl's stuff!" snorts our young comics reader. "Who wants to be a girl?" And that's the point; not even girls want to be girls so long as our feminine archetype lacks force, strength, power. Not wanting to be girls they don't want to be tender, submissive, peaceloving as good women are. Women's strong qualities have become despised because of their weak ones. The obvious remedy is to create a feminine character with all the strength of a Superman plus all the allure of a good and beautiful woman (42).

2. Marston: The Innovative Mind Behind the Birth of Wonder Woman

Marston, a prominent figure in the field of psychology, is known for his notable contributions to the development of the lie detector. However, his impact on the field of psychology extends beyond this invention as he introduced DISC theory, which has remained relevant and widely utilised in contemporary times for personality assessment tests (Hanley 11). Marston's book *Emotions of Normal People*, published in 1929, presents a comprehensive theory that explains the underlying reasons for human behaviour. It is based on the four primary personality types: Dominance, Inducement, Submission, and Compliance (107-9). Marston employed the theory of DISC to explicate the dynamics of interactions between genders. He believed that men have a natural inclination towards asserting dominance, resulting

in a confrontational dynamic that necessitates the subjugation of females into a submissive state (Marston 256-257).

In contrast to their male counterparts, women exhibit a tendency to prioritise influence in the context of male and female interactions (395). Marston states in his book that "Men dislike intensely the idea of submitting to women. Yet, at the same time, they exert themselves to the utmost to establish just such passionately submissive relationships with women who have captivated them. The man's passionate enjoyment of submission can be evoked continuously, throughout the relationship" (396-7). Therefore, a sense of satisfaction could be achieved if men acknowledged and embraced women as active members of their relationships.

This theory heavily influenced Marston's beliefs, and he used it as a framework for creating Wonder Woman. The DISC theory helped Marston to develop the character's dominant and assertive personality traits, which were in line with his belief in the superiority of women. Marston's perspective on male dominance is that it is a problematic dynamic with significant societal implications. Marston views Wonder Woman as a potential remedy to the challenges stemming from a world governed by hostile male hegemony. Her strength, courage, and compassion are crucial qualities that can serve as a remedy to mitigate the adverse impacts of male hegemony. Marston's creation of Wonder Woman was motivated by his belief that traditional male dominance often leads to women being forced into submission. He sought to challenge this paradigm by introducing a female character who could use her alluring personality and compassionate nature to influence men in a positive way. He states in his article "Why 100,000,000 Americans Read Comics" – "Give men an alluring woman stronger than themselves to submit to and they'll be proud to become her willing slaves!"

In his view, Wonder Woman was able to induce men to submit willingly and happily rather than through force or coercion. According to him, this type of power is more potent than male dominance, as it relies on persuasion rather than force.

3. Wonder Woman: Symbol of Female Empowerment or Embodiment of Marston's Idiosyncratic Beliefs?

Marston advocated feminist ideals, and his views on feminism were progressive for his time; however, his fervent sentiments and affinities towards the ideology were grounded in his personal sexual inclinations. "Marston was, in short, a crank. His feminism was tied (all too literally) to his own erotic interests and desires" (Berlatsky). The subject of sexual submission is given explicit attention in Marston's book, *Emotions of Normal People,* as he posits that men would derive immense pleasure from submitting to women who have ensnared their affections, thereby engendering a state of felicity for both genders involved (396). This led him to create the character of Wonder Woman, who embodied both feminist ideals and erotic fantasies. Hence, the origins of Wonder Woman can also be interpreted as a manifestation of Marston's idiosyncratic beliefs.

Tim Hanley, in his critique of Marston's ideology on gender, argues in *Wonder Woman Unbound: The Curious History of World's Most Famous Heroine,* published in 2014, that Marston's "concept of gender relied on reductionist generalisations" (16). Hanley's criticism suggests that Marston's views on gender were overly simplistic and failed to take into account the complexity and diversity of human experience. By relying on reductionist generalisations, Marston's ideology may have perpetuated harmful stereotypes and limited our understanding of gender and its role in society. Hanley further argues, "The female aptitude for love was both maternal and sexual, reducing women to a Madonna/whore stereotype. Marston's theories idealised women and sexualised their power, basically stating that they were better suited to rule solely based on their ability to fulfil the desires of the men they subjugated" (16-17).

Hanley's critique highlights the problematic nature of Marston's ideology and its impact on the representation of women in popular culture. Marston's theories regarding women and their role in society were characterised by an idealisation of femininity coupled with a sexualisation of female power. While Marston's theories may have been well-intentioned in their attempt to elevate the status of women, they ultimately reinforced harmful gender stereotypes and contributed to the marginalisation of women in society.

Moreover, the personal life of Marston has been a subject of interest for many scholars as they believed that his personal experiences likely played a role in shaping his beliefs about women empowerment. A polyamorous relationship was known to have existed between him and two women, namely Elizabeth Holloway and Olive Byrne. It is also believed that Marston's relationship with these two women had a significant influence on his comic book writing – "When Marston was designing a superheroine that would capture the hearts of comic book readers nationwide, he looked no further than the two women – Byrne and Holloway – who captured his own heart" (Carifio 51). In fact, it is speculated that Marston incorporated elements of their relationship into his work. It has sparked discussions about the role of personal experiences in forming his feminist ideologies and the role of sexuality and power dynamics in our society.

One of the most controversial aspects of Marston's beliefs was his fascination with dominance, bondage, and submission, which he believed necessary in human relationships. Marston saw these behaviours as natural and healthy, and he believed that they could be used to create a harmonious society (Marston 396). His views on bondage and submission have been criticised by some scholars as being exploitative and objectifying of women. Marston, who believed in the power of submission and domination in sexual relationships, also believed that women were naturally more submissive than men and that this was a key to their strength and appeal (240-1).

In the early issues of *Wonder Woman*, the character frequently found herself tied up or bound in some way as Noah Berlatsky, in his article "How Wonder Woman's Male Creator Helped Shape Third-Wave Feminism" points out, "Open any random page of Marston's original Wonder Woman comics (drawn by artist Harry Peter) and you're as likely as not to see Wonder Woman, or some other woman, or many other women, bound in the golden

lasso, or in ropes, or in chains, or even sporting a gimp mask". These images were often sexualised and fetishistic, with Wonder Woman being tied up, gagged, and helpless.

Some critics argue that it reinforces harmful gender stereotypes and sends a mixed message about female empowerment. Some also saw it as a subversion of traditional gender roles, while others saw it as a form of sexual fetishism (Finn 12). Additionally, his views on gender roles were not always consistent, and he sometimes fell into traditional gender stereotypes. Many feminists criticised his views, arguing that they were based on a narrow and limited understanding of women's experiences. As Hanley states, "There is a sort of fetishism inherent in Marston's theories that says much more about what Marston was into than about gender relations and feminism" (17). The utilisation of bondage imagery in Marston's work is subject to interpretation regarding his underlying intentions. It implies a convoluted intersection of incentives and his fascinations.

4. Wonder Woman's Contribution to Advancing Gender Equality and Empowerment During Wartime

World War II marked a pivotal moment in history, particularly regarding the workforce. During this time, there was a major transition as women began to enter the workforce in large numbers to support the war effort. This shift had a profound impact on society, as it challenged long-held beliefs about gender distinctions and cleared the way for greater gender parity in the workplace. Wonder Woman represents a significant milestone in the ongoing struggle for gender equality and serves as a testament to the power of representation in shaping our collective consciousness. During the war, the character played a significant role in supporting the government's initiatives to encourage women to participate in war activities. It was shown that Wonder Woman, who belongs to an all-female land called Paradise Island, is always pushing women to fight for equal wages and to join auxiliary forces. The character not only encouraged the women in the real world to realise their strength and potential, but she also covertly prepared the young male readers for the forthcoming matriarchal world that followed after the war.

The storylines of the comic book depict Wonder Woman confronting Mars, the Greek God associated with war and violence. He has been employed in the *Wonder Woman* comics as a potent emblem of the patriarchal structure that dominated the era of World War II. For instance, in a particular scene of *Wonder Woman* issue #5, he is depicted venting his frustration towards an enslaved woman who is restrained by heavy chains and apprising him of the increasing number of women getting involved in war efforts.

> Woman: American women are warriors – WAACs, waves, secret agent! 10 million British women are in war service, 30 million Russian women –
>
> Mars: Silence – enough! If women gain power in war they'll escape men's domination completely! They will achieve a horrible independence! (Moulton 2A)

Mars serves as a powerful representation of the forces that seek to oppress women as he believes that – "women are the natural spoils of war! they must remain at home, helpless slaves for the victor! If women become warriors like the amazons, they will grow stronger than men and put an end to war!" (Moulton 2A). In contrast, Wonder Woman's struggles against him highlight the importance of standing up against such oppressive forces. The character of Mars serves as both a corporeal antagonist and a manifestation of misogynistic beliefs. He embodies a conventional power dynamic dominated by males, which aims to hinder the advancement of women and restrict their roles to authoritative positions.

Moreover, in issue #5 of *Wonder Woman* comics published in 1942, she faces one of her most challenging battles as she confronts another villain Dr. Psycho, who harbours a deep-seated animosity towards women. He is introduced as,

> "Known wherever his evil genius strikes as the man with a thousand faces, this monster abhors women! With weird cunning and dark, forbidden knowledge of the occult, Dr. Psycho prepares to change the independent status of modern american women back to the days of the sultans and slave markets, clanking chains and abject captivity" (Moulton 1A).

His misogynistic tendencies and pursuit of power make him a formidable opponent; however, Wonder Woman's steadfast commitment to upholding justice ensures that she will not yield in the presence of such malevolence. As the battle between Wonder Woman and Dr. Psycho unfolds, it becomes evident that the conflict transcends mere physical combat. The conflict is a clash of opposing belief systems, as Wonder Woman strives to safeguard and enhance the status of women, whereas Dr. Psycho attempts to subvert and debase them.

The character also served as a source of inspiration for women to enhance their physical prowess by enlisting in the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAACs) or Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES). She also conveyed the notion that through the acquisition of financial resources and the attainment of self-determination, women could achieve autonomy from their male counterparts. Towards the end of the storyline in issue #5 of *Wonder Woman* comics, she rescues the woman named Marva from the clutches of her cruel husband Dr. Psycho and impresses upon her the importance of cultivating strength and achieving financial autonomy.

> "Marva: Submitting to a cruel husband's dominition has ruined my life! But what can a weak girl do?
>
> Wonder Woman: Get strong! Earn your own living - join the waacs or waves and fight for your country! Remember the better you can fight the less you'll have to!" (Moulton 16A)

5. Analysing Wonder Woman's Feminist Legacy and Complexities Amidst Women's Liberation Movement

In the mid-twentieth century, American society was characterised by pervasive norms and expectations regarding the appropriate behaviour of women. These norms were deeply

rooted in traditional gender roles and were reinforced by cultural, social, and economic factors. However, during this period, women began challenging these conventions and striving for greater autonomy and equality. The mid-1960s witnessed the inception of the second wave of feminism, which was distinguished by a fervent aspiration to confront the systemic disparities that prevailed between men and women across diverse domains of life. The second wave exhibited a more comprehensive approach, seeking to address concerns encompassing reproductive rights, workplace discrimination, and gender-based violence (Martha 3).

The period was also marked by a series of protests, campaigns, consciousness-raising, and demonstrations aimed at challenging gender inequality and promoting women's rights. One notable event during this period was the demonstrations against the Miss America competition held in Atlantic City, which became the focus of feminist activism in 1968 and 1969. These demonstrations marked the beginning of a new era in the feminist movement, as women began to challenge the traditional beauty standards and objectification of women perpetuated by such events.

The feminist movement has long been critical of the objectification of women, which they argue is perpetuated by a patriarchal society that seeks to limit women's roles to those of beauty and domesticity. One example of this resistance against objectification is the "cattle parade," a term used to describe beauty pageants and other events that reduce women to mere objects of male desire. Feminists have parodied these events in an effort to draw attention to the harmful effects of such objectification, which they argue can lead to women being relegated to low-paying jobs and limited opportunities for personal and professional growth (Martha 3). Robin Morgan, a renowned activist who made significant contributions to the women's liberation movement, reflects on the Miss America protest that occurred in 1968. During this event, a group of feminist demonstrators, including her, organised a counter pageant in which they bestowed the title of Miss America upon a sheep. Additionally, they symbolically discarded various "oppressive" feminine artefacts by throwing them into a trashcan. Morgan recalls – "We placed a huge trashcan decorated with the words "Freedom Trashcan" on the boardwalk, and women were invited to throw in symbols of their oppression ranging from stiletto heels to dishrags and diapers to cleaning tools and corsets" ("I Was There: The 1968 Miss America Pageant Protest").

Betty Friedan's book, *The Feminine Mystique*, published in 1963, further propelled second-wave feminism. It is widely considered a seminal work in the history of feminist thought and activism. It served as a catalyst for women to question their societal roles and demand equal rights and opportunities. The book sparked a national debate about women's role in society and helped to galvanise the feminist movement. Friedan observed that the perpetuation of the erroneous belief that domestic life constituted a legitimate career choice for women was not solely the fault of society at large. Rather, she argued that magazine editors and writers bore a significant degree of responsibility for perpetuating this myth (44). By consistently portraying the role of the housewife as a fulfilling and meaningful occupation, these publications

perpetuated the notion that women's aspirations and achievements should be confined to the domestic sphere. In her seminal work, she also coined the phrase "the problem that had no name" to delineate the plight of the dissatisfied homemaker (44). The phrase encapsulated the sentiment of discontent and exasperation that numerous women experienced during the 1950s and 60s, as they perceived their conventional roles as homemakers and mothers as unfulfilling.

Wonder Woman was portrayed in a manner that aligned with the dominant ideologies of the era. These ideologies frequently reinforced the notion that women were unsuitable for positions of authority or for displaying significant power. During this period, Wonder Woman's stories often had a more fantastical and whimsical tone, focusing on mythology, fairy tales, and unusual creatures. These narratives diverged from the crime-centric and realistic plotlines typically attributed to *Batman* and *Superman* comics. Batman encountered iconic villains such as the Joker, the Riddler, Penguin, and Two-Face, who possessed distinctive skills and intricate plans. Superman encountered a variety of opponents who exploited his vulnerabilities, including Lex Luthor, Brainiac, and Doomsday. These villains possessed extraordinary abilities or were equipped with sophisticated machinery, rendering them considerably more dangerous and challenging to overcome.

On the contrary, the enemies of Wonder Woman were frequently portrayed as frivolous and comparatively less powerful in comparison to those of Batman and Superman. The villains that she typically encountered were usually giants, creatures of the ocean, untamed beasts, extinct creatures such as dinosaurs, and even a gigantic egg. The disparity in power between Wonder Woman's supervillains and those of Batman and Superman extended beyond their physical prowess and abilities. Wonder Woman's villains lacked the psychological complexity and moral ambiguity that has become a hallmark of Batman and Superman's villains. The characters of the Joker, and Lex Luthor were depicted as intricate and multifaceted, whereas the opponents of Wonder Woman were generally portrayed as simplistic and easily defeated.

In contrast to the male villains, who are frequently depicted as pursuing dominance around the world or planning destruction, the female villains in Wonder Woman are frequently characterised as exhibiting envy and spite, and usually, their main objective is to eradicate Wonder Woman. For example – In the comic series *Wonder Woman* issue #160, the Cheetah, a notorious adversary of Wonder Woman, expresses her envy towards the latter's physical beauty and declares her intention to eliminate her – "horrible looking creature am I? I'm ten times more beautiful than that female strong-man! I'll fix her!" (8).

Furthermore, the loss of her superpowers in the year 1968 has had a notable impact as they constituted a fundamental aspect of her identity and her capacity to advocate for justice and equality. Furthermore, the act of relinquishing her emblematic attire has augmented her sense of powerlessness by depriving her of the symbolic manifestation of her strength and power. Ultimately, the diminished significance of her affiliation with her Amazonian roots has additionally undermined her capacity to motivate and empower women. The lack of these

indicators led to a depiction of her identity that did not entirely embody the principles of women's liberation. It is significant to note that in instances where Wonder Woman experiences powerlessness, her ability to convey a message of empowerment that is specifically targeted towards women is impeded. For example – In issue #203 of the *Wonder Woman* comics series, Diana Prince, the alter-ego of Wonder Woman, declined to offer her support to a women's liberation group when her friend Cathy asked her to join.

Cathy: Diana you've got to come to our group and hear for yourself!

Diana Prince: I'm for equal wages, too! but I'm not a joiner. I wouldn't fit with your group. In most cases, I don't even like women..? (13).

This rejection implies that the latest version of the character may not conform to these principles in a similar manner like the original Wonder Woman used to do. The shift in her viewpoint, whereby she transitioned from highlighting the positive attributes of actual women to renouncing the idea of joining a female liberation group, conveyed the impression that she no longer placed significance on matters pertaining to women. However, even during these times, her editor Dennis O'Neil has consistently asserted that she still serves as a powerful role model for feminist ideals – "I saw it as taking a woman and making her independent, and not dependent on superpowers. I saw it as making her thoroughly human and then an achiever on top of that very much in keeping with feminist agenda" (Daniels 126).

Moreover, the overemphasis on her romantic relationships at times conveyed the impression that her sense of completeness depended on her relationship with her male partner rather than deriving from her identity as a female superhero. This emotional dependency on a male represented a significant deviation from the liberating spirit she exhibited during her initial years, considering her origins as a member of an all-female utopian community which prohibited the presence of men and the fact that these women typically stayed away from any kind of relationship with males.

To conclude, it could be argued that despite Wonder Woman being hailed as a beacon of empowerment during the movement of women's liberation, she frequently conformed to the traditional gender roles imposed on women in that particular era. Wonder Woman's portrayal was not always entirely progressive. Her characterisation did not fully align with the evolving values of the women's liberation movement, highlighting the complex nature of representing female empowerment in popular culture. While real-life women were fighting to break down the barriers of gender inequality, Wonder Woman faced challenges in fully transcending gender norms and serving as an exemplary figure for female empowerment. It is important to consider the impact these portrayals can have on society and strive for accurate and positive representations of women in all forms of media.

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Nation and its Others: The *Tawaif* and the Muslim Literary Consciousness in Mirza Ruswa's *Umrao Jan Ada* and Ahmed Ali'sa *Ocean of Night*

P. MURALIDHAR SHARMA

Abstract

This paper intends to examine the centrality of the figure of the courtesan to the Muslim consciousness and the cultural self-perceptions of the Muslims in the face of the marginalizing tendencies set in by colonial domination. Further, it investigates the ways in which these reductive tendencies united with the anxieties for the consolidation of an exclusive "Hindu" nation in the early 20th century. In doing so, it studies how Indian Muslim writers produced counter-narratives that interrogated the experience of nationhood and thus challenged the hegemonic tendencies of colonialist and Hindu nationalist ideologies. The extraordinarily erudite *tawaif,* who controlled the manners and mores of her world, became a common trope which enabled the Muslim literary consciousness to assert pre-colonial glory as a means of compensating for the cultural dispossession that had set in. The paper discusses Mirza Muhammad Hadi Ruswa's *Umrao Jan Ada* (1905) and Ahmed Ali's *Ocean of Night* (1964), two significant interventions in the discourse of women performers, in order to trace the emergence of a reactionary Muslim consciousness that appropriated nostalgia as a political maneuver and made the cultured *tawaif* its sole repository.

Keywords: Hindu nation, Muslim identity, *Tawaif, Umrao Jan Ada,* Urdu fiction

Any attempt at understanding the cultural forces that impinged themselves upon the figure of the courtesan in the early twentieth century must take cognizance of the British attitude to Muslims post 1857 and their alignment with the forces of marginalization that had set in with the emergence of a predominantly Hindu nationalist sentiment. The British perceived India's immediate past as one of extravagance, lasciviousness, and indulgence, wherein the Mughal rulers were constructed as symbols of a decadent 'Indian' culture. The intellectually dominant strain of Orientalist thought aggravated such attitudes through its reconstruction of a 'golden', Sanskritic past for India. The Muslim interregnum was interpreted as a 'dark' phase in the otherwise rich history of India. Such constructions of an 'Indian' past, as critics like Partha Chatterjee have observed (210), were often complimented by the notion of the 'backwardness' of Indian Muslims, a stereotype perpetuated in colonial discourse, which they began to internalize as an established fact: "One of the tropes to emerge in the colonial discourse after 1857 was that of the 'backward Muslim' as compared to the 'progressive Hindu'…This self-image of backwardness was embraced by a section of Muslim elites. This image, largely unsubstantiated, came to acquire a life of its own" (Farooqi 24).

Nautch practices in Northern India, in particular, were perceived as inseparably intertwined with the 'evil' influences of the Muslim interregnum. European encounter with the dancing girls of India dates back to the 17th and 18th centuries, when Indian hosts entertained the English officers with their performances. The British famously referred to these women as 'nautch', which is a distortion of the Hindustani word *naach* meaning dance. It was a common term by which all forms of performances by women in public came to be referred to. The nautch-girls of Northern India, known as '*tawaifs*,' came to be perceived as strong symbols of cultural backwardness. Such impulses went hand-in-hand with the reform-oriented initiatives of the evangelical missionaries, whose anxieties about the supposedly enigmatic figure of the royal Indian courtesan helped British administrators to associate sexual depravity with the cultural intervention of Islam.

The attitudes attesting the fallen-ness of the Muslim were also promoted actively by the Hindu nationalists, who perceived the Muslims as their immediate enemy. All moral lapses began to be invariably attributed to the Muslim cultural lineage. The narrative of a 'dark' phase of Muslim cultural intervention was readily available to the Hindu nationalists, whose claims to cultural superiority were premised on this projected cultural decay. Notions of medieval decline were pitted against the antiquity of a Hindu past.

<div align="center">II</div>

In the Indian colonial context, the notion of racial/cultural/religious superiority was always conceived in gendered terms. The debates surrounding the exclusion of the courtesans from mainstream 'Indian' culture were at the very centre of the struggle for cultural hegemony, where the categories of race, gender, and religion intersected each other. In her informed analysis of the forces of communal mobilization in colonial India, Charu Gupta asserts that gender and sexuality became important determinants in the construction of the Muslim 'other' in the discourse of Hindu nationalists and publicists (243). Notions of an exclusive Hindu identity came to be consolidated in relation to the sexuality of the Hindu woman, which in turn was seen as prey to the uncontrollable and vile desires of the Muslim man. Just as the Hindu woman was being defined in terms of an inviolable chastity that was constantly under the threat of the Muslim man, the Hindu man was seen as being enticed by the Muslim courtesan and her uncontrollable sexual desire. With the dramatic upsurge of the Anti-Nautch Movement in various parts of the subcontinent and the involvement of Hindu nationalists in the debates, the Muslim courtesan came to be projected as doubly soaked in sin: she was representative of decadent cultural practices and embodied a form of unconventional, non-conjugal sexuality. Musical forms like the *Ghazals,* which embodied the sexual urges of the courtesan, became the chief point of censure: "The chief reason for nationalist and social reformist discomfort with love in the ghazal is that it is almost never marital or procreative" (Vanita 25). The reformist wing of the Muslim elite, especially the men of the upper classes associated with Aligarh Muslim University as well as enthusiasts like Altaf Husain Hali and Muhammad Husain Azad strongly disapproved of the perceived traces of eroticism and

sensuality in Urdu literary practices, which were seen as the excesses of the withering feudal order.

In the face of these sweeping cultural changes and shifts in attitudes, the isolated Muslim found respite in an immediate *nawabi* past, which for him represented the pinnacle of communal glory. Condemned by both the British and the Hindu nationalists, this was a past of which the cultured *tawaif* was an inseparable part. In popular perception, the *tawaif's* remarkable taste and artistic erudition have set them apart from other popular entertainers and prostitutes who were classified in to one stereotypical category by the British administrators (Neville 109). Known for their elitist sophistication, they flourished in and around urban centers like Lucknow. Amritlal Nagar's memoir *Yeh Kothewaliyan* places the *tawaifs* in the topmost position in the hierarchy of North Indian courtesans (45). In her study of colonial Lucknow, Veena Talwar Oldenberg asserts that *tawaifs* embodied a world that was hierarchical in fashion, and were paid primarily for their musical services and for training men in conversational etiquettes of the elite. They were a class apart from the *thakahis* and *randis* who offered sexual services readily on demand and were paid accordingly (264).

In the face of bitter criticism and censure, the Muslim consciousness attempted to retrieve the courtesan as a symbol of the golden past of poetry and music. Most of the courtesan narratives by Muslim writers from the late 19th century onwards are soaked in the rhetoric of nostalgia. As opposed to British representations, the courtesan in Muslim narratives is resurrected as conscientious and morally sound, adept in the arts of classical music and *ghazal* and *thumri* rendition. Whereas British representations consistently condemned the courtesans of Lucknow for their projected role as political agents in the Mutiny as well as the danger of contagious diseases to the sepoys, the Muslim imagination attempted to destabilize many of these images.

<div align="center">III</div>

In his classic critique of Jameson's reductive understanding of the Third World Novel, Aizaz Ahmad points out that the experience of colonialism and the 'national' experience were not necessarily the major preoccupations of the Third World Novel. Rejecting the model of the 'national allegory' that Jameson offers, Aizaz Ahmad calls for a more critically nuanced understanding of the Third World Novel. Ahmad argues that the Urdu writer had to face exclusion from the supposed mainstream of Indian Literature sometime around the close of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century: "The typical Urdu writer has had a peculiar vision, in which he/she has never been able to construct fixed boundaries between the criminalities of the colonialist and the brutalities of all those indigenous people who have had power in our own society" (21). Away from mainstream Indian literature and nationalist politics, the Muslim (and not just Urdu) writers sought refuge in the culturally vibrant *nawabi* past, on which their fictional tropes were premised. If nostalgic celebration and romanticization of the pre-1857 Lucknow are the hallmarks of a novel like Ruswa's *Umrao Jan Ada* (1905),

the strain of critique is more unequivocally evident in Ahmed Ali's *Twilight in Delhi* (1940) and *Ocean of Night* (1964).

One of the early novels written in Urdu, Mirza Muhammad Hadi Ruswa's *Umrao Jan Ada* (1905) explores the lives of 19th century courtesans from Lucknow and takes shape as a nostalgic celebration of the time that was. Set in both pre and post-Mutiny Lucknow, as Kokila Dang argues (96), the novel captures the ambiguities and anxieties that were characteristic of the courtesans' lifestyles in this period. At a time when Urdu fiction engaged in an intense form of proselytization for the cause of women's reform, and the Muslim community itself was battling social exclusion and censure from the British, a novel like *Umrao Jan Ada* might be viewed as a bold attempt at delineating the apparently scandalous life of a courtesan in a rather candid manner. Books of conduct like *Mirat-ul Urus* (*The Bride's Mirror*) and *Majalis-un Nissa* (*Assemblies of Women*), published around the same time, detail the lives of 'respectable' women in the enclosed space of the domestic sphere, which is depicted as free from the dangers of the brothel. By contrast, the *kotha* or the courtesans' establishment is the very antithesis of the domestic, and relatively free from the sense of restraint of domesticity. The representation of a space for women other than the domestic, a life outside conjugality, and a non-monogamous sexuality were the major challenges for Ruswa.

Although Ruswa's novel is free from the explicit moralizing of the didactic novels, it does not altogether negate the model of ideal womanhood and monogamous femininity offered by the reformist prose. The novel takes up the cause of reform in an artistically nuanced fashion and adopts a multi-layered narrative design which strategically constructs the courtesan as a model of ideal womanhood. Umrao's self-consciousness about her profession and her retrospective approach to the events of her life project the present Umrao as embodying an ideal femininity—a courtesan, who, in spite of being trapped in the profession and sinned against, has been able to keep her sense of morality intact. The whole act of recounting, or confession, becomes a means of purging herself of the supposedly "sinful" aspects of her profession.

The story of Umrao's rise and fall as a far-famed *tawaif* in the 19th century makes an interesting narrative when read alongside the life and times of her real-life counterparts like Gauhar Jaan and Mah Laqa Bai 'Chanda'. Gauhar Jaan, who began her singing career as a *tawaif*, performing for aristocratic audiences, got associated with Nawab Wajid Ali Shah's team of courtesans at Matia Buruj and earned fame for herself as the most accomplished singer of *thumris*. Mah Laqa Bai, another accomplished courtesan from late 18th century Hyderabad who wrote under the pen-name of 'Chanda', was an expert composer of *ghazals* using *rekhta,* and compiled a *divan* of about 125 *ghazals*, an extraordinary feat for a woman of her time.

In Ruswa's novel, Umrao self-fashions herself as a woman who has remained chaste in spite of living the life of a courtesan. What a discerning reader notices is the fundamental contradiction between the language she uses for her verses and the one she uses in casual

exchanges and conversation, for instance. The language of poetic composition is invariably the kind elite men from Lucknow would use, signaling perhaps her erudition, but also her distance from the colloquial language of courtesans. She uses the male poetic idiom of mystical and non-mystical *rekhta*—elevated, formal, rich with philosophical underpinnings— for the couplets that form an important part of the narrative. Ruth Vanita has shown in her book *Gender, Sex and the City: Urdu Rekhti Poetry, 1780-1870* how the natural choice for an Urdu-speaking woman from the 19th century would be *Rekhti,* a variant of Urdu that is frowned upon as bawdy, obscene, and as '*auraton ki zuban*', meaning women's speech. The second verse that Umrao recites at the *mushaira* with which the novel opens, is identified as having a masculine tone. At this, Umrao is annoyed and playfully asks if she was expected to use the "language of women".

The novel epitomizes the sense of unease emerging from colonial disapproval of courtesans and the imposition of a Victorian morality, which privileged domestic womanhood over its other, less respectable variants. The shift from a pre-colonial moral economy that was characterized by a certain degree of tolerance for women in non-conjugal sexual roles to that of the colonial phase distinguished by intolerance is wonderfully dramatized in the novel. This shift is best manifested in the narrative design of the novel, which formulates a compromise between the two. The non-conventional sexual practices of *tawaifs* get celebrated in the poetic couplets and performances of Umrao even as she advocates the norm of Victorian morality in speech. The nostalgic evocation of a lost way of life in poetry and the espousal of the values of chaste womanhood in Umrao's dialogues constitute a central tension in the novel.

Critical perception on the novel has consistently maintained that Umrao's understanding of the past is free from the moral underpinnings that one would normally expect from a courtesan recounting her life. Meenakshi Mukherjee (91), for instance, argues that Umrao's reflection on her 'sinful' life is only peripheral to the text and that the novel does not make an engaging comment on social reform. Whereas the novel does not engage in an explicit propaganda, the reformist ethos of the time crucially inform many of its thematic concerns, enabling it to negotiate with the discourse of ideal Muslim femininity in a rather indirect manner. The ideological influence of the reform-oriented didactic novels that gained immense popularity with the Urdu-reading public significantly shape the moral import of Ruswa's novel. His borrowing of the idiom of chastity is palpable in the manner in which Umrao engages in reflections on the significance of virtuous womanhood. Although unsparingly critical of the limiting tendencies of the domestic space, Umrao highly values the ideals of monogamous femininity (162-63). Umrao's glorification of domestic womanhood is made to contrast with the unconventional sexuality of the public woman, thus making possible her symbolic alignment with the domestic space. Her constant craving for the relative security of conjugality gets articulated in many seminal episodes of the novel.

Umrao's ability to speak favourably of conjugal love, even from the vantage point of a courtesan who represents the very antithesis of this form of love, helps her maintain social

respectability in the narrative. Her narration is an appropriation of the social respectability otherwise denied her in real life. In her incisive analysis of the novel, Krupa Shandilya (2017) argues that Umrao consistently uses the identifiably domestic and therefore 'respectable' practice of veiling as a strategy to counter claims of immodesty in the novel. Shandilya examines "veiling as an aesthetic and corporeal practice that enables the discursive site of the courtesan to be constructed by both sexuality and piety. In other words, Umrao Jaan's veiling enables her to be both a sexual, sensuous courtesan and a pious subject" (81).

The technique of engaging in an elaborate discourse on domesticity, while at the same time delineating a form of sexuality that is 'aberrant', is a narrative strategy common to many writings on the figure of the courtesan. This manner of recasting of the courtesan as a "respectable" woman is also a recurrent strain in Hasan Shah's *Nashtar*, a Persian novel written in 1790 and subsequently translated in to Urdu and then in to English as *The Dancing Girl.* In *Umrao Jan Ada,* the courtesan's perspectives on her profession are steeped in the ideology of reform, even as she constructs a stage-wise defense of her status in the profession. As is often asserted through her critical backward gaze, the morally cleansed courtesan's internalization of reform ethos culminates in her reclamation of respectable femininity: "Then came the time when I came to regard the mean profession of a prostitute a sin, and I washed my hands of it. I stopped entertaining just anyone who happened to come along, and restricted myself to singing or dancing" (189-91).

Umrao consciously evaluates the moral standards of the debased feudal order of which she is an inseparable part and attempts to transcend it through her narration. Through her overriding conscience, she absolves herself of the moral burden of being in the profession and assumes respectability as the narrator of the tale. Narration facilitates the purgation of the sinful excesses of the courtesan's profession, culminating in her concluding confession that having repented for her life of pleasure, she is now awaiting death.

The notion of cultural decadence, which gets thematized in Ruswa's novel, acquires deeper connotations in later generations of Muslim writers of fiction, and is often merged with the nostalgic reclamation of a pre-colonial past. If Ruswa's strategy of forging a counter-narrative of a romanticized past through the figure of the courtesan represented an early response of the Muslim consciousness, the more polemically nuanced later responses are best manifested in the novels of Ahmed Ali.

> Literary production in Urdu after 1857, by and large, became focused on the hardships of the Muslims and their changed status in the milieu. This resulted in further narrowing the particularity and exceptionality of the community. Ahmed Ali's novels *Twilight in Delhi* and *Ocean of Night* fall in to the same groove…. (Farooqi 33)

For Ahmed Ali, nostalgia was not merely a narrative device but a political maneuver for the reclamation of a misrepresented past. Nostalgia emerges as both a powerful rhetorical device and a means of writing back to the dominant narrative of Muslim degeneration.

Whereas Ruswa's *Umrao Jan Ada*, as the first structurally matured Urdu novel, epitomizes the effervescence of the Muslim cultural consciousness, Ahmed Ali's *Ocean of Night* represents another phase in the evolution of this consciousness. Set in colonial Lucknow, both the novels attempt to counter the narrative of Muslim cultural degeneration through the figure of the *tawaif*, who is elevated to great moral heights through her constructions as a conscientious woman. In both the cases, nostalgia for a lost golden age remains a recurrent strain, and the courtesan the unshakable center of this world.

<div align="center">IV</div>

Ruswa's *Umrao Jan Ada* and Ahmed Ali's *Ocean of Night* represent two significant phases in the development of the Muslim literary consciousness. Both novels are imbued in the rhetoric of nostalgia and shape themselves as strong counter-claims for cultural sophistication. The courtesan figure in the Muslim consciousness engenders significant departures from the representations in Hindu nationalist discourse. She is not a home-wrecker, a stereotype that became immensely popular in the nationalist imaginary. In Ruswa and Ali, the courtesan is a sensible woman who is concerned about the families of her patrons. Exclusive connotations of cultural refinement, literary erudition, and a rare brand of nobility are attributed to the courtesan.

Both texts also offer revisionist depictions of the courtesan's establishment or the *kotha*. The *kotha* assumed a central significance in the accounts of the *tawaifs* that permeated colonial discourse and continued to perplex the nationalist psyche. It constantly invaded the Hindu and Muslim nationalists' notions of propriety and sexual restraint. In most of these accounts it assumed an erotic dimension as symbolizing sexual extravagance and display of sensuality, as Krupa Shandilya and Taimoor Shahid argue:

> Colonial discourse produced the *zenana* (women's quarter) as the 'harem'—a confining space in which the veiled woman led a blighted life. Unveiled woman who lived outside the home in the *Kotha* (brothel) represented the dark, illicit mysteries of the East. The "nautch-girl" epitomized this construct, and the "civilizing" mission in this context involved disciplining the sexuality of courtesans and other "disreputable" women in new ways. In contrast, social reformers argued that the veiled woman's inhabitation of the home protected her from the evils of the colonial public sphere and enabled her to become a "guardian of orthodoxy" who could preserve Islamic culture for the Muslim man. In this context, the *kotha* took on the eroticized elements of the *zenana* and became the socially sanctioned counterpoint of the women's quarters of the respectable home for the reformers. (29-30)

By contrast, the *kotha* in the novels of Ruswa and Ali reincarnates as a symbol of cultural exclusivity. The domestic respectability of the *zenana* is transferred to the proscribed space of the courtesan's establishment. In these texts, the unveiled courtesan, and not the veiled housewife, is depicted as the "guardian of orthodoxy", who preserves the cultural heritage as well as the moral values for the Muslim social order at large.

The politicization of nostalgia for the assertion of communal identity, which is the central strain in both Ruswa and Ali, is informed by different worldviews. Ruswa's notion of Muslim cultural identity attempts to counter post 1857 attitudes of the British towards the Muslims. Ahmed Ali's notion of a Muslim cultural identity, as reflected in *Ocean of Night,* has more to do with a series of exclusions that might have begun after 1857 but have continued down post-independence, with the dominant strain of Hindu nationalism and the exclusivist politics of the consolidation of a "Hindu" nation.

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Chronicle of a Death Foretold: A Personal Mastery of Life

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the concept 'psychological well-being' as the need of the hour in today's world. Gabriel Garcia Marquez' *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* is taken for the study to substantiate this concept and critiqued under the theory of Carol Ryff's Six -Factor Model of Psychological Well-Being to analyse the character of Angela Vicario. Angela's transformation from being a poor little and helpless girl into a matured and witty woman acts as a model for those who are silenced and hopeless after suffering. This paper also acts as a platform for the researcher to stress over the concept of better and healthy lifestyle through mental detoxification.

Keywords: Self- acceptance, Personal growth, Autonomy, Balanced life, Psychological well-being

"The only journey is the journey within"

- Rainer Maria Rilke

Happiness and sorrow work together, they are like two sides of a coin. One must understand this golden rule to maintain a balanced life. Balanced life is like a water pulley, it is the same chain which brings water and returns empty. People appreciate only the good things which happen in their life but they fail to see the lessons taught by suffering or failure. These lessons nourish the life of an individual and help one to be a better human being. Everything depends on the art of balancing. In order to know the art of balancing one must understand the symbol which has its roots in Chinese cosmology. The symbol is popularly known as Yin-Yang called Taijitu, by understanding this concept one can maintain both psychological and sociological well-being.

An individual with psychological well-being will experience a better quality of life. It is more essential to appreciate the mental well-being of a person in today's world. Stress, commitments, competitions, anxiety, and depression are all like the slow poison which kills the mental well-being of an individual. Human beings experience different kinds of emotions but must not allow one emotion to dominate the other. If one emotion dominates the other then there comes a suffering. The world renowned writer Gabriel Garcia Marquez portrays the art of balancing life through the fictional character Angela Vicario in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*.

Marquez is one of the most celebrated and outstanding writer of the 20th century, who is known for his fiction and non-fiction. His works have hit larger audience and got commercial success for popularizing the literary technique called magical realism. *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is considered as the masterpiece of Marquez for which he received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1982. *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* not only unveils the serious issues like honor killing and oppression but also the power of a woman who turns suffering into happiness through her patience and tolerance. Marquez' untiring portrayal of the real historical happenings in his country made him to reach great heights in the literary world. Through his works, Marquez has wished to create a country where there is no oppression.

Professor Carol Diane Ryff created one of the systematic models of psychological well-being and her model is scientifically verified and accurate even today. Ryff is an American psychologist well known for her studies on psychological well-being and psychological resilience. Ryff developed a theory called 'Six-Factor Model of Psychological Well-Being', which helps an individual to attain psychological well-being. Psychological well-being is nothing but personal mastery through challenging and rewarding events in life.

Ryff's model is based on Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics in which Aristotle sketches the highest good for man involving both practical and theoretical side. According to Ryff there are six factors which act as the key-element for psychological well-being of a human being: 1. Self-acceptance, 2. Personal growth, 3. Purpose in life, 4. Environmental mastery, 5. Autonomy, and 6. Positive relations with others. In all these six factors Ryff talks about both strong and weak sides. This paper focuses on the strong side in connection with the fictional character Angela Vicario in *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*.

Figure 1. Six-Factor Model of Psychological well-Being

Chronicle of a Death Foretold is a story about an innocent young man who is murdered by the twin brothers to save their family honor. This work was written in 1981 was made
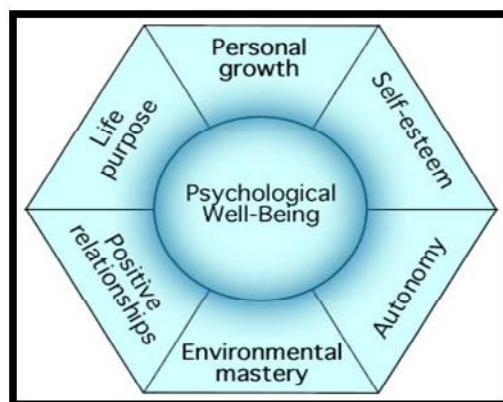
into a Broadway play and a feature film. This literary piece of Marquez talks about the irrationality of human nature in the name of honor killing.

Angela Vicario is the most quoted character in the novel, who is the distant relative of the narrator. As a young girl, she is more beautiful of her four sisters whose life became fatal after the discovery of her pre-marital sex, "…the beautiful girl who'd gotten married the day before, had been returned to the house of her parents, because her husband had discovered that she wasn't a virgin" (*CDF* 21). Angela is the youngest daughter of Poncio Vicario and Purisima del Carmen. Angela's father is a poor goldsmith and her mother a retired school teacher. Pedro and Pablo are the twin brothers of Angela who are eagerly waiting to kill Santiago Nasar for deflowering their sister.

Bayardo San Roman is an enormous wealthy man who is obsessed with Angela and wished to marry her. Angela's parents are excited and relieved by his arrival and they forced her to marry San Roman. Angela has no interest towards San Roman, she says: "He seemed too much of a man for me" (*CDF* 34). Before the wedding, Angela tries to disclose the secret about her lost virginity to everyone but no one paid attention towards her, "She was so distressed that she had resolved to tell her mother the truth so as to free herself from that martyrdom … they assured her that almost all women lost her virginity in childhood accidents" (*CDF* 38). They convinced and taught her, "old wives' tricks to feign her lost possession, so that on her first morning as a newlywed she could display open under the sun in the courtyard of her house the linen sheet with the stain of honor" (*CDF* 38).

Angela married San Roman with this illusion but her life turned in reverse when he discovered about her lost virginity. San Roman left Angela in her house as soon as he knows about her dark secret. Angela's brother and her mother attacked Angela for shattering the family honor, "The only thing I can remember is that she was holding me by the hair with one hand and beating me with the other with such rage that I thought she was going to kill me… Angela Vicario lying face down on the dining room couch, her face all bruised, but she'd stopped crying. "I was no longer frightened", she told" (*CDF* 46 - 47).

Angela accepted her suffering and started loving San Roman from the moment when he left her in her house, "she spoke about her misfortune without any shame in order to cover up the other misfortune, the real one that was burning in her insides. No one would even have suspected until she decided to tell me that Bayardo San Roman had been in her life forever from the moment he'd brought her back home" (*CDF* 91).

The mental well-being of Angela becomes stronger after facing the turmoil that occurred in her life. The bitter experience taught her to be strong and independent. The narrator says:

> My sister Margot, who also visited her during the first years, told me she had brought a solid house with a large courtyard with cross ventilation … I refused to believe that the woman there was who I thought it was, because I couldn't bring myself to admit that life might end up resembling bad literature so much. But it was she: Angela Vicario, twenty-three years after the drama.

She treated me the same as always, like a distant cousin and answered my questions with very good judgment and a sense of humor. She was so mature and witty that it was difficult to believe that she was the same person. (*CDF* 88-89).

Angela's life as a rejected wife continued and she started doing the embroidery works along with her friends. Angela started writing letters to San Roman in a hope to reunite with him but she did not get any reply from him,

She stay in the room until dawn writing letters with no future. She became lucid, overbearing, mistress of her own free will, and she became a virgin again just for him … At first they were a fiancée's notes, then they were little message from a secret lover, perfumed cards from a furtive sweetheart, business papers, love documents, and lastly they were the indignant letters of an abandoned wife who invented cruel illnesses to make him return … The only thing that didn't occur to her was to give up. (*CDF* 93-94)

Finally, Angela's love towards San Roman brought him back to her. While doing embroidery work with her friends, Angela saw someone coming near the door:

He was fat and was beginning to lose his hair, and he already needed glasses to see things close by… God damn it, it was him! … His shirt was soaked in sweat, as she had seen him the first time at the fair, and he was wearing the same belt, and carrying the same unstitched leather saddlebags with silver decorations.

"Well", he said "here I am".

He was carrying a suitcase with clothing in order to stay and another just like it with almost two thousand letters that she had written him. They were arranged by date in bundles tied with colored ribbons, and they were all unopened. (*CDF* 95)

 Ryff's theory, 'Six-Factor Model of Psychological Well-Being' is applied to analyse the character of Angela Vicario. Angela's high self-acceptance is clearly seen when she turned her past life into a positive way, she accepted both her good and bad experiences. Angela transforms from being a poor little and helpless girl into a matured and witty woman. The most surprising part is about the understanding of her life. Angela's financial independence and maturity indicates her personal growth. The act of waiting for her husband shows Angela's strong sense of directedness through which she wanted to give meaning to her present and past life. Angela treated everyone equal and reminds same and it shows her positive relation with others.

The environmental mastery of Angela has to be highly mentioned, instead of being broken after the domestic violence, she stood up to live a meaningful life. She is no longer under the control of her mother, not afraid of anything and she totally became self-reliant. Angela managed the miserable situation and found an opportunity to live an independent life. Lastly, Angela's self-governing and independent quality made her an ideal person for those who are silenced after the suffering.

Mental detoxification is more important to live a positive life. Emotional hurt, grudges, jealousy, feelings of hatred, revenge and anger can make the mind of a person toxic. If a person holds these entire toxin for a long period of time may result in psychological and physical disorders. Therefore, mind has to be detoxified like a body for better functioning. Zarrine Flores in *Yin Yang Balance: 7 Ways to Yin Yang your life* says: work, relationships, diet, health, declutter life, cultivating patience and peace of mind and nurturing gratitude are the ways to balance Yin and Yang.

Wellness means living a fully engaged life at every moment. Physical, mental, financial, spiritual, emotional, professional, relational and social are the eight pillars of well-being. Each pillar works to support the others. One can improve one's well-being by eating well, doing regular exercise, being social with friends and family, finding a way to relax, and   self-care. The individual who has high level of wellness will be productive and stay motivated. Looking after one's well-being not only improves the mental health but also shapes the lifestyle of a person.

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Dionysian Affect in the Plays of Eugene Ionesco, Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter

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Abhinaba Chatterjee

Abstract

The plays of 'Theatre of the Absurd' have mostly been studied in terms of philosophical and theatrical performance. However, the plays have scarcely been studied in terms of audience response. This paper proposes to study select plays of Eugene Ionesco, Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter in terms of affect theory. In so doing, it is presume that the term 'absurd' as defined by Esslin is, in essence, an affect. 'Affect' according to Brian Massumi, is 'unqualified' and hence, are more perceptible to senses than to reason. The 'affect' of the absurd is more dependent on theatricality and the avant-garde than to a rational explanation and hence can be related to the cult of the Dionysus.

Keywords: absurd, affect, Dionysian

Nietzsche, in his *The Birth of Tragedy*, defines the Dionysian state as one of pure ecstasy, transgressing 'the limits that ordinarily would delimit one's self, one's individuality, one's subjectivity.' (Krell & Wood, 3) Under the Dionysian affect, Nietzsche claims, individuality loses itself into nature. Krell and Wood point out,

> Dionysian ecstasy, being-outside-oneself, would be a matter not simply of relating an inside to an outside, but rather of shifting the 'inside' into the 'outside', displacing it, disrupting the very logic of the opposition inside/outside. The Dionysian, this ecstasy bursting forth from nature itself, would be a deconstruction indeed of subjectivity. (3)

The Dionysian affect refers to a compulsion to express the most valuable experience of life in the highest aesthetic form. It manifests itself in two major forms – the faith in the unity of existence and that this unity is not static but dynamic energy. However, the affect of this energy is revealed only when the man can display the heroism of affirming the limit to all existence. It initiates the spectator to develop an understanding that the greatest horror has the potential to unleash the highest good. The doctrine of Eternal Return propounded by Nietzsche is closer to the promise of eternal life to Being rather than the individual being. Unlike Schopenhauer, Nietzsche emphasises the active, creative nature of Being which follows all destruction. The dynamic energy of the Dionysian affect manifests itself in various forms to ensure the continuation of life. According to Walter H. Sokel,

> "Such a view entails infinite hope, hope beyond the ubiquitous destruction that likewise characterizes the world. For this vision of the world, even destruction is a positive element.

Destruction is only a gateway, a necessary precondition for not merely renewed, but enhanced, creation. Not destruction, but re-creation, surpassing previous creation, has the final word." (501-20)

The Dionysian is considered a communal feeling transmitted in ancient Greek tragedy and mysteries and fundamental to the Greek worldview. The Dionysian affect transmits pre-philosophical wisdom, forming the ground for pre-Platonic philosophy.

Mukesh Ranjan Verma

Before the 20th century, dramatic structures adhered to the Aristotelian dictum, having a proper beginning, middle and end. As such, they could easily be grasped by the audience by virtue of their Apollonian reasoning. However, the two world wars of the 20th century not only changed the philosophy and psychology of man but also changed every aspect of modern drama. A close reading of the plays of Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco and Harold Pinter reveals that changes in plot, setting, themes, atmosphere, and characterization are directed at revelation of the variations of man's obsessions and the way the staging mode of representation of literature tries to reflect them to the reader and the audience. The close detection of the changes shows the principle of the strange attraction which can be considered Dionysian as against the Apollonian. It is this kind of an affect that it has on the audience and the response of the audience that Martin Esslin, in his famous book 'The Theatre of the Absurd', refers to as 'absurd'. The absurdity of the situation arises from the sensations which are yet to be cognized, seizing our whole sensations, thereby relating the affect to the ancient Greek cult of Dionysus. The plays of 'The Theatre of the Absurd' initiate a disturbance that affects its audience and provokes them to apply their rational thought to understand the emotional and impulsive responses to the action. The action on the stage initiates the spectator into an imitation of the powerful events of love and grief, producing the 'absurd' affect in them. At this moment, the spectator shares a compulsion to look at the events, and to question the worth of existence, in undergoing the immediacy of the Aristotelian 'catharsis', while, at the same time, they are overcome with a desire to look away, a transfiguring overcoming of the suffering in an expansive eternalization which can reinforce the religious belief, but which can also be an attempt to maintain an affirmative worldview despite the immediacy of suffering.

According to Martin Esslin, the plays of 'The Theatre of the Absurd' are "the reflection of what seems the attitude most genuinely representative of our own time's contribution." (xviii), comprising of a loss of certitudes and basic assumptions on which life was supposed to be based on, thereby questioning the very essence of the culture. Thus, Esslin can be read as presenting the concept of the 'Absurd' against the background of mass destruction of the two world wars which resisted rationalisation. As Esslin goes on to state:

> If a good play must have a cleverly constructed story, these have no story or plot to speak of; if a good play is judged by subtlety of characterisation and motivation, these are often without recognizable characters and present the audience with almost mechanical puppets; if a good play has to have a fully explained theme, which is neatly exposed and finally

solved, these often have neither a beginning nor an end; if a good play is to hold the mirror up to the nature and to portray the manners and modernisms of the age in finely observed sketches, these seem often to be reflections of dreams and nightmares; if a good play relies on witty repartee and pointed dialogue, these often consist of incoherent babblings. (xvii-xviii)

It is such deviations from a 'good' play that establishes the link between these plays with that of Nietzschean Dionysus. The baffled reaction of the 'sophisticated' audience, which Esslin refers to as the 'absurd', is the affect that "seems founded on the recognition that we perceive and make sense of much more in the theatrical presentation than our minds (or language) enable us to access, and so we can never arrive to fully understand it." (Einarson, 125-126)

According to Esslin, "Absurd is that which is devoid of purpose [...]" (xix). For Esslin, then, absurdity specifically denotes the disintegration of human rationalism, which, since the Enlightenment, has emphasized progress and human domination of the world. The plays of the 'Theatre of the Absurd' depict this disintegration by means of the revelation of extraordinary personalities in their Dionysian selves to an Apollonian audience.

Eugene Ionesco's play "Rhinoceros" reveals an apparently 'absurd' situation, wherein human beings get "evolved" into rhinoceros. This situation is in stark contradiction to the Enlightenment belief which placed man at the centre of the universe. It also challenged the Darwinian theory of organic evolution, which placed man as the highest form of life as of date. The characters in the plays, however, believe the rhinoceroses to be more "beautiful", "real people" and "natural". The play ends with the protagonist, Berenger, standing alone in the "world", defying the transformation valiantly.

Berenger's defiance of the prevailing tendency to succumb to the transformation is reminiscent of Camus' "Myth of Sisyphus". However, unlike Sisyphus, Berenger is presented as both tragi-comic as well as heroic. His proclamation that "I'll take on the whole of them! I'll put up a fight against the lot of them – the whole lot of them! I'm the last man left, and I'm staying that way until the end. I'm not capitulating!" (Act Three), seems heroic, but given the circumstances under which it is said, inclines the audience to consider him more as a Dionysian character than an Apollonian. While in the beginning, Berenger claims that the rhinoceroses are "anarchic, because they're in the minority" (Act Three), the situation is reversed towards the end of the play, as Berenger remains the 'last man' and is clearly in minority and is therefore, 'anarchic'. What enables Berenger to survive the transformation is his ability to evolve from his initial drunken state to be the last man standing. His evolution is discernible in his growing realisation of the anarchy caused by the rhinoceroses – devoid of any individuality. This realisation is reminiscent of his Dionysian trait that enables him to accept his fate of never being able to transform into a rhinoceros. Thus, Berenger's final claim to "staying that way until the end" can be seen as a reaction to his being a misfit in an Apollonian society. The audience is affected by this antiphilosophical stance of the Dionysus that defies the Apollonian rationality. In experiencing this affect, the audience "transgresses

the limits that ordinarily would delimit one's self, one's individuality, one's subjectivity", as it becomes aware of the dialectics of possibilities that evolve from the action on the stage.

Ionesco's "The Bald Soprano", centering on the two couples – the Smiths and the Martins, present the irrational and unintelligible babblings of the characters. The audience response can be considered to be akin to what Leonard Powlick has referred to with reference to Pinter's "Old Times" – *What the Hell is That All About?* The play has been referred to by Ionesco as an 'anti-play', thereby prompting the audience to a Dionysian affect of "craving for the ugly" (Birth of Tragedy, 21) thus contrasting the play from the conventional 'well-made' play.

The identity of the Martins is cast into doubt by the audience by the maid, Mary, who says:

> Mary: Elizabeth and Donald are now too happy to be able to hear me. I can therefore let you in on a secret. Elizabeth is not Elizabeth, Donald is not Donald. And here is the proof: the child that Donald spoke of is not Elizabeth's daughter, they are not the same person. Donald's daughter has one white eye and one red eye like Elizabeth's daughter. Whereas Donald's child has a white right eye and a red left eye, Elizabeth's child has a red right eye and a white left eye! Thus all of Donald's system of deduction collapses when it comes up against this last obstacle which destroys the whole theory. ... But who is the true Donald? Who is the true Elizabeth? Who has any interest in prolonging this confusion? I don't know. Let's not try to know. Let's leave things as they are. (The Bald Soprano, 19)

Two facts can be deciphered from this act. One is that the Martins have willingly accepted their fate of being someone else thus reminding us of Nietzsche's idea of *Amor fati*. Secondly, in losing their identity, the Martins have been united with the universal selves, the Dionysian selves. As Catharine Hughes says in her review of 'Ionesco's "Approaches to Truth", "losing their identity, the characters of *The Bald Soprano* assume the identity of others, become; part of the world of the impersonal." (107).

Another important aspect of the play that emerges here is the role of the maid as Chorus in the Greek plays. Such usage of the choral structure-making in 'The Bald Soprano' functions leads to creating a Dionysian affect on the audience wherein he or she is challenged to live his or her life in such a way that he or she would want to live it eternally. It is Nietzsche's version of Kant's categorical imperative – live in such a way that you would wish every one of your actions to become a universal law.

Beckett's play, 'Endgame', play is foregrounded against the holocaust, showing a barren, uninhabited world outside. It depicts its characters in limited mental and physical activity, thus refuting the scope of purposeful as well as physical action. The play presents Hamm, blind and confined to a wheelchair, trying to maintain his authority over his servant Clov, who cannot sit, and his parents, Nagg and Nell, whose legless bodies are stored in dustbins. The play ends with a shift in the relationship between master Hamm and the servant Clov. Shortly before the close of *Endgame,* he spies a small boy, and Hamm's reaction is, "If he exists he'll die there or he'll come here."

Action would imply that the boy should take steps and defy the Apollonian rationality that would incite pessimism and loss of hope. In order to survive, the boy must invoke the Dionysian irrationality and be able to be in sync with the outside barren world. Only then will he be able to evolve as the Nietzschean Overman and reach Hamm's house, where he would have a chance of survival.

Beckett's play *Not I* defies conventional theatrical practices, which asks for an active subject, in his attempt to deny his hero's subjectivity. And to complicate things further, he presents his hero as a disembodied mouth. Made up of a disembodied mouth, which formulates segmented phrases, and its almost invisible Auditor, "enveloped from head to foot in loose black djellaba" (376), the play offers an exciting, though intriguing, experience to its spectators. It is an extremely difficult task for both the audience and the reader to construct a meaningful plot, however vague, out of this string of fragmented phrases. By destabilizing subjectivity, refusing consistency, disregarding linguistic, dramatic and poetic rules, challenging social networks, and laughing at the idea of a merciful God, by showing how complex human nature is, with all its contradictory desires, instincts, unconscious drives, mistakes, guilt, dreams and conscious will, and by allowing a mouth to be its protagonist, *Not I* affirm the body, returns to the space/Chora where nothing is settled and celebrates life with all its potentialities, one of which can be the mystical experience.

Beckett's perception of the senses is the other which disturbs the real, which is manifested in *Not I* in his use of fragmented speech and his depiction of the crisis of subjectivity put in "[...] such desperate situations, playing so confidently with the idea of being..." (379). Unlike conventional plays, which begin with a proper introduction to the plot and character, Beckett affirms the crisis of subjectivity at the very outset:

> MOUTH: ...out...into this world...this world...tiny little thing... before its time... in a good for-...what?...girl?...yes...tiny little girl...into this...out into this... before her time... godforsaken hole called... called... no matter... parents unknown... unheard of... he having vanished... thin air, no sooner buttoned up his breeches ... she similarly ... eight months later... almost to the tick ... so no love ... spared that... no love such as normally vented on the ... speechless infant... in the home... no... nor indeed for that matter any of any kind .... no love of any kind... at any subsequent stage... so typical affair... nothing of any note till coming up to sixty when-... what?...seventy?...good God! (376)

This fragmented speech is about the birth of a girl whose parents are not known. The girl is not named. While the monologue creates a gap of information about the character, it also gives an impression that Beckett approaches a subject of cosmopolitan dimension, not limited to male or female or any community. The concept of identity crisis is a concept that penetrates all societies in general. The gap is evident from the very outset as the monologue begins with a small letter, suggesting a common feature of the Theatre of the Absurd, viz. the absence of a proper beginning.

The crisis that Beckett creates in his plays can be understood in terms of the Nietzschean critique of "the deceptive simplicity of Schopenhauer's conception of the "*Will*" as well as

the correlated psychic phenomenon of "*willing*". (Oliai, 46). For Nietzsche, the '*Will*' is required to be explained differently as an irreducibly heterogeneous multiplicity of phenomenon. The crisis that is deciphered thus in the plays of Beckett means that he does not aim at expressing the absurd directly, but that he wants to lead us to the point where the absurd becomes visible at the end of a process, namely the dissolution of the subjectivity. This is the point where the subject no longer creeps back in and where we are able, even if only for a glimpse, to experience absurdity in its horror, thereby proclaiming, like Nietzsche, the death of (rational) God. As Esslin so eloquently points out in the introduction to *The Theatre of the Absurd,* many twentieth-century writers have echoed this despair. What Beckett does, through his minimalist approach to theatre, is, for the first time, to admit to no world other than that on the stage.

Traditionally, Pinter's plays have been perceived as comedies of menace, and his characters often find themselves trapped in spaces where they are engaged in power struggles that highlight themes of freedom and oppression, loyalty and betrayal, and more immediately how the so-called failure of communication underscores the futility of these struggles. The early plays of Pinter operate by frustrating such basic premises as character, history, motivation and conclusion. His plays involve a given set of characters in a given space vying with one another for domination of that space or of some situation that has arisen there. Thus, in his first full-length play *The Birthday Party*, Pinter fills the audience with an affect that is menacing and it remains unrelieved till the end. He underlined this with a lack of understanding of the identity of his characters, tense, quick-fire sequences of dialogue, and each contributes equally to the affect. Ominous undercurrents lurk, for example, beneath the most mundane exchanges over the breakfast table of the lower-class Meg and Petey.

> MEG: Is that you, Petey?
> Petey, is that you?
> Petey?
> PETEY: What?
> MEG: Is that you?
> PETEY: Yes, it's me.
> MEG: What? *(Her face appears at the hatch.)*
> Are you back?
> PETEY: Yes.
> MEG: I've got your cornflakes ready. *(She disappears and reappears.)*
> Here's your cornflakes.
> *He rises and takes the plate from her, sits at the table, props up the paper and begins to eat. Meg enters by the kitchen door.*
> Are they nice? PETEY: Very nice. MEG: I thought they'd be nice. *(She sits at the table.)* You got your paper?
> PETEY: Yes.

The repetitions and lack of logic of ordinary conversation that the tightly knit realistic play so rarely includes are carefully woven into the texture of Pinter's dramatic world and give it its distinctive combination of the banal and the strange. Pinter has been praised for his ability to record the idiosyncrasies of ordinary speech, but he has also been shown to be a master of mannerisms. His characters speak a familiar language in an unfamiliar way. The plays most often appear to be naturalistic in theme and diction, but they also show an obvious concern to escape the conventions or restrictions of naturalism.

Breaks or interruptions in the dialogue affect the nature of what is being said to the extent that they alter the movement of time, and among these pauses and silence feature prominently. Peter Hall, who directed several Pinter's later plays, maintains that the pauses and silences bear a direct relation to the meaning of what is said on either side of them:

> There is a difference in Pinter between a pause and a silence and three dots. A pause is really a bridge where the audience think that you're on this side of the river, then when you speak again, you're on the other side. That's a pause. And it's alarming, often. It's a gap, which retrospectively gets filled in. It's not a dead stop - that's a silence, where the confrontation has become so extreme, there is nothing to be said until either the temperature has gone down, or the temperature has gone up, and then something quite new happens. Three dots is a very tiny hesitation, but it's there, and it's different from a semicolon, which Pinter almost never uses, and it's different from a comma. A comma is something that you catch up on, you go through it. And a full stop's just a full stop. You stop. (As quoted in Quigley, 276)

According to Hall, a *pause* is a space or gap during which the intention or direction of the speaker changes, causing surprise or alarm, whereas a *silence* is a break indicating a crisis of some kind, which cannot be immediately resolved by speech. As John Russell Taylor points out,

> "[The use of silence and pause] not only creates an unnerving atmosphere of doubt and uncertainty but also helps to generalize and universalize the fears and tensions to which Pinter's characters are subject. The more doubt there is about the exact nature of the menace, the exact provocation which has brought it into being, the less chance there is of anyone in the audience feeling that anyway it could not happen to him." (Taylor, 328)

The character of Ruth in Pinter's 'The Homecoming' depicts the apotheosis of his obsession with the dialectics of identity. The character of Ruth is depicted simultaneously as a wife, mother and a whore. She is introduced by her husband to his brothers and father, only to accept their offer of staying with them as a shared lover and maternal house-maker, earning her keep by embracing a position as a local prostitute. The play represents the culmination of Pinter's writing in which he had been concerned with territorial struggles, indefinable external menace and masculine anxiety in confrontation and femininity. The play, as such, has elicited some surprisingly negative critical responses that never cease to shock audiences but has also been considered one of Pinter's finest plays.

The play introduces a new form of negation by deconstructing not only the patriarchal family but also conventional family drama as an ideological structure. The play opens with the reversal of roles as we find the father Max in the role of the home keeper as we find him coming from the direction of the kitchen, wearing an old cardigan and a cap, and carrying a stick. His son lacks respect for him as is obvious by the language that Lenny uses for Max:

> LENNY (*looking up, quietly*). Why don't you shut up, you daft prat?
>
> …
>
> LENNY. Plug it, will you, you stupid sod, I'm trying to read the paper.
>
> …
>
> LENNY. Dad, do you mind if I change the subject?
>
> *Pause.*
>
> I want to ask you something. The dinner we had before, what was the name of it? What do you call it?
>
> *Pause.*
>
> Why don't you buy a dog? You're a dog cook. Honest. You think you're cooking for a lot of dogs.

In doing so, Pinter deconstructs the conventional male notion of the realist narrative which acts to powerfully reinforce the patriarchal ideology. As the play progresses the reversal of roles of the patriarch and matriarch is highlighted, as Ruth starts dominating the male-dominated family.

> *She continues to touch JOEY'S head, lightly. LENNY stands, watching.* (Act Two)

'The Birth of Tragedy', Nietzsche formulated the concepts of the Apollonian and the Dionysian, to denote the two conflicting forces of humanity, which, according to him, makes a complete human being. The Apollonian represents the classical Greek genius extolled by Winckelmann and Goethe: the power to create harmonious and measured beauty, the rational aspect. Dionysian, on the contrary, is the symbol of drunken frenzy which threatens to destroy all forms and codes; the ceaseless striving which defies all limitations; the ultimate abandonment we sometimes sense in music. This, however, does not imply that Nietzsche extols one over the other. For him, it is crucial that the question of the metaphysical sense of order inevitably presupposes the treatment of a more fundamental issue, namely, the metaphysical difference between order and disorder.

The affect of the absurd in the plays of Beckett, Ionesco and Pinter is conveyed not only through the contents but also through the structure. Nietzsche, in his 'The Birth of Tragedy' is concerned with embedding the form of his writing in his 'message', so that the writing itself, in its structures, metaphors, allusions, repetitions, etc., takes on a leading role in steering the reader in the desired direction. He posits a perennial ensemble of forces of human cultural production. These forces or drives are understood from a broadly Schopenhauerian metaphysical point of view as specific modes of objectification or expression of the underlying Will. The drives have metaphysical meaning and, in their realizations in cultural forms, are

symbolic of that meaning. Following Nietzsche, it can be argued that the 'absurdity' in the plays of Beckett, Ionesco and Pinter affects its audience in a way towards a desired direction.

Nietzsche assumes that drama has a connection to a particular aspect of the 'make-up' of the human species, which he conceived as the two opposed but connected drives, viz. the Apollonian and the Dionysian. This gives the drama its essential quality. Where an element is missing, as in realist stage plays, it is no longer properly drama in its fullest sense. So, there is a clear idea of what proper drama is. Further, the essence of drama is not one singular thing. It is a dialectical relationship between two opposed connected drives. From this relationship flows constant restlessness, where one thing has always to be considered relative to another. The 'absurd' plays of Samuel Beckett, Eugene Ionesco and Harold Pinter, present this dialectic and, in presenting it, depict also counter the threat of Nihilism, the rejection of all religious and moral principles, in the belief that life is meaningless. Like the Greeks, whose mode of combating nihilism, it is argued to have been utilised by the 'absurd' playwrights, embraced, to quote Nietzsche, the 'will to death' (Gay Science, 344). It can be argued that the 'pessimism' associated with those critics who relate the absurdity of these plays in terms of Camus' notion of the same has failed to appreciate the force of the dialectical relationship between the Apollonian and the Dionysian drives, which, following the theory of Nietzsche, gives these plays essential their quality as drama and makes them drama in its fullest sense.

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Culture of Sexism: Revisiting Manjula Padmanabhan's *Lights Out*

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Lakshi Bhardwaj

Abstract

Gender-based discrimination against women has been a topic of significant academic discussion for many years. Manjula Padmanabhan's work elucidates the intricate dynamics of gender prejudice that contribute to the disrespect and marginalization of women. At its most basic level, the play *Lights Out* depicts the brutality inflicted upon women, specifically through the portrayal of rape and the dialogue surrounding this egregious act. This narrative exposes the underlying societal attitudes towards such violence. The pervasive nature of sexism within the community has become an insidious force, reinforcing discriminatory behaviors and attitudes towards women. Padmanabhan's play draws on a real-life rape incident to illustrate the power dynamics at play. This paper seeks to explore the entrenched concept of sexism in society, with a particular focus on the thematic and narrative elements presented in *Lights Out* by Manjula Padmanabhan.

Keywords: gender, patriarchy, power, politics, sexism

Over the past several decades, women have increasingly articulated their experiences through written narratives, allowing a broader audience to engage with and comprehend their perspectives. Literature has served as a powerful medium to expose the injustices inflicted upon women due to gender bias. Stereotypical social roles based on sex have predominantly affected women and girls, fostering an environment of inequality. Women have organized against the routine violence that has shaped their lives over the years. This violence not only inflicts physical harm but also causes significant psychological trauma, which is even more challenging to address. Furthermore, the politicization of gender-based violence has transformed our understanding of these issues. Manjula Padmanabhan's play *Lights Out* critically examines and challenges the political dominance that perpetuates such violence. The play presents a stark and accurate depiction of marginalization, demonstrating how feminist efforts have sought to politicize women's experiences as sexism intersects with their daily lives.

This paper aims to explore the intersectional experiences of women concerning rape and their marginalization within dominant discourses of resistance. It seeks to discuss the violent assaults committed on women by men and the societal attitudes that trivialize such sexist actions. Manjula Padmanabhan, as a writer, addresses sensitive and realistic issues, with *Lights Out* citing a real-life rape incident to expose the true nature of a patriarchal society.

Padmanabhan's ability to convey these complex themes allows readers to engage deeply with her work and derive their own interpretations.

Lights Out recounts a rape witnessed by bystanders, exposing the cruelty inflicted upon women due to their gender. The incident, which took place in an urban area of Santacruz, Mumbai, in 1982, involved urban middle-class observers whose reactions and comments, though shocking to some, reflect deep-seated societal attitudes. Through the characters' conversations, Padmanabhan reveals the multifaceted violence against women, which encompasses physical, mental, and emotional abuse. Male characters in the play are depicted making sexist remarks and deriving perverse enjoyment from the scene of the rape, which occurs in the apartment compound. Remarks such as "women of lower caste are free and available for being raped" expose the ingrained misogyny and the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes. These attitudes create an oppressive environment that hinders women's freedom, even in contemporary society.

Divyabha Vashisht

By processing the conversations and events in the play, Padmanabhan highlights the pervasive and insidious nature of gender-based violence and discrimination, urging a critical examination of the societal structures that sustain such injustices.

The normalization and political endorsement of men's growing indifference towards social commitment have exacerbated societal issues. This social apathy has increasingly characterized the middle class, contributing to the worsening situation. The violation of women's human rights manifests in various forms, as women are not only abused but also ignored. They are dismissed based on their gender and are subjected to sexual assault, further deteriorating their condition.

The play "Lights Out" reveals unacceptable traits of wealthy middle-class individuals, highlighting their discriminatory comments against women. The characters discuss the heinous crime and take perverse pleasure in the criminals' cruelty towards the victim, rather than attempting to rescue her. Such acts are facilitated by the lack of security for women, a significant issue over the years. The playwright critiques this by staging the open dismantling of a woman's body, where no one intervenes to help her. The passive audience of the crime is equally culpable, their ignorant and sexist behavior contributing to an environment that is hostile to women. Despite these challenges, women are still expected to conform to societal norms and behaviors.

Padmanabhan targets social evils in her play to expose the cultural sexism that women endure throughout their lives. Her disappointment with the turbulence and violence against women is evident in her other works, where she addresses the challenges women face due to their gender. Women are subjected to a culture of abuse, assault, and neglect, simply because they are seen not as essential human beings but as objects for men's pleasure. This objectification is a prevalent societal opinion.

Through *Lights Out*, the playwright portrays the harsh reality of society, where traumatic and torturous experiences are normalized. She exposes societal hypocrisy through characters who suggest ignoring the victim's pleas and avoiding police intervention. People readily find excuses to shirk their social responsibilities, and their indifference encourages criminals to continue their brutal acts. This selfish and indifferent attitude is prevalent in daily life, as depicted in the play. *Lights Out* reflects the indifferent outlook of people towards suffering women, providing a mirror image of real life and the tragic realities where individuals exploit adverse circumstances.

Sexism manifests as a behavioral pattern ingrained in societal conditioning, dehumanizing both men and women by imposing rigid gender roles. These roles are not chosen freely but are dictated by societal expectations. Literature on gender roles documents the tragic, oppressive behavior that disproportionately harms women. Men generally enjoy more work choices, hold decision-making positions, control financial resources, and are less likely to be victims of family violence. In contrast, women lead lives constrained by force, living in the shadow of men's privileges. This disparity results in psychological, emotional, and mental harm to women, leading to lives marked by failure. Gender conditioning strips women of their essential humanity.

Gender roles play a crucial role in initial identity development, often compelling women to "act like a man." This pressure leads to depression, frustration, substance abuse, and self-harm. Women must also contend with suppressed emotions such as compassion, cooperation, and nurturance, often living beyond their means. Conversely, when men fail to meet societal expectations, they often resort to destructive behaviors: "dumping out," "numbing out," or "punching out." The pressure to conform to gender roles is damaging to men as well, causing feelings of embarrassment and anger after experiencing a sense of loss. No matter how successful a man becomes, societal expectations can lead to feelings of inadequacy, which in turn can result in violence against women as men seek to assert their masculinity in times of crisis.

Women have been working tirelessly to end their oppression, but this struggle has caused considerable confusion, displacement, and pain. Despite ongoing efforts, sexism persists, supported by influential institutions. The feminist movement has emerged as a powerful initiative, encouraging women to raise their voices against unethical and uncomfortable practices. However, women continue to face disproportionate violence and discrimination in every sphere of life. While some progress has been made, significant challenges remain, such as the non-recognition of marital rape and the practice of female genital mutilation in certain countries and communities.

Feminism represents a long history of struggle to end sexism, oppression, and exploitation, aiming at full gender equality in law and practice. Despite the challenging circumstances, some extraordinary women have played vital roles in creating world history. Societies often confined women to roles as daughters, wives, and mothers, yet some women, like Christine de Pizan, defied these constraints by engaging in cultural and political life. Pizan, a pioneering

writer, challenged the perception of women by questioning their humanity and critiquing societal norms.

Women have historically used literature to call for justice, narrating their own stories or those of other women in pain. However, women writers and playwrights have often faced significant criticism and lack of recognition due to pervasive gender biases. Their works were critiqued by those who enjoyed privileges and advantages, often ignoring the lack of resources available to women. The early years of women in literature were marked by criticism and revolt as they fought against sexism and exploitation through their writings.

Mass demonstrations, newspaper updates, debates, and the formation of committees have all contributed to breaking societal stereotypes and providing support to exploited women. The political landscape has significantly impacted women's lives, prompting liberal feminists to demand legal equality. They identified patriarchy and capitalism as primary factors contributing to women's degraded condition. Over the years, women's voices have brought about changes, yet many issues persist, continuing to harm women's lives.

Over the years, awareness of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation has increased, with a primary focus on the status of women in the global context. Feminism gained significant attention by leveraging mass media and pop culture to highlight women's issues and advocate for improvements in their lives. Efforts have been made by women to enhance the quality of life for future generations, striving for a better world for both men and women. Notably, some prominent male figures have supported women's rights, while some women have opposed gender equality, reflecting the contradictions inherent in gender roles. The entire system of gender conditioning and role designation has come under scrutiny.

Sexism manifests in various forms, both offline and online. Cyberspace has become a significant battleground for the exploitation of women's lives, exemplified by the #MeToo movement. Understanding sexism is crucial for decoding feminism, as it involves judging individuals based on their sex or gender. Despite the successes of feminist movements, discriminatory treatment persists, often in subtle forms such as insensitive comments about women's bodies, objectification, reactions to women's attire, and the assignment of less challenging tasks to women.

Sexism is categorized into three primary forms: Traditional Sexism, which supports traditional gender roles and perpetuates the notion that women are less competent than men; Modern Sexism, characterized by negative attitudes towards women's rights and the denial of women's claims; and Neo-Sexism, which justifies discrimination based on perceived competencies. Proponents of these ideologies often ignore or deny the challenges women face in society.

Sexism also has linguistic dimensions, involving the patronizing treatment of one sex, usually females. Human languages often exhibit linguistic sexism, where verbal insults can be as harmful as physical exploitation. Language and culture are interrelated, influencing each other significantly. For women to achieve gender equality, rights, and empowerment, they

need value and visibility, which require education, training, and supportive policies and laws. The absence of these factors contributes to women's invisibility, vulnerability, and dependency, undermining their economic value, dignity, and rights.

Although progress has been made, sexism remains pervasive. Acts, gestures, visual representations, spoken and written words, and behaviors that treat individuals as inferior based on their sex violate their inherent dignity and rights. This leads to physical, sexual, psychological, and socio-economic harm to women. Sexism and sexist exploitation create a humiliating and offensive environment, reflecting historically unequal power relations between men and women. For women to realize their potential in any field, they need robust support structures. Empowering women economically and socially creates a win-win situation. Progressive policies are essential to establish an environment of equality, not by diminishing men, but by uplifting women through significant changes and legal efforts.

Showcasing the lives of empowered women has been a motivating factor for those who are marginalized, encouraging them to assert their rights and achieve social belonging. Stepping out of traditional roles has been crucial in fostering change, as it promotes financial independence and enables women to take decisive actions to improve their circumstances.

The relationship between literature and history is inseparable and robust, with literature often reflecting past struggles. Historically, a sexist atmosphere has been prevalent in many households. Literary artists, either deliberately or inadvertently, respond to significant events and prevailing societal ideas. Drama, as a genre, has long recorded socio-political changes and influenced modern literature. In the contemporary age, drama remains a powerful medium, offering group viewing and engagement. People often prefer drama for its immediate impact and ability to present issues face-to-face, making it a more compelling way to address problems compared to merely reading about them.

Manjula Padmanabhan, through her play *Lights Out*, poignantly addresses the pervasive issue faced by women, highlighting not only the heinousness of criminals but also the societal complicity that exacerbates the suffering of women. The play critiques the superficiality of middle-class modernization, which, despite adopting modern lifestyles, fails to embrace gender equality. *Lights Out* vividly depicts the violence against women and the passive complicity of silent female characters, capturing the anguish of the victims through stark imagery and evocative scenes. These elements profoundly impact readers and audiences, urging them to acknowledge and address the deep-seated problem of sexism.

The construction of identity within the context of a patriarchal society reveals how entrenched ideologies shape Indian culture. Negotiations between genders redefine societal perceptions of superiority and inferiority, blurring political, social, and economic boundaries. The endorsement of sexist beliefs negatively impacts social interactions, legitimizes gender inequality, and hinders women's performance and opportunities.

Padmanabhan's work illustrates the multifaceted nature of sexism, from overt acts of sexual harassment and victim-blaming to the subtle normalization of discriminatory behavior

through jokes and comments. The pervasive nature of these issues emphasizes the need for societal change to create a more equitable world for women.

Padmanabhan masterfully portrays women's issues, capturing both the silence and the outcry of female characters to delineate societal boundaries. The play's conclusion, marked by chaos and unresolved tension, leaves a lasting impression on the audience, prompting critical reflection on the societal structures that enable gender-based violence.

The ongoing struggle against sexism underscores the importance of addressing and dismantling harmful ideologies. Despite significant progress, the persistent exploitation of women's lives necessitates continued efforts to achieve true gender equality. Highlighting the work of Manjula Padmanabhan inspires further dialogue and action to address these critical issues.

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Depiction of Caste in the Contemporary Retelling of the *Mahabharata*

T.V. KUSHMA KUMARI & S. JAYALAKSHMI

T.V. Kushma Kumari

Abstract

Retellings of Indian epics have served as a significant source of knowledge within ancient Indian culture for millennia. These retellings often introduce new perspectives on mythological characters and concepts. A recurring theme in such retellings is the caste system, which was prevalent in ancient times. This study examines the depiction of caste in Anand Neelakantan's *Ajaya: Roll of Dice*. Neelakantan provides a voice to the marginalized and highlights their aspirations and suffering. The paper explores how mythical characters engage with and challenge the entrenched caste system in ancient India. Although the novel adheres to the original narrative of the Mahabharata, its structural differences offer a new dimension to the story.

Keywords: Indian mythology, Caste, Retellings, Mahabharata, Destiny, Aspiration

Various scholars have examined the retellings of the Mahabharata from different perspectives. For instance, Abinayasivaranjani M. investigates the portrayal of female characters in *Karna's Wife: An Outcast Queen* by Kavita Kane, employing a psychoanalytical feminist framework. Kane's narrative critiques traditional cultural norms through her characterization.

Introduction

Indian novelists have expressed their views on the age-old caste system by retelling ancient myths, thereby presenting these myths from contemporary perspectives. The postmodern approach in Indian literature reflects modern realities while revisiting classical narratives. By continually reinterpreting these myths, authors underscore the enduring issues related to caste. *The Mahabharata*, one of the two major epics of India, is celebrated for its intricate plot and character development.

The caste system in India, as defined by Sir H. Risley, is "a class of the community which disowns any connection with any other class and can neither intermarry nor eat nor drink with any but persons of their own community." (4) This rigid system has been perpetuated through generations, with varying definitions across regions and lifestyles.

Anand Neelakantan, an Indian author and screenwriter, presents a unique retelling of the Mahabharata in his books *Ajaya: Roll of Dice* (2013) and *Ajaya: Rise of Kali* (2015), focusing on the Kaurava perspective. Neelakantan's retellings amplify the voices of the

marginalized and explore the caste dynamics within the epic. Although the fundamental plot remains unchanged, the narrative structure provides fresh insights into caste and social status.

This study is organized into three main sections:

1. **Acceptance of Caste**: This section examines characters who reconcile with their low-caste status, exploring how this acceptance influences their actions and perspectives.

2. **Aspiration and Destiny**: This part focuses on how the caste system impacts the aspirations and destinies of characters, illustrating the constraints and opportunities shaped by their social status.

3. **Defiance of the Caste System**: The final section analyzes characters who challenge and subvert the entrenched caste hierarchy, exploring their efforts to defy societal norms and the consequences of their resistance.

Acceptance of caste

Vidhura, the youngest of Bhishma's three nephews, was born to a house cleaner and the sage Veda Vyasa. Despite his scholarly prowess and significant contributions, Vidhura's low-caste status precluded him from claiming the throne of Hastinapur. The portrayal of Vidhura in Anand Neelakantan's narrative underscores his resigned acceptance of his social position. His consciousness of his low-caste identity is deeply ingrained, as illustrated by a moment when Suyodhana, in a gesture of gratitude, attempts to embrace him. Vidhura responds with discomfort, saying, "Prince Suyodhana... You cannot touch me, especially after you have already had your bath" (22), reflecting the belief that contact with a lower-caste individual is considered impure.

Although appointed as the prime minister, Vidhura remains impoverished. His acceptance of his economic and social plight is evident in his silent endurance and his focus on ensuring a modest but secure future for his children. He resolves, "We will build our own house... the boys should have at least a roof over their head" (65). This sentiment reveals the limited aspirations allowed to those of low caste; their dreams often remain unfulfilled, constrained by the persistent economic and social barriers.

Vidhura reflects on the systemic limitations imposed by caste when he notes, "The kind of education I received would be impossible for any Shudra boy. No one with the baggage of low caste, like me, could aspire to even be a clerk in government service... every position was based on caste" (85). Despite his personal achievements and the modest advancement afforded by his education, Vidhura acknowledges that his opportunities are severely restricted due to his caste. His education, though equivalent to that of the Kshatriyas, does not fully mitigate the caste-based limitations imposed on his potential.

Another character who embodies acceptance of caste without resistance is the charioteer Athiratha, Karna's father. Athiratha's lines reflect a resigned acknowledgment of his caste

status: "Swami, we are poor Sutas. Who will instruct my son?... But learning archery is beyond our caste status and means" (48). He further asserts, "He is a Suta, I mean we are of the Shudra Varna, swami" (55). These statements reveal Athiratha's deep-seated awareness and acceptance of his social position. The pervasive nature of caste oppression has led individuals like Athiratha to internalize their low-status roles, limiting their aspirations and reinforcing the belief that their circumstances are immutable.

When Athiratha endeavors to support his son's aspiration to become a warrior, he faces substantial financial barriers. To fulfill his son's dream, Athiratha decides to sell his chariot and house, a testament to his desperation and determination to transcend his caste constraints. This scenario highlights how caste not only enforces social and economic limitations but also perpetuates poverty. Individuals born into lower castes are typically confined to roles within their own community—charioteers remain charioteers, farmers stay farmers, and so forth. Efforts to break free from these constraints often lead to further economic hardship and oppression.

These instances underscore the profound challenges faced by low-caste parents who strive to improve their children's futures. Vidhura and Athiratha's experiences illustrate the inherent despair of those burdened by caste, as well as the forced acceptance of their predetermined roles. Through these characters, the author reveals the pervasive impact of caste on social mobility and the enduring struggle for a better life despite systemic restrictions.

Aspiration and Destiny

Karna, though born a Kshatriya, was raised in the household of a charioteer, Athiratha, and thus was publicly identified as the son of a Suta. His aspiration to become a warrior was thwarted by the rigid caste system, which deemed him ineligible for training due to his perceived low status. When Vidhura sought to enroll Karna with Guru Drona, Drona's response was dismissive: "I understand your sympathies as you too belong to these people. He is a low caste Suta, a lowly charioteer caste. I am a Brahmin, yet you expect me to teach him?" (60). This rejection underscores the dominance of caste over individual merit, illustrating how caste considerations overshadowed Karna's inherent worth and potential.

Undeterred, Karna pursued his goal with unwavering determination. His relentless effort and profound desire to become a warrior eventually led him to study under the revered guru Parashurama, thanks to Kripacharya's assistance. In a bid to overcome caste barriers, Karna disguised himself as a Brahmin to gain access to advanced training in archery and Vedic studies. This act of subterfuge demonstrates his deep commitment to his ambition and his willingness to transcend caste limitations. As advised by Kripacharya, "Karna, when you want to learn, learn from the best Guru. Bhargava Parashurama... I will teach you how to behave like a Brahmin so... travel to his land and learn from our greatest living master" (73).

Despite achieving considerable success, including becoming the King of Anga and forging a close alliance with Suyodhana, Karna continued to face caste-based discrimination. His

elevated status did not shield him from the prejudices that accompanied his background. Although he sat alongside Kshatriyas and Brahmins in the court, his caste continued to diminish his stature in the eyes of others. His rejection by Draupadi during the Swayamvara—solely due to his Suta lineage—exemplifies the persistent caste prejudice. Karna's lament, "I am a mere Suta yet my friend made me a king. The best Gurus trained me. I have everything, yet I am bitter because of women who cannot think beyond caste" (324), highlights the persistent and dehumanizing impact of caste, which eclipsed his accomplishments and contributions.

Karna, despite his Kshatriya birth, faced relentless caste-based discrimination due to his upbringing in a Suta household. His rise to power and wealth did not shield him from the prejudice associated with his caste, illustrating how even significant achievements could be overshadowed by caste identity. His frustration with being unable to fully enjoy the fruits of his labor due to persistent caste biases underscores the deep-seated discrimination in society.

In stark contrast, Ekalavya, a Nishada boy, faced even more severe systemic barriers. His desire to learn archery was stifled by the entrenched caste prejudices that prevented him from even approaching Guru Drona. The narrative reveals how the lower castes, like the Nishadas, were marginalized to an extent where they were relegated to the periphery of society, with limited access to opportunities and resources.

Ekalavya's decision to practice archery in isolation, learning by observing Drona from a distance, demonstrates his determination and ingenuity despite severe limitations. However, his eventual encounter with Drona, who demands Ekalavya's right thumb as Guru Dakshina, further exposes the malice and control wielded by the upper caste. This act of demanding a physical sacrifice not only undermined Ekalavya's potential but also symbolized the broader systemic efforts to prevent lower castes from surpassing their assigned status.

Ekalavya's ultimate realization of his lost potential, especially in light of Karna's success, highlights the tragic disparity between their fates. While Karna, despite enduring humiliation, achieved significant power and wealth, Ekalavya remained in obscurity, his efforts to transcend caste limitations thwarted by systemic prejudice.

The contrast between Karna and Ekalavya effectively illustrates the capriciousness and cruelty of the caste system, where inherent talent and ambition often falter in the face of entrenched social barriers. This comparison underscores the profound impact of caste-based discrimination on individuals' lives, revealing the harsh realities faced by those born into lower castes regardless of their abilities or aspirations.

Defying caste system

The narrative reveals a profound contradiction in the enforcement and flexibility of the caste system, particularly emphasizing the differential treatment of various castes. While the caste system traditionally assigns specific roles to different groups—Brahmins as priests and scholars, Kshatriyas as warriors and rulers, Vaishyas as merchants and agriculturists, and

Shudras as laborers and artisans—this rigid structure is selectively enforced, particularly disadvantaging lower castes.

Brahmins, despite their prescribed roles, are shown to transcend these boundaries. Characters such as Drona and Parashurama, traditionally Brahmins, assume roles as warriors, thereby subverting conventional Varna assignments. Similarly, Ashwathama, born a Brahmin, assumes the role of a Kshatriya warrior, illustrating the fluidity afforded to higher castes. This flexibility contrasts sharply with the systemic exclusion faced by Shudras who attempt to ascend beyond their designated roles. For instance, Karna, despite his demonstrated skills and aspirations to become a warrior, encounters significant resistance due to his Shudra origins. His caste status remains a substantial barrier to full acceptance and recognition within the warrior class.

The power dynamics inherent in the caste system are further exemplified by the actions of the Kshatriyas, who exhibit the ability to alter caste norms. Bhishma's appointment of Vidhura, a scholar of low-caste origin, as the Prime Minister of Hastinapur reflects a notable deviation from traditional caste restrictions. This appointment highlights Bhishma's respect for Vidhura's scholarly abilities and illustrates the flexibility exercised by Kshatriyas to maintain their authority and the respect of the royal lineage. Similarly, Suyodhana's coronation of Karna as the King of Anga signifies a substantial departure from established caste norms, underscoring a broader acceptance of merit over caste origin.

These instances underscore how those in power, such as Brahmins and Kshatriyas, can reshape or disregard caste norms to their advantage, while Shudras face persistent systemic barriers that limit their upward mobility. The selective enforcement of caste norms illustrates the entrenched inequalities and power imbalances that characterize the caste system, revealing a system that privileges those in power while systematically restricting lower castes.

Conclusion

Anand Neelakantan provides a unique perspective on the Mahabharata by giving voice to characters often overlooked or underrepresented in other retellings. His novel brings to the forefront the experiences of minor characters such as Athiratha and Vidhura, who articulate their grief and struggles with caste discrimination. Neelakantan adeptly handles these characters, ensuring that their portrayals remain faithful to the storyline while vividly exploring the nuances of caste.

The author's treatment of caste is notable for its depth and sensitivity, offering a nuanced examination of how caste affects individuals' lives. Through characters like Vidhura and Athiratha, Neelakantan illustrates the pervasive impact of caste and poverty on personal aspirations and familial hopes. Vidhura's and Athiratha's experiences reflect a broader reality where many individuals, constrained by their caste and economic conditions, find their aspirations thwarted. This portrayal highlights the ways in which systemic poverty and caste restrictions limit opportunities and perpetuate inequality.

In the novel, the elite's power over lower castes is a recurring theme. The ability of those in higher castes to dictate the futures of those from lower castes underscores the profound imbalance in societal power structures. Neelakantan reveals how the elite can determine the trajectory of lower-caste individuals' lives, either elevating them or condemning them to perpetual poverty. This dynamic demonstrates how caste and wealth intertwine to shape an individual's prospects, often resulting in a cyclical perpetuation of inequality.

Neelakantan's portrayal of mythical characters serves as a vehicle for broader commentary on societal structures. His depiction of the bourgeoisie's dominance over the laboring class, coupled with the poignant expression of the laborers' despair, brings to light the harsh realities faced by lower-caste individuals. By blending mythological elements with contemporary issues, Neelakantan offers a critical examination of caste relations and the power dynamics that perpetuate socio-economic disparities.

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